

DURING THE pre-Rosh Hashana period, the harvest is at its peak. Here: At Carmel Winery. (David Silverman)

NEW YEAR WINE ALERT



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

For wineries, the pre-Rosh Hashanah sales rush coincides with the vintage. It is a busy time for all concerned.

The prolonged heat wave has ensured an early harvest, which helps because the festivals are unusually early this year.

As for the wine buyers, they have never had it so good. The supermarkets have traded up, improving their range of quality wines, and wine stores have traded down, including many more price-friendly wines than before. Online buying opportunities abound, and many wineries offer the chance to buy direct from the winery cellar.

Then there is a rush of new wine shops and gourmet stores also selling wine. Check these out, because my experience is that sometimes they are not what they seem.

There are two things that are a real turnoff for me, both service-orientated.

One is ignorance or indifference. A prospective customer goes to a specialist wine shop expecting to receive some expertise. All that is required is the ability to listen to what the potential customer is looking for in the hope of receiving some useful, practical advice. That is why we go to a wine shop instead of a

supermarket. However, occasionally we are met with a lack of knowledge. They just do not know what they are selling and are unable to contribute, apart from recommending in parrot fashion the wine they import. To make things worse, they sometimes are not aware that customer service is part of their job description. You know the type – deep into their phone, frantically messaging, oblivious as customers come and go.

The other curse at the other end of the spectrum, is the arrogant use of knowledge. There is the kind of shop assistant

who has a little knowledge, but is puffed up with their own importance. Instead of using knowledge to stroke and ease the buying process, they instead use it to hector and lecture. They assume the person standing in front of them knows nothing, and use their little knowledge to batter and bludgeon, so the customer, already out of his comfort zone, feels smaller. A suggestion is met with rolled eyes and fluttering eye lashes, which translate to “Oh dear. You just don’t understand.”

I have experienced both very recently in one of those glossy new wine shops

which assume decor and a wow factor is enough. Don’t be bamboozled by the look. Without being professional and customer-orientated, the flashiness is worth nothing. So be careful of assuming that gloss equals professionalism. Beware of the new shiny shop that appears a wonderful new gift to the wine buyer. Go instead to the wine store where your questions are answered, and your needs cared for.

Some recommendations for the festival meals, divided into price categories:



BUNCHES OF grapes at Yatir Winery (from left): Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache, Syrah, Merlot, Cinsault. (Ariel Nitzan)



(FROM LEFT) Jerusalem Petit Verdot; Recanati Petite Sirah; Nana Chenin Blanc; Drimia Sahar; Zion Sauvignon Blanc; Dalton Majestic; Story Rose; Bat Shlomo Summer Blend; 1848 Orient Red; Yarden Yonatan Merlot; Tulip Viognier (half bottle). (Photos: Wineries mentioned)

WINE DRINKERS: Up to NIS 50

Zion, Imperial Sauvignon Blanc 2020. Fresh and good value. Cannot ask for more at a great price point. Zion Winery, founded in 1848 and still family-owned, has been revived and rejuvenated.

Tabor, Har Chardonnay 2020. Tabor Winery is a master of white wines. There is not a white wine it does not make well. This is a Chardonnay in a simple, modern, refreshing style.

Carmel, Private Collection 2020. Aromatic, easy drinking, semi dry Gewürz from Israel's historic winery. Perfect for those who want that recognizable Gewürz aroma with an easy sweetness.

Barkan, Reserve Gold Edition Merlot 2020. Fruity with plum and black berry fruit, not too sophisticated, but a great easy drinking wine. It is full of flavor and not too heavy. Represents good value. Barkan is Israel's largest winery.

WINE LOVERS: NIS 50-100

Gush Etzion, Lone Oak Tree Sauvignon Blanc 2020. This is a gentle Sauvignon Blanc, without too much tropical fruit and a harsh acidity. It is soft, refreshing and well made. Gush Etzion has some of the finest vineyards in the country.

Albert Bichot, Chablis 2020. Chablis is a massive brand in Israel. Many buy it having no idea it is made from Chardonnay. The criteria for choosing a kosher Chablis is regrettably often based on price rather than quality. However, this is a good expression, at a reasonable price point, from a stellar producer... and it is kosher. May be found in the Yayin B'ir chain.

Nana, Chenin Blanc 2020. Grown in Mitzpe Ramon, Chenin Blanc seems to be a grape variety that blossoms in the Negev. This is crisp, citrusy, mineral and refreshing. This is one of our better wines from this variety.

Jezreel Valley, Gewürztraminer 2020. A refreshing semi dry wine with classic Gewürz aromas of lychee and

roses, with delicate sweetness and good acidity. This is for Gewürz devotees. It was not my plan to list this, but when I tasted it, I just thought it ticked a few boxes.

Midbar, Viognier 2020. This is another winery making desert wines. Every time I taste them I am surprised anew, though I do think its whites are better than the reds. Its Viognier is one of the best in the country. Nice apricot and tropical fruit nose, it is quite full-flavored in the mouth, and finishes with a pleasant acidity.

Yatir, Darom By Yatir Rose 2020. Roses in Israel tend to be pale pink or onion skin colored. The last vintage has brought about a change. A rose with more color, almost more like a watered-down red. This is a great example, and it has more character and flavor than many. NIS 80

Bat Shlomo, The Farmhouse Summer Blend 2020. A deep-colored rose, more red than pink, from Bat Shlomo Vineyards, whose wines are always of interest. This is a rose with good red berry fruit and a refreshing finish. Quality roses are so popular in Israel today because they really are ideal for our two C's – climate and cuisine.

Story, Provence (France) 2020. A classic blush wine from Provence, the home of rose. It is such a pale pink that there is barely any color at all, with delicate berry fruit and refreshing acidity. Simple, but a great wine with meze, or for sipping on hot evenings. Kosher. Available in Derech Haya'in wine stores.

Galil Mountain, Galil Petit Verdot 2019. Fruit forward, generous wine with good structure, but not bombastic, which makes it nicely drinkable. Galil is a new mid-priced label for the Galil Mountain Winery.

1848 Winery, Orient Red, 5th Generation 2018. A beautiful "old world" style of wine. Understated, elegant, with a silky grip and showing subtle complexity. It is a fascinating blend of Marselan, Argaman & Syrah. Lovely expression from 1848 Winery.

Dalton, Majestic Old Vines 2019. A medium bodied wine with red fruit aromas of strawberries and cherries, and a hint of Mediterranean herbs. It is also quite refreshing. It is made from old vine Carignan. This is a variety Israel has adopted. It has been here 150 years, nearly as long as Malbec has been in Argentina.

Drimia, Sahar 2018. Basically this is a Cab Merlot with a spritz of Carignan. It is actually a very nice wine. Good black berry fruit, quite full but smooth with flavor that runs through to a balanced finish. This small winery is situated in the South Hebron Hills.

Segal Whole Cluster Syrah 2018. A newly launched single vineyard Syrah. It is fruity, peppery, with a touch of smoked meat and a long, lingering, flavorful finish. It is reasonably priced, too. The winemaker is Ido Lewinsohn, who is now a Master of Wine.

Tulip, Viognier Dessert 2018. For the aperitifs or preamble to the Rosh Hashanah meal, I always recommend a dessert wine. It goes with the sweet foods we eat, which symbolize the hope for a sweet year. It is not so strange; the French will often have a dessert wine served ice-cold as an aperitif. This is a delicious addition to the Tulip Winery portfolio, but serve it from the freezer. Note that it comes in half, 375-ml. bottles.

CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-150

Netofa Tel Qasser Red 2018. This is a blend of Grenache and Syrah. The wine has nice weight, is not overoaked, and has a pleasant chewy, meaty character. Always performs. A regular favorite of mine.

Recanati Petite Sirah Reserve 2018. I love Petite Sirah. It seems to grow well here. This is one of the best. Deep, full-bodied and characterful. It has lifted aromas of violets and ripe black fruit, earthy, slightly dirty flavors and a long finish.

Tulip, Mountain Heights Cabernet Sauvignon 2017. A classic New World Cabernet, with deep, ripe berry fruit, sweet vanilla from oak aging and a full

flavor that accompanies you through to a long finish.

Jerusalem, Petit Verdot Reserve 2018. Petit Verdot reminds me of a more one-dimensional Cabernet which is deep-colored and tannic. However, this is a beautifully sculptured wine. Great fruit, elegant yet with a long powerful finish. Jerusalem Vineyard Winery is making some really nice wines these days.

FEINCHMECKERS: NIS 150 +

Golan Heights, Yarden Yonatan Vineyard Merlot 2018. This one of the finest Merlots I have tasted in a long time. It has a rich aroma of blackberries and ripe plums, with a hint of orange peel hidden within the fruit and spice. Linger complexity. It makes you want to go back for more.

Chateau Golan, Geshem 2018. A GSM (blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre). Perfumed fruit, medium weight, balanced finish. One of our best wines in the Med blend genre.

Teperberg, Legacy, Cabernet Franc 2018. This is a classic Cab Franc and a beautiful wine, from the third-largest winery in the country. Lovely ripe fruit aromas with a green backdrop of bell pepper. Quite full-bodied and big, but all in balance. High quality wine.

Shiloh Mosaic Exclusive 2017. A sumptuous limited edition wine. Full of flavor but with an elegant structure, layers of complexity and a long and well-balanced finish.

This is the Rosh Hashanah Wine Alert: Drink well and within your means. Don't be afraid to buy what you like, but if you want to, have fun experimenting. Lift a glass to a Shana Tova and a Sweet, Happy and Healthy New Year. Let's lose ourselves in that wonderful festival blend of good food, family and wine, and banish thoughts of Covid, corona and Delta for a few hours. ■

The writer is a wine industry insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wine for 35 years. He is often referred to as the English voice of Israeli wines. www.adammontefiore.com