

# ALL RIGHT TO GO WHITE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**W**hen I came to Israel in 1989, most of the wine drunk was white wine. Since the early 1990s, we have become a red wine-drinking country for a number of reasons. First, there was the influential *60 Minutes* television program claiming that drinking red wine was healthy. Second, improved winemaking techniques enabled wineries to make entry-level red wines like white wines: fruity, without astringency, with a good refreshing acidity. Third, a more sophisticated wine-loving public simply began to choose red.

One of the things that infuriates me most is the so-called wine expert who announces to all in hearing distance, “I drink only red.” The implication of this statement is that they drink only red because they truly understand wine. Well, what a lot they are missing! This is akin to listening to only one style of music, or eating the same food all the time. You miss all the variety and endless possibilities if you drink only red.

I recently visited a Greek winery and was one of the last two visitors of the day. There was one other couple on the tour. Of course, the Hebrew was a giveaway, they were Israelis. (What are the chances of that? Quite high apparently!) We were both offered a tasting. I considered it a great opportunity to taste everything that was offered. Our Israeli colleagues stopped the tasting short saying “We only drink red wines” and so missed a rare opportunity to taste wines they would not normally drink. It was an opportunity, as many believe that Greek whites are better than their reds. I cringed. This blight of “red wine only” always makes me wince and grimace.

Fortunately, the current trend is back to white wines. Increasingly, wine drinkers are realizing that there is a far greater variety of white wines than red. Furthermore, white wines are served cold and being lighter than reds, they are far more satisfying and refreshing to drink in our hot, humid climate. Also, the higher acidity makes white wines better accompaniments to food than reds.

In recent years, there has been a quality revolution in white wines. They are so much better than they were. We are now making quality whites with good varietal character and some great southern Rhone-type blends.

We even have a new white-wine festival. Suddenly it is de rigueur to drink white wines at Shavuot. Wine and cheese are considered natural partners, but once the wine in the equation was assumed to be red. Cheese is served in France after the main course, before the dessert. In England, cheese is served after the dessert. In both cultures this is normally accompanied with the remains of the red wine drunk with the main

course, so the image is of cheese washed down by red wine. In practice, white wines go better with cheese, and this is the fashion in Israel, especially in a place where cheese usually is part of a dairy meal.

Cheese is a subject no less complicated than wine. There are so many variations. However, as a brief guide of cheese and cheese-based dishes you may meet at Shavuot, the following matches may help:

**Quiche:** Sauvignon blanc; unoaked chardonnay; dry sparkling wine

**Goat cheese:** Sauvignon blanc

**Fondue:** Sauvignon blanc; pinot gris

**Smoked cheese:** Oaked chardonnay; gewurztraminer

**Soft cheeses:** Young, fruity unoaked reds; unoaked chardonnay

**Cream cheeses:** Sauvignon blanc

**Hard cheese:** Quality red wine, cabernet sauvignon

**Blue cheese:** Sweet, dessert wine; muscat; port

**Cheesecake:** Fortified muscat

However, it is only a broad-brush guide, not to be

taken overly seriously. Anyway, by now you know me better than that. Drink what you want. There are no rules, apart from personal taste. As you can see, there is a place for red wines and even for rosé. Rosé usually has good acidity and is therefore a more than worthwhile alternative to any dry white wine.

If you want to organize a cheese-and-wine party, buy four or five different cheeses and three different wines according to your preference (maybe a white, red and rosé), cut up some vegetables, buy some artisan bread and you can have a party. Or you can challenge your guests to bring one cheese each, or, do the same with wine. It will be the easiest party you ever prepare. I have given some recommendations to cover all tastes and price points.

So the rising temperatures and the food customs of Shavuot make it a good time to go white. If you already enjoy white wines, you have another opportunity, but if white wine is not your thing, Shavuot provides a chance to broaden your wine drinking experience.



WHILE RED wine and cheese make a lovely combination (enjoyed here at Tel Aviv's Montefiore Hotel), in recent years there has been a quality revolution in white wines. (Photos: Courtesy)

### GAMLA BRUT NV

Fantastic value sparkling wine from the kings of sparkling wine, the Golan Heights Winery. It has piercing acidity. Good sparkling wine goes with everything! NIS 75



### BARKAN SPECIAL RESERVE GEWURZTRAMINER 2017

Another semi-dry option. Gewurztraminer has really replaced Emerald Riesling as the national semi dry wine. This example is aromatic with the typical Gewurz aromas, this wine is balanced and will be popular with the Blue Nun crowd. NIS 75

### JEZREEL NATURAL 2017

A lightly sparkling alternative. A fun wine: a “pet nat,” which means naturally pétillant. Made from local variety Dabouki and Colombard. Not that it is a match for aroma or flavor, but I like the label and the fact it is something different. NIS 69



### ORTAL ROSE 2017

Super delicate, beautifully colored, crisp rosé with great acidity. Refreshing. This will go with any cheese calling for sauvignon blanc or unoaked chardonnay. Ortal Winery has a new winemaker, whom I respect greatly. I will be watching this winery closely. NIS 68



(Adi Peretz)

### SEROR L'OR BLANC 2017

This is a fragrant and complex blend of two ideal varieties to blend together. The Chenin Blanc, with excellent natural acidity, blends well with the fatter and delicately aromatic Viognier. It comes from Domaine Seror on the Golan Heights. They also have a fine rosé in the French style. NIS 120



(Eyal Guttman)

### MAIA MARE PINK 2017

Mediterranean style rosé. Pink colored, fragrant and refreshing. Made from Carignan & Mourvèdre grape varieties. A rosé to accompany mezze or to sit out on the patio with on the hot summer nights. NIS 79



(Ron Hillel)

### MATUA SAUVIGNON BLANC 2016

There many very good Israeli Sauvignon Blanc options these days. However good, they can never match the fruit concentration of a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. There are quite a few New Zealand Sauvignons in the market. This is one of the better ones. This is the classic variety to accompany goat's cheese. NIS 75

### MT HERMON RED 2016

The country's largest selling wine, made by the Golan Heights Winery. Light, fruity, and refreshing. A great wine to accompany soft cheeses, like brie or camembert. No tannin or astringency to clash with the cheese. Full of flavor. NIS 35

### BRAVDO CHARDONNAY 2017

A traditional and good value chardonnay. Oaky and buttery but not too much, with a well-balanced finish. It is produced by the Karmei Yosef Winery, which is one of the few, genuine estate wineries in Israel. NIS 80



(Eyal Guttman)

### TURA MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2015

This is the quality red wine I recommend that will go well with aged cheddar. An aged hard cheese needs a red wine with good fruit, a solid structure and soft well-integrated tannins. This will do the job. It has a soft complexity that I like. NIS 129



### HAYOTZER VIRTUOSO GEWURZTRAMINER 2017

I don't want to forget those who like semi-dry wines. If that is your bag, insist that your needs are catered for! Semi-dry is okay. This is very aromatic and well balanced, refreshing with a touch of sweetness, produced by Hayotzer Winery, whose wines are improving fast. NIS 49



### PRIVATE COLLECTION MOSCATO 2017

Moscato is a big hit in Israel, combining qualities that many people like. The wine is light, slightly sparkling, low alcohol and sweet – and it has a screw cap. This Moscato comes in a wretched blue bottle (how original!). It is a versatile option as your third wine. It will also go with Grandma's cheesecake. Just serve it ice cold. NIS 39

*The writer has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years, and is known as “the English voice of Israeli wine.”*  
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