

(Mitch Lensink from Unsplash)

ENJOYING WINE *AT HOME*



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

The first step to enjoying wine at home is deciding where to buy it. There are many more options today. Most of the supermarkets sell only kosher wines. Tiv Taam is an exception in that it has both kosher and nonkosher Israeli wines and a broad selection of imported non-kosher wines.

However, whatever the depth of choice, the supermarket is undoubtedly the best place to find wines under NIS 50.

Here, though, you are usually on your own. You gingerly arrive at the drinks section, with “bottle of wine” written at the bottom of your long shopping list. You are under pressure to get back to the children and so don’t have much time. You are faced with what looks like a wall of wine, where nothing seems familiar, and are thinking: What the hell am I going to buy?

There is normally an added pressure. You are likely buying for someone who you are convinced knows more than you do. You don’t want to let the side down, but are inwardly cursing why the wine-buying duties are left to you.

The key is simply not to panic, when faced with rows of wines that at first glance look the same. It may help to look for a brand or winery you are familiar with, or

the name of a wine you know you. Maybe a grape variety, such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Gewürztraminer, is what first comes to mind. Decide the price you are prepared to pay in advance. Also, you can feel relaxed knowing that if you buy because you like the label, you won’t be the first!

Take a good look at the promotions. There are always special offers, particularly before the festivals. However, don’t automatically be seduced by the least expensive. The cheapest is often not the best buy. The fixed costs of a bottle, label, cork and capsule are reasonably similar, so the difference between a wine costing NIS 20 and NIS 40 is the wine itself.

Avoid wines that appear not to have sold through. Older vintages, scuffed or stained labels are signs that all might not be well, as is the color of wines. Avoid whites that are too yellow and roses that are too orange.

There is a sweet spot and that is the three for NIS 100 section. Here lie many bargains, with pretty good quality. Brands like Carmel Private Collection, Golan Heights Winery Hermon, Recanati Yasmin, Tabor Har and Teperberg Impression always punch above their weight.

In supermarkets, the largest-selling wines are (not in order) Carmel Selected, Barkan Classic, Golan Heights Hermon and Segal’s Wine. If you are totally stuck, follow one of these.

However, visits to supermarkets today have many more options for the adventurous wine buyer. For in-

stance, Shufersal, in a large number of stores, now has a section for premium wines. There you can potentially purchase a wine from NIS 15 to NIS 200. If you are already shopping to buy milk, look around. The range of wines may surprise you.

The alternative is to make a special visit to a wine shop – and there are hundreds of these. There you will



have someone knowledgeable to consult and maybe even an opportunity to taste. Go where you receive the friendliest welcome and the best service. Derech Hayayin is arguably the chain with the most advanced wine culture. Also Wine & More, Avi Ben in Jerusalem and Special Reserve in Haifa always give knowledgeable service.

What to buy is not so difficult. I suggest you go through the same process that you go through when deciding what to cook. Is it a casual dinner for old friends, a formal dinner where the boss is invited or a traditional festival or Shabbat meal? Maybe it is for a Shabbat brunch, a party or a barbecue. Remember you only have to buy one or two wines, whereas you have to buy many food ingredients. You also don't have to match wines for different courses as in a restaurant, because everyone is eating the same. It is always best to keep it simple: buy what you like and what you can afford. It is no more complicated than that.

If you want to learn and develop your wine knowledge, then experiment. If purchasing for a special meal, you can match the wine to the food. However, it is not uncommon these days to "match the wine to the mood, not the food." You can also match the wine to the weather. Whites are more popular these days and rosés are in. Do what you want and don't feel pressured.

WHEN YOU arrive home, store the wine on its side (if it has a regular cork). This is so the cork will stay wet and not dry out, which would let in too much air. A cardboard wine box (aka case) makes a good wine rack if you have nothing else. Try and store your wine away from sunlight, vibration and heat, all of which are enemies of your wine. A wine fridge is best, but wine is hardier than you think. I am constantly pleasantly surprised how old wines show, even when not stored at ideal temperatures.

How much to buy? There are five or six glasses in a standard 750 ml. bottle, depending on the size of the glass and how much you pour. Remember, some of your guests won't drink, while others may have two or three glasses. If you want to serve more than one wine, bear this in mind. Serve dry before sweet, white before red, and young wines before older wines. For most dinner parties a white and a red wine will suffice, but for the regular meal, one wine will be enough. Alternatively, you can theme the wines, as you do with food, by choosing wines for the fun in comparing them. By



FROM LEFT to right: Segal White, Recanati Yasmin Red & White, Tabor Moscato, Hermon Cabernet Sauvignon. (Courtesy)

the way, if your guest brings a bottle, don't feel you have to open it.

Put your white or rosé wine in the fridge at least four hours before you need to open it. If you forgot to do this in advance, put it in the freezer, but don't forget it there. The quickest way to chill a wine is to put it in a sink or bucket of iced water with a sprinkle of salt. I personally recommend putting quality red wines in a domestic fridge for 20 minutes. In our climate and with our relatively high alcohol content, the wine will keep its shape better when chilled ever so slightly.

Many will insist in opening the bottles in advance to allow the wine to breathe. However, this is not all that effective, as only the top part is exposed to air. If you fear the wine is closed and needs airing, then you are better advised to open it, pour it into a clean water jug and then pour it back in the bottle. This will help the wine open up.

Ideally, you need two glasses: one with a larger bowl for red wines and a smaller, narrower one for white and sparkling wines. However, most households have one wine glass only and there is no problem with that. Nowadays there are professional-sized wine glasses available in supermarkets and kitchenware shops which are not expensive.

I suggest washing and rinsing the glasses, if they are taken from a cardboard box or a wooden cupboard. It would be terrible if everyone thinks the wine is disappointing, when it is actually the glassware. You will be surprised how often this occurs. When you pour for your guests, a third full is enough in a generously sized glass, or half full in a small glass.

It is stylish to cook with the wine you are due to

drink, but I would rather not use my precious wine in a dish, where it will be indistinguishable from a cheaper wine. Just do not cook with a bad wine. Any off, undesirable flavors will become more concentrated when cooked.

The main choices with choosing a cooking wine is to think color (red or white) and sweetness (dry, semi dry, etc). Price is not an issue, so it is certainly okay to buy cheap. The color of the sauce will be affected by the wine selection. The main decision is to decide whether to add the wine early in the cooking procedure, where its flavors become more integrated, or later, where the dish will have more of a winy character.

A useful tip: If you do not finish a wine, boil the remains in a pan, so that the alcohol evaporates, then freeze the remainder in an ice tray from the freezer. You then will have a cooking wine stored in useful iced cubes, ready for future use.

As soon as you realize that you are unlikely to finish a bottle, put the cork back in. If it does not go in, turn it around and try again (it will be easier) and then put it in the fridge. Air and warmth are enemies of wine. Without too much exposure, the wine will last a good few days in the fridge.

Another tip is to take an empty plastic bottle of water, fill it with the remaining wine. Squeeze the bottle as you screw the top on to create a vacuum. There, you have stored the wine perfectly for future use.

Finally, wine is meant to be enjoyed with family, friends and food. You may choose to entertain, but you are not on trial. You are meant to enjoy the company. So relax and enjoy the occasion. Uncork a bottle and allow the wine to work its magic. ■

The writer has been advancing Israeli wines for over 30 years, and he is known as "the English voice of Israeli wine." www.adammontefiore.com

From left to right :

SHUFERSAL SUPERMARKET – The broad selection of wine in a supermarket is intimidating to some, a buying opportunity to others.

SHUFERSAL PREMIUM – The premium section is available in some Shufersal supermarkets.

DERECH HAYAIN – The Derech Hayayin chain of wine stores are centers of wine culture. (Photos Courtesy)

