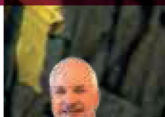


# NEW YEAR MEANS WINE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**R**osh Hashanah is a time for sweet things, to give us hopes of a sweet year. Hence the tradition of apple dipped in honey. Therefore, for me, this is the festival for sweet wines. Not any old sweet kiddush wine, but a proper dessert wine.

Having a sweet wine as an aperitif before the meal starts is unusual but there is a precedent, from France of all places. The French sometimes serve Sauternes served ice cold as an aperitif, and Israel has some pretty high-quality dessert wines. However, for Rosh Hashanah, I suggest a lighter, less sweet option to accompany the short ceremonial part of the meal, and that would be Moscato. Carmel Buzz & Selected, Dalton, Hayotzer, Golan's Mount Hermon, Tabor, Teperberg and Zion wineries all produce Moscatos. Carmel, Teperberg and Zion also have a red version for

those wedded to reds for ritual.

In tough economic times, it is certainly sensible to buy carefully, and not spend more on wine than your budget allows. Peer pressure, or what your guests will think, should not influence you. Those who look for wines in the under NIS 50 category should do so with absolute pride and with their head held high. The wines may be fruitier, lighter and more refreshing and therefore almost more suitable for the current weather.

Unfortunately, these are not the wines people talk about. They are not the wines that win awards, nor are they the wines the wine critics generally write about. Furthermore, there are those among the wine intelligentsia who say sneeringly "I don't drink wines under 50 shekels" (and I hear them all the time), but they are misguided. There is no shame in choosing a "drink-ing" wine for a festival or special meal.

As readers will know, I do not believe in giving scores. Wine is such an ephemeral, constantly changing art form that it takes "a braver man than I am, Gun-

'THERE ARE those rare great wines that are almost an emotional experience.'

(Pictured: Chisinau winery, Moldova; Moshe Shai/Flash90)



(Binyamina Winery)

(Zion Winery)

ga Din" to reduce wine to a number. On the other hand, the more one writes in-depth tasting notes, the more wines tend to sound the same, because the same adjectives appear and reappear.

I believe, generalizing, there are three categories of wines I like to drink. The first are what I call drinking wines. These wines match the food and the company present. In no time, you suddenly notice the wine is finished. It was so drinkable and right, but because it was not on a pedestal, it was not unduly noticed. However, this sort of wine will be appreciated in respect.

Then there are the wines you analyze, discuss and chew over, and they have a refreshing, cleansing character that simply demands you take another sip or another glass. The wine simply demands further drinking. I taste many very good wines that lack this critical characteristic. When you find one, make the most of it.

Finally, there are those rare great wines that are almost an emotional experience. They can move you like a great concert or a wonderful meal. Sometimes words or regular descriptions are just not enough. These are wines you want to inhale rather than drink, to capture and retain that fleeting magic that is a great wine.

These are my recommendations for the Rosh Hashanah family meal, divided into price categories to assist your choice.

## LESS THAN NIS 50

**Gamla Sauvignon Blanc 2019.** Very good value. Very aromatic, minerally with a piercing balancing acidity. Crisp and refreshing. The fruit comes from the northern Golan Heights. Gamla is the second label of the Golan Heights Winery.

**Carmel Selected Moscato.** This is a designer edition, but it is not that important in a NIS 25 bottle of wine. The label seems to be following the example of Hermon Moscato, which is also blue. There is no vintage year, which is unusual. It is a sweet dessert wine, though it is described as a sparkling wine on the label. Confusingly, Carmel markets a number of Moscatos: Buzz, Selected, Private Collection and now Designer Edition Selected. What are the differences? I have absolutely no idea! My guess is that they are pretty similar. As for the wine, it is lightly sparkling, low alcohol and has an aroma of freshly squeezed grapes. It is a perfect "any time" wine.

**Zion Imperial Riesling-Gewurztraminer 2019.**





This is an aromatic and semi-dry white wine, perfect for those seeking a moderate sweetness. This is from Israel's oldest existing winery, which was founded in 1848 by the Shor family in the Old City of Jerusalem. Zion Winery has been relaunched with striking labels, and some of the wines I have tasted are genuinely great value.

**Barkan Reserve Gold Edition Rose 2019.** This is an amusing marketing concoction from Israel's largest winery. This brand has words like "Reserve," "Gold," "Edition" and even a single vineyard, thrown in together in the name, as though cramming in all the meaningless names possible to denote rare quality. Image-wise it is weird, but sales-wise it seems to work, and sales are what this winery is interested in. In the end it is a 40-shekel rosé with a nice color, good berry fruit and fresh acidity. Refreshingly simple and accessible, in absolute contrast to the high falutin' name.

**Binyamina Yogev Cabernet Sauvignon Petit Verdot 2019.** A well-rounded wine with a good blackberry and blackcurrant aroma, and in the mouth it is pleasantly flavorful. Binyamina is a winery that has gone totally off the radar in recent years, but many of their cheaper wines are good value and well made.

**Hayotzer Bereshit Petit Verdot 2019.** It is rare to find a Petit Verdot among the less expensive wines. This is bold, fruity, tasty and inexpensive. A wine to drink, not taste. The name of the winery refers to the "author" of the wines, who is their French born winemaker.

#### NIS 50 to NIS 100

**Dalton Estate Fumé Blanc 2019.** A quality wine that is crisp and refreshing, it has a nose of tropical fruit, a pleasing complexity in the mouth and good acidity on the finish. Dalton Winery were the pioneers of the Galilee. They are making very good wines these days.

**Tulip White 2019.** One of my favorite whites. Like the winery, the wine is young, fresh, innovative, and also great quality. It is an original blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer, which makes an aromatic, refreshing and slightly different white wine. The aromatic Gewürz on the nose, and the steely Sauvignon Blanc in the mouth, make a good combination. Tulip Winery employs adults with special needs, and is always one of Israel's most interesting wineries.

**Midbar Semillon Sauvignon 2019.** This shows what can be done in the desert. It is nicely aromatic, crisp, complex, with a mineral thread that runs through the wine. Midbar Winery (*midbar* means desert in

Hebrew) grows its wines in the deepest Negev. Their whites are excellent.

**Yatir Rosé 2019.** Bone-dry rosé with more color and flavor than usual. Complex, refreshing and extremely versatile as a food wine. Yatir Winery has just completed its 20th anniversary. The winery is situated at Tel Arad, among the Bedouin and camels, and their vineyards are in Yatir Forest in the southern Hebron Hills.

**Galil Mountain Grenache 2017.** I loved this. This wine has an attractive but delicate cherry berry aroma, an elegant, earthy taste, with nice length on the finish. Grenache is the Pinot Noir for countries with a hot climate.

**Segal Wild Ferment Cabernet Sauvignon 2018.** There are some interesting new wines under the Segal label, made by Israel's new Master of Wine Ido Lewinsohn. This particularly wine is tasty, easy to drink and the fruit carries forward to the finish. It is a nicely focused wine and it is very drinkable.

**Jezreel Valley Alpha 2018.** A blend of Syrah, Argaman (the Israeli variety) and Cabernet Sauvignon. It has rich, bold flavors of berry and plum fruit. Certainly not elegant, but very flavorful. Jezreel Valley are specialists in Argaman.

**Tura Mountain Vista Heartland 2018.** A bold, hearty wine full of ripe fruit flavors, with a sweet backdrop of vanilla. Full flavored from the Central Mountain region. Their wines are consistent and popular.

#### MORE THAN NIS 100

**Château Golan Geshem 2019.** An expensive but unique white wine made from Grenache Blanc and Roussanne. It has an herbal element on the nose, a broad flavor in the mouth has a nice complexity. It is such a relief to be spared the blast of tropical fruit you receive in most Israeli wines. Château Golan's winemaker is innovative and talented.

**Yarden Cabernet Franc 2017.** This has a lot of aromatic oak flavors on the nose, but in the mouth it is elegant, with good fruit and a slight herbaceous notes, and it has a lingering, well-balanced finish. I think the effect of the oak will be reduced with bottle age. Cabernet Franc was the first of the "other" Bordeaux varieties (that is, other than Cabernet Sauvignon), to be used in blends by the Golan Heights Winery, but it is the last of them to be made into a varietal. No doubt, a very good wine.

**Lahat GSM 2018.** This is one sexy wine. Delicate



with tantalizing aromas, the weight in the mouth is the antithesis of the usual Israeli wine. It is simply a delight. Itay Lahat is our very own Rhône Ranger, that is, a specialist in Rhône-style wines, and he is one of the leading practitioners of this in the country. It is a Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre blend. The Grenache provides the aromas, the Syrah the fruit and peppery taste, and Mourvedre the texture. Elegant and high quality, but rare because of tiny production. The Lahat Red and White may be easier to find, and they are also very good.

**Petit Castel 2018.** This is one of the most consistent wines on the market. It always delivers. It is the second wine of Domaine du Castel, made from the Bordeaux varieties. It is plush, rich, soft and velvety, with a great length. Castel is one of our very finest small wineries and their winery is one of the most advanced and beautiful in Israel.

*The writer, a wine trade veteran, has been advancing Israeli wine for 35 years and is regarded as the English voice of Israeli wine. [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)*