



NEW YEAR WINES

THE CENTRAL Mountains is one of the best regions for Merlot; Tura Winery's Merlot vineyard is at Har Bracha. (Tura Winery)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Rosh Hashanah is upon us again. The wine trade eagerly awaits the holidays because they are when the wine sales boom. The consumer also enjoys what is a buyer's market because the promotions and special offers are at their peak. Many people find wine buying an ordeal. But remember, you have to purchase only one or two wines – compare that to the number of food items you will need to buy.

When you are looking for the right wine, go in with a fixed idea of how much you want to spend. Wine shops are worth a special visit because of the extra service, but you can find a great range of excellent wines in some supermarkets these days, too. If you are already there to buy milk, take time to browse the wine shelves.

By all means look for the good price, but always remember the cheapest wine may not be the best value. There may be a reason a wine is discounted so heavily. It may be old wine that has not sold through. Furthermore, the fixed costs of a wine (bottle, cork, capsule and label) are reasonably similar. So, the difference between a wine of NIS 20 and NIS 40 is the wine itself.

However, do not feel bad about buying cheap. Nothing makes my blood boil more than the wine snob who is disparaging about cheap wines. Yet many are great drinking wines, especially for the price. You don't need to taste every wine like a sommelier or have a symposium giving opinions of the experts like sharing gold among the minions, whom one is hoping to impress. Sometimes the wine does not have to be on a pedestal. It is on the table like the salt and pepper and enjoyed as an integral part of a meal, but in the background.

Most wines will curl up at the idea of sweet wines, and it is true there is a big move away from sweet kiddush wines to grape juice and dry table wines. However, Rosh Hashanah is the festival where one should have a sweet wine for the ritual part of the meal, along with the apple and honey, to express our hope for a sweet year. No need to focus on a kiddush wine, but to match this special occasion choose a dessert wine; just serve it ice cold, so it is palatable.

I recommend a few wines for the holiday meals, from a broad range of wineries in a wide range of wine styles.

TABOR SAUVIGNON BLANC 2018

This is the nearest we have to a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Very aromatic, lashings of tropical fruit and a palate-cutting acidity make it a very refreshing option to go with grilled fish or meze. It will also go well with baked vegetables and goat's cheese. Tabor's wines, particularly their whites, represent great value. NIS 60



(Photos: Wineries mentioned)

RECANATI CHARDONNAY UPPER GALILEE 2018

A modern style Chardonnay, designed to be refreshing and good with food. Half the final blend was aged on its lees in oak, and half in stainless steel. The result is a fresher style, where the oak does not take over, though it is apparent and gives the wine body. Recanati Winery is one of our most successful commercial wineries, with regard to international recognition. NIS 59

YARDEN PINOT GRIS 2018

This crisp wine has notes of unripe apple, zesty lime, a hint of floral notes, and an underlying minerality. It is refreshing with very good acidity. Pinot Gris is newish in Israel, and this is one of the better ones. This is the Israel version of a grape variety very popular abroad under the name Pinot Grigio. The Golan Heights Winery is the pioneering winery of Israel and it led the wine quality revolution. NIS 75



VITKIN GRENACHE BLANC 2018

Vitkin Winery is a pioneer of lesser known, more exotic grape varieties. Now it has done it again with this Grenache Blanc. People usually are more familiar with the red Grenache. Why I like this wine: it does not have the bowlful of tropical fruit that most Israeli whites have. The aromas are delicate and subdued, the mouth feel is broad and complex. Vitkin Winery is family owned, with an inventive, creative winemaker called Assaf Paz. One of our best. NIS 130



CASTEL LA VIE ROUGE 2017

Castel has been a winery that has helped Israel reach the highest level in terms of international third-party recognition. Those who wish to sample Castel, but do not pay big bucks for wine, this is your opportunity. The wine is mainly Cabernet, Merlot with a little Petit Verdot. It is medium-bodied, well balanced and has a refreshing quality that demands another glass. NIS 75



KISHOR GSM 2016

Kishor is a winery that is part of the Kishorit village, which serves adults with special needs. It is one of the few genuine estate wineries. Its wines have elegance and are well defined. I love the GSM – Grenache Syrah Mourvedre. Fruity, spicy and refreshing. Serve this slightly chilled. NIS 95

MAIA MARE NOSTRUM 2016

MAIA specializes in Mediterranean wines, and this is a blend of Carignan, Syrah and Durif (Petite Sirah). It is a joint venture between the winemaker and two famous Greek consultants who are involved with this project. It is a full-flavored wine with plenty of red berry fruit, a smoked meat character and a nicely defined finish. NIS 135



TURA MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS MERLOT 2016

This comes from one of the best Merlot regions. The wine is from Har Bracha in the Central Mountains. The wine is rich, plush, full-bodied and velvety. Aromas of ripe plumb and blackberry fruit are supported by an oaky backdrop which gives body and depth. Good wine, but big. NIS 129



PSAGOT EDOM 2017

This is a Bordeaux-style blend made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot from a winery situated in the Central Mountains. It is full-flavored with classic aromas of cassis and blackberry, yet it has a well-defined elegance in the mouth and a pleasing finish. Well made, good quality and very drinkable. NIS 90

YATIR CREEK 2016

This is a reincarnation of the Yatir Syrah as a blend. It is still mainly Syrah, with a little Tannat and Malbec. The fruit is up front, and not lacking in any way, but the wine is also spicy with some savory notes and an attractive bitterness that prevents it from being jammy. Yatir Winery is situated in the northeastern Negev, but its vineyards lie within Yatir Forest, Israel's planted forest. NIS 150



MATAR PETIT VERDOT 2016

Petit Verdot is a Bordeaux variety that often fails to ripen there, but there are no such problems in Israel. The variety has become very well used as a blender here. This is a rare varietal Petit Verdot. To me the fruit is similar to Cabernet, just bigger, blacker and more powerful, but it is great example for those wanting to sample Petit Verdot for the first time. Matar is the kosher brand of the Pelter Winery. NIS 160



Wishing you enjoyable wine time this Rosh Hashanah and a happy and sweet New Year. Shana Tova! ■

The writer has advanced Israeli wines for over 30 years and is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wines. www.adammontefiore.com

1848 SECOND GENERATION ROSÉ 2018

A delightful rosé. Lightly pink, delicate aroma, crisp flavor and a good, refreshing acidity. It is produced by 1848 Winery, underrated but fast improving. 1848 Winery is a premium winery owned by Yossi Shor. The Shor family has been making wine for eight generations of winemaking over 170 years. Their family winery was originally founded in... you got it, in 1848 in the Old City of Jerusalem. NIS 60



CARMEL MOJO RED

I have long been a believer in semi-sweet wines for the many that look for them. This is a new brand from Carmel based on the phrase "moments of joy." The wine is a semi-sweet red. If this is what you are looking for, go for it, with no fear of what others may think. After all, Rosh Hashanah is a festival of sweet things, and though a top-class dessert wine would really fit the bill, this is a more reasonably priced alternative. Carmel is the historic winery of Israel. NIS 35



HAYOTZER VIRTUOSO CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2016

Don't be put off by the ostentatious bottle. This is a very drinkable, good-value Cabernet, full of flavor, medium-bodied and tasty. Hayotzer Winery is also owned by the Shor family, but another branch. Today there are five wineries owned by this special family. NIS 45



GALIL MOUNTAIN ELA 2016

An interesting blend from Galil Mountain Winery, which is situated at Kibbutz Yiron. This is made from Syrah, Barbera and a little Petit Verdot. It had a cherry-berry aroma, plummy fruit, good acidity with a flavor-led finish. NIS 60