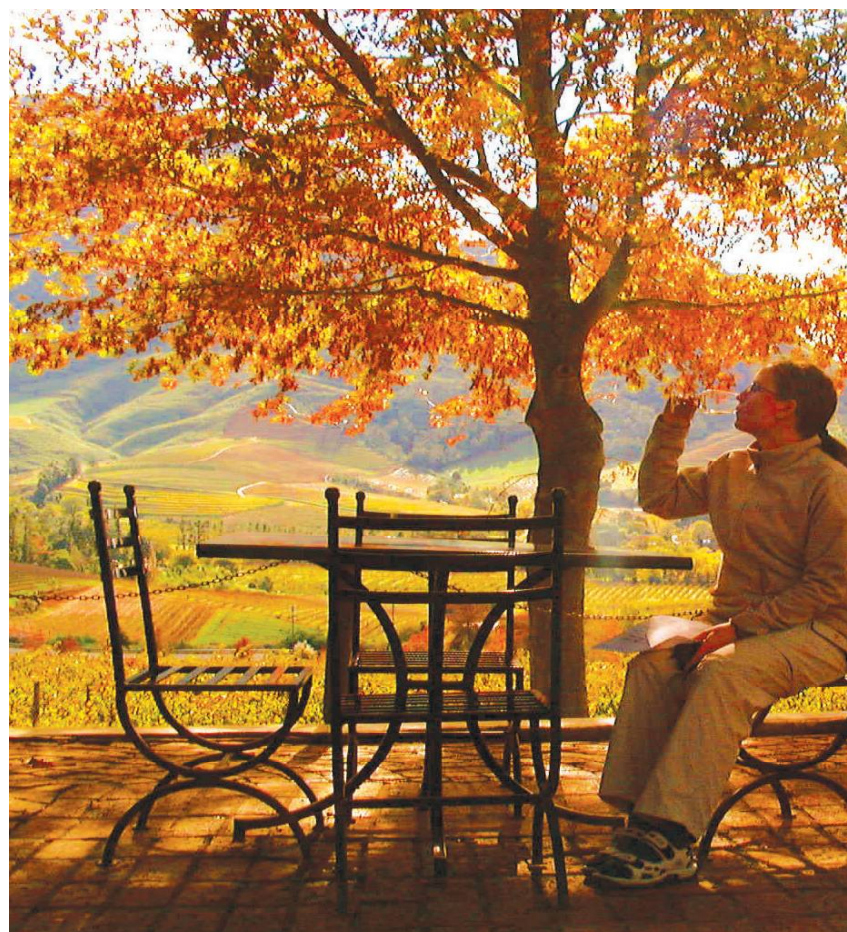




WINE ACCOMPANIES a formal meal at the Montefiore Hotel. (Photos: Courtesy)



POWER TO THE PEOPLE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

There is a broad spectrum of people who don't go to tastings, don't check wine scores or read wine articles. They don't know the difference between Cabernet and Merlot. They just don't care. However, they buy and drink. Their criteria are simple – to choose what is tasty to them and drink what they like.

Those of us in the wine trade have a passion that extends beyond the drink itself. Yet, we are all guilty of building an ivory tower, which is only accessible to those who speak the language. We are rightly accused of only speaking about wine in terms of baskets of fruits or critic scores. We rave about winemakers like famous chefs, and discuss different vintages, terroir, soils and elevation. The talk is pretentious, elitist and I suppose it is a self-perpetuating club. The disease is fairly widespread amongst winos.

However, there are many other people who drink wine without a symposium. They are not interested in forest fruits or Parker points. They are not particularly bothered by the wine speak of the wine intelligentsia. When did you last hear someone talking about the wonders of Barkan Classic, Carmel Selected, Mount Hermon or Segal's Wines? Yet there are millions of these bottles being sold each year. My conclusion is that there are people who buy wine to talk about and others who buy wine to drink.

Look at the massive sales of Blue Nun, Lambrusco, Verdi and Moscato. These are wines that many professionals will sneer at. Don't disparage the wine drinker who buys what he likes. I have encountered more than one wine shop manager who talks about Blue Nun in terms of embarrassment. "We sell Blue Nun because we have to" said one, "but it is not really wine." Well, actually it is and two million bottles are sold each year.

I am a kind of wine snob, because I love delving into the intricacies of wine. I spend my life typifying the wine lover stereotype and educating people to understand more about what they drink. Yet I hate wine snobbery. Therefore, I want to support the real wine drinker who is teaching us that wine is to drink and that it should be fun and tasty. I think we can learn from them... and I am happy to encourage them.

While the sophisticated few debate which Riedel glass to use, we should remember that many real people don't own different wine glasses. One is all you need – and if you do not have one, drink from whatever you have at home. A tumbler will do. For me, the best part in the film *Sideways* is when the hero drinks his expensive bottle of wine in a plastic cup in a hamburger joint. His feeling was most likely: "If I don't care, why should anyone else?"

The most risible comment by so-called wine experts is "I only drink red wine" as if to explain how much they understand this complicated world. It is quite common to hear this refrain. To me, it is a nonsensical stance, suggesting ignorance more than

knowledge. Anyway, white wines are coming back in. They are perfect for our climate, often go better with food and there is lots of variety to suit different tastes. Certainly, don't feel inferior if you do not drink "only" red.

Likewise, rose has had a reputation of being a poor man's wine. Well, I am happy to say rose wines are "in." Usually beautifully colored, they go well with our food, with our heat and humidity and they are almost symbolic of the Mediterranean. Drink them proudly without a second thought about what people with think.

Matching food and wine is fraught with problems for most people. Whereas the wine snob will relish the challenge of matching the wine to the food, my advice to the real drinker is it really does not matter. Good food goes with good wine. If you drink red wine with fish or white wine with meat, the roof does not fall in. Some say "match the wine to the mood, not the food." What might be more practical advice is "match the wine to the person, not the dish."

Sweetness is a no-no to the wine expert (apart from expensive dessert wines.) Many real people find white wines too sour and red wines too astringent, in the same way many people find coffee too bitter. They are able to drink their coffee only with lots of milk and sugar. I once gave a tasting on the radio of all the expensive wines in a winery portfolio. At the end, I asked the host which he preferred. He was embarrassed, as though he was about to say something forbidden. "Actually, I liked the sweet one



'THERE ARE people who buy wine to talk about, and others who buy wine to drink.'
(Marcus Hansson/Flickr)



WINE IS also delicious when sampled informally from a tumbler glass.

WINE LOVERS taste the grape at the Jerusalem Wine Festival.



best," he said! I have learnt he is not alone. To the wine jury, I say people have ketchup and Coca-Cola with a meal and they are sweet. So, if someone prefers a sweet wine with a meal, why not?

There is a stigma against buying cheap wines, though I can't understand why. It really is ok to buy, drink and enjoy a wine costing less than 25 shekels. Many times the wine lover will say with indignation and disdain, "I don't buy wine at that price," probably thinking it says something about them if they do. However, if you were to hide the source of the bottle and give a blind tasting, they might actually quite like it. I agree that at these price points, the wines are to drink and not taste like a pro, but considering the price, they are really not bad and if served chilled, very quaffable. It may surprise you, despite that despite all the talk, that even the wine expert does not drink Margalit, Yarden Katzin or Castel Grand Vin every night.

It really is okay to drink so-called unsophisticated wines. Some people like Lambruscos or Moscatos, not because they have won a medal, but simply because they are tasty. These are fun wines. You can permit yourselves to enjoy something without having to explain why you like it.

I love a spritzer. It is a fantastic summer drink. All you have to do is add sparkling water, to your wine. Just because the Yekkes from Germany liked to add soda water to Carmel Hock pre-State, does not mean it is has to be passé. In fact, it is a great idea and one of the most refreshing and invigorat-

ing ways of drinking wine.

Please do not be intimidated in the restaurant by the ordering and tasting procedure. Either feel free to order what you want or don't be afraid to ask for advice. We all do it. Also, it is okay not to taste the wine you have ordered in the restaurant. When asked if you want to taste the wine, you are then expected to perform the tasting ritual in front of your guests or family. You don't have to play this game. Just say, "No thank you, please go ahead and pour."

Many wine people frown on a wine with a screw cap. This is really out of date. Screw caps are good even for quality wines. In any case, why make things difficult for yourself? One can never find the opener anyway and if you can, you can never remember how to use it. Today there are fine wines sold by screw cap. It is practical, sensible and modern. A wine is not less impressive because it doesn't have a bit of tree bark in it to stopper up the bottle.

As far as temperatures are concerned, white wines are often served too cold and red wines too warm. In fact, I believe even the finest red wines should be served after 20 minutes in a domestic fridge. With high alcohols here, a red wine can lose its shape when served at room temperature. Therefore, don't recoil from chilling a red wine. It will be served chilled from most cellars or wine fridges anyway and will swiftly warm up in the glass.

The professional will know how to get a bottle cold quickly, but if you want to follow your best instincts, and add a couple of ice cubes to your wine, do it!

Where did we get so precious that we feel embarrassed about adding ice to a glass? We do it with whiskey sometimes and there are no thunderbolts. Wine is mainly water, so what the hell. The sommelier who frowns at this request in a restaurant is not worthy of the job. The customer is always right.

Finally, wine regrettably seems to encourage a "look-at-me" culture. There is a fad among wine lovers to regularly post on Facebook rows of bottles to show what they are drinking. Presumably, the number and quality of wines contribute to one's standing in the wine connoisseur pecking order. I find it a sad and slightly warped concept of what wine should be about. "Show off and share it" seems to be the byword for many wine lovers. My message to you is you can enjoy wine without talking about it, boasting about it or putting it on a pedestal.

Put wine in its rightful place. Don't take it too seriously. Do not feel you have to impress or conform. Wine is not a straitjacket any more than religion is just ritual. The tent is broad and there is room for everybody. There is not one truth only. Let all who are thirsty, come and drink from the fountain in the way they choose. Drink what you like and how you like! I will continue educating about wine and sharing the passion, but I also want to give space to all those who like wine in a less pretentious way. ■

The writer has advanced Israeli wine for over 30 years and is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wines. adam@carmelwines.co.il