



JOHN GAGO, the long-serving chief winemaker of Penfolds.
(Photos: Courtesy Penfolds Winery & Hennessy Cognac)

PRIDE IN HERITAGE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

I have been in the wines and spirits trade for a long time and have always looked up to Hennessy Cognac and Penfolds Winery as companies to be followed and studied. When I recently was invited to tastings by these two icons in two consecutive days, I was reminded of their special qualities. They illustrate the same immense pride in heritage, a mission of continuity, attention to detail, while producing wines and spirits of style and quality.

Hennessy Cognac was founded by Richard Hennessy in 1765, 254 years ago! His son, James Hennessy, gave the company a new name, Jas Hennessy & Co., in 1813. More recently, the company partnered with Moët et Chandon, the leading champagne company, to combine the two precious jewels from those two protected areas, Cognac and Champagne, whose very names evoke added value. In 1987 they came under the wing of LVMH, the ultimate luxury goods group.

Throughout this long history, Hennessy has been the No. 1 Cognac house in both sales and prestige. It sells between 40% and 50% of the world's Cognac, an astonishing figure of domination. However, despite this exalted position, it has never lost its focus on company values and quality.

The art of making great Cognac is the art of blending. Hennessy receives eaux-de-vie from five of the six different crus (registered regions), and the master blender has to cope with the vagaries of the harvest and the regional differences, to blend final products that have the quality and consistency demanded by Cognac aficionados, being loyal to the house style of over 250 years.

I was astonished to learn that for the last eight generations, the crucial figure of master blender has been the responsibility of one family. In 2017 the latest in this unique chain was appointed. Renaud Fillioux de Gironde took up the baton after a rigorous apprenticeship under his uncle, the seventh-generation Yann Fillioux. When he took over, Renaud was 39 years old. Previously, he was the winegrower manager, responsible for the vineyards in five different crus or growing regions officially demarcated by Cognac. He was groomed for the role in the tasting committee for 15 years, with the daily tasting held every day at 11 a.m. without fail.

The tasting room looks like a time warp from previous centuries. The furniture has not changed and there are no modern appliances. Even the priceless notebooks containing all the blending secrets are still written in longhand. No one has attempted to bring things up to date by entering the notes onto a computer. Instead, they pride themselves in maintaining the past to look after the future. This is similar to the farmer who plants a tree, with the understanding this is not for him, but for his son and grandson. In the same way, Fillioux blends carefully for the library of Cognacs, which may be used in generations to come, or even in future centuries.



HENNESSY COGNAC, France.

PENFOLDS GRANGE, one of the world's great wines.

It is mind-blowing and heartwarming that this respect for the past and responsibility for the future is the culture of a modern global brand, dealing in a modern world where instant satisfaction, sales and profits have overriding importance.

THAT IS the world of spirits. The next day I found an equivalent in the world of wine. Penfolds is an Australian winery founded in 1844 by Christopher Rawson Penfold, an English doctor, and his wife, Mary Penfold. They had brought over vine cuttings on their voyage and planted a vineyard at the Magill Estate near Adelaide in South Australia. Eventually Mary Penfold took over the running of the winery.

In 1948, Max Schubert became the winery's first chief winemaker. Schubert created the Penfolds Grange, one of the great wines of the world, which is a story in itself. It became the flag-bearer of Australian wine.

Penfolds has since grown into a massive winery, with wines at every price point. Each one is outstanding in its own market. The winery survived becoming part of large conglomerates, with names like Southcorp, the Foster's Group, and now Treasury Wine Estates. Despite this, the winery has maintained its excellence, independence and integrity. The wine graveyards are full of major wineries that did not navigate the changes of generations or the transformation of becoming a mega global brand. Penfolds has achieved it with flying colors.

One of its secrets is that since 1948, it has had only four chief winemakers. Four in 71 years! Following the Hennessy recipe of safeguarding the succession, the current winemaker, Peter Gago, joined Penfolds in 1989, absorbed the culture and learned the ropes, before graduating to chief winemaker in 2002.

It is a story that inspires. I have worked for two large wineries in my time, the Golan Heights Winery and Carmel. I always took Penfolds as one of the finest role models of how a large winery should be managed. It has remained at the very highest pinnacle of quality, and yet has also maintained the strong brand despite having wines at every price point. There are many Australian major brands that did not survive the cost cutting needed to stay ahead of the sales curve. This makes Penfolds's continued devotion to its core values even more remarkable.

Hennessy and Penfolds are really newbies. The Italian



THE TASTING meeting at Hennessy, every day at 11 a.m.

winery Antinori was founded in 1385! Now that really is an old winery! However, what Hennessy and Penfolds represent is so special and rare in market leaders. One should certainly not take their continued success for granted. Look, for example, at Seagram's, a Jewish firm formed by Samuel Bronfman, which grew to become the largest spirits company in the world. The third generation sold the company, and it was split up.

IN ISRAEL, wine lovers love something brash and new. I am not sure heritage is something respected so much. Most of the wineries here were founded in the last 25 years. We don't have an Antinori, or even a Hennessy or Penfolds, but we have wineries that have continued to make wine over a long period of time. So, I think we should pause and give some respect to the very few wineries with a long history that we have.

The Shor family is the custodian of our oldest winery still existing. It came here from Ukraine. Its winery was founded in 1848 in the Old City of Jerusalem, on Haggai Street in the Muslim Quarter, adjacent to the Little Western Wall. Over seven generations, it has continued to make wine. Grandfather has passed the wine baton on to his son, who in turn has passed it on to grandson, over more than 170 years.

The core winery focusing on wine nonstop is the Shor Winery, which eventually became known as Zion Winery and, in its premium incarnation, as 1848 Winery. The Shor family continues to own and manage the winery. Also, uniquely, the winemaker of the Shor-Zion family winery has always been a member of the family. Zvika Shor is the latest family winemaker in the chain.

The Shor family also divided over 70 years ago. Brothers went different ways, but stayed in the wine trade. One branch is Shor-Arza-Hayotzer Winery, and another is Hacommim. These are cousins of the Zion-1848 Shors, but their devotion to wine continues. 1848 Winery and Hayotzer were founded to bring these wineries into the 21st century. They have both employed French-born and French-trained winemakers.

Teperberg is another family with a long history. The Teperbergs came from Austria. In 1952, they began to trade in wine as retailers and distributors. In 1870, they founded a small boutique winery near the beginning of Yehudim Street in the Old City of Jerusalem. For five generations they have been part of the Israeli wine

scene. Today, Motti Teperberg, the fifth generation, is the longest-serving CEO of a winery. Due to his navigation and vision, Teperberg is now the fourth-largest winery in Israel and the largest family-owned winery in Israel.

Carmel Winery was the first commercial winery in Israel. It was founded in 1882 by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, an owner of Chateau Lafite. They brought French expertise, built Israel's two largest wineries with deep underground cellars, and planted vineyards all over. This signaled the founding of a modern Israeli wine industry. In 1906 the Societe Cooperative Vignerones des Grand Caves was founded. What is unique here is that the same wine-growing families have been the shareholders of this company for over five generations. Furthermore, the winery had four chief winemakers spanning 65 years: Shimon Rosenthal, Freddie Stiller, Israel Flam and Lior Lacser.

The Trappist Latrun Abbey and the Cremisan Valley Salesian Monastery were founded in the 1890s. They have continued to make wine and sell it to gain an income. Domaine de Latroun pioneered some varieties like Pinot Noir and Gewurztraminer in Israel, and Cremisan Wine Estate is the current pioneer of indigenous, Holy Land domestic varieties such as Dabouki, Hamdani, Jandali and Baladi Asmar. For well over 100 years, monks from the two orders were responsible for the winemaking. In retrospect, Latroun's most famous winemaker has been Lebanese-born Mounir Souama, who has become the famous owner-winemaker of Burgundy's celebrated Lucie le Moine. Cremisan currently uses the services of Riccardo Cotarella, Italy's most famous winemaking consultant.

The Golan Heights Winery is our main large winery with a culture of quality, a house style and continual innovation, yet with a view to long-term continuation. Victor Schoenfeld has been winemaker for 28 years. Instead of crediting the winery with maintaining quality ever since its founding in 1983, some in the wine intelligentsia complain it has become boring and part of the establishment. Yet the winery remains the finest ambassador of Israeli wine.

We should sometimes take stock and appreciate values, family, pursuit of quality and pride in heritage. ■

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