



# Pioneer of the Galilee

IN THE vineyards of Dalton Winery. (Courtesy)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

**W**hen I lived in England, I was known for being Jewish. Having come to live in Israel, I instead became known as a “Brit” or “Anglo,” which is short for Anglo-Saxon. An Anglo covers anyone from an English-speaking country. Considering that the English-speaking countries are highly involved in producing and selling wine, it is surprising that there aren’t many wineries here with an Anglo influence.

There is, of course, the legendary winemaker from the Golan Heights Winery, Victor Schoenfeld, who hails from California. Paul Dubb of Tzuba Winery is from South Africa. Sam Soroka, winemaker of Jerusalem Wineries, and Barry Saslove, once of Saslove Winery, are from Canada.

Then there is Alex Haruni from England, whose Dalton Winery has just enjoyed its 20th anniversary and continues to thrive. It is a great success story.

Dalton Winery was the first commercial winery in the Galilee, making it a forerunner of a trend. Fast

forward to today and there are many Galilee wineries – someone told me as many as 60, taking into account wineries of all sizes.

The Galilee has also become an area where many wineries, even in the center of the country, have planted vineyards. The result is that today the upper Galilee in particular, is covered with vines, which intermingle with the forests, stony ridges, plunging mountains and running streams. It is Israel’s most beautiful wine region. The Galilee and Golan combined have in the last 20 years become the largest vineyard area in Israel.

The Dalton Industrial Park, where Dalton Winery is situated, has become the heart of the Galilee wine region. In addition to Dalton, Adir and Carmel also have wineries there, along with other smaller wineries. Recanati is building there, too. So Dalton Winery was really a pioneer; it was there first.

Haruni was born in London into a family with Indian roots that dealt in precious stones. He first came to Israel as a 24-year-old in 1991 to learn Hebrew. When his father, Mati, was looking to invest in Israel, he specifically chose the Galilee. He wanted a business connected to the land that would involve tourism

and showcase the benefits of the Galilee. It was primarily a Zionist project, tinged with the usual business objectives.

They slipped into wine. Armand Maman had an established vineyard and, in line with the new trend of the time, he had started making his own wine. He needed help and this was the opportunity. The Harunis knew nothing about wine; they were whiskey drinkers. However, they dived in, learning about wine as they went along. They learned by trial and error with all the ups and downs.

Building a winery is not easy and returns are far slower than in most business. At times Haruni’s father must have thought it would have been more profitable to sell mineral water, Coca-Cola or Johnnie Walker. Sometimes they must have wondered what on earth they got themselves into. However, they persevered. They had worked out that they needed to reach 300,000 bottles to be profitable; in 1995 they produced 30,000 bottles.

I remember some of the original bottles were very flashy and the labels slightly garish. I say this because with development over time, when Haruni absorbed himself in the business, Dalton was to become one of the most stylish,

ALEX HARUNI is the owner of Dalton Winery. (David Silverman)

## The Dalton wines I tasted are as follows:



### Dalton Alma Vin Gris 2015

An onion-skin-colored pale pink rosé made from Grenache and Barbera. Very delicate fruit notes with great acidity. Refreshing. Vin Gris (literally gray wine) is the terminology often used in France and Morocco for a pale rosé. PRICE: NIS 75



### Dalton Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2013

A smooth and deep red, with blackberry fruit notes, hints of ripe plum and sweet vanilla. Full of flavor, with a silky texture and a broad, tannic finish. PRICE: NIS 110



### Dalton Pinot Gris 2015

Crisp, fresh and fruity, with citrusy notes providing a refreshing finish. One of the first releases of this variety in Israel. PRICE: NIS 65



### Dalton 20th Anniversary Red 2013

Limited edition. A blend of mainly Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz with small amounts of Grenache, Mourvèdre and Merlot. A full-bodied, powerful wine with a bold black fruit nose, velvety texture and prominent oak flavors of vanilla. It has a long balanced finish. PRICE: NIS 200



### Dalton 20th Anniversary White 2014

Limited edition wine made from Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. It has a tropical fruit nose balanced by green apple. It is rich, oaky and flavorful. It shows good complexity as it warms up. Don't serve it too cold. PRICE: NIS 90



THE VISITORS' center of Dalton Winery. (Michal Cohen)

best marketed wineries in the whole country.

Haruni is very measured and cerebral, talking slowly to be sure of what he is saying, rather like a seasoned veteran in the diplomatic service. However, when someone ruffles him, he can respond with a surprising sharpness that shows the passion flowing within, even if it is usually held carefully in check.

It is fair to say that Dalton was the winery that his father built, but it was the son who filled it with content. His father was very wise at the outset to employ a consultant, something only the Golan Heights Winery did in those days. They started a long relationship with flying winemaker John Worontschak that continues to today. Worontschak is an Australian living in England, and advises wineries all over the world. He still comes here three times a year.

Haruni is one of the most interesting people in the wine trade to talk to, because he has learned at the sharp end. He is knowledgeable enough to act as a judge in international competitions. It is not a "look at me" winery, and Haruni is not a "look at me" type of owner. He manages the business in a very modest way but he is innovative, and everything he does is stylish and well thought out. I call his a "less is more"

approach, and the winery reflects this.

Dalton Winery today produces just under a million bottles a year. The entry-level wines are called Canaan. Then there are the Dalton varietals, the D series, the Alma blends, the Reserve label and the Single Vineyards. The Homage label of a red and white wine is the prestige label that honors his parents, Matatia and Anna, who invested and persevered. The result of their effort can be seen not only in where Dalton is today, but also where the Galilee is today as far as both wineries and vineyards are concerned.

Haruni is a supporter of new talent. He did not hesitate to appoint Russian new immigrant Arkadi Papikian as a winemaker. His next winemaker was a woman, Naama Sorokin. In those days there were very few women winemakers. His latest appointment is Guy Eshel, which demonstrates his confidence in new blood. Eshel is young, with impeccable credentials but as yet untried. One day, if not already, Eshel will thank Haruni for his support and the opportunity. Mind you, Haruni will also be grateful for gaining such a young talent for the winery's immediate future.

As far as wines are concerned, they have also shown

innovation. The red Zinfandel was for a time a rare serious attempt at a quality wine from this variety. Their wonderful Petite Sirah shows they are not just tied to the famous grape varieties. They were also the first winery to introduce Pinot Gris and to revive Semillon as a quality variety and among the first to produce Mediterranean style blends.

Haruni is a great fan of Shiraz. He believes it grows particularly well in Israel and shows Israel at its best. He likes varieties such as Albarino from Galicia in Spain and Gruner Veltliner from Austria. He also has hopes for Jandali, the indigenous variety here, which he believes could develop into something worthy. Like all of us, he wishes wineries would work together better to market Israeli wine abroad.

So congratulations are in order. We should thank this Anglo for bringing us 20 years of growth and stability in the topsy-turvy world of Israeli wine. Under Haruni's wise stewardship, even better years are ahead of them.

*The writer has been promoting Israeli wines for over 30 years. He is known as "the ambassador of Israeli wine" and the "English voice of Israeli wine."*