

wine talk



# A soul and a sense of place

*We can learn a lot from Tuscany about wine culture*

■ By ADAM MONTEFIORE

Wander around the beautiful vineyards of the country, and you will hear someone say proudly, "Now, this is the Tuscany of Israel." They may be referring to the verdant mountains and running streams of the Upper Galilee or the terraced vineyards fitting the contoured valleys of the Jerusalem Hills. It could be the sparser, more biblical-looking vineyards of the Central mountains or the miracle of green vineyards sprouting in the desert. All beautiful in different ways, but the comparison is always with Tuscany.

The reason is that the famous region in central Italy has become the overriding symbol of all that is beautiful in a wine-growing area and the ultimate in wine tourism.

Tuscany's charms are well known, and

its reputation is totally justified. There you will see vineyards, olive groves and handsome lines of tall cypress trees intermingling in the Tuscan landscape. Funnily enough, that sounds a little like Israel. In the background are rolling hills punctuated by oak woods or even forests, shrouded in morning mists. There are those beautiful stone walls and attractive villages and towns, usually with an impressive medieval watchtower. Add to that the food and wine. It is certainly heaven on earth.

The Tuscan diet is based on bread, wine and olive oil. That sounds familiar as well. Think how many times grain, wine and olive oil are mentioned together in the Bible. They were the staples of the ancient Israelites, too. Psalm 104:15 also brackets them together... "wine to make glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face shining, and bread giving strength

to his heart." Wine and olive oil are partners throughout the Mediterranean, never more so than in Tuscany.

However, Tuscany is known mainly for its Chianti wines and the Sangiovese grape variety. Here, the similarities end. Sangiovese (the blood of Jove) is at its best in Tuscany and most unique in Chianti. There, the wines have less depth of color than what we are used to. They are more angular, less fruity and jammy, with prominent tannins and a rasping, refreshing acidity. More cranberry or pomegranate juice than Ribena. The astringent, sometimes tart, Sangiovese goes well with the broader olive oil flavors.

Lately, some Tuscans have been trying to make their Chiantis more international and globally acceptable by blending Sangiovese with Cabernet or Merlot and aging them in small new oak barrels. But others are trying to preserve the authentic Sangiovese taste,

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with its imperfections. They are perfect food wines but less memorable as competition show-off wines that draw attention in the one-off tasting.

The Italians have a healthy regard for a wine's place in a meal. It is always food and wine, never wine and food. The wine is secondary and has a supporting role. It is an intrinsic part of the meal and knows its place. It is not put on a pedestal as happens elsewhere. We have so much to learn about wine culture. Italy is always a great place to start.

There is more to Tuscany than Chianti. Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and Super Tuscans like Sassicaia, Solaia and Tignanello also come from this region, with its long history. We think that Carmel Winery is an old winery, making wine for more than 125 years. Well, the famous Tuscan houses of Antinori and Frescobaldi started in the wine trade in the 14th century!

No doubt Italy is one of the greatest wine-producing countries, but Italian kosher wines have never really hit the jackpot. I always have the impression that producers there are making commercial kosher wines rather than making the best wine possible that happens to be kosher. This may be semantics perhaps, but there is a difference.

I know Italians make the Bartenura Moscato, which is just about the largest-selling kosher brand in the world outside the infamous but big selling kiddush wine brands, but other kosher table wines don't excite. Maybe it is the size of the Jewish community, but it doesn't bother Spain, where Capcanes and Elvi make outstanding kosher wines.

Wine is a troika of three things. I call them the three Ps: the person, the place and the product. There is the wine itself, the place where it was grown and made, and the individual who made it. Many of the Italian kosher wines are basically private labels. This means that the wine you see is more associated with the importer or distributor that sells it than with any particular winemaker or winery. They have a brand name, and some of them are good, but the people and place aspect is missing. That is a pity because this is what adds context to a wine, and it is what differentiates wine from Coca-Cola.

There is hope. There is a small, quality dedicated winery called Terra di Seta, not far from Siena in the Castelnuovo

Berardenga region, whose objective is to make quality, authentic Chianti Classico wines, that also "just happen" to be kosher.

Chianti Classico is the heart of Tuscany and the heart of Italian wine. It is a regulated wine region situated between Florence and Siena, two places that reek of the history of art and wine. The difference between Chianti Classico and Chianti is purely geographical, though the locals fiercely protect the uniqueness of the Classico region as being superior to the wider geographical region. For proof, look for the black rooster displayed on the label or capsule to denote an authentic Chianti Classico wine.

Terra di Seta is owned by Daniele Della Seta and his wife, Maria Pellegrini. The Della Setas are an ancient Jewish family that came from Rome. The Pellegrinis are a Tuscan family with three generations of experience in wine. They run a beautiful estate. The word *terra* means "land" or "earth"; and Seta, the family name, means "silk." This is a wine that is all about people and place.

In 2001, the family bought the winery building and vineyards. They refurbished the winery, and in 2008 decided to dedicate all their production to kosher wine. Their winemaker is the respected Enrico Paternoster.

Daniele proudly claims that his objective is to make high-quality Chianti

Classico wine that is also kosher. It is the only winery in Tuscany dedicated 100% to kosher wine.

They have 15 hectares of vineyards, which are more than 500 meters above sea level. The original vineyards they inherited were 35 to 40 years old, but they have been gradually replacing them since 2002. They use only their own grapes and make about 40,000 bottles, of which 80% is sold in export.

They also produce olive oil and honey. Their estate is organic. That is to say, their vineyard is organically grown. I always think that organic or self-sustainable vineyards go well with kosher wine. The concepts complement each other, and I wish more Israeli vineyards chose the self-sustainable or organic route.

Terra di Seta is flying the flag not only of Chianti Classico but also Italian kosher wines. The wines represent a region and a wine style that is more local than international. These are wines with a soul and a sense of place. I will be watching their progress with interest.

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## The wines I tasted were as follows:

### Toscana Rosso, Terra di Seta 2012

I liked this. Very Sangiovese. Pale red, with a tinge of orange brown. A little thin with red cherry fruit, a touch of sourness and spice and very good acidity. A wine to drink chilled. Fun wine, good value.

Price: NIS 70



### Chianti Classico, Terra di Seta 2009

This in the modern way has a 5% boost of Cabernet Sauvignon. It has the classic Sangiovese sour cherry nose with aromas of plums, ripe berries but was perhaps less knitted together than the other samples I

tasted. I certainly look forward to the next vintage.

Price: NIS 110



### Chianti Classico Riserva, Terra di Seta 2010

Fuller-bodied version. Aromas of sour black cherries, a Mediterranean herbal character with a whiff of white pepper and spice against a backdrop of sweetish oak. A well-balanced wine, which adheres well to the standards expected by traditional lovers of Sangiovese. Firstly enticing, then satisfying and finally, refreshing.

Price: NIS 170

