



CHEF SHALOM KADOSH (R) with the writer, holding the gift box signed by great chefs from all over the world. (Photos: Shalom Kadosh)

THE ISRAELI BOCUSE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Chef Shalom Kadosh is an icon. He has cooked for kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers, from US president Jimmy Carter and prime minister Menachem Begin onward.

Nowadays Israeli chefs are shaking up the world, but Kadosh was the first. No one has done more to advance kosher cuisine and Israeli gastronomy. And he has been a shining ambassador of Israel among his peers – the greatest chefs in the world – and gourmets and gourmands everywhere.

On March 21, 2021, his world nearly came to an end when, on the day of his daughter's wedding, he was robbed at a gas station, and everyone could see on CCTV the sickening blow his head received on the concrete. His recovery was described by his doctors as a miracle.

As soon as Kadosh was able to leave hospital, the French president's chef, Guillaume Gomez, flew over to present Kadosh with a medal celebrating his life's work, in a surprise ceremony. I saw it on the news with great relief and joy.

Recently, I contacted Kadosh and invited myself to come and see him.

OUR PATHS have crossed a few times during my time in Israel. In 1989 I made aliyah and, as a wine guy, looked for work in the wine industry. Unfortunately, everyone was interested, but you know how it is here – no one responded with a yes or no. I did, though, have a background as wine manager for a hotel group, and eventually I was offered a job by Clement Hassid,

the gentleman general manager of the Sheraton Plaza Jerusalem hotel, as food and beverage manager. He explained to me that the job would include working with a chef who was a legend. It was the first time I heard of chef Kadosh.

As fate had it, the same week I was offered the job, I met Dan Propper, the owner of Osem. He took one look at my CV and said: "You should be working in the wine trade." There and then, he telephoned Avraham Ben-Moshe, the CEO of Carmel Mizrahi, and presto, I was offered a job. I chose wine over hotels, and the rest is history. I spent the next 27 years working with Carmel, the historic winery of Israel, and the Golan Heights Winery, the pioneering winery of Israel.

I used to visit Kadosh in the bowels of the Sheraton Plaza, to talk wine. His office was more modest than I expected. Though I was slightly apprehensive bothering the great man, he was always kind, unhurried and welcoming. At that time his Cow on the Roof was the finest kosher restaurant on the planet, bar none.

We next met over what was arguably the most famous meal ever held in Israel. It was the King David Feast, held in 1996, to celebrate 3,000 years of Jerusalem. The organizers decided that it would be a 12-course banquet (to symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel) and that chefs would be invited from abroad to prepare each course. A few months before the event, nothing was moving, and the dream event seemed far removed from reality. They then approached Kadosh, late but in time, who took ownership for the event. He had to attract the most famous chefs in the world, explain the kosher restrictions, cope with fragile egos and orchestrate a 12-course meal fit for the gods.

Kadosh performed a miracle. He managed to cajole, attract and invite 12 of the world's most famous

chefs on short notice to come and cook. He did it by first persuading the great Joel Robuchon, possibly the greatest of them all, to support the venture. Once he had accepted, others followed. Kadosh then had to prepare a menu that flowed through 12 courses, with specific recipes to suit the strengths and wishes of these superstars.

There were a few fraught nerves over kashrut, which was new to most of these superstar chefs. The great chef Jean-Louis Palladin was not best pleased when the officiating rabbi threw his carefully grilled foie gras into the bin, while three-star Michelin chef Gualtiero Marchesi was furious when he was not permitted to use gold leaf in his signature risotto dish.

The wines were selected by Serena Sutcliffe MW, head of Sotheby's Wine Department, and Philippe Bourguignon, sommelier of the Laurent Restaurant in Paris. From memory, they were Carmel Private Collection Sauvignon Blanc, Yarden Chardonnay, Yarden Merlot, Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmel Private Collection White Muscat. The choice is indicative of where Israeli wine was in the mid-1990s! Bourguignon was later quoted as saying the best wines were the Yarden Chardonnay 1994 and the Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon 1992. By the way, Sutcliffe was the wine expert who "discovered" Domaine du Castel, but that's another story.

Anyway, representing the Golan Heights Winery, I was one of those privileged to attend the banquet. Three hundred people paid \$600 a head, with the proceeds going to charity. The chefs prepared 3,600 courses! I will never forget: I was sitting at a table with a young couple of supposed feinschmeckers. The wife was very vocal about how wonderful the food was, but I could not help noticing that she was playing with the food with her fork and not eating anything. She then quietly passed the food to her husband, who ate hers as well as his own, enjoying 24 courses for his investment.

After this event I looked at Kadosh with new eyes. Who else an Earth could have pulled this off? And the answer is no one. These chefs came for him. It was a personal commitment.

In 1998 he did it again. The Golan Heights Winery decided to organize the first, totally original Golan Vintage: Wine & Culinary Festival. The idea was initiated by Laurent Celcer and organized by the peerless Daniel Benaim. The first decision they made was to co-opt chef Kadosh. It was the obvious decision.

Again, Kadosh attracted the very top level of chefs. Three-star Michelin chefs of the caliber of Marc Haerberlin, Michel Lorrain and Philippe Legendre came, along with celebrity chefs Palladin and Hubert Keller. The wine VIP guests were Adam Strum, owner and editor of the *Wine Enthusiast*; Prof. Roger Boulton from UC Davis; Marc Beyer, owner of Leon Beyer of Alsace; Brian Jordan, a wine writer from England; and, again, Bourguignon.

The grounds of the Golan Heights Winery were transformed. Large tents with air conditioners were constructed. The main hall had a kitchen where the chefs gave cooking demonstrations and workshops, which were relayed on larger screens to an audience watching in tiered seating, theater style. Wine tastings and lectures by the wine guests also took place. Though it was booked up, many people were desperately clamoring for tickets. It was a food and wine festival of a standard and scale never seen before in Israel.



In 2001, they repeated the festival, reaching even greater heights. Chefs included Igles Corelli, Haeblerlin again, Jacques Chibois, Christian Delouvrier and Anne Pic-Sinapian.

This is a wine article, so to give a scale of the place of wine in the events, the wines for the gala dinner were Yarden Blanc de Blancs as an aperitif; Yarden Katzrin Chardonnay, Yarden Merlot Magnum, Yarden Katzrin Magnum; and Yarden Heights Wine with the dessert. I stood with Bourguignon as he gingerly removed the wax from the Yarden Katzrin 1990 (the first-ever vintage of this icon wine). It was the first time any one of us had seen so many magnums of Yarden Katzrin in one place!

In 2010, Kadosh celebrated 35 years as executive chef at the Sheraton Plaza, which later was renamed Leonardo Plaza. Illustrious chefs worth 22 Michelin stars among them gathered in Israel. They were joined by legendary French food critic Giles Pudlowsky, who had named Kadosh "the Bocuse of Israel." Paul Bocuse, the great chef, was famous not only for his cuisine but also for his influence of generations. The comparison is totally with merit.

The great chefs who came to pay homage included George Blanc, Lorrain, Haeblerlin, Legendre and Chibois. They cooked alongside the crème de la crème of Israeli chefs, such as Haim Cohen, Yonatan Roshfeld, Meir Adoni and Ezra Kedem, who initiated the event. Tickets cost NIS 1,800, with the proceeds going to Beit Issie Shapiro in Ra'anana.

In honor of the great chef, I took the responsibility to be the sommelier for the evening, and Carmel Winery and Yatir Winery supported the event. This time I did not eat but wandered around the room checking that the wine service was the best it could be. We served

the following wines: Pommery Champagne, Yatir Sauvignon Blanc, Carmel Limited Edition, Yatir Forest, Carmel Shaal Gewurztraminer Late Harvest, Carmel Vintage (Port style) and Carmel 100 Brandy! What an evening that was! At the end, I presented Kadosh with a magnum of Carmel Limited Edition signed by winemaker Lior Lacser. I arranged for all the guest chefs to sign the presentation wooden box.

When I visited Kadosh in his home, it was to reminisce about these unique events. These were the ones I was involved in, but of course Kadosh stage-managed countless similar events in his sparkling career. I was extremely moved to see that the gift box was on prominent display.

KADOSH WAS born near Marrakesh in Morocco, in a family of nine children. They came to Israel when he was 14 years old and settled in Afula. He began his



cooking career on the cruise ships, and from there he came a long way to be the person who single-handedly reinvented kosher gastronomy and drew attention to Israeli cuisine at the highest possible level.

Now he is fighting a different battle, that of recuperating from his assault. It will be long and hard going, but it is fortuitous that he has Zohara, his wife, in his corner. She is a pearl, firstly with the patience and love with which she has helped his recovery, but also with the unwavering support with which she has supported his whole career. She is also a wonderful baker. While we talked, I was gorging on homemade biscuits and cake, hot from the oven. She did not know that, like Oscar Wilde, I can resist anything except temptation.

I liked Kadosh's answer when asked what was his favorite, signature dish: "Any time the plate comes back clean." Reminds me of what I say. What is a good wine? Simple: An empty bottle. Kadosh gives a great deal of respect to the Golan Heights Winery. The same revolution that happened with bread and cheese also happened with wine. It was the Golan Heights Winery that was responsible for kicking wine up a notch or three in Israel. His favorite wine is the Yarden Katzrin.

I was quite relieved that he remains the same Shalom Kadosh – warm, modest to a fault, with a smile that could melt icebergs. He is a great storyteller, recounting the professional events that shaped his life, but tells it all with an innocence and wonder, that he still can't quite believe it all happened. A mensch in chef's whites.

Thank you for all you have done for Israel, chef! ■

The writer is a wine industry insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 35 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com



Clockwise from top:

THE GREAT Shalom Kadosh, with one of the greatest of them all, Joel Robuchon (L).

THE CHEFS and sous-chefs who prepared the Jerusalem 3000 Banquet, with mayor Ehud Olmert.

WITH PRIME minister Ariel Sharon.

GREETING KING HUSSEIN of Jordan as prime minister Shimon Peres looks on.

A BIRTHDAY cake for legendary Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek.