

SEDER NIGHT is a Roman-style banquet with a focus on wine. (Miriam Alster)



BLUE-AND-WHITE PASSOVER



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

In honor of Israel's 75th year, I would like to recommend that only Israeli wines be chosen for this year's Seder night. The buildup to the festival has been so divisive that I would like to think of everyone linking arms at Passover through the wines they drink. The Israeli flags everywhere make me feel particularly patriotic.

An Israeli wine by my reckoning is one where a vineyard owner, farmer or grower has carefully nurtured the vine, getting his or her hands dirty. An Israeli wine is not one grown overseas, shipped to the Holy Land in bulk and blended here. There have been instances of wines marketed as Israeli wines that are nothing of the sort. The truth on the back label is apparent only to the eagle-eyed or strictly religious, who read back labels carefully.

It is true we live in a post-truth world of fake news and alternative facts, and even prime ministers and presidents can lie without shame; so maybe this should not be such a surprise. I would expect higher standards from our wine brethren, though. The abuse is not widespread, but the culprits were two large wineries. To falsify a label in this way is, at worst, downright dishonest. At best, it is simply inept. Either way, it does not show a great deal of respect for the customer.

I have no problem with a winery choosing not to make wine during *shmita* (the sabbatical year) or a winery marketing wines made abroad. Just do not make it appear that they are Israeli wines from Israeli vineyards. Don't encourage the malpractice. If you find a wine made abroad dressed as an Israeli wine, put

it back on the shelf. It is not Purim! Choose a wine that is authentically grown and made in Israel.

Passover requires us to drink four cups in the style of a Roman banquet. The modern-style dinner would start with a sparkling wine, have a white wine with the first courses, a red wine with the main course, and end with a sweet dessert wine. Here you have your four cups – or glasses.

As usual, I recommend wines by price. I take great pride in having an under NIS 50 category. I regard with scorn the so-called experts who sneer “We don't drink wines under NIS 50.” No one should feel any shame or peer pressure in buying on price.

There are some trends in Israeli wine. The appreciation and consumption of white wines is on the up. These wines go better with both our climate and our cuisine than reds. In a meal where you have to drink more wine than usual, if you go white the cumulative effect will be lighter. Also, it is no longer passé to drink rosé. You can even be a wine connoisseur and be seen to enjoy rosé these days. However, I appreciate that most will be looking for red wines.

Wine drinkers: Up to NIS 50

Tabor Har Chardonnay 2022. All Tabor Winery's whites are excellent. This Chardonnay is particularly good value. Lean and clean. Tabor specializes in what it calls the ecological vineyards.

Recanati Yonatan White 2022. A delicious, unpretentious wine made from Colombard and Sauvignon Blanc. Nicely crisp and very refreshing. Recanati Winery has now settled into its new winery in the Upper Galilee.

Galil Mountain Bar White 2022. Beautifully fresh,

fragrant white. Made from Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc. The two varieties are very complementary. Galil Mountain is a pioneer of true sustainability in both the vineyards and the winery.

Hayotzer Bereshit Merlot 2021. For those who like a wine round and soft. Easy drinking and good value. This is the entry level for Hayotzer Winery. The parent company, Arza, was founded in the 1950s by a branch of the Shor family, which traces its winemaking past back to 1848.

Carmel Selected Cabernet Sauvignon 2022. This is a light, fruit forward, refreshing wine. Selected is a 50-year-old brand, and Carmel is the historic winery of Israel. Always popular and with a good following.

Zion Estate Shiraz 2021. Juicy, fruity and lively. This is a cracking wine. Such good value. Founded in 1848, Zion Winery is Israel's oldest existing winery. For 175 years, the owner, manager and even the winemaker have been members of the Shor family.

Golan Heights, Hermon, Mount Hermon Red 2022. Fruity, with mouth-filling flavor, Hermon Red is light and very accessible and will never let you down. It is Israel's largest-selling wine, and it is easy to understand why. Consistent drinkability year in, year out.

Wine lovers: NIS 51-NIS 99

Jerusalem Vineyard Winery, SLB 2022. A great value Sauvignon Blanc that ticks all the boxes. Aromatic, crisp, with a refreshing finish. Jerusalem Vineyard Winery is based in Atarot, and its visitors' center is at the Montefiore Windmill in the Yemin Moshe-Mishkenot Sha'ananim neighborhood, in the heart of Jerusalem. Certainly a best buy.

Gush Etzion, Lone Oak Tree, Gewurztraminer



(FROM L) 1848 Orient Red 2021; Bat Shlomo Sauvignon Blanc 2022; Golan Heights Mount Hermon Red 2022; Tulip Syrah Reserve 2021; Vitkin Carignan 2020; Golan Heights Yarden Allone Habashan Merlot 2018; Galil Mountain Bar White 2022; Darom Rose 2022; Barkan Platinum Cabernet Sauvignon 2020; Carmel Selected Cabernet Sauvignon 2022. (Photos: Wineries mentioned; Darom: Ayal Keren)

2021. Such a pleasure to taste a dry Gewurz in Israel. It has all the spice and aromatics you look for, and you would expect a touch of sweetness to follow. A very nice, original wine from the 900-meter-elevation vineyards in the Jerusalem mountains. I could have also confidently recommended its Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.

Binyamina Green Bin Rosé 2022. Attractive fun labels for this new look wine. Like the label, the wine is fun, unpretentious to drink. Exactly what rosé should be like... and I liked the screw top. Binyamina is a winery in its 71st year. It is true that neither the front label nor the headline of the back label nor the colored bottle makes it easy to understand this is a rosé. However, once you unlock the secret, enjoy it.

Darom Rosé 2022. This is the entry-level arm of Yatir Winery. *Darom* means "south." The rosé and white are both excellent. This was made from Zinfandel (rare in Israel) and Grenache. Salmon pink in color, delicate nose with good acidity. Yatir Winery is situated at Tel Arad in the northeastern Negev.

Tura Limited Edition 2021. A summer red made from Dolcetto and Marselan. I loved it. Red berries and cherries, and a prominent acidity, make this a refreshing fun wine. Perfect for lunchtime or hot summer evenings. Tura Winery is consistently making some very good wines. The Cabs and Merlots are regular winners in my book.

1848 Orient Red 2021. Simply beautiful. Old-world, delicate, understated Mediterranean blend made from Marselan, Argaman and Syrah. 1848 Winery is the small, boutique winery founded by the eighth generation of the Shor family.

Barkan Platinum Cabernet Sauvignon 2020. Ignore the bombastic look and the ultra-heavy bottle. The wine is the opposite of the packaging: elegant, well made, and it demands another *shluk* (taste). Barkan is Israel's largest winery, situated alongside Israel's largest vineyard at Hulda.

Connoisseurs: NIS 100-149

Bat Shlomo Sauvignon Blanc 2022. Very good Sauvignon Blanc. Always delivers. Aromatic, with good mouth feel, complexity and a fresh finish. The glass stopper is useful to keep. Bat Shlomo Vineyards Visitors' Center and the exquisitely furnished Farmhouse, a beautiful boutique hotel, are side by side. The winery's rosé is also excellent.

Nana Chardonnay 2022. Showcasing the quality of white wines from the Negev, this Chardonnay from the high-elevation Mitzpe Ramon is a velvety combination of tradition and modernity. High-quality and moreish [causing a desire for more]. Nana Winery is leading the way in the desert.

Gavriel Blend 2016. Gavriel Winery is a *garagiste*

winery on the Golan Heights, named after Gavriel, whose life of promise was tragically cut short in a terrorist attack. The wine is a blend of Cab, Merlot and Syrah. It is flavorful, rich and smooth. It needed time to open up. When I tasted it, I raised a glass to Gavriel, may his memory be a blessing; to Chaim Hoter, the owner-winemaker-father, to wish him improved health; and to small wineries everywhere to encourage them to continue making wine with individuality and character. *Yishar koah* (well done!) and *behatzlaha* (good luck)

Tulip Syrah Reserve 2021. A perennial favorite of mine. Full-bodied, oaky, with good fruit, a touch of smoked meat and a flavor-led finish. I understand Tulip's winemaker, David Bar-Ilan, is on the move. We will miss him. Tulip is loved by us all for caring about adults with special needs... and the wines are great, too!

Shiloh Secret Reserve Petit Verdot 2020. Most follow the extraordinary success in competitions of Shiloh's Cabernets, but the wines across the board also win awards. This is rich, full-bodied and quite oaky. There are not so many varietal Petit Verdots about, and this is a good one.

Psagot Homeland 2020. This is a blend of Cabernet, Shiraz, Petit Verdot and Petit Sirah. Bordeaux meets the Mediterranean. It has abundant fruit, mouth-coating flavor and a long finish. Nice wine.

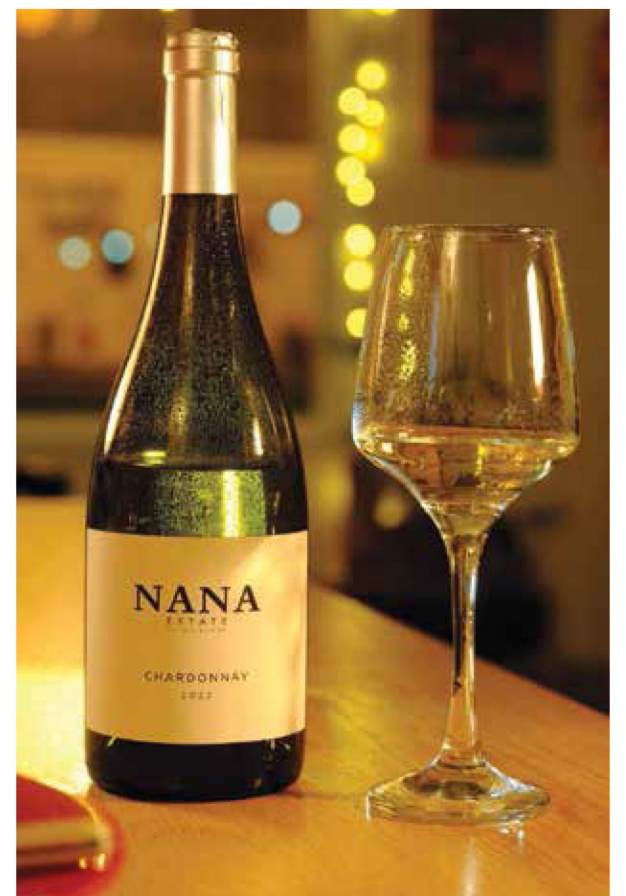
Vitkin Carignan 2020. If you are looking for our adopted or heritage variety, then look no further. Vitkin Winery is the pioneer of quality Carignan in Israel and, after 20 years, this expression is still the standard. A lovely wine with good complexity.

Feinschmeckers [Foodies]: NIS 150+

Alexander Syrah Reserve 2020. This is big, bold, bursting with fruit and flavor. Put alongside the right steak, it will taste just fine. Alexander is the answer for those who like powerful, oaky wines, but they are well made in a style that is popular with consumers.

Golan Heights, Yarden Allone Habashan Merlot 2018. One of the finest Merlots I have tasted in Israel. Layers of aroma, flavor and complexity. Allone Habashan was a vineyard with the leafroll virus, which the Golan Heights Winery replanted from its own nursery and propagation block. The quality is better than ever and attests to the winery's unprecedented investment in quality.

Teperberg Providence 2018. This is the limited edition flagship wine of Teperberg, our largest family winery. The wine is made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Syrah. It has bold blackberry and black currant flavors, with an earthy backdrop and a touch of spice. It is opulent but finishes with a focused elegance.



A BEAUTIFUL Chardonnay from the deepest Negev Desert. (Nana Winery)

Jerusalem Quintessence Reserve 2010. A luscious, sweet dessert wine, perfect for the fourth glass. Made from Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling grapes that were frozen. I love what we call pudding wines, but this is best sipped and savored on its own. Serve it ice cold, even from the freezer. This is a Jerusalem Winery different from the one in Atarot. It is a sister brand to Ramat Hevron and is based in Kiryat Arba.

LET'S ALL come together and enjoy Passover with a glass in hand. May we appreciate the quality, diversity and variety of Israeli wine. Our growers and winemakers deserve your support, and we should support our own. Consider it a mitzvah to buy blue-and-white. ■

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