



THE RELAXED informality of enjoying rosé – the essence of the Levant. (Asaf Karela)

(BELOW) BARKAN Beta Riesling will pair well with cheese. (Photos: Wineries mentioned)

DRINKING WHITE, PINK & ORANGE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Remember when Israel was a white wine-drinking country. Emerald Riesling was the largest selling wine, Grenache Rosé was popular, and reds were considered astringent – and only for those who understood wine. Of course, all that changed, and Israel became a red wine-drinking country.

Today, white wines are coming back. The reasons are obvious. Our climate and cuisine cry out for white wines. The balance between fruit and acidity, the freshness, comparative lightness and refreshing nature of white wines are certainly easier to drink in our hot, humid climate than bombastic, high alcohol red wines. They match better with food, offer greater variety, and quench the thirst.

Another benefit is that Israeli white wines have undergone a real quality revolution in the last 15 years. We are now producing some truly outstanding white wines. The change is apparent in the main place where new trends begin. That is in the “on-premise” (aka “on trade”) market, which is in restaurants, where consumption is “on the premises.” There we see a distinct move to white wines. It is a rumbling under the surface, which is also likely to permeate the off-premise, retail market.

The return of white wine is bolstered by Shavuot. Some see this as the Feast of Weeks, the festival of

the first fruits, the second harvest festival, the festival of the giving of the Torah, and a festival of all night study. We read the story of Ruth, one of my favorite biblical stories.

In my wine bubble, I see Shavuot as the “white wine festival.” It is starting to get hot as we dive deeper into summer, and temperatures are rising. The main culinary partner to Shavuot is dairy products, and it is not a big jump from there to the wonders of cheese, a world every bit as complicated as wine. General Charles de Gaulle was once quoted as moaning “How can one govern a country with 300 cheeses?”

Wine and cheese are natural partners, and the phrase rolls off the tongue. Contrary to the fake news that has been trumpeted over many years, it is not red wine that goes with most cheeses but white wine. Hence at Shavuot, there is every excuse to make it a celebration of white wines.

In the last 10 years, there has been a boom in the production of rosé wines. I always think rosé is the wine that best sums up our Levantine region in terms of its suitability, not only for our climate and cuisine but also because of its unspoiled informality. It somehow represents the relaxed and easy-going nature of the Near East.

More people are enjoying rosé, and more and more *feinschmeckers*, connoisseurs and wine lovers are prepared to drink rosé and, what’s more, are prepared to be seen drinking rosé. That is relatively new. So, pink wines are on the rise. Therefore, our white wine festival

has swiftly metamorphosed into “the white and pink wine festival.”

SUDDENLY, THERE is a new animal gate crashing the party. This is the so-called orange wines. These are white wines made with their grape skins, like a red wine. The result is characterful wines with more of an emphasis on texture than aroma. Though they tend to be more amber in color than orange, the new name has stuck. This style of wine is relatively new but also ancient because the early made white wines will have been made this way. They may also join the party. So here are some recommendations.





(FROM L) Barkan Gewurztraminer; Dalton Alma; Maia Mare; Psagot Rosé; Teperberg Pinot Gris; Yarden Sauvignon Blanc; Yatir Creek; Tulip White Franc. (Psagot: Ilan Naritzki; Yarden: Hagit Goren; Yatir: Eyal Koren)

CARMEL APPELLATION Merlot with a selection of Jacobs cheeses.

ZION ESTATE CHARDONNAY 2021. This is a fresh, modern style Chardonnay with a crunchy apple aroma and a good acidity. The wines of this winery are proving to be very good value. This is our oldest existing winery, owned and managed by the Shor family for 175 years. And if that was not enough, the winemaker is also from the family! NIS 38.

TEPERBERG IMPRESSION ROSE 2022. I didn't plan to include this wine in, but I loved it, and the price even more. Deliciously precise, fresh and unpretentious, it is made from Grenache and Cabernet Franc. Teperberg is our largest family winery, with the CEO, fifth generation, who has been in charge for nearly 40 years. NIS 45.

GALIL MOUNTAIN, GALIL ROSE 2022. This wine is a blend of Syrah and Sangiovese, with a little Grenache. It has an innovative label that illustrates flora and fauna from the Galilee on the back of the bottle, which shows through to the front. Very fitting for a winery promoting sustainability so effectively. Beautifully drinkable, fragrant, crisp and, best of all, only 10% alcohol. NIS 62.

JERUSALEM VINEYARD WINERY, SLB 2022. I have written about this before. It just begs to be included. If you like Sauvignon Blanc, you will love it. It is aromatic, crisp, and the acidity makes it refreshing. There are two Jerusalem wineries. This is the one really in Jerusalem. The winery is at Atarot, and the visitors' center is at the windmill in Yemin Moshe. NIS 65.

BARKAN GEWURZTRAMINER SPECIAL RESERVE 2022. This is for those wanting a semi-dry wine. The Gewurz is aromatic, with an aroma of lychee and roses. It is spicy with gentle sweetness. The winemaker at Barkan is one of Israel's only two Masters of Wine. NIS 75.

TULIP WHITE FRANC 2022. An onion skin pink rosé, which is one of those innovative blends Tulip seems to specialize in. This is made from Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc. Good berry fruit with a herbaceous backdrop. Apart from being the parents of this wine, these varieties are also parents of a child that has grown up to be very successful. It is called Cabernet Sauvignon! The label says "We label wines, not people." Nice touch for the winery that employs adults with special needs. NIS 79.

MAIA MARE WHITE 2022. A very nice Mediterranean blend of Marsanne and Colombard. The fatness of the Marsanne and acidity and flowery aroma of the Colombard combine well. Maia is a winery specializing in wines with an Israeli Mediterranean identity. Very drinkable... and underrated. NIS 79.

DALTON ALMA WHITE 2021. Dalton is one of our most conservative wineries, known for quality and stability. Yet this is no longer the case. The worm has turned. This winery has developed into one of the most innovative, exciting wineries with a plethora of new interesting products, and bright labels that sing. This wine is a blend of Viognier, Colombard, Gren-

ache Blanc and Chenin Blanc. It has floral and tropical notes, a broad flavor and a clean finish. Hard to keep up with what is going on there. NIS 80.

TEPERBERG ESSENCE PINOT GRIS 2022. This is a wine that shows minerality, clean acidity, and it is an excellent food wine. Flinty and refreshing. Another from Teperberg, which is the third-largest winery in Israel. I have written about it before. It has good wines at every price point. The winery doesn't always get the credit it deserves. NIS 80.

GOLAN HEIGHTS WINERY, YARDEN SAUVIGNON BLANC 2022. Israel's first quality white wine was the Yarden Sauvignon Blanc. It was the first to receive rave reviews in America. Now, 40 years later, it is still one of our very best Sauvignon Blancs. It has the aromas and acidity you are looking for, but with a complexity and mouth feel that make it special. NIS 80.

1848 WINERY, 5th GENERATION, ORIENT WHITE 2021. A nice surprise. A texture wine made from Grenache Blanc and Colombard, balanced with Chardonnay. It is modest, understated and satisfying. Without the blowsy tropical aromas that override many of our whites. 1848 Winery is a small winery that always seems to deliver these days. NIS 89.

RECANATI CHARDONNAY, TEL PHARES VINEYARD 2021. A single vineyard wine from the Golan. This is a bigger, richer, robust wine with more elements of a traditional Chardonnay, but it still has a flavorful freshness running through until the finish. Recanati Winery will soon be having its second harvest in the new Upper Galilee winery. NIS 89.

BARKAN BETA RIESLING 2019. Beta is a label for on-premise only. Look out for this Riesling. It has something of the wildflower nose, with a backdrop of petrol notes that a Riesling can get with bottle age. It is medium bodied with a touch of sweetness. A nice change if you are tired of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Barkan is today our second-largest winery, alongside our largest vineyard at Hulda. (Sold only in restaurants.)

PSAGOT ROSE PR 2021. A beautifully colored salmon-pink rosé. Delicate berry fruit, elegant and fresh flavored and a refreshing finish. Psagot is the largest winery in the Central Mountains region, and the winery is one of the most beautiful in the country. Talented Sam Soroka is the winemaker. NIS 90

YATIR CREEK WHITE 2021. A blend of Roussanne, Grenache Blanc, Clairette and Viognier. Very Southern Rhone! The wine is floral, with grassy herbaceous and herbal notes. Slightly oily and broad flavored. Yatir's vineyards are the meeting place between the Judean Hills, the Negev Desert, and the Judean Desert. Rather expensive, but a good wine. NIS 165,

CARMEL, APPELLATION MERLOT 2019. Now white wines go with most cheese. However, with a hard aged cheese like cheddar or Parmesan, you do



need a red wine. So here is my token red. A plush, tasty, round, soft Merlot, good value. Carmel is the historic winery of Israel. NIS 60.

I AM aware that I have not mentioned an orange wine. I will name two. One is the **Barkan Beta Orange Wine 2022** (made from Roussanne with a splash of Marawi and Jandali). The other is **Ari Erle's Dabouki Orange 2022**. One is from a very large commercial winery, and the other is an artisan expression from a very good winemaker. Both are neither orange nor amber in color but are like regular whites with added flavor and a touch of tannin. These are real texture wines and come into the category of super interesting.

For those seeking imported wines, there are some very good international brands that may also be found in kosher expressions. I am referring to **Mud House Sauvignon Blanc; Miravel Rosé; and Porta 6**. The kosher wine world has never been so broad.

For those who want to fall back on the big brands with a smattering of sweetness, do it. **Blue Nun** and **Bartenura Moscato** are the kings of their sector in terms of sales. They are in their iconic blue bottles, which the rest of the world copied. Buy them if they are your preferred poison, and let the experts be damned. Enjoy them without a second thought.

Now, if you think it is easy deciding which wine to purchase, have fun choosing the cheese! ■

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

