



LIFE GOES ON



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Passover is one of the most famous Jewish festivals. Jews and Israelis all over the world, whether religious or secular, will sit down with their families and tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

It is known as the Festival of Spring, the Harvest Festival, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and the Festival of Freedom. Passover is the essence of the Jewish story, the Jews' emergence as an independent people and return to the Promised Land. It is also the Festival of Wine!

Wine features through every Jewish lifestyle ceremony. Grapes are one of the Seven Species in the Bible, and in Judaism wine has its own blessing for "the fruit of the vine." On the first night of Passover, everyone is expected to drink four cups of wine. Children will drink grape juice, but the adults will drink wine in every Jewish home around the globe.

The first Passover evening is called Seder night, at which the Exodus story is told and a festive meal, rich in symbolism, is eaten. The evening historically was developed to emulate the Roman banquet. Like any banquet, the service of wine follows the usual rules.

The first glass is the aperitif, and it can be a sparkling wine. The second glass may be a white wine. The necessary glass for religious ritual is drunk before the meal, but it can be continued to accompany the first courses, which are likely to feature fish. For the main course, usually meat, you could choose a red wine. The ritual third glass is after the meal, but the red wine could be extended for this purpose, too. The last glass is the dessert wine. A sweet wine is appropriate to end the meal on a sweet note, but a quality dessert wine is recommended rather than a sacramental wine.

Now many people host very large Seder nights, with members of the extended family. Maybe it is the only time of the year one meets distant cousins, aunts, and uncles. For a large party, they will almost certainly prefer less expensive wines. This is absolute-

ly fine. It is not the time to bring dusty, well-aged rare wines from your cellar.

In the Jewish and, for that matter, the Christian religion, there is often a preference for red wines for religious rituals. Those preferring to focus on red for traditional reasons may choose rosés and light reds to satisfy the demand for red, while maintaining the balance of the traditional banquet. In actual fact, the choice of wine is personal. The hosts can choose exactly what they want at whatever price point is within their budget. The only rule that is unalterable is the need to consume four glasses, but the choice of wine is flexible.

Passover has always been a wine festival for me. When our family was small, with no less than three people in the wine trade, Passover was a glorified wine celebration. Special rare wines were chosen, and there was always a special tasting on a theme. My children would ask in the weeks before, "Which wines are we going to taste at Passover?" That was a luxury of a family of six people. Now, as time has gone by, our growing family has combined with other growing families. So the indulgence of drinking the best has gone out the window.

There are many who traditionally mix grape juice and *Kiddush* wine. I never really realized how popular this practice is. For them, I recommend Moscato. These wines are low alcohol, sweet, and frizzante [gently sparkling]. Carmel, Teperberg, and Zion wineries also produce a red or rosé version for those for whom color is important.

As usual, I divide my recommendations into easily understandable price categories.

WINE DRINKERS: UP TO NIS 50

Recanati Yasmin White 2023. The mark of a good winery is to make the volume wines well. This is a fragrant fresh blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Colombar. It is very refreshing and drinkable. It is one of the best whites in this category. Recanati Winery is situated in the Upper Galilee. All wineries from this region should receive priority this year.

ABUNDANT GRAPES in a Carmel vineyard.
(Carmel Winery)

VINES BLOOMING in the Judean Hills.
(Avinoam Inbar)

Jerusalem Vintage Chardonnay 2023. This is produced by Jerusalem Vineyard Winery (to differentiate it from the other Jerusalem Winery). It is a delectable modern-style Chardonnay. Aromas of peach and nectarine with green apple; smooth on the palate, with crisp acidity. Founded in 1955 in Jerusalem, now based in Atarot, JWV has visitors' centers at the Montefiore Windmill in Yemin Moshe in Jerusalem, and at Jeruz Yard in Petah Tikva.

Tabor Har Gewurztraminer 2022. A white to satisfy fans of Gewurz. Aromatic, flavorful with a touch of sweetness. Those who like semi-dry wines will like it very much. Tabor Winery is owned by Central Bottling Company (aka Coca-Cola Israel) and is situated at Kfar Tabor in the Lower Galilee.

Carmel Private Collection Rosé 2023. A refreshing rosé from the house of Carmel. It does not specify a grape variety, but the wine ticks all the boxes. Nice color, delicate aroma, and good acidity. Carmel is the historic winery of Israel, and Private Collection has been an important brand since 1988.

Barkan Gold Cabernet Sauvignon 2022. Fruity, with mouth-filling flavor, this wine represents good value. Easy drinking and an enjoyable lunchtime wine. The new label is greatly improved. Barkan, the second-largest winery in the country, is owned by Tempo Beverages.

WINE LOVERS: NIS 51-NIS 99

Teperberg Inspire Art Dabouki 2023. This is part of a special edition produced with labels featuring the art of Dede, the famous graffiti artist. The wine is made from Dabouki, an indigenous local variety. It comes from a 70-year-old vineyard. The wine has delicate tropical notes and a certain mouth-coating character. Teperberg is Israel's largest family winery.

Zion Capital Lions Gate White 2023. A fragrant, refreshing, and innovative blend of Grenache Blanc, Colombar, and Sauvignon Blanc. Excellent value and very drinkable. Zion, founded in 1848, is Israel's oldest existing winery, and it is still owned and managed by the Shor family.



VINO ROUNDUP (L to R): Shiloh Syrah; Teperberg Dabouki; Tulip Syrah; Netofa Tel Qasser; Feldstein Grenache Rose; Kishor GSM; Carmel Private Collection Rose.

(Photos: Wineries mentioned; Netofa: Karela)

Barkan Beta Colombard 2023. Crisp with a flowery aroma, fresh acidity, and a clean finish. Colombard, though regarded as a simple variety, is very suitable for the Israeli climate.

Feldstein Rosé 2022. A Grenache rosé with fresh strawberry and raspberry aromas, a texture that oozes freshness, with a mineral backbone. Feldstein is another Upper Galilee winery deserving of our support. It is one of our most innovative small wineries, always searching to connect with Israeli roots and authenticity.

Galil Mountain, Galil Alon 2021. A wine blending Bordeaux and the Mediterranean varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. It has body, ripe fruit aromas, a chewy flavor, and a nice finish. Galil Mountain is the champion of the Upper Galilee. Its winery is on the northern border overlooked by Hezbollah. Make a special effort to support Upper Galilee wineries this year. Galil Mountain is also the leader in sustainability in Israel.

Shiloh Shor Syrah 2022. Shiloh is a regular award winner for its more expensive wines. However, its entry label has some good drinking wines of excellent value. This Syrah is new. It has a balance of ripe fruit, with a note of black pepper, and it slips down. It also has a good Barbera and a new, minerally Chenin Blanc.

Kishor GSM 2022. GSM is the abbreviation for Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre, three varieties that blend well together. The aroma of Grenache blends with the fruit flavor and spice of Syrah and texture of Mourvedre. It is medium bodied, elegant, with a meaty flavor and a focused finish. A very good wine for our climate and cuisine. Kishor is a genuine estate winery (rare in Israel) and is part of a village for adults with special needs. Admirable!

CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100-NIS 149

Netofa Tel Qasser 2021. This is a blend of Grenache and Syrah. It has a beautifully enticing aroma, with a medium body and an understated complexity. Netofa does not have its own winery, but it has one of the plushiest visitors' centers. It has a very good name for its Mediterranean-style reds. This is drinkable, moreish, and high quality.

Tulip Syrah Reserve 2022. I think this is one of Tulip Winery's best reds. I have chosen it before and make no apologies for recommending it again. It has concentrated fruit aromas, is full bodied, and spicy. Big and flavorful. Tulip Winery supports adults with special needs as part of its day-to-day operations. Praiseworthy and inspiring.

Yarden Petit Verdot 2020. Petit Verdot is already the fifth most planted variety in Israel. It grows well

throughout the country – in the valleys, on the hills, even in the desert. This expression is maybe the best varietal Petit Verdot in the country. The wine is deep, full bodied, with a fine balance of fruit, herbal notes, and hints of oak aging. It has a long, lingering finish. The Golan Heights Winery is the pioneering winery of Israel.

FEINSCHMECKERS: NIS 150+

Nawe White 2021. A bonus for kosher consumers. Nawe (pronounced Naveh) is the new kosher label from the house of Chateau Golan, one of our finest small, non-kosher wineries. This is a high-quality, multi-nuanced white wine made from Sauvignon Blanc; a wine that needs respect. Don't serve it too cold.

Psagot Homeland 2021. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Shiraz, and Petit Verdot. The wine is fruit-forward with a silky, full-flavored texture. When you open the bottle, you will finish it without noticing. It is very drinkable. Psagot is the largest winery in the Central Mountains Region.

Yatir B'tzel Ha'alva 2020 (In the shade of the foliage). From the name, one would think this is a wine the winery does not want to sell to English speakers. In fact, it is sold only at the winery. However, I had to include it. It is different from the old Yatir and so many Israeli reds. It is lighter, fruitier, fresher, with lower alcohol than we are used to. The wine is a blend of Mourvedre, Syrah, and Grenache, grown in the goblet style in the Yatir Forest. An enchanting summer red.

Bat Shlomo Betty's Cuvee 2019. Bat Shlomo is named after Betty, wife of Baron James de Rothschild – who bought Chateau Lafite for the Rothschild family – and mother of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, founder of the modern Israeli wine industry. Appropriately, it is a Bordeaux blend based mainly on Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is full bodied, opulent, and richly flavored, with potential for cellaring.

ISRAEL HAS experienced a dreadful six months, and Israeli wine also suffered. Sales crashed particularly in the first three months after Oct. 7. Those in the Western Negev and Upper Galilee particularly suffered... and we too easily forget what the Galilee wineries are going through day by day.

So, this Passover is all about supporting our own, being resilient, and showing defiantly that life goes on. Why is this year different from all other years? This year the growers, wineries, and winemakers really do need your support: Buy blue and white! ■

The writer is a winery 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

COLORFUL SPRING
flowers in Tabor winery
vineyard. (Tabor Winery)

