



HE HAS A DREAM



ADAM MONTEFIORE

Building a winery is long term – everything is in slow motion. Patience is not a virtue, it is a necessity. There is no alternative.

The Family Baum Winery has taken a different approach. They began a marathon as though it was a 100-meter sprint. They launched their winery in the full glare of social media, and were quite happy to announce their plans to all and sundry. What makes this approach of interest is that it gives a wonderful insight into the hard work involved in founding even a tiny winery. We have also been introduced quite early on to the ability, professionalism, and charisma of two very special, unique people.

Meet Rivka and Sam Baum, a British blend of Manchester and Hendon, not yet known as famous wine regions. They have come onto the Israeli wine scene like a whirlwind. There has never been such a minuscule winery that made so much noise.

It all started in the Negev Desert. Sam made *aliyah* as an 18-year-old and was serving in the army as a lone soldier. He had advanced to become a deputy company commander in Nahal.

ONE DAY, he came across the Nana Winery vineyard at Mitzpe Ramon. He saw the miracle of green vines growing in the sandy desert. This was his epiphany moment. It opened a window in his mind. There and then, he decided that after fighting to protect the land, he wanted to become a farmer to grow and develop the land and take care of it.

Wine has an elevated status in Judaism, and as a religious Jew this attracted him to the world of vines and wines. The wine that beckoned him and drew him in was Isaac's Ram of Hebron Heights Winery. From that moment, he became one-track minded and obsessive in his desire to learn.

When someone told him that "bad grapes equal bad wine," he knew he wanted to begin learning about wine in the vineyards. He applied for a job, offering boundless enthusiasm, being prepared to do back-breaking hard work, but with no knowledge to speak of or experience whatsoever. He found himself employed at Domaine du Castel. Not a bad place to start. The trouble was that there was no work available in the vineyards, so he was sent to work in production.

He was prepared to work hard, do anything and everything, and he absorbed information like a sponge. At the first opportunity, he moved to the agriculture and wine growing department, where he was quickly given responsibilities in keeping with his capacity to learn quickly.

Eventually, he was appointed as manager of the agriculture department and chief grower. He has had experience over five years listening, watching, learning, and communicating with professionals at both Castel and Razi'el Winery. Baum was also a mensch and very honorable. He simply refused to use the Castel connection to his benefit all the time he was working there.

Baum is very articulate and now very knowledgeable, with a firm vision of what he wants to achieve. He believes in growing wine, making blends where the final wine is more important than the varieties. He wants to grow wine like a vigneron [a person who grows grapes for winemaking] rather than make it like a winery-based winemaker.

He believes that wine is a product of a person and a place, along with the vagaries of the seasons, which come from above. He sees the wine cycle as naturally synchronized with the Jewish calendar. For him, whether fighting to protect the land or growing vines, it is part of his Judaism, which he feels very deeply. This intrinsic belief, his innate intelligence, and barely concealed passion make him a very fluent, interesting person to meet and write about.

The budding viticulturist found himself working long weeks in the vineyards, leaving no time to study winemaking. So he decided to learn by doing and to make his own wine. He and his wife spent all their savings on a small winery they put up at their home. It was what is known as a garagiste winery, but in a garden rather than a garage.

Sam Baum was quite content to take all the time in the world in the search for perfection. He was totally



PROUD WINEMAKERS with the fruits of their labors: the bottled wine.

(Photos: Family Baum Winery)

RIVKA BAUM made the wine when her husband, Sam, went to serve in Gaza.

THE FAMILY Baum wine made in 2023 from Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot.

focused on his vision of producing great wine but did not feel the need to hurry. But friend and mentor Avi Moskowitz of the BeerBazaar pub had a different idea. He advised him to start building a customer base almost immediately. This was very smart advice. Making wine is not so hard – what is difficult is selling it.

NOW THIS is where Rivka, a nurse at Shaare Zedek Medical Center who was totally new to wine, stepped up and showed herself to be an incredibly talented marketer. She came into her

own by marketing through social media.

Rivka started recording the different stages of their progress with regular posts and humorous videos. We, the onlookers, became like voyeurs looking in at the beginnings of a start-up winery. They have given the curious observer an insight into all the steps they have taken. The problems, the panics, the humor, and the exhilaration are all recorded for everyone to see.

She has proven to be very sharp and accomplished in marketing and brand building. They named the winery Family Baum Winery. The label shows a tree (the meaning of *baum* in German) with the genuine fingerprints of Rivka, Sam, and their son in place of leaves. The name "Baum" is written in Hebrew in a font used for a Torah scroll. In the background are the prophetic words of Amos: "And they shall plant vineyards" (9:14).

They bottled their first wine in August 2021: two hundred bottles. The 2023 vintage will be approximately 600 bottles, and they are all already pre-sold. The bottle has a highly original pink waxed capsule.



FAMILY BAUM in the vineyard: Rivka, Sam, and their son, Lavie.

RIVKA & LAVIE: Winemaker and helper while Sam is on reserve duty.

SAM BAUM, the soldier-winemaker serving in Gaza.
(Nadav Rotem)

It is carefully wrapped in paper; and instead of a back label, there are information cards giving details about wine and winery.

Their slogan is “Lovers of the Land and its People.” All is stylish; the writing is professional. The look is a million dollars, and everything is artisan work done by hand. I have never known a winery that produced so few bottles with such style and attention to detail. It reminds me a little of Eli Ben Zaken’s first Castel Grand Vin in 1992.

SAM AND Rivka Baum, who had met in 2017 and married in 2018, are a great team. Theirs is a perfect blend of abilities. The combination is greater than the sum of its parts; one plus one equaling three. Sam is able to concentrate on everything in the vineyard and winery, while Rivka handles the sales and marketing. Both have absolute confidence and faith in the other and allow each other total ownership in their areas of expertise.

They are besotted with wine. Their son is named Lavie Shabtai, but he also has a third name, Marawi, an indigenous variety here. At the boy’s *brit milah*, Castel La Vie and Recanati Marawi were served. I imagine he will one day feel relieved he was not named Cabernet Sauvignon or Gruner Veltliner. This is a couple where wine permeates everything.

On Simchat Torah, October 7, 2023, Sam was called up and immediately left without hesitation. A deputy company commander in the Harel Brigade, he disappeared into Gaza for four months, like so many other brave soldiers. Rivka was left with a child, a job... and a winery. She managed to blurt out “The wine is on me” as they said their hasty goodbyes, but she had no idea what that entailed.

Fortunately, they had harvested their Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot on Erev Sukkot. She took care of the fermenting wine, punching down the cap as is required. All was recorded on Facebook and Instagram. She called herself “the punch-down girl.” For the important analyses that need to be taken throughout the process, she had the valuable assistance of Michal Kalisher, who used to work at Castel. Rivka began working nights so Lavie would not miss her during the

day. She got by with pluck, determination, and ability – and no doubt, the 2023 wine has her stamp on it.

I TASTED the 2022. It is a Cabernet Sauvignon hand-picked from wickedly steep vineyards at the Cramim Hotel at Kiryat Anavim. The vines were planted more for display than practical use. Their harvest was Erev Rosh Hashanah. Not easy for a religious couple, but that is the way of nature – it has its own agenda.

The wine was aged in used barrels for eight months. It had prominent aromas of black fruit with ripe plum, a full fruit flavor with a touch of bitterness on the back palate that provides contrast, and a long fruit-led finish. I was given the opportunity to taste a barrel sample of the 2023 (Cab & Petit Verdot). This at a glance was better. It appeared livelier and fresher; the fruit is purer. Let’s hope this will be preserved through to the bottling. However, all are sold out, pre-sold and personally delivered. This is a couple who understand they are in the people business, not just the wine business.

THE GRAND plan is to move to the Golan Heights. The Baums of Efrat in the Judean Hills will soon become the Baums of Sha’al in the Northern Golan. They are going to uproot themselves and move from a place they call home to a northern outpost of the country, all for a piece of land with the terroir they are looking for. Shortly after the move, Sam is returning to reserve duty, with all that implies for the harvest and winemaking.

The Baums plan to plant their own vineyard in 2025 and produce their own handcrafted, terroir-driven wine. This is very rare, as most new wineries use established vineyards first. The Baums aim to start from the ground upward. When they move north, Sam will work in the agriculture department for Dalton Winery. He wanted to enroll in the winemaking course at the Ohalo College in Katzrin, but his reserve duty meant this had to be delayed.

This winery duo have produced a very deeply thought-out business plan, which has the maturity and smarts of wine trade veterans. They know exactly where they are going. Sam and Rivka, you certainly have our attention. We are captivated and enchanted

by your story, spirit, your ambition and optimism. We will be following your every step.

When the Family Baum Winery produces its long-planned-for wine from the Family Baum Vineyard in the Northern Golan Heights, we will be waiting. We may have to wait a few years for the wine, but I am sure we will be entertained along the way, watching the development of their exciting project on social media.

Good luck, and have fun on your journey! ■

The writer is a wine trade veteran and a winery insider turned wine writer. He has advanced Israeli wine for 38 years and is known as the ‘English voice of Israeli wine.’
www.adammontefiore.com

