



JACOB NER-DAVID, owner of Jezreel Valley Winery, up at the crack of dawn to harvest the grapes. (Jacob Ner-David)

# HOPING FOR BETTER TIMES



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

It is hard to believe nearly a year after Oct. 7 that we are still at war in Gaza, that Israelis in the North are still living like refugees in their own country, and that the hostages are still not home. The country has never been so split. We are going through the worst times since the founding of the state, and a collective depression has descended on Israelis everywhere.

Quite apart from anything else, Israeli wine has been under attack. A winemaker was killed; wine hobbyists were kidnapped and murdered in captivity; a winery was destroyed; vineyards were burnt, and other vineyards were abandoned for security reasons; winery workers were called up to the reserves; visitors' centers were closed; and wineries are operating on a security footing. The damage to the Galilee and the Golan has been eco-terrorism at its worst.

So from where does one find the chutzpa to write an article on something as unimportant as wine? The answer is that the biggest strength Israelis can show is to continue as normal. True, festival celebrations will be muted. Too many people will be missing at

the festive table for Israeli society to return to normal. And often forgotten are the thousands wounded and maimed for life.

But carrying on as normally as possible is a must. This means buying wine as normal. So even though my heart is bleeding and I feel crushed like all Israelis, I have gone through the routine of recommending wines as usual. Life must go on. If you decide to make all your purchases from the Upper Galilee and the Golan, I for one will have no complaint. This is home to 40% of our wine industry, and it has been targeted by Hezbollah nearly every day since October 8. For Israeli wine, there has never been a year like it. So my first recommendation is to support our northern wineries. Other recommendations are as follows:

## WINE DRINKERS: UP TO NIS 50

**Carmel, Private Collection Chardonnay 2023.** This is a modern style Chardonnay, with green apple and tropical notes. It is refreshing with good acidity. Private Collection is a much-loved brand since 1988, producing wines that represent good value. Carmel is the historic winery of Israel and still the largest. It is a powerhouse in the mass market.

**Barkan Moscato 2023.** Light, grapey, sweet, slightly sparkling, and low alcohol, made from Muscat. A good wine for all the family and, paradoxically, anyone who dislikes wine will love it! It is a good new addition to the Barkan portfolio, and no doubt it will be very popular. Barkan is Israel's second-largest winery and is situated alongside Israel's largest vineyard at Hulda.

**Hayotzer Virtuoso Shiraz 2022.** A fruity, vibrant, and spicy Shiraz. Even though it is medium-bodied, it has a full flavor and is nicely priced. Hayotzer is part of the Arza Winery, which is situated in the Judean Desert at Mishor Adumim. Hayotzer is its brand for wines over NIS 30 a bottle. They are making some good-value wines.

## WINE LOVERS: NIS 51-NIS 99

**Tabor, Adama Sauvignon Blanc 2023.** A regular pleaser for lovers of Sauvignon Blanc. It has buckets of tropical fruit with balancing acidity. This particular wine is a regular award winner from Tabor Winery, a large winery that is owned by the Central Bottling Company (CBC) or, in other words "Coca-Cola Israel." The wines are always better than the super-market image.





FESTIVE VINTAGES:  
Feldstein Cabernet  
Sauvignon; Dalton Family  
Collection Cabernet  
Franc; Jerusalem Cab;  
Carmel Private Collection  
Sauvignon Blanc; Maia  
Mare Red; Zion Capital  
Rosé; Recanati Sauvignon  
Blanc; Yatir Petit Verdot.  
(Photos: Courtesy wineries  
mentioned. Dalton: Uri Grun;  
Recanati, Carmel & Yatir: Eyal  
Keren)



LAHAT LAVAN is a quality white wine from the Western Upper Galilee. (Neo Media)

**Recanati, Sauvignon Blanc Galilee Vineyards 2023.** Crisp and aromatic with a hint of grapefruit, citrus, and grassy notes with good acidity. Very refreshing and, being from the Galilee, worthy of support. This Galilee series now has a new label that is younger looking and less obviously Recanati, as it forgoes the bright, brassy logo of the past. Recanati Winery is the largest winery in the Upper Galilee.

**Psagot, Sinai White 2023.** I liked the Sinai Red, and the white is the same genre. Very tasty. It is a blend of Gewurztraminer and Viognier. The Gewurtz has the familiar aromatics, and the Viognier provides a full mouthfeel. Aromatic, floral, with good balancing acidity. An innovative blend from Psagot, the largest winery in the Central Mountains.

**Tzuba Chardonnay 2022.** A classic Chardonnay from high up in the Judean Hills. It has buttery notes and a broad flavor but is backed by good balancing acidity. Tzuba Winery's Chardonnay is always good from its beautiful vineyards. There is an English-speaking connection here. Winemaker Paul Dubb is originally from South Africa.

**Zion, Capital Rosé 2023.** A lovely rosé, so perfect

for our climate and cuisine. Pale pink in color, with notes of strawberry, a caressing flavor, and excellent acidity. So drinkable and refreshing from Zion Winery, our oldest existing winery, founded in 1848. Good to taste, quaff, or glug!

**Jerusalem, Premium CAB 2023.** A medium-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon that has bright fruit, a mouth-filling flavor, and a fresh finish. Jerusalem Vineyard Winery's Premium label has a number of wines, all of which are excellent value. The winery is at Atarot on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem.

**Golan Heights, Gamla Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2022.** Gamla always delivers. This wine is deep, with multiple ripe, black berry fruits, a full flavor backed with oak flavors in the background, and a long finish. The Golan Heights Winery is the winery that brought quality wines to Israel. The Golan has also been under fire from Hezbollah.

**Maia Mare Red 2022.** Maia is from the stable of Tulip Winery. A Mediterranean blend made from Carignan, Syrah, and Mourvedre. It has good fruit, a meaty flavor, and excellent drinkability. Maia Winery specializes in wines from Mediterranean varieties. It is often overlooked because of the success of Tulip Winery, which is a pity. Maia wines deserve more attention.

**Teperberg, Inspire Art Grenache Syrah Marselan 2023.** A charming new wine from Teperberg Winery. Medium-bodied, fruity, spicy, and refreshing. I loved it. Teperberg, Israel's largest family winery, is making some very good wines these days.

#### CONNOISSEURS: NIS 100- NIS 149

**Amphorae, Terroir Grenache Blanc 2023.** An enchanting wine from Amphorae Winery in the foothills of Mount Carmel on the Mediterranean coast. It does not have the nose of the more aromatic varieties, but it has restrained floral notes and a medium body, but with a steely core. Amphorae is a beautiful winery in a rural setting and is very popular with visitors looking for a memorable wine experience.

**Lahat Lavan 2023.** A beautiful wine, which is a blend of Roussanne and Viognier, with a touch of Marsanne. It has herbal, grassy notes, restrained aromas, and a firm minerality that runs through the wine like a taut wire from start to finish. It is a classy wine with great texture. Lahat is one of our finest small wineries, and it is from the Western Upper Galilee.

**Segal Petit UF 2021.** Segal was the first winery to launch an unfiltered prestige wine. That was the Unfiltered Cabernet Sauvignon. This is the younger brother, Petit UF, which is also made from Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is full-bodied with black currants, cherries, and ripe plums. It is quite big, but it finishes elegantly. Segal is part of the Barkan stable.

**Netofa Tel Qasser Moursyr 2021.** This is really a Mourvedre with a little Syrah. There are not many wines made from this variety, as it is usually used in blends. It has restrained fruit and a pleasingly rustic texture with

a hint of earthiness. It is certainly worth trying for those interested in tasting a new variety. Netofa Winery is a master of Mediterranean-style wines.

**Dalton, Family Collection Cabernet Franc 2022.** Dalton Winery's new label for super-premium wines. It shows excellent typicity. The aroma is of black fruit and green bell pepper with herbaceous notes. The wine is full-bodied, showing good complexity. The winery is in the Upper Galilee, and for that reason alone is deserving of support; but the wine is excellent, too.

#### FEINSCHMECKERS: NIS 150 +

**Ramat Negev, Ramon Malbec 2020.** Ramat Negev Winery is a pioneer of the desert from Kadesh Barnea in the Negev. It has had a grand year, being awarded as the best Israeli winery at our own Terravino competition, and then internationally in the prestigious Decanter World Wine Awards. This has the juicy fruit of Malbec, backed with a solid oaky structure. Malbec seems to grow well in the desert.

**Jezreel Valley Argaman 2020.** When you see an Argaman, you know it only comes from Israel. It is the most prominent Israeli variety. The word *argaman* means "crimson." Jezreel Valley is the master of this variety. The wine shows good upfront aromas of cherries and berries, with a spicy peppery character. This expression has a solid oaky structure mingled with fruit and an earthiness, yet it has a clean, fresh finish. Very good wine, and it is Israeli through and through.

**Yatir Petit Verdot 2021.** A deep, full-bodied, velvety, focused Petit Verdot from Yatir Forest. Rich with black forest fruits, silky and complex. Petit Verdot is proving to be a variety that thrives in Israel, particularly in blends. This is a good example of the wine as a varietal. The wine comes from Yatir Forest, a meeting place between desert and mountains.

**Feldstein Cabernet Sauvignon 2019.** One of the best Cabernets in Israel. It is recognizably Cabernet Sauvignon, but it is devoid of the usual bold structure normally associated with this variety. Instead, it has a verve, energy, and elegance about it and a spine of minerality that refreshes and demands another sip. Winemaker Avi Feldstein was one of the early pioneers of the Upper Galilee region in the late 1990s; the winery is today situated in the danger zone. A super expression of our most well-known variety.

Quite apart from the necessity of buying wine for festivals, it should be remembered that a glass of wine here and there can help the imbibor to relax and improve the mood. For sure, we hope for better times and a calmer New Year. In the meantime, *le'chaim! Shana tova.*

*The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 38 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. [www.adammontefiore.com](http://www.adammontefiore.com)*