



The Jerusalem wine story

The 'Post' wine writer takes an in-depth look at the Holy City's history with the grape

ADAM MONTEFIORE



◀ **Zion Winery**, founded in 1848 in Jerusalem's Old City, is Israel's oldest existing winery. (Photos: Wineries mentioned)



Zvika Shor took over from his father as winemaker of Zion's impressive winery.

In the Israel of the mid-19th century, there was no wine industry as such, but wherever there are Jews, there will be home winemakers. Jews require wine for even their most basic religious ritual. So I suspect there were domestic wineries in Hebron, Safed, Tiberias, and Jerusalem making wine for their families.

The ones we know anything about are the wineries that became larger and more commercial, supplying their community and neighbors. However, most of our early known wine history seems to be condensed into Jerusalem.

A key figure in our understanding of the time was British financier Sir Moses Montefiore. This is where it all began.

Montefiore was a forerunner of Zionism and the most prominent visitor to Jerusalem in the 19th century. He saw the abject poverty of the Jews in Jerusalem and noted the dirty, crowded, and unhealthy conditions of where they lived. As early as 1839, he shared his vision.

He wanted to encourage Jews to return to agriculture and plant vineyards and olive groves, so that they could become self-sufficient instead of surviving on charity and philanthropy. This was the first call for a return

to agriculture.

In 1855, Montefiore purchased a plot of land outside Jerusalem's Old City. He named it Moses & Judith's Vineyard because the area was covered with wild vines and olive trees. In 1860, it was renamed Mishkenot Sha'ananim. This was the first neighborhood outside the Old City walls, and it was to become the cornerstone of modern Jerusalem. The new residents were asked to plant vines and olive trees to get a feel for agriculture.

Moses Montefiore was a wine lover who drank a bottle of wine every day (usually port, which was very popular in Britain at the time), and he lived to the grand old age of nearly 101. It is likely that new wineries in Jerusalem were founded inspired by Montefiore's message to earn a

living, but it took a Rothschild three decades later to plant vineyards and make Montefiore's agricultural vision come true.

Israel's first winery on record

The Ginio Winery was the first recorded winery in Israel. It was founded in 1840 by David Ginio. The Ginios were a Sephardi family, descended from Jews expelled from Spain. From there, they settled in Salonica (Thessaloniki, Greece) and arrived in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 19th century.

I visited the building where the Ginio Winery was situated, at the top of Yehudim Street in the Old City. There is a plaque outside commemorating the Ginio Winery. The family lived in the house, and the basement was the winery.

When I visited the building, it was a secondhand bookshop. I was welcomed by an elegant, refined elderly woman. She showed me the secret entrance behind a movable bookcase and pointed out the trapdoor where grapes had been lowered to the winery in the basement.

Enjoy a glass of Jerusalem wine at the Montefiore Windmill overlooking the Old City walls.





new family name of Shor.

Thus, history records that Rabbi Yitzhak Shor founded the winery on Haggai Street in the Old City's Muslim Quarter. The cellar backed onto the Little Western Wall, and barrels were strategically placed so employees would not touch the holy wall by mistake. The winery purchased grapes on a long-term contract from Arab vineyard owners in Hebron.

Moses Montefiore met the patriarch of the family, who was head of the Tiferet Yisrael Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He drank wine from Hebron and purchased small casks as a souvenir. Bottles were scarce then, and there were no labels... and no *kashrut* certificate. Funnily enough, the first evidence that the Shor family was working in wine came from the Montefiore Census, commissioned by Montefiore in 1849.

The legendary Rosa Shor was the first person to run a wine shop cum wine bar in the Cotton Market of the Muslim Quarter. It was known as Hamra Rosa, which is Aramaic for "Rosa's Winery." I have enjoyed walking around to follow the trail, but no evidence exists anymore. The family home and winery would be part of what is now known as Beit Rand.

In 1925, the British decreed there should be no industry in the Old City, and the Arab riots of 1929 gave a further incentive for the family to move. The family and winery's next stop was Beit Israel in western Jerusalem.

As the Shor family grew, different branches of the family chose to stay in the wine business by founding their own wineries. These days, there are a number of wineries in the market owned by the wider Shor family. These include 1848 Winery; Arza,



The Jerusalem Vineyard Winery's visitors' center is charmingly situated at the Montefiore Windmill.

Hacormim; Hayotzer; Zion; and a brand called Shorr [sic] Estate.

Shimshon Winery was another one of these. It was founded by Moshe Shalom Shor in 1955 in Jerusalem. It began by focusing on spirits and later reverted to concentrating on *Kiddush* wine and grape juice. He passed the winery on to his daughter Tsippora and her husband, Yona Mendelsohn.

Another famous Jerusalem winery is Teperberg. The family story began when Avraham Teperberg fled Odessa to avoid compulsory conscription and ended up in Austria, where he picked up the Germanic-sounding name and some knowledge and interest in wine. He immigrated to Israel in 1950, and in 1952 he established a distribution company selling wines and spirits.

In 1970, he founded the family winery in the Old City's Jewish Quarter. In the 1930s, the company went bankrupt; but after the founding of the state, Menachem Teperberg,



Inside the windmill, vintages are offered to taste and buy.



Motti Teperberg, CEO of Teperberg Winery for 40 years, is flanked by son Amotz and the winemaker, Shiki.

the fourth generation, reestablished what was then called Efrat Winery at Mahaneh Yehuda. It was a small winery producing mainly liquid reli-

gion (sacramental wine and grape juice). By the time I made *aliyah*, the winery was situated in Motza at the entrance to Jerusalem.



Moses Montefiore was the first to recommend a return to agriculture, inspiring the early wineries. (Adam Montefiore)



What has happened to these Jerusalem wineries?

Ginio Winery continued to operate until the Jewish Quarter fell in 1948, and then faded away. Many wineries fall by the wayside either because of trading problems or, more likely, the next generation is just not interested in wine and want to do something different.

The others have all grown and bloomed. They made the move from liquid religion to quality table wine in the early 2000s. Each is making their best wines ever and frequently winning awards. For those looking for best buys, each winery has a range of excellent, less expensive wines.

Zion Winery is these days the fifth-largest winery in Israel, situated in Mishor Adumim, just east of Jerusalem. The winery is still owned and managed by the Shor family. The wine baton has been passed down from father to son for 176 years. The CEO, senior management, and even the winemaker, have always been from the family. The winemaker is Zvika Shor, who took over from his father in 1992.

Zion Winery has made wine in three separate centuries (the 19th, 20th, and 21st) under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate, and now the State of Israel. It remains our oldest existing winery. The crest used on the label today is a copy of one used on one of the winery's early labels.

Efrat Winery was firstly renamed Teperberg 1870, and it was then changed to Teperberg Winery. It is still owned by the Teperbergs and is the largest family-owned winery

in Israel. Situated in Tzora, in the Judean Foothills, it is the third-largest winery in Israel. Since 1984, the CEO has been Motti Teperberg, from the fifth generation, who has been in charge for 40 years. He is the longest-serving winery managing director in Israel.

Shimshon Winery was purchased in 2006 by Ofer Guetta, a businessman and entrepreneur. It has since been renamed Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. This winery has grown and now features comfortably among the top 10 largest wineries in the country. Situated in Atarot, it still has a toe-hold in Jerusalem.

The three wineries each invested in quality. Zion and Jerusalem both heavily invested in their wineries,

whereas Teperberg built a new one. All three are producing wine of a quality that would have been impossible to envisage as recently as the late 1990s.

Today's Jerusalem wine scene

These days, there may be very small or domestic winemakers within Jerusalem, but the commercial wineries have left the city. The centers of winemaking have moved to the Judean Foothills, Judean Hills, and Samaria Mountains. Confusingly, there is another brand marketed as Jerusalem Winery, but it has nothing to do with Jerusalem at all, and its wines are produced in Kiryat Arba.

The only winery that can still say it is in Jerusalem is the Jerusalem Vineyard Winery (note the difference in the name). The winery's innovative visitors' center is not in Atarot but in the very heart of Jerusalem. It is situated in a place that connects the dots of Jerusalem and wine from the 19th century until today: I am referring to the Montefiore Windmill, built by Sir Moses Montefiore in 1857.

A well-known feature of the Jerusalem skyline, the windmill is situated

in the Mishkenot Sha'ananim-Yemin Moshe neighborhood. There, one can sip wine overlooking the Old City walls. What could be better?

I sometimes use the quote "In Tel Aviv we play, and in Jerusalem we pray." There may not be much wine tourism in Jerusalem in terms of wineries to visit, but there are plenty of places to appreciate and enjoy wine with good company and good food.

Two recommended places are Blend5, a super wine bar that always features interesting wines; and Mona restaurant, where the food is excellent and the wine selection is broad. In both places, the service is topnotch. For a dose of elegance and nostalgia with every sip, the King David Hotel's Oriental Bar is a good choice.

Let's change the quote: "In Tel Aviv we play and in Jerusalem we pray, but also eat, drink, and are merry." ■

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



Jerusalem choices (from L): Windmill Collection Petite Sirah; Windmill Collection Chardonnay; Teperberg Providence; Teperberg Pinot Gris; Zion Estate Merlot; Zion Capital Lions Gate.