



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Quality, accessibility, and value

I have been a student of the history of Carmel for many years, the historic winery of Israel that has made wine in three different centuries.

Uniquely, no less than three future prime ministers worked at its wineries, which were the first places in Israel to use electricity and the telephone.

The winery, founded by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, owner of Château Lafite, kept Israeli wine afloat over 100 years of wars, economic crashes, terrorism, and the ebbs and flows of wine production and consumption.

The “Société Cooperative Vigneronne” (Agudat Hacormim) was founded in 1906. It may be said that it was a company that had the same shareholders (the growers) for five generations.

I have observed and experienced Carmel over three reincarnations. The first was as Carmel Mizrahi, the second as Carmel Winery, and the third, let's call Carmel Corp.

My own experience of Carmel started in 1987, when I visited Rishon Lezion Cellars as a tourist from the British wine trade. When I made aliyah, I made contact, seeking a job. I received a polite reply. But there was no interest.

A few months later, I happened to meet Dan Propper of Osem fame. He looked at my CV, and immediately said that I should be working in wine.



A PRECIOUS old vine: Carignan vineyard in Mazkeret Batya, on the coastal plain. (Dror Dotan)

He rang his friend, Avraham Ben Moshe, CEO of Carmel Mizrahi, and I was taken on as wine education manager for hotels and restaurants in early 1990. This was my first experience of what is known as *proteksia* (connections).

Carmel Mizrahi was the wine powerhouse of the time and had 75% of the

Israeli wine market. The prestige wines were called Private Collection, and the volume seller was Selected. Both are familiar today. The big seller was Emerald Riesling.

However, despite the success in terms of market share, they were up against the quality revolution fermented by the Golan Heights Winery, but also several new small boutique wineries.

A later marketing manager described the company like a Subaru Tender competing against private cars. This was the old Carmel.

After two years at Carmel Mizrahi, I left to work at the Golan Heights Winery for 11 years. But in late 2002, I returned. Carmel began a whirlwind of change.

They stopped producing spirits and liqueurs to focus on wine. They employed a new team of younger, internationally trained winemakers and took on Californian Peter Stern, the legendary wine consultant.

They refurbished wineries, built boutique facilities in Zichron Ya'acov and Tel Arad, and a station for receiving grapes in the Dalton Industrial Area.

New vineyards came on-stream from the Upper Galilee and existing old vineyards in Mount Carmel, and the Judean Hills were explored again. This was a decade in which Sidrat Eizory (Appellation) and Single Vineyard labels were created.

The new prestige wines launched were Limited Edition and Mediterranean.

It is long forgotten, but Carmel was the pioneer of single vineyard wines and led the trend for Mediterranean varieties.

The winery won a bucketful of awards. This culminated in the unprecedented Decanter International Award for the Kayoumi Vineyard Shiraz 2006, still arguably the best award ever received by an Israeli wine.

The name change from Carmel Mizrahi to Carmel Winery was symbolic: the “winery” was put back into Carmel. The company image was successfully changed. However, image and long-term stability were not the same thing.

In 2013, Carmel was purchased by an international consortium led by Kedma Capital. I was there at the beginning to witness the promise and hope, but left in 2016, after 16 years, in two spells.

The offices at Rishon Lezion Cellars closed, a new bottling plant at Alon Tavor opened, and the head office moved to Shoham – all in that same year.

AFTER THE appointment in 2018 of a new CEO, Nadav Arens Arad, and a new head winemaker, Yiftach Peretz, everything fell into place. Carmel has gone onwards and upwards ever since.

A new umbrella brand, Carmel Signature, was created to connect all the labels in the professional market (specialist wine stores and restaurants).

Carmel began to increase its distribution with a series of global beer brands and swiftly became number three in the beer market.

The parent company was renamed Carmel Corp and went public, along with investing in the soft drinks company Jafo-Tabori.

The Alon Tavor facility was developed and became fully operational in 2025 with all winemaking, storage, bottling and logistics on one site for the first time in Carmel's history. You have the feeling Carmel has built a corporation for the next 100 years. If Carmel Mizrahi was the past, then Carmel Corp is the future.

In the last 50 years, there have been only four head winemakers of Israel's largest winery: Freddie Stiller, Israel Flam, Lior Lacer, and Yiftach Peretz. I had the honor of working with them all.

Peretz joined Carmel at Zichron Ya'acov in 2006. As head winemaker of the new Alon Tavor facility 26 years later, he showed us the splendor of the new winery.

Peretz grew up on a moshav. He enjoyed working in agriculture and especially appreciated the local flora and fauna. It was through contact with a couple of friends who became mentors that he connected wine to the land he loved so much.

An early influence was Israel Assayel, a retailer, who was self-taught but a significant educator of the time.

Peretz went to study in Italy and graduated with a degree in oenology and viticulture. He was there with other



CARMEL VINTAGES (L to R): Appellation; Private Collection; Signature; Selected. (Photos: Carmel Winery)



THE DRIVERS of the Carmel bus (L to R): Winemaker Yiftach Peretz, CEO Nadav Arens Arad, marketing manager Ran Assa. (Rafi Dalouya)

Israelis, including Ido Lewinsohn, future Master of Wine. Then he gained valuable work experience in Italy.

Winemaker Gil Shatzberg advised Peretz to apply to Carmel because there was no better learning ground.

So, in 2006, Peretz joined Carmel in Zichron Ya'acov Wine Cellars. We got to know each other, and I appreciated two things in particular, apart from his natural warmth and ready smile.

Firstly, he had an acute interest in the history of winemaking, grape varieties, and viticulture. This always made him a very interesting person to listen to and learn from.

Secondly, he was the first person to rave about the Mount Carmel region, from the valleys of Zichron and Meir Shefeya to the Hanadiv Valley.

The influence of the Mediterranean and the sheer variety of soils, sometimes within one vineyard, make it a unique region for him.

It was not enough for us to listen to his enthusiasm. But he took us out on a tour of the vineyards to explain his point with the infectious excitement of a child finding something shiny.

Assaf Paz, whom he replaced at Carmel, had already explored the potential of the local old-vine Carignan. Later, the iconic Margalit Winery chose to plant a totally new vineyard at Zichron, giving a great compliment to the environs.

However, Peretz was the first to enthuse me about the region, and we now take for granted the enthusiasm he showed and the knowledge he imparted.

DURING HIS CAREER, Peretz was involved in two massive operational missions. The first was the 2011 harvest, after the Rishon winery was shut down. All

the grapes had to be received at Zichron Ya'acov Cellars.

Peretz was the lead winemaker of Zichron by then, and it must have been a logistical headache to squeeze the two largest wineries in Israel into one.

Soon after, he had a break for a productive few years as head winemaker of Binyamina Winery. There, he gained plaudits for his wines, particularly for those in the value category.

Peretz has always been a champion of the regular drinker, believing in what I call easy drinkability. One of his achievements is bringing quality, accessibility, and value to the mass-market wines.

Then he received the call to come home, as head winemaker of Carmel. The second great operational upheaval was moving all Carmel's winemaking, bottling, storage, and logistics to one site.

Alon Tavor became fully operational in 2025. It was established with an investment of NIS 160 million and was built with the expertise of Spanish specialists, ASPA.

The visitors' center would remain in Zichron Ya'acov, so the country's oldest winery building would live on. There are plans to develop a boutique facility there for the Carmel Single Vineyard and flagship blends. I cannot stress how important this is.

Peretz is a father of two and lives in the Golan Heights.

He makes the largest-volume brands in Israel in every mass-market sector, including Selected and Private Collection wines, Buzz Moscato and fruit-flavored wines, King David kiddush wines, and Carmel Tirosh grape juice.

The premium label Carmel Signature ranges from 4 Vats to Vineyards, then excellent Single Vineyard wines, including a new Malbec, up to the prestige Limited Edition, a classic Bordeaux-style blend.

He has a particular affinity for varieties that have come to be associated with Israel, like Carignan and Colombard.

THE WINE I most associate with him is the Carmel Signature Mediterranean. This

was the pioneering prestige wine made as a Mediterranean-style blend. That first vintage was in 2007 during his first spell at Carmel. It was launched in 2010.

The 2016 Mediterranean won a gold medal at the Decanter World Wine Awards and was awarded 96 points. The 2020 Mediterranean won a gold medal at the Decanter and received 95 points. These are the highest scores achieved for a Carmel wine.

At the official opening of Alon Tavor, we drank the 2023, and when we sat together, we tasted the 2017, which was drinking superbly.

One character trait of Peretz: he is always giving credit to his winemaking team and those who came before. A few times I have seen him win awards and take the microphone to credit the previous winemaker. This is commendable in a country where giving credit does not come easily.

He also believes that Carmel is greater than all its workers and employees. We are part of a chain and do our best, but the company benefits from those who came before, and will continue long after we go. These are wise words.

If we look at the chain from Carmel Mizrahi to Carmel Winery and then to Carmel Corp, this is certainly true.

Carmel Mizrahi and CEO Ben Moshe were pioneers of the Negev, created the concept of a winery at Tel Arad, and planted vineyards in the Upper Galilee (then an out-of-comfort-zone for Agudat Hacormim).

This was all to the benefit of David Ziv, the next CEO of Carmel Winery.

However, when Ziv, in turn, refurbished wineries, brought in young winemakers, and established Yatir Winery, it was the next CEO, the late Israel Ivzan, who enjoyed the benefits.

Carmel, the historic winery of Israel, is undoubtedly the largest winery in Israel. The problem is that being old, large, and historic are not things that play well with the wine consumer who worships anything new, innovative, and small.

However, Carmel wines are always far better than the winery's image. That has always been true. Today, Peretz is king of the castle.

He is the winemaker responsible for making nearly one out of every three bottles of wine and grape juice purchased by Israelis. He is situated at Alon Tavor, a state-of-the-art winemaking cathedral of excellence, size, and flexibility.

Yet he bestrides the Israeli wine scene with humility, modesty, an ongoing hunger to learn and develop, and that engaging smile.

At the same time, he links arms with the winemaking team, agronomists, and all the support services and generously credits "the team" with all his successes.

The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines over four decades. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com



CARMEL'S IMPRESSIVE new winery at Alon Tavor in the Jezreel Valley.