

ITAMAR ALPERIN, who represents Barkan, Feldstein, and Lahat, is very knowledgeable about every aspect of wine.
(Barkan Winery)



DORIT BEN-SIMON of Recanati Winery is also an international wine judge.
(Recanati Winery)



Yael Gai of Golan Heights Winery and Galil Mountain is the most experienced of the export managers.
(Golan Heights Winery)



Salute the wine ambassadors



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

To be export manager is a noble job, but it is harder than you think.

Your bosses may think you are privileged to travel abroad. They do not always understand the difficulties of representing Israel overseas.

When weighing up profitability of the export sales against the local market, they often miss the point. Export activities are vital for building image. Export is also useful as a reserve pipeline for sales. However, export is a long-term project, where knowledge, expertise, and an understanding of wine are crucial. It is not like the local market, where a decision made today can affect sales tomorrow.

The job of export manager is all-encompassing. To do the job successfully, you are responsible for export marketing, sales, wine education, public relations,

logistics and you are regarded by most of the world as the spokesperson for the winery.

The local marketing department will by definition rarely understand what is needed abroad, nor have the time to devote to export requirements, so you have to stick up for your own interests, whilst ensuring everything is in step with local policies. Building an international brand is important to any winery.

It is a fact that CEOs and marketing managers change quite frequently. However, export managers change far less often. They are usually knowledgeable, dependable, and experienced, and are experts in their field. I know this partly because I have been there.

I was export manager for the Golan Heights Winery for a number of years, followed by being international marketing manager for Carmel. Same job, but different name! Anyway, it entailed being responsible for export to North America, Europe, and the Far East. When I did the job, 90% of Israel's export sales

were by Carmel and the Golan Heights Winery.

As an English-speaker with experience in the wine trade overseas, this gave me a leg up as the unofficial, quasi representative of Israeli wine abroad. It is a role I have been honored to fulfill for decades.

When I joined Golan Heights Winery, Segev Yerovam, managing director, and Doron Rand, marketing manager, were my bosses, and my senior partner in the marketing department was Carmit Ehrenreich. These were three giants – legends who, along with the winemakers, created the biggest changes in Israeli wine in 100 years.

Rand looked after export. Eventually, I took over (he remained marketing manager), and I had the benefit of learning from him. He remains one of the most knowledgeable people I know about the business of wine and wine export, and is now a much sought-after business consultant way beyond the confines of the wine trade.

I used to travel roughly one week every month. Often it was for a two-week period, including a Shabbat and the weekend. It was fun, challenging, but wearing. Anyway, I had experiences filled with meaningful content, which left wonderful memories. I could write a book about it. Maybe one day I will!

The job is not just selling wine. You are representing Israel, not only your own winery. I remember once giving a presentation in Poland, when a Polish sommelier asked “why should we sell Israeli wine when Israelis murder Palestinian children?” They don't teach you how to answer that in wine school, but you soon get used to coping with the slings and arrows. It just illustrates that being an export manager of an Israeli winery is more challenging than just the business of wine.

The leading export managers today are icons of our industry. They are in the front line and represent us all abroad in the toughest of all times. We have had a pandemic, followed by three years of war,

with Israel's image experiencing a nadir we have not seen before. The anti-Israel tsunami is now with us big-time. Those in the arts, academia, sciences, sport... and wine, too, can't help but feel the ice-cold winds. It is a very different world.

THE MOST experienced export manager is Yael Gai. I first met her in the early 2000s when we found ourselves sitting next to each other at some export gathering. She was working for Olivia and I was then with Carmel.

She became international sales and marketing manager of the Golan Heights Winery and Galil Mountain in 2007, and for nearly 20 years has represented the wines of Yarden, Gamla, Hermon, and Galil Mountain in Europe and the "Rest of the World."

She is old-school, which is meant to be a compliment. Knowledgeable, focused, assertive with a streak of perfectionism. She has high standards. She knows the job backwards.

During a time when Israeli wineries are shying away from exhibitions, the Golan Heights Winery has continued to attend more often than not, so Gai is also the most practiced in the art of managing a wine stand at an exhibition in the different countries and cultures. "Yarden – Golan Heights Winery" is arguably the most well-known Israeli winery worldwide, and Gai plays her part in keeping the wines at the forefront.

Itamar Klieman is the new VP international sales of the Golan Heights Winery, with overall responsibility for export. I have not had the opportunity to meet him yet.

The export manager most immersed in the world of wine has to be Dorit Ben-Simon. She is the VP international sales & marketing for Recanati Winery. She is fascinated by the world of wine and will always be the first to book for a tasting.

I first met her in the 1990s when she was



ETTI EDRI of Carmel and Yatir Wineries is the face of Israel's largest winery. (Carmel Winery)

recruited by Ehrenreich to give tastings of wine for the Golan Heights Winery.

After a spell when she worked for Royal Wine Corp. in California, I recruited her to Carmel. She was promoted to be export manager of Carmel and Yatir Winery in 2012.

After Carmel, she moved to the Golan Heights Winery, managing export to America. Then she moved to Barkan, and is now at Recanati.

She has therefore had experience at each of the largest exporters of Israeli wine and also with the largest importer of Israeli wine.

She represents Israel and Recanati Winery with grace and charm, and her deep passion for wine comes through. She is also an international wine judge, representing Israel for a number of years at Mundus Vini, Germany's most important wine competition. That is a big honor.

Itamar Alperin is the international sales and marketing manager of Barkan Winery, usually the largest exporter of Israeli wine.

He is so dynamic and professional, and everything he does, including talking, is done at great speed.

He has the broadest wine experience of the export managers. He studied oenology in Milan, following Ido Lewinsohn MW, and did a harvest at Tzora Vineyards with Eran Pick MW. He has experience working at Derech Hayayin, the wine store chain; Tempo, the total beverage company; and Cheers, the wine start-up founded by Yair Haidu.

He has been involved in training, trade marketing, and sales, and left after winning admiration and respect in every role.

He was appointed to manage Barkan Winery's export division in 2023. Since then, the portfolio he is responsible for has enlarged significantly.

He is now also the export manager for Lahat Winery and Feldstein Winery, which have come under the umbrella of

Tempo Wine. It gives him a portfolio any wine lover would appreciate, covering every price point.

Etti Edri is the export manager of both Carmel, the historic winery of Israel, and Yatir Winery. She is a human dynamo who thrives on making warm, meaningful contacts with everyone she meets.

I often say we are in the people business, not the wine business. Well, Etti is the example that proves that better than anyone.

She started in wine with the founding of Yatir Winery as COO in 2004, but did everything. She was the warm, friendly, passionate, and informative figure who welcomed everyone to the winery, though her responsibilities were far broader than that.

I was at Carmel, the parent company, and was able to observe at close hand how she grew as a person along with the winery, which became one of Israel's leading small wineries. She created a whole sea of wine lovers loyal to Yatir by personal contacts and her bubbly personality alone.

In 2018, she became export manager of Carmel Winery, Israel's largest winery, and Yatir Winery, the king of the South. She went into the job like a whirlwind and has never stopped since.

There are two more wineries that are far larger in reality than they are given credit for. They are not only big but possibly Israel's most improved wineries in terms of quality at every price point.

One is Zion Winery, which by my reckoning is the fifth largest winery in the country. Here the marketing and export manager is David Gronich.

He reached the top of the ladder as a hotelier specializing in food and beverage, before coming into wine. He was a great success at both the very large Tel Aviv Hilton and then at the boutique Scottish Hotel.

I had the honor and fortune to recruit him to Carmel, where he be-

came a key figure in the professional wine department and in the hotel and restaurant division.

He is another with drive, knowledge and passion. He is export manager for Zion Winery and the smaller sister company, 1848 Winery. Gronich is a doer, not a talker, and, no doubt, he has brought about an impressive image turnaround for those two wineries.

The other winery of note is Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. It is possibly the seventh or eighth largest winery in Israel.

And here we go back to Ehrenreich. She was the VP marketing and export who, along with CEO-winemaker Lior Lacser, changed the image and quality of the winery. Now she is devoted to export, as well as serving as a very knowledgeable and valuable consultant to other clients, including Bazelet Hagolan, Yaffo, and Tel Shifon wineries.

We do not forget that she did things and initiated projects in the early 1990s at the Golan Heights Winery in marketing, tourism, and education that changed Israeli wine forever.

She was marketing manager of Galil Mountain Winery in its early years, but one can only marvel at what has been achieved at Jerusalem Vineyard Winery. Her best quality is that she is very creative and thinks outside the box.

IT WAS an excellent article by wine journalist Alon Gonen that inspired me to write about export managers. I owe him for the idea.

To me, wine represents the very best of Israel. "Wine is the beautiful Israel" is my slogan. When you are lecturing about wine abroad or giving a tutored tasting, it is also soft-power diplomacy.

At this time, the kosher wine niche is saturated. There are more kosher wines being produced than ever before, and there are more Israeli wineries trying to enter the international kosher market than previously.

Outside the niche, Israel is facing hostility. Some friends in the general wine trade have suddenly gone quiet and no longer answer emails. Not everywhere.

Israeli wine has never been so most important for Israel's image. The wine trade carries far more weight than its size in export dollars.

I salute the export managers representing Israel at this time. They have to cope with pressures from within and difficulties abroad, but continue to bravely represent Israel with belief, energy, and pride. I am full of admiration for their abilities and persistence. They are manning the barricades and are stoic ambassadors not only of the wineries they represent, but also of Israeli wine and Israel itself.

We should be supportive of them, appreciate their expertise, and be grateful for their efforts.

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



JERUSALEM VINEYARD WINERY is represented by Carmit Ehrenreich, whose influence and achievements go back to the early 1990s. (Dikla Ran-Shalev)



DAVID GRONICH has maneuvered a turnaround in the fortunes of Zion Winery and 1848. (Zion Winery)