

2017 Wine Review

With Pesach just around the corner and the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine on the horizon, it is time once again for the Rabbi Nightingale yearly wine review. It is a bit funny that I offer these before Pesach, because truth be told, I usually don't drink really good wine for the Seders. That's because of all the halachic (Jewish Law) demands on the mitzvah that kinda takes the fun out of drinking wine. You are supposed to drink 3-4 ounces pretty quickly, and that is no way to really enjoy a fine wine. So I go for the lighter fare and often, when it comes to Cups 3 and 4, just stick to grape juice. Our beloved traditional rabbis probably should have spent some time with cultured European gentiles to learn how to sip wine. Then again, who in their right mind wants to spend time with cultured European gentiles? So here we go...

Galil Mountain 2013 Yiron (Israel). So for years I have been telling you that this is one of my favourite wines and a great value to boot. Every year that I have written this column I have said you will not go wrong with this wine. As proof to my personal history with Yiron, I still have an 04, a couple 06's and a few 08's. Well, now the respected wine mag, *Wine Spectator* has backed me up. They recently had an issue devoted to Israeli wines. They listed Yiron as #2 of the hundreds of Israeli wines they tasted. But it gets better. At the end of the year, they listed the top 100 wines in the world - we are not talking just *kosher* world, but the whole wide world. They listed Yiron in the top 100!!! (Yessirree - applause please.) Go get some. For about \$25-\$28 you will get a real treat in wines. And if you have patience you will stick a few in your wine cooler or cellar and forget about them for about 5 years or more. It will be even more amazing than it is now. I can still recall when I opened one of my 04s at Yoni's Bar Mitzvah in 2012. Heaven.

Prix Reserve Chardonnay 2013 \$40 (California). So I am not much of a white wine guy, but this past year I have discovered that it is a nice change on a Saturday night, let's say, after lots of heavy eating and drinking over Shabbat and you want something a bit lighter to go with your sushi. I guess I must be getting older if I am now drinking whites, or maybe I am just discovering my feminine side. Anyway, when it came to whites, I just looked for the \$8.99 **Barkans** figuring there isn't much difference. Well, this wine proved me to be the ignoramus that I truly am. "Like Buttah" is all I could think when Michael Chesal brought this along to Emunah Café. Smooth velvety butter, vanilla, full of taste and not just the run-of-the-mill tart white wine. I bought the **Hagafen Oak Knoll Chardonnay (normally \$23, \$18 damaged label*)** made from the same winery thinking it would be similar, and although also nice, was clearly not in the same league.

Ramon Cardova Rioja Garnacha \$18 (Spain). *Damaged label you ask? So onlinekosherwine.com has been having frequent sales on wine in their "scratch and dent" section. And you thought "scratch and dent" only applied to BrandsMart appliances? Silly you. I have no idea what is going on in the warehouses of this website, but they seem to be having a nice supply of these of late. Me thinks they have hired some immigrant to ruin labels and/or spill wine on wines they are trying to

unload. Whatever, I love it because it gives me an opportunity to buy wines I would normally not because of the price. Picked up the Garnacha for cheap and figured I would like it since I like other wines from this winery. Wines from the Garnacha (or Grenache) grape are not all that common and if you like cherry tasting wine, you will love this. Very strong berry taste and a lighter wine than most, it's the type of wine everyone at your table will enjoy.

Dalton Special Edition 2013 \$40 (Israel). Looooove this wine - a new favourite of mine. It has one of my favourite combos of grapes - Cabernet with 15% Shiraz. I have no idea where you can pick this up though other than from the Duty Free Shop at Ben Gurion Airport. Two different people got it for me as gifts (shout out to Patrick Amar, best tour guide in Israel and my neighbours Karen and Nathan Elkayam) and I loved both bottles. I told Yoni, who came back from Israel for Pesach, to pick me up a bottle and they had a buy one get one free sale - yessss!! (The drinking age is only 18 in Israel so he had no issues buying it, but they did give him a bit of a hard time at MIA when returning.)

Where to buy: So the Duty Free Shop at Ben Gurion, curiously named James Richardson (there go those cultured European gentiles again) is a great place to pick up some lovely Israeli wines way cheaper than anywhere else or that you won't find elsewhere. I got a **Segal Unfiltered Cab** for \$60 which included a free bottle of **Yaffo Heritage**, their flagship wine that goes for \$65 here in the US. (I have not drunk either yet.) Onlinekosherwine.com has the best prices although they don't have everything I like. They always have coupons on shipping but still expect to pay about a buck a bottle. Also, make sure your delivery is going to an address where an adult can sign since UPS/FEDEX won't drop off alcohol without an adult signature. Kosherwine.com has a great selection but their prices are a bit higher. But do the math since if you get a case, shipping is free. For my Toronto friends and family, move off of LCBO - the communist controlled liquor stores - and go to **Simcha Wines** at Bathurst and Steeles. They must be in bed with **Dalton Winery** because their prices on Daltons are all very good. I happened to love Dalton and all levels of their wines are terrific.

Hagafen Napa Valley Cabernet Franc 2013 \$35 (California) - In describing this wine, they excitingly announce: *Platinum Medal! This intensely colored Cabernet Franc-our first new release of this varietal in more than ten years!-is grown in the well-drained, stoney soils of our newest vineyard, Weir Family Vineyard III, in the Eastern bench of the Napa Valley.* Um, ok. My dear friend, Michael gave me a bottle of this which I took with me to Kosh restaurant in Miami. What can I say? I was not crazy about it; it tasted like typical tired dirty/earthy Bordeaux if you like that sort of thing. Lot of tannins going on. After dumping the remainder of my glass into Karen's, I ordered a glass of **Ramon Cardova Rioja** for \$10 and enjoyed that a whole lot more. Call me uncouth and uneducated - I know what I like.

Binyamina Bin Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 \$12 (Israel) is an entry level wine from the Binyamina Winery. I always assumed the name was a short form for Binyamina, and

maybe it is also that, but they claim, "The word BIN is an Australian term to describe quality stocks of wine kept in a particular part of the barrel cellar." Ok. At weddings there are limited wines available to serve since they must be "mevushal" (google that, no room to explain it here) to be served by a non-Jew. If BIN is an option take it over the standard boring, **Baron Hezog** fair that is usually offered. It is way more interesting and better.

Chateau d'Arveyres 2014 \$14 (France) is not great but neither offensive. Bit bland but not bad. Just not that exciting. Saw it on the "scratch and dent" sale and gave it a shot. Won't buy another bottle though.

Can't go wrong wines: **Yarden Cab** or **Merlot** are great every year and not crazy expensive for what they are at \$23-28 a bottle. **Yogev Cab/Shiraz** and **Gilgal Cab** are still the best wine values out there in my opinion, \$12-\$14 each. Stick with these since the **Yogev Cab** for some reason not that great - the 09 I ordered tasted tired - nor am I crazy for the **Gilgal Merlot**. The **Gilgal Syrah** is nice and also a best buy. **Galil Mountain** also always has nice stuff. All the **Shiloh** wines are amazing but they are not cheap. A lot of them have an interesting chocolate taste going on that you don't find too often. Shiloh just introduced a less expensive fare, **Privilege** for about \$21 and it's wonderful. **Psagot** also not inexpensive but always good. I like the **Edom** blend over the regular Cab.

So there you have it. My very unprofessional and Israeli-biased take on wine for this year. Have a Happy Pesach and remember, "Man does not live by bread alone" - he needs a good steak and fries with a good glass of red as well.

*Behind the ritual, behind the ritual
You find the spiritual, you find the spiritual...*

*Behind the ritual, behind the ritual
In the days gone by, drinking that wine
Making time, drinking that wine way back in time
-Van Morrison*