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They've got a lot of bottle: There was much to browse and sample

Raising a glass to kosher wine and spirits at capital showcase

BY SIMON ROCKER

► OUR SAGES must have appreciated fine wines. When the Talmud details the ingredients used for incense in the Temple, it does not go for any old Palestinian plonk but wine from Cyprus.

A Cypriot vintage may have been absent from Kedem Europe's annual Kosher Food and Wine Experience in London.

But 250 varieties from 40 producers from five continents offered more than enough for oenophiles.

Among the 800 people circulating the buffet and stands at the Sheraton Grand in Mayfair with glass in hand was Jason Shane, who works in IT in the City.

A first-time attendee, he explained that until a couple of years ago, "I didn't know a massive amount about wine. But I've been on a journey. A group of friends in Elstree started the 30-50 Club, where we meet with our wives for dinner to try new wines. We have learned so much about different kosher wines — from France, Israel, California — and I'm enjoying the learning experience."

The club takes its name from the price range of members' usual selections, though some of the vintages he tasted at the KFWE go for considerably more. For example the Chateau Leoville Poyferre 2015, one of a large choice of high-end wines from Bordeaux which were a feature this year.

Although his home collection of 250 bottles has not come cheap, "I've enjoyed it and why not? It's nice to open a good bottle of wine on Shab-

bat, especially when you have people round."

Mr Shane's KFWE tips included the "beautiful" Clos Mesorah, the flagship red from Elvi in Spain, and the Blue C Viognier, a white from the Covenant winery in Israel.

Elvi produces only 7,000 bottles of Clos Mesorah a year, which may be reflected in its price of £58 a bottle. But there were plenty of wines on show at the budget end of the market.

Producing "good, affordable kosher wine" has been the ambition of Frenchman Eli Gauthier, who four years ago launched Cantina Giuliano in Tuscany with his Italian wife Lara. He explained that visitors to one of Europe's few kosher-only wineries can enjoy not only their chianti but home-made pasta, cheese and ice cream.

From a small first harvest in 1995, the Dalton winery in the Galilee — established by the family of Alex Haruni, once of Finchley — now produces 1.2 million bottles annually, close on ten per cent of which are purchased in the UK.

"I believe Israeli wineries have everything to be proud of," he said. "We

have wines that can compete. They are a little more expensive but then they aren't subsidised."

As for the knowledge of KFWE punters, he observed: "At the beginning of the evening when they are sober, they pay far more attention to what they are drinking. By the end, they don't care."

For Gilad Flam, co-owner of Flam, KFWE was "about education — increasing awareness of good wine".

His winery in the Judean Hills is one of an increasing number in Israel producing its own rosé — a discovery for Louisa Walters, founder of the Restaurant Club, a discount scheme which includes a number of kosher restaurants.

"When you think of kosher wine, you think of heavy red or chardonnay but you don't think of rosé," she said, recommending in particular a "wonderful" Roubine La Vie en Rose from France.

Martin Kaye, director of Kuperard's publishers, was on a mission. "I've got to make a wedding for my son and I've got to find some wines. The Rothschild Champagne is a definite and I do like the [American] Hagafen Pinot Noir."

For nourishment between glasses, Japanese, American, Italian and English dishes were prepared by the hotel's kosher caterer, Arie Wagner.

And to accompany the mini-chocolate tarts, lemon meringue pies and churros, there were dessert wines, gin or vodka cocktails mixed by California-based Distillery No 209 — or Boondocks American whiskey or bourbon to sample.

"Actually I prefer the food," admitted Young Norwood's Anthony Shaw. Surveying the age and cultural mix, from secular to strictly Orthodox, he suggested that the social aspect of the event was a key attraction. "People have come to network as well as to enjoy a good glass of wine."

Guests learning more about one of the exhibitors

