

RAISING A GLASS

The making of a Royal wine bonanza

BY ADAM MONTEFIORE

THESE ARE exciting times for consumers of Israeli wines, which have come so far in a relatively short time. There have been four revolutions in the development of Israeli wine. The first was the French revolution, when Baron Edmond de Rothschild, owner of Chateau Lafite, founded a modern Israeli wine industry in the late 19th century, providing French expertise and finance on an enormous scale. The main areas of vineyards were then in the coastal regions, around the southern slopes of Mount Carmel and the Judean Plain, south east of Tel Aviv. In the 1980s, the technological revolution arrived, when Israel began to absorb New World winemaking procedures, initially with expertise from California. This provided the key to producing quality wines in a hot climate and Israelis learned fine

wine was something to be appreciated. There were then 10 wineries in Israel. The boutique or small winery revolution began in the 1990s and shows no sign of stopping. The number of wineries swelled to more than 300. The larger wineries had no alternative but to fight back, investing in quality. Vineyards moved northwards and eastwards to the Golan Heights, Upper Galilee and Judean Hills in search of higher altitude.

In the 2000s, international critics began to notice Israeli wine for the first time. Hugh Johnson's *Pocket Wine Book* awarded Israeli wines four stars. Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate* tasted Israeli wines and awarded high scores. *Wine Spectator* produced a cover edition extolling the virtues and potential of Israeli wine and recently, Jancis Robinson, arguably the most influential wine critic and writer in the world today, made her first visit to Israel, tasting about 70 wines.

Now we are in the midst of the fourth revolution — that of identity and a sense of place. Israeli winemakers are producing wines that represent the terroir of a particular vineyard with grape varieties more suitable to the climate. Vineyard sites and the

individual plots within the vineyard are becoming the determining factor of the final wine.

In the UK, the main importer of Israeli wine is Kedem Europe, a sister company to Royal Wine Corporation, the largest importer and distributor of kosher wines in the world. Kedem represents some of Israel's largest wineries, such as Barkan, Carmel, Binyamina and Dalton, as well as some of Israel's most exciting boutique wineries such as Castel, Flam, Matar (Pelter), Psagot, Tulip, Vitkin and Yatir. It has supported the Israel category like no other importer and provides the consumer with a wonderful range of wines to choose from.

"Kosher" is not a dirty word in

Adam Montefiore:
'Now Israeli wine is all about identity and a sense of place'

Israeli winemaking. Not all Israeli wines are kosher... and visitors to the KFWE will appreciate that not all kosher wines are Israeli. Ignoring the kiddush wine category, Israel makes the

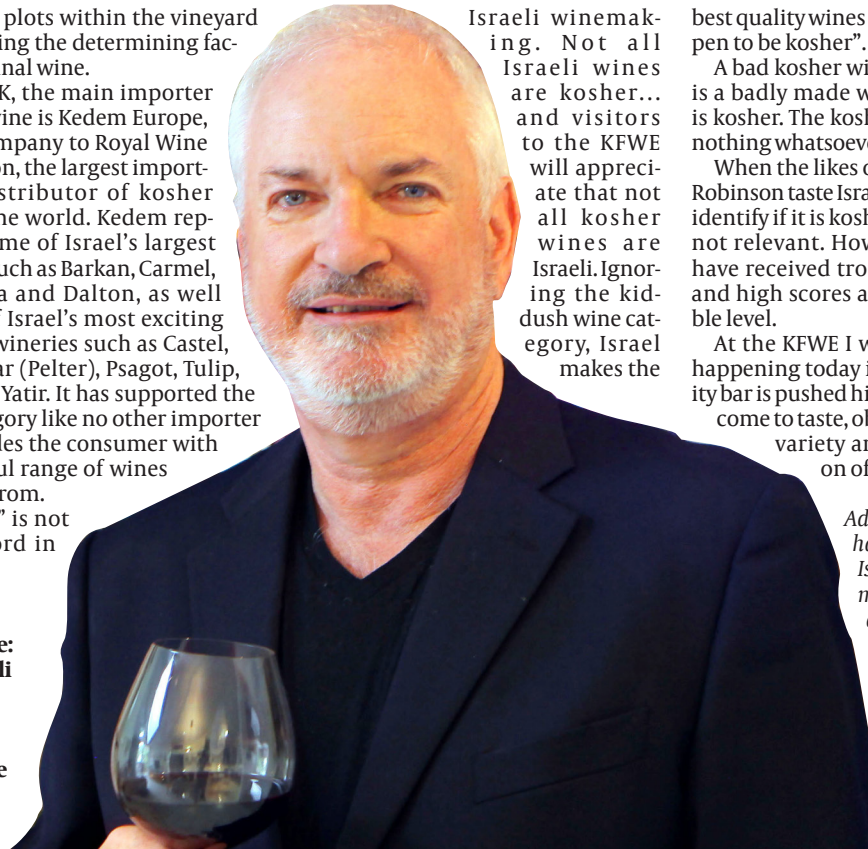
best quality wines it can that just "happen to be kosher".

A bad kosher wine is bad because it is a badly made wine, not because it is kosher. The kosher designation has nothing whatsoever to do with quality.

When the likes of Johnson, Parker & Robinson taste Israeli wine, they do not identify if it is kosher, because it is just not relevant. However Israeli wines have received trophies, gold medals and high scores at the highest possible level.

At the KFWE I will explain what is happening today in Israel as the quality bar is pushed higher. I hope you will come to taste, observe and enjoy the variety and quality of wines on offer.

Adam Montefiore has been advancing Israeli wines for more than 30 years and is sometimes referred to as "the ambassador of Israeli wines". He is the wine writer of the Jerusalem Post



Pouring creativity into their wine since 1848

THE HERZOG winery was founded in 1848 in Czechoslovakia. After surviving the Second World War in hiding, Eugene Herzog moved his family to New York City and went to work for Royal Wine Corp, eventually buying it out. Eugene and his sons incorporated the name Kedem — and, beginning with just one line of kiddush wine, set out to redefine the kosher wine industry. Today Kedem has become an industry leader and is the largest kosher wine supplier in the UK.

