



# The International Wine Review

July-August 2012

## Report # 32: The New Wines of Israel

### Introduction



Israeli wines are relatively unknown to wine enthusiasts. Yet this tiny Mediterranean country of 7 million inhabitants has a fast growing and dynamic wine industry that is gaining recognition in international markets for producing high quality wines. Since the 1980s, when there

were very few wineries in operation in Israel, the industry has grown rapidly. Today there are over 240 wineries, both large and small, throughout the country from the Lebanese border to the Negev producing 3 million cases from 4,800 hectares (12,000 acres) of wine grapes. Although the industry is dominated by a handful of large producers, there are many new and outstanding boutique wineries and "garagistes" who are handcrafting wines comparable to some of the best in the world.

In this report, the International Wine Review examines the new Israeli wine industry. We trace the growth and development of the industry from ancient to modern times. We identify some of the important pioneers of the industry and their contributions. We analyze the growing conditions in different regions of the country, the grapes under cultivation by kibbutzim and moshavs (cooperative agricultural settlements), and identify the improvements that have taken place in viticulture and winemaking over the years with the introduction of technology and know-how from both within and abroad.

While Israel is small, it has a remarkable number of highly trained and talented new and veteran winemakers, who are committed to improving the quality and authenticity of their wines. Many of these winemakers have been trained at UC Davis in California, as well as in France, Italy and Australia and have had extensive international winemaking experience. We

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also examine the meaning of kosher and assess its impact on the wines. In the latter sections of the report we also examine the growth of wine tourism within Israel and the challenges facing the industry in the marketing of its wines in the United States. Many consumers still mistakenly view Israeli wines as sweet kosher wines made for the Jewish holidays.

We tasted more than 250 Israeli wines for this report, both kosher and non-kosher, and at all price levels. In the final section we present our tasting notes and ratings for these wines, which are at all price levels. Many of them are available in the United States, but, unfortunately, not all of them are exported, especially some of the more interesting ones from the boutique wineries. Nonetheless, savvy wine enthusiasts will want to search out the highly recommended wines on the market and give them a try.



**In Memoriam.** Daniel Rogov (1935-2011) was Israel's leading food and wine critic. Rogov, as he liked to be called, was passionate about food and wine and gained enormous pleasure from sharing his thoughts on wine and food with others.

Rogov was a prodigious writer and wordsmith. He was the wine and restaurant critic for the Israeli

daily newspaper HaAretz and contributed regularly to Robin Garr's Wine Lovers Page and several European newspapers and books on wine such as Hugh Johnson's *Pocket Wine Book* and Tom Stevenson's *World Wine Report*. However, Rogov was perhaps best known for his annual *Rogov's Guide to Israeli Wines*, which provided reliable assessments of the Israeli wine industry and Israeli wines.

Rogov was widely admired by Israelis and foreigners alike. We had the pleasure of meeting him in Israel a couple of years ago at the Yarden Vintage Festival and regularly corresponded with him, sending our articles on Israeli wines for his review. He was warm and generous with his feedback, and we had planned to seek his advice and counsel in preparing this report. Like so many others, we felt a tremendous loss with his passing last September 7. However, we have very fond memories of our encounters with him and have regularly referred to his writings in preparing this report. It is only fitting that we dedicate this report to his memory.

**Acknowledgements** Several individuals have contributed significantly to this report, and we acknowledge and thank them here. First and foremost, we thank our colleague Joel Butler, MW who offered expert advice and critical inputs in the writing of this report. We are also indebted to Adam Montefiore who enthusiastically shared his rich knowledge and information on all aspects of Israeli wine. We also wish to thank Drs. S. Drori and E. Netzer of the Ariel University Center and Amos Hadas, Emeritus, A.R.O. Volcani Center for their excellent paper, "Notes on the Israeli wine industry, past, present and future," which they prepared at our request. We greatly appreciate as well the collaboration provided by Jay Buschsbaum, Gary Landsman, and Josh Greenstein of Royal Wine Corp. They helped acquaint us with their extensive portfolio of Israeli wines and with the kosher wine scene in Israel and the U.S. We also are indebted to Udi Kadim, CEO Yarden Inc, for his insights on the marketing of Israeli wines. Finally, we wish to acknowledge and thank the following individuals and publications: Louis Marmon, [www.grapelines.com](http://www.grapelines.com), Gershon Feder, David Rhodes, two outstanding blogs, the HaKerem: The Israeli Wine Blog, and Yossie's Corkboard, the excellent internet site, [www.wines-israel.com](http://www.wines-israel.com), and the fine book, *The Wine Route of Israel*.

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