

THE JEWISH LINK

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Favorite Fruits: Israel's Best and Brightest Bordeaux-Style Red Blends

By Elizabeth Kratz

Imagine tasting a single sip of wine that includes a fusion of the very best grapes grown in Israel. Nice. Now, let's take it a step further. Imagine Israel's most experienced winemakers working for years to produce the choicest grapes from multiple orchards for a single, solitary purpose: to create classic, aged red wine that is the very fulfillment of the experience, the longing, the taste and the blessings of Eretz Yisrael. That is what this year's Jewish Link Rosh Hashanah tasting was all about. Tasters Ari, Chana, Ezra, Jake and I all agreed that these wines we present here are, quite simply, unforgettable.

Our tasters noted several differences that set these red wines apart from others; all the wines we tried were in the good-to-great range, and it was difficult to rank them formally because of their unique attributes and special characteristics. Instead, we decided to recommend them all and explain why we liked each. "With blends, everyone who enjoys wine can find something here they enjoy the most," said Ari. Tasting blends also "allow us to enjoy flavors we like and also explore and understand the characteristics of varietals that are new to us," said Jake.

We limited the tasting to Bordeaux-style red blends. These are wines that typical-

ly include any combination of five types of grapes generally grown in the Bordeaux region of France, which are cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot. Because of the richness and variance of Israel's desert bloom and other types of terroir, including some soils with limestone or rock variations, the Bordeaux-style blends in Israel are rich in a different way than they are in France or California. In some ways one thing that these blends have in common is they are less earthy and more airy than their French or American cousins.

For us, these wines tasted of the joy, blessings and modern delicacies that we have come to know as a tribute to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and to Medinat Yisrael. Most of the wines in our tasting did not include

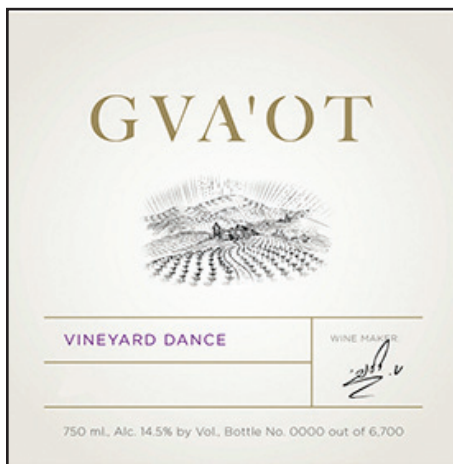
all five types of Bordeaux grape, and some included a sly addition of the syrah grape, but we tried our best to limit our tasting to special wines around or under \$45. These wines would make great gifts and would certainly be robust, special-occasion additions to any Rosh Hashanah or Yom Tov table. Unless otherwise noted, these wines are non-mevushal and widely available at all area wine stores with good kosher selections.

The **Bravdo Landmark 2B 2012**, bottled by the Karmeit Yosef Winery in Samson, was one of the smoothest wines of our tasting. It has an oaky perfume, strong tannins and smoky layers. "This is why I love Israeli reds," said Ezra. "This would be an amazing accompaniment to a really good steak," said Chana. Landmark is a label that is a unique creation by renowned winemakers Professors Ben Ami Bravdo and Oded Shoshayov, and while 2B is a cabernet sauvignon and merlot combination, it was enriched with cabernet franc skins separated from an early stage of a parallel rosé wine preparation. After malolactic (secondary) fermentation, the wine was aged 24 months in a 75/25 combination of French and American oak. The result

is one of the most satisfying glasses of wine we've ever tasted. The 25 percent American oak results in the tiniest of hints of vanilla in the nose and at the end. Bravdo wines are imported by The River Wine's Ami and Larissa Nahari and are available at Skyview Wines in Riverdale and by request at your favorite wine store.

The **Flam Classico 2012**, imported by Royal Wines, was likely the most sophisticated wine of our tasting. Awarded 91 out of 100 points by Wine Enthusiast, it was aged 10

months in oak barrels and is made from grapes grown in the Judean Hills near Castel and Beit Shemesh. Flam Classico is bright, rich and more deeply complex and aromatic of berries than many of the others we tried, with a zappy, spicy finish. "It's a heavier wine than I expected; I like this," said Ari. "It has warmth going down," said Chana. Flam Classico is a more classical Bordeaux-style than the Landmark, employing a blend of 47 percent cabernet sauvignon, 17 percent cabernet franc, 16 percent merlot, 13 percent petit verdot and 7 percent syrah. The wine is made by Golan Flam, who learned the art of winemaking from his father, Israel Flam, who worked at Carmel for many years.



G'vaot Vineyard Dance 2014 has been rated the best of all wines produced in the Shomron and, for its 2012 version, attained a score of 90 from Wine Enthusiast. Vineyard Dance is a special wine that I fell in love with earlier this summer, and is at its peak now and will continue to develop for six to eight years (if there's any left!) It was certainly the fruitiest and least dry in our tasting. Givat Harel in the Shomron, on the banks of Nahal Shiloh, is a hilly region; its unique terroir has a history of producing high-quality vines, and this boutique winery uses advanced technology to do amazing things with the grapes it produces. This wine is clearly the result of good grapes and careful winemaking. It exhibited the subtlest tannins in our tasting, but it should not be confused with a semi-sweet wine either. "There's a lightness to it, but very fruity and dense too, does that make sense?" asked Jake. This wine comprises 45 percent cabernet sauvignon, 30 percent petit verdot and 25 percent merlot. Imported by Allied Importers, Vineyard Dance is truly a luscious dance of complex, soft fruit flavors and deep colors, and for me, it just tastes of Israel. The winemakers are Dr. Shivi Drori, a molecular biologist/agronomist who has become an expert in viticulture at

Ariel University, and entrepreneur Amnon Weiss. Also, great deal alert: At approximately \$22, this wine was the least expensive in our tasting. This winery only produces 40,000 bottles a year, so get this bottle now before it runs out. Allied Wines' Marty Siegmeister told me at a recent tasting that there are very few bottles being

shipped as they are selling out fast, but if Vineyard Dance is not available, be sure to try G'vaot's merlot, which exhibits much of the same richness as Vineyard Dance but highlights the typical warmth that merlot wines bring to the drinker's experience.

Royal Wines' **Matar Cumulus 2012** called to mind, in two words, "battered popcorn," said both Ezra and Chana, at the same moment. It's named for those fluffy, wispy, cumulus clouds, and all of us took a moment to contemplate the imagery. "It's a softer wine, not dry, soft around the edges and smooth," explained Chana. My sense was that the wine felt somehow perfumed with plush, ripe, crushed blackberries and a little buttered toast for warmth. Winemaking brothers Tal and Nir Pelter, who are famous for non-kosher winemaking, created Matar to make their wines accessible to everyone, including the kosher consumer. Tal Pelter, who serves as the winemaker (while Nir serves as CEO), is said to infuse his wines with a personal signature, often with less popular and/or offbeat varietals. Matar Cumulus is made from 33 percent cabernet sauvignon, 33 percent merlot, 24 percent cabernet franc and 10 percent petit verdot, and was aged 14 months in French oak (one third each in new, one-year and two-

year old barrels). Most of the grapes were sourced from the Golan Heights, with a smaller portion sourced from the Galilee.

Psagot Edom 2013, also imported by Royal Wines, was as dry as G'vaot was fruity, and we were amazed to taste them alongside one another. "Dry, heavy tannins here, but still natural and easy to drink," said Jake. "I liked the structure, how it tells a story," said Ari, noting the wine's complex character combined with accessibility. Made with 75 percent cabernet sauvignon and 25 percent merlot grown in the Jerusalem hills, the wine was aged in French and American oak barrels for 14 months, and also underwent an aggressive stainless steel malolactic fermentation prior to barreling. Earlier vintages of the Psagot Edom have won multiple awards, including gold and silver medals in various competitions. Psagot's vineyards are rooted on picturesque limestone terraces, 900 meters above water level in the Psagot settlement in Binyamin.

Dalton's Alma Crimson 2013, brought to us again by Allied Importers, was beautiful in a few distinct ways. Garnet-colored, it had more acid than many, if not all, the other wines in our tasting, but was also fruity, darker and more full-bodied than the others, and heavy with tannins. This wine would stand up well with Rosh Hashanah brisket or other savory roasted meats. Alma Crimson also benefited from wines from several vineyards that were picked and fermented separately and also from encouragement of malolac-

tic fermentation, like Psagot's above, and then the wines were aged separately in French oak barrels for 12 months. Once the aging was complete, each parcel was individually tasted and the final blend was chosen: It comprises 55 percent cabernet sauvignon, 30 percent merlot and 15 percent cabernet franc. The blended wine was then aged in oak for an additional two months. We noted this wine should be opened at least an hour before tasting to fully enjoy its complexity, and would be a perfect accompaniment to roast chicken. Dalton's CEO Alex Harumi recently shared thoughts with me on his Alma series at a recent tasting. He said that the series, which includes Alma Scarlett (a blend of shiraz, grenache and mourvedre), Ivory (a white blend) and Coral (a rosé) in addition to the Bordeaux-style Crimson, are unique signature blends that highlight the craftsmanship for which Dalton has become known, and the Alma blends seek to offer experiences greater than the sum of their parts. These wines are also on the more affordable end of the spectrum, at approximately \$25 a bottle.

Whatever you serve at your table this Yom Tov, we hope one or more of these wines have interested you, and we hope everything on your table helps you usher in a sweet new year, complete with all the flavors, colors and incredible essences of Israel's stunning bounty.

