

Old wine in a new bottle

David Montefiore worked from the bottom up, to declare the best 'bottom's up'

• Text and Photo by GLORIA DEUTSCH

My job is to make people think of wine-drinking as young, cheeky and sexy," says David Montefiore, who was born in London, but lived in Israel since 1989.

With his illustrious family name it was perhaps inevitable that he would go into the wine business. His father is Adam Montefiore, who writes a regular wine column in *The Jerusalem Post*. And his distant relative was Sir Moses Montefiore, who started the whole wine industry back in the 19th century in the Land of Israel.

Sir Moses had no children but the present dynasty, of which David and his sister Rachel are the last in the line for the moment are descended from his heir, Joseph Sebag Montefiore.

"I grew up in a home where wine was always on the table and always being talked about," says the 30-year-old wine connoisseur, who earns his living by persuading people, restaurants and anyone who will listen that wine is essential to a good healthy life.

He works for the Tabor Winery, which was founded 15 years ago, and has built a formidable reputation as a provider of excellent wines.

"What I do is in fact wine education," he says. "I work mainly with restaurants, either creating wine lists or getting the Tabor label onto already existing wine lists. It means visiting some of the top restaurants in the country and persuading some of the celebrity chefs in them to pair our wine with their food."

Montefiore moved with his parents to Ra'anana when he was seven and grew up in a typical Anglo-Israeli home with frequent visits back to England, ensuring that his English is as perfect as his Hebrew.

He decided very early on that he was going to dedicate his life to wine, but first completed his army service in the artillery division, rising to the rank of sergeant, and finished a degree in English literature before plunging into the liquor business by working as a barman for several years.

If pressed to explain the attraction of alcoholic drinks in general and wine in particular, he will tell you that it's a very versatile world that can give insights into history as well as culture, and that spirits can tell stories.

"I'm fascinated by the whole ethos of wine and food and the fact that certain wines go best with certain foods," he explains.

To acquire the necessary knowledge, he took a bartender course, read about the subject and began working as a barman where he was able to pick up some basic wine lore. Travels in South America and in Spain added to his experience. In addition, he represented Israel in an international cocktail competition, having invented a drink – an original combination of red grapefruit juice, Campari, vodka and basil leaves. Called Rubelio, he thinks it is still being served in the Tapeo Bar in Tel Aviv where he once worked.

He spent a year and a half in Australia, learning the wine business there from the bottom up.

"I did a vintage in the Barossa Valley at a winery there," he says. "This involved everything from cleaning out tanks and filters to bottling and labeling."

He did the same in a Spanish winery and then studied at the Wine and Spirits Education Trust in London, generally considered a world leader in wine education. He spent an intensive week there learning the ins and outs of wine drinking and selling.

Now that he is back in Israel, he feels strongly that it is important to take the mystery out of wine drinking and make it more accessible. At Tabor they are trying to change the whole image of wine as something suitable for everyone and not just the social elite.

"Wine shouldn't be scary," he says. "It's supposed to be fun."

To that end Tabor has introduced concepts so that very often the white wine will come in a screw-top bottle and the labels no longer emphasize the name of the grape so much as the character of the wine inside.

"We have very nontraditional labels and we don't use wine jargon," he says. "Instead we give our wine names that reflect the feel of the drink."

The wine labeled Keshet ("rainbow") is "elegant, subtle and layered," according to Montefiore.

Thunder is, as one might expect, a powerful red wine. Flame is rich and "chewy," while Storm is rugged, he says.

He is often asked to give talks on wine, and he enjoys imparting his extensive knowledge to audiences.

He uses any spare time he has as a sports enthusiast, swimming three times a week, cycling and running. All that probably helps to counteract the caloric overload of all that wine consumption. He is a fanatical Liverpool supporter and has visited the club several times.

Having taken a creative writing course, he often writes articles about his passion for wine. He also writes poetry and has a blog.

With his evocative family name and out-of-the-ordinary job, he is certainly carrying on a long family tradition. ■

DAVID MONTEFIORE, 30
FROM LONDON
TO TEL AVIV, 1989



'WINE SHOULDN'T be scary,' Montefiore says, and believes it is essential to a good healthy life.