

The new stars of the kosher wine-list

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THIS YEAR sees some excellent new bottles on the kosher wine shelves which have won accolades not only at home in Israel but in the wider world. Israel's table wines are improving all the time with competition from boutique wineries — and even at lower price points the quality is impressive.



The name Montefiore is so familiar to the Anglo-Jewish community that it is surprising it had never been bestowed on a wine until last year. Yet while Moses

Montefiore was the first to urge 19th century zionists to restart a wine industry that had lain dormant for a millennium, he did not actually plant vines himself. It would be more than 100 years before his descendants, the first to make aliyah as well as get into the wine business, decided to launch a label named after the family.

Adam Montefiore has been associated with premium wines in Israel for a generation and his daughter Rachel is the family member fronting Montefiore Wines. She has sent three new bottles to London this year via leading kosher wine distributor Kedem.

The reds, a superb cabernet sauvignon and the flagship Kerem Moshe wine named after her illustrious ancestor, are highly recommendable, even at £19.99 and £49.99 respectively. Less so the white, a not entirely successful mix of chardonnay and the tricky colombarid grape.

Rachel's brother, David Montefiore is helping to promote the wines of Tabor, another new entry to the UK market this year. Bearing the name of a mountain in the Galilee, this young winery founded by a long-time grape grower with a burning ambition to make his own wine has flourished in the past decade with the help of massive investment from Coca-Cola.

The multinational saw the potential of the grapes and the original winemaker who, like the grower himself remained with the business when the original partners sold out. The winery is now winning prizes for its affordable as well as premium wines and both ranges reward a tasting. The Adama mid-range merlot may have been awarded 93 points by the influential American publication Wine Enthusiast — the highest it has ever marked an Israeli wine — but the less costly Har merlot from the entry-level range, £13 versus £15, is even more quaffable. At the top end, a limited edition cabernet sauvignon, £34.99, is out of this world. Adam Montefiore, wine development director of Carmel (founded in 1882 by Moses Montefiore's brother-in-law Jacob Rothschild) has seen the winery grow from a purveyor of sweet sacramental libations to a producer of some of the finest table wines Israel has to offer. These include the wines of the boutique Yatir subsidiary, which operates independently.

Yatir's flagship Forest, a cool £70 per bottle, is the only Israeli wine ever to have received 90 points or more from the ultimate wine guru, Robert Parker, eight years in a row.

But there are also more affordable Yatir single varietals, including a yummy Syrah, as well as a simply sumptuous Shiraz-Cabernet-Merlot blend, both £33.99. New to the UK this year from Carmel is its more modestly priced Private Collection, fielding a classy chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon at £13 per bottle. Those seeking something a bit special should try Carmel's prestigious Mediterranean blend, recalling the ripe fruit of the southern Rhone, a gorgeous choice to see in the new year, at £40.

Among less familiar names, another sure-fire sign of quality is Flam, thanks to the family winemaker's training in Tuscany. All its reds are lovely and justify the hefty price, but the reserve syrah is exceptional.

Finally — respect to the Golan Heights Winery, which first dragged the quality of Israeli wine upmarket 30 years ago. Its Yarden range is not inexpensive but always to be trusted for quality.

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