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## Viniculture's New Strides, Markets

March 25, 2010 - Elyse Glickman, Jewish Exponent Feature

It's been years now since the iconic bottles of Manischewitz and Mogen David solely graced the Passover seder table for the requisite four cups of wine.

So much activity has taken place in viniculture in recent decades that it's somewhat ironic that many people have forgotten or may not be aware that Jewish winemakers have been spinning their magic for quite literally thousands of years.



In fact, back in times when the Gauls (ancestry of France) were known to wash their food down only with water, the Jews were toasting and blessing their meals with wine, enjoying the oldest known codified relationship to the spirit on earth.

*Wine before its time? The time is now for Ramy and Monica Djerassi.*

An increasingly informed and educated wine-drinking public understands that wines from all over the world are now seeking a hechsher so that they can be savored in Jewish households over the eight-day holiday.

Harrisburg, Pa.-bred, Washington, D.C.-based wine expert and author Charlie Adler (I Drink on the Job: A Refreshing Perspective on Wine) has his own take on Israeli kosher wines and kosher wine in general.

"When somebody says the name 'Manischewitz,' I not only know he is Jewish, but is a person of a certain age, or may not be as experienced as other wine drinkers," says Adler.

"While Manischewitz is sweet, 99 percent of what modern wine drinkers prefer are dry wines," he continues. "People I consider the 'New Jewish Wine Drinker' are savvy enough to steer clear of kosher wines they may have grown up with in favor of kosher and/or Israeli wines that represent the complexity and high quality they demand as



experienced wine drinkers."

Thanks to the commitment of people like Ramy and Monica Djerassi, Philadelphia wine aficionados will get back to their true roots with bottles from Israel -- and just in time for this year's observance of Passover.

Instead of settling for the sweet and syrupy wines of our childhood and our parents' observances of the seder, the East Falls couple has given local Jews the freedom to choose high-quality wines that are drier, more complex and more food-friendly.

Though Ramy, 52, is a judge and Monica, 46, is a corporate paralegal, the genesis of their move into the wine business stems from personal experience and frequent travel to Israel.

On one trip, a stop at a high-end wine boutique in Tel Aviv convinced them that many Israeli producers had what it takes to make it in the increasingly savvy and sophisticated U.S. wine market -- including Pennsylvania, with its state-run liquor board notwithstanding.

The event that catalyzed their exploration into Israeli wine was their goal of serving good-quality bottles at their daughter's Bat Mitzvah reception.

They were able to work with a state liquor store to make that possible. While they didn't get the exact wines they wanted, they knew opening the market was doable with research, commitment, time and conversion via a well-planned wine-tasting.

Partnering up with fellow Philadelphian Caroline Igra (an art-history professor), her husband Rami Igra (a former Mossad agent), and distributor Majestic Wines and Spirits, they patiently took the measures needed to bring Tabor ([www.taborwinery.co.il](http://www.taborwinery.co.il)) wines into Pennsylvania.

"I think people recognize that buying Israeli wine is a pleasant way to support the country and its economy," says Ramy Djerassi. "After partnering with people who were as enthusiastic about Israeli wines as we were, we started a dialogue with wineries in Israel and decided to go forward. We had a most interesting meeting with the liquor-control board folks, and we were able to convince them that Israeli wines were worth bringing into the Pennsylvania marketplace."

At press time, their company, Kingdom Importers, was awaiting a large order of Tabor wines special for this Passover holiday.

### Do Your Homework!

Monica Djerassi is especially excited about Tabor's Adama Galilee series, where each wine is distinguished by soil variations. For example, there are 2007 Merlots that include one sourced from grapes grown in chalk soil, the other from volcanic. Also available are Cabernet Sauvignons made with Galilee varietals -- one grown in terra rosa soil, the other from volcanic soil.

If you're new to the kosher-wine industry, Djerassi recommends doing your homework, such as turning to books like Rogov's Guide to Israeli Wines as a starting point.

However, this research should not just be for Passover alone.

"Kosher Israeli wine is natural, and fulfills the religious obligation to drink four cups of quality wine during the seder and sanctifying the kiddush wine," she continues. "That said, I can't think of a Jewish holiday, including, of course, Shabbat, that doesn't involve wine."

If you are interested in ordering wine online, remember that Pennsylvania has some of

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To do this in Pennsylvania, you first must contact your local state store and see what forms must be filled out so the wines can be sent directly to them for your purchase.

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