Which Wines to Drink at the Seder This Year, and Why

Matt Kokkonen's explains how the four cups of wine elevate the holiday, while two enthusiasts recommend their favorite wines from the great regions of Jewish civilization.

Kosher wines from Israel, Hungary and Spain. | Photo Credit: Jonathan Gewirtz/Mosaic

JONATHAN GEWIRTZ
Senior Editor, Mosaic
@JonathanGewirtz
jonathan.gewirtz@mosaicscience.com

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first cup of wine at the seder. Try the just-released Netofa Tel Qasser Moursyr 2018, an exhilarating medium-body Mourvèdre, blended with a small bit of Syrah.

For the second cup of wine (Maggid), pour wines from **Bat Shlomo**, a winery named for Betty Salomon (Shlomo), Baron Edmond de Rothschild's mother.

The winery was established by an American immigrant and prominent entrepreneur, Elie Wurtman. Bat Shlomo's Napa Valley-trained winemaker Ari Erle makes a velvety Chardonnay (scored at 90 points by Robert Parker), and a full-bodied, smooth Bordeaux blend called Betty's Cuvée. If you prefer a lighter wine, try the winery's rosé. On your next trip to Israel, make sure to visit the winery's sleek new tasting room in a beautifully refurbished old home in the historic and quaint Bat Shlomo village near Zichron Yaakov on the coastal plain.

For the third cup of wine (Grace after the Meal), pour wines from **Tura**, Erez and Vered Ben-Saadon's winery in the town of Rechelim in the Samarian highlands.

This young couple started out growing grapes in 1997 on Mount Bracha, near Nablus (Shechem). That vineyard is now considered one of the finest in the entire country, producing bold and fruity grapes in excellent conditions of viniculture (2,800 feet above sea level: hot and dry during the day, very cold at night), and it supplies grapes to many wineries across Israel. After a while, it became clear to the Ben-Saadons that they should produce their own wines, and olive oil too.

Erez is the winemaker, and Vered the marketing and public-affairs manager—a job that she does with great flair and charm. Part of any visit to their tasting room involves hearing Vered's remarkable personal story. Her grandfather was a Nazi. As penance for his sins, she, along with her mother and sister, converted to Judaism, inspired by the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland.

Like Yaacov Berg, Vered is a high-profile activist for Jewish communities in the West Bank. She was a driving force behind the publication of the *Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wines 2016*, which makes a point of including Israeli wineries in the West Bank.

For Passover, drink the high-end Bordeaux blend called Tura Mountain Peak, or the peppery Mountain Heights Shiraz. These big, bold, and smooth wines from the heights of Samaria will beautifully accompany the hearty meat dishes traditionally served at the seder. If you are preparing lighter fare, pour the Tura Mountain Vista Snow, a dry white wine that blends Viognier, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay.

For the fourth cup (Hallel), pour the wines of **Teperberg**, the country's oldest winery.

Teperberg produces over eight million bottles a year, including several hundred thousand high-end wines, under the auspices of its erudite and universally beloved winemaker, Shiki Rauchberger, who studied viticulture and enology at UC Davis and the Hebrew University's faculty of agriculture in Rehovot. Everybody in Israeli winemaking consults with, and admires, Shiki.

You have at least three fantastic choices here, depending on budget. Teperberg's Legacy series Cabernet Franc is world-class (Decanter World Wine Award score: 96!); the Essence series Malbec is unique (and less expensive); and the Inspire series Devotage (a Malbec-Marselan blend) is a quality-for-price star. They are great wines that should grace the table of any serious connoisseur and can grace your Passover holiday meals throughout the week.

For the fifth cup (Elijah's Cup), drink the wines of **Matar**, the kosher label from Tal Pelter's winery on Kibbutz Ein Zivan in the Golan Heights.

What? Drink a fifth cup at the seder? Well, yes!

The prevalent custom is to pour but not drink wine for the fifth cup, leaving it to Elijah the prophet to waft in the open doorway, "drink" from that centrally placed cup, and herald future redemption. But there is an Israeli custom, advanced by the great rabbinical scholar Menachem Kasher of blessed memory, to drink the "Cup of Elijah" in celebration of the establishment of modern Israel. This parallels a *fifth* phrase from Genesis 6:8, "And I will **bring** you to the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

In the Bible and in Jewish tradition, Elijah is known as the "Gileadite," from the ancient name for the Golan Heights, so drinking Golan wine is most appropriate for this cup.

Try the elegant Matar "Cumulus" wine or the top-end "CB"—both of which blend Golan-grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot. They are finely tuned, complex masterpieces of winemaking.

Finally, for dessert at the meal itself (which usually precedes drinking the ritual third cup), try one of these wonderful, sweet dessert wines: Golan Mount Odem Inbar Port (it tastes like a fine brandy with maple and toffee flavors), Netofa LBV Port, Tzora Or Gewürztraminer (it tastes like liquid honey), Bat Shlomo Ice Wine, or best of all, Ya'acov Oryah's Old Musketeer 2008, a dessert wine barreled for twelve years and made from late-harvested Muscat of Alexandria blended with some Chardonnay. An absolute treat.

Before retiring from the Passover seder table, don't forget to thank God and His intrepid Israeli winemaker-emissaries for this exquisite bounty.

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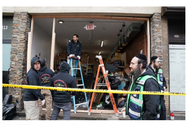

A Threat Assessment for American Jewry, Part One
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