

365 = Days of Wine
2009

Choosing wines for a seminar on food and culture at the Boston Synagogue – which I did this week with Josh Ruboy from his selection at The Butcherie in Brookline – is like a crash course in the more recent history of wine in Israel.

Like the year 1882, when Tishbi winery was founded. (We sampled the 2004 Tishbi Emerald Riesling.) At that time the Baron Edmond de Rothschild of France supported farm colonies and vineyards as part of his industrialization and economic development promotions in Palestine. Rothschild chose Michael Chamiletzki to plant and develop vineyards on the site of what is now the Tishbi estate. That was five generations ago, and the family still runs the winery.

Or the year 1899, when Barkan winery was founded. (We tried their 2007 Classic Negev Pinot Noir.) Back then the purpose of the winery was to produce sweet ceremonial wine and brandy and, though they still do produce different fortified wines, I would place their Pinot Noir well within the range of delicious examples of that varietal from all over the world.

Or the year 1995, when the Haruni family moved from England to the Upper Galilee and established the Dalton winery. (We tried their 2007 red blend of Cab, Merlot and Syrah.) The wine, typical perhaps of a more recently-founded winery, was clean and fresh and fruity like many of its New World counterparts.

That's the thing about the wines we tasted: whether their original wineries were founded 20 years ago or 120 years ago, their recent vintages have a twist of the modern to them.

Tishbi's winemaker today, for example, has an international focus that is true to the winery's French-infllected history: he studied cognac making in France, and then winemaking in New Zealand before returning to Tishbi, where he transfers his experience into producing both wine and brandy.

Barkan winery owns vineyards all over Israel that are the source of the grapes that go into their single-varietal wines and blends. That's similar to the way some brands in California own vineyards all over the state or source grapes from producers in climates as diverse as Lodi or Carneros.

Tasting through these wines, and knowing something about their history, was like putting on a fresh coat of paint. The foundation is the same but its personality shifted, so your perspective and your appreciation has changed.

That is an experience I'd welcome again and again.
History, Israel, and Wine: Culture Talk at the Boston Synagogue
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