

ISRAEL GETS REAL

ASSOCIATION SPREADS THE MESSAGE OF ISRAELI WINE QUALITY AS A BASELINE

BY JACK ROBERTIELLO

Whatever the situation and whatever the season, there's a wine made in Israel that fits. That, in a nutshell, is the message of the Israeli Wine Producers Association's (IWPA) American representative, Joshua Greenstein, who these days spends half his time out on the road visiting retailers and restaurateurs, persistently proselytizing about the merits of wines from the country.

The IWPA's Vice President, Greenstein notes that IWPA's 25 Israeli member wineries, including commercial and boutique producers, represent 85% of the total wine imported to the U.S. from the country, he says.

In organizing various events throughout the country, Greenstein sees a sea change in the American view of Israeli wines: "When I'm in retail shops in Texas or Oklahoma or Colorado—places you might not think of as where Israeli wines will do well—I like to ask people, 'What did you expect?' Most have never tasted wines from Israel at all, but when they try

them, they're quite impressed with the quality. I like to say that Israel has been making wine for close to 5,000 years—they just started getting good at it."

Greenstein says that growing interest among retailers, restaurateurs and consumers for wines from under-represented regions with interesting stories gives him an advantage these days, especially since

most retailers have little awareness of wines from the Middle East.

"Israel as a wine producing country has one of the best stories across the world, and each winery has a unique story to tell," says Greenstein.



Getting Past Kosher

When presenting IWPA wines, Greenstein likes to avoid "the K word" (kosher), as he calls it, because it distracts from the quality message: "I don't dive into the meaning of kosher unless people are really interested. However, when it comes up, I love to ask people 'Have you ever had Snapple? Ever have a Hershey bar or a bag of Lay's potato chips?' All of those are kosher. There is no difference in the winemaking process for kosher versus non-kosher in Israel."

The selling proposition these days, he says, is threefold: First, Israeli wines are trending in American wine media. "I can consistently say that IWPA has over 75 wines with 90+ points from the major publications, retailing from \$12 to \$90." Second, the thirst for something new makes it easy to find retailers receptive to his educational presentations and samplings. Third and most important, improved techniques have made Israeli's



Israel now boasts around 300 wineries in five distinct wine regions—Galilee, Shomron, Samson, Judean Hills and Negev. IWPA represents 85% of the total wine imported to the U.S. from Israel.

wines competitive on quality. Greenstein believes an Israeli-Mediterranean style is evolving as a result of those technical changes.

While many marketers focus first on an ethnic connection, Greenstein eschews it when talking about IWPA wines. "Not only Italians drink Italian wine. Not only French drink French wine. I'm having great success in Texas and the Midwest and the Southwest, just because the wines are good." With a full range of white and red varietals being produced, in styles reminiscent of Bordeaux, Napa, the Rhône and other regions, and young winemakers trained all over the world, it's not surprising that the IWPA is looking to break through beyond stereotypes.

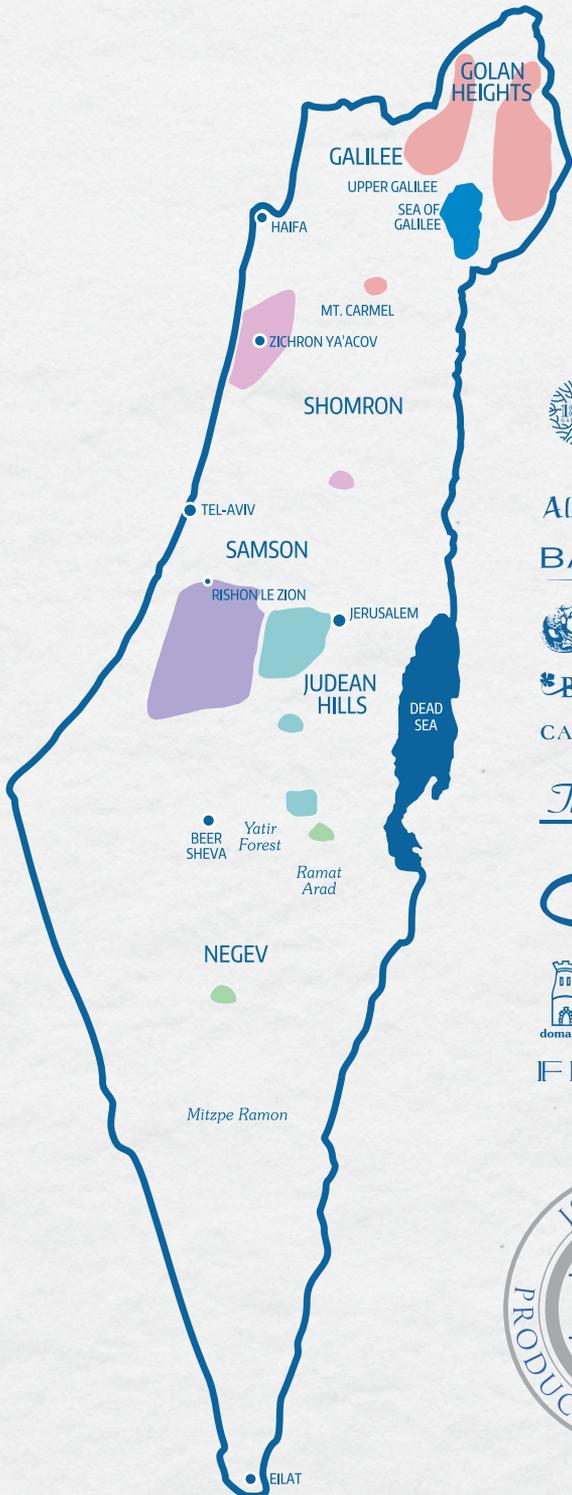
The relative scarcity of Israeli wines in the overall U.S. market has helped IWPA wines find placement in as many as 500 non-kosher restaurants in the U.S., a fine record for the notoriously hard to crack on-premise market. But it's a crucial component of the IWPA game plan, based on increasing the awareness among consumers and retailers of the breadth of prices and styles now available. ■



Joshua Greenstein

Israeli Wines

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