

The promised land...

Israel is a country which rarely features in wine reviews, it is certainly not a country which immediately springs to mind when searching for something to guzzle with the Sunday roast! Yet why not?? Israel is one of the earliest countries known to have produced wine. A document dating back to around 1800 BC was discovered stating Palestine was ...*blessed with figs and vineyards producing wine in greater quantity than water*. There are literally thousands of references in texts from all religious denominations mentioning the production & use of grapes, vines & wine. According to the Tanakh it was Noah who planted the first vines once the great flood had subsided & was the first recorded drunk in the old testament! Mid way through the 1st century the imposition of Muslim law forbade the consumption of alcohol and consequently all but ceased the production of wine in Palestine. It was not until late in the 1800's that wine started to once again be produced by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, a Jewish Frenchman who shaped the Israeli wine industry as we now know it.

So why now??

Around 1990 the Israeli wine industry spread beyond the well-established regions of the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee into the Judean hills, the corridor to Jerusalem. Nestling in the foothills of the Ayalon Valley is the Historic *Clos de Gat* Vineyard with its 3000 year old wine press. Over the past two decades head winemaker Eyal Rotem has been quietly producing some of the most exciting and refined wines not only to come out of Israel, but the world over. What is it that makes these wines so unique? The answer is simple, hardship! The more the vines struggle to find sufficient water, the deeper the roots grow, passing through a plethora of different elements and soils, each in turn adding another layer of complexity to the flavour of the resulting fruit. Amongst the broad range of wines produced at *Clos de Gat* is the 'entry level' *Chanson Blanc*, a blend of Chardonnay, Semillon & Viognier. For me this is a dream, the expression of each grape variety is perfectly balanced. From the Chardonnay you get minerality and tropical fruit helped in no small part by a hint of malolactic fermentation. The almost oily mouthfeel added by Semillon is perfectly balanced with juicy white peach from Viognier. This wine is truly a joy to pair with food and has become a firm favourite with diners at my Tunbridge Wells restaurant, Thackeray's. Currently paired with Hand dived Orkney Scallops on our *Chef's Tasting Menu* and regularly featuring on Wednesday evenings for our *Wednesday Wine Club*.

So next time you are contemplating what to pick up from the off license, bypass the Pinots & the Sauvignon blanc and seek out something a little more inspiring!

Why not come along to Thackeray's for dinner on Wednesday and be part of our wine club? You can taste as many or few of our diverse range of wines available on the evening to match your chosen menu.

Happy Drinking!

"The mountains shall drip wine and all the hills shall flow with it."

The Prophet Amos (9:13)