

Passover Wines—You've Come A Long Way, Bubbe

I like to think of Passover as the Jewish version of Thanksgiving. Families and friends gather together to tell stories and eat a traditional meal, called the "Seder". But there are a couple of small, intsy weensy differences.



First, the meal must be prepared without using any products that incorporate flour or yeast. This is in deference to the Jew's hasty departure out of Egypt when they did not have time for their bread to rise. But the second requirement, a big one in my book, is the Rabbinic requirement that four cups of wine are to be consumed during the Seder. Although grape juice is an acceptable substitute, the Mishnah – a history book of sorts - insists that "even the poorest man in Israel" is obligated to drink and enjoy the fruit of the vine.

But here's the catch; for proper observance, the wines served at a Seder meal must be kosher – a type of dietary guideline. That means that the wines have to be harvested, vinified and bottled according to very specific rules. In some situations, this could include - and I am not making this up – boiling the wines. The latter is how most of the cloyingly sweet concord grape-based wines are made. The good news is that many of those wines are quickly becoming a thing of the past.

Today, kosher wines have entered a new era. There are a several countries that are dedicated to producing quality wines for all consumers. Israel is leading the way with six wine producing regions turning out some pretty good juice. Italy, New Zealand and California are also on the map with respectable Kosher wine offerings. This isn't your father's Manischewitz.

The fresh, easy, and approachable **2010 Gamla Chardonnay Reserve** from Israel exhibits bright aromas of fresh red apple, light citrus and dainty yellow flowers. The palate is slightly richer and fuller-bodied, with lush flavors of baked apple and toasted brioche that transition into the baking-spice laden finish. **\$20**

The **2013 Goose Bay Sauvignon Blanc** hails from Marlborough, New Zealand and is packed with fragrant citrus blossom and grapefruit on the nose. The palate also features a healthy dose of juicy grapefruit notes but is buoyed by the addition of passion fruit and honeydew melon. The crisp, bright acidity would make this a fine candidate to pair with the traditional gefilte fish course. **\$19**

The **2013 Ramon Cardova** is a luxurious example of Spain's famous Rioja wines. Produced from 100% Tempranillo grapes, which are carefully selected from old vines surrounding the town of Haro, La Rioja. With its bright ruby red color, a nose of ripe wild berries and balsamic aromas, Ramon Cardova is ideal with red meat, fish, and soft, light cheeses. **\$16**

The **2010 Barkan Assemblage Reichan** from Israel is made from a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Aromas of mint are woven together with the cassis and the chocolate on the fragrant nose. Surprising earthiness combined with cloves, cinnamon and marzipan add elegant richness and complexity to the wine. The flavors of ripe blackberry, dark plum and cassis are supported by firm tannins and fresh acidity, offering balance and texture throughout the long and elegant finish. Perfect with lamb. **\$31**

If brisket is in the oven then the **2013 Covenant Red C Cabernet Sauvignon** from Napa, California should be in your glass. The "second wine" of Napa's exalted Covenant Winery, Covenant Red C Cabernet Sauvignon is rich and opulent, yet accessible. Winemaker Jeff Morgan crafts this in the same style as his top Cabernet, resulting in a highly vivacious character with ripe, round, black cherry, blackberry and herb flavors couched in firm acidity and soft, supple tannins. The layered flavors and textures are showing beautifully in the glass, and the finish is long and lush on the palate. **\$42**