

From Bukhara to Tel Aviv

JAY LEVINSON

ELIRAN Aharonoff sat behind a large desk in his impromptu office in a Yerusholayim kollel, and described his role as the fifth generation in a family wine business that started years ago in Bukhara.

His ancestor was a well-to-do textile merchant and a leader in the Jewish community. His impetus to make wine was not commercial. He saw the religious need to provide a kosher product. As time passed both the textile and wine businesses passed to his son, but then there was a dramatic change. In the summer of 1920 the Bolsheviks formally took power from the Emirate of Bukhara.

Soon the textile and wine businesses were confiscated.

Eliran's ancestor was a prominent Jew. Religion had been forbidden. He was eventually deported to a prisoners' camp, where he was lined up against a wall and executed. The family (and other Jews) understood the new reality. They fled to Palestine. By the early 1930s the family was re-established in the Tel Aviv area. They took with them two important reminders from Bukhara: a cherished photograph of their murdered relative and a passion to make wine.

Fast forward to Eliran Aharonoff, the fifth generation in the family chain. The year was 2005. He was (and still is) an ardent kollel student, but he realized that he needed a financial basis to support his learning. The solution was self-evident. In the family tradition it was wine! Times had changed. There was no market to sell just any wine, and in Israel there were plenty of kosher wineries. Eliran did what was obvious to him: he set out to learn the wine business. He teamed up with a wine manufacturer. The deal was free work in exchange for lessons to learn the trade.

Learn he did. Good wine starts with the grape. The wine that he now makes has carefully selected grapes from chosen vineyards in the Galilee and the Judean Hills. Harvesting is done around sunrise, after the grapes are naturally cooled from the day's heat. The wine is eventually aged in French barrels until it is ready for bottling.

Kashrus is impeccable without the slightest question. In addition to local *hashgocho* (required by Israeli law) there is supervision from Manchester! All products are certified for Pesach. Bottles, however, are from abroad, so they need *tevilah* if reused. (The Israeli manufacturer of wine bottles is not *shomer Shabbos*.)

Recently a delegation of potential buyers from the Far East visited Aharonoff. They wanted to know why kosher wine is relatively expensive. He explained that there are numerous *halachic* considerations in addition to the cost of good grapes and barrels.

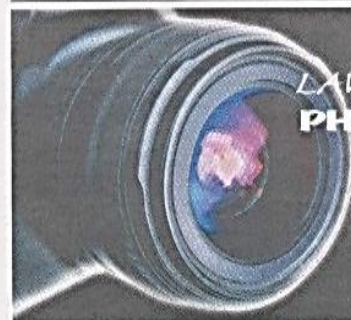
A vineyard has a production life of about twenty-five years. Deduct from that the three years of *orlah* and the following year of *meta-reval*. Then deduct the years of *Shmitta* in the twenty-five year vineyard lifetime. Remember to take away the produce given for tithing, etc. Even at the height of the season harvesting is limited to six days per week. The employment market is limited to *shomer Shabbos* only. All of these requirements must be factored into the cost of kosher wine. Although these considerations are obvious to JT readers, it was not

so for the Far Eastern visitors.

Aharonoff, the family name, is also the company brand name, and a picture of the murdered ancestor is the symbol. The products are Heritage and Reserve. One is Cabernet Sauvignon and the other is a careful blend.

At the end of the interview I shared a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon with Aharonoff. My absolutely honest assessment: excellent! Generally, I do not care for Cabernet Sauvignon, but this wine is an exception. It has a smooth flavour that is a pleasure to the taste buds.

Currently Aharonoff wines are available in selected Israeli wine stores and in North America. Plans to move to a new and larger winery, and negotiations to expand sales to Europe, are underway.

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