



Scores and reviews by Mark Squires

88 **2007 Carmel Gewurztraminer Sha'Al Vineyard**
The 2007 GEWURZTRAMINER SHA'AL VINEYARD in 375ml is the latest release of this late harvest wine. Delicious and unctuous, although not really thick, it is ripe and tinged with apricot and mango notes. The pristine and tasty fruit is a pleasure to drink. Drink: 2008-2012

88 **2009 Yatir Viognier**
The 2009 VIOGNIER, from an altitude of 900 meters, was hard edged and disjointed when I saw it first, without delivering much in the way of either fruit or aromatics, although there were enough hints that it would become interesting. Since I counseled that it needed a little time to unwind in its youthful state, I thought it might be interesting to take another look at this, another six months or so down the road. It has certainly rewarded that time in the cellar and it is quite lovely now, about as good as it is going to get. Well integrated, with all of its parts in balance, it seems bright and sunny, although without any obvious bursts of acidity. It has good purity of fruit, just a hint of herbaceousness and nice aromatics. It is quite charming, with a feeling of solidity. Drink now-2012.

91 **2007 Carmel Limited Edition**
The 2007 LIMITED EDITION (there was no 2006) is the first made 100% from grapes grown in the Upper Galilee, an important step, I think, considering that this is supposed to be an upper tier wine, and wines with blended regions are generally not held in high regard (fairly or unfairly) in the grand scheme of things. This first iteration is a big enough success so that I can say that there is little or nothing to choose from qualitatively this year between this and the Yatir Forest, its Judean Hills top-of-the-line sibling, and their styles are fairly similar this year, too. The wine is a blend of 57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot, 5% Malbec, and 2% Cabernet Franc, aged for 15 months in a mixture of new and old French oak. Simply sensual, this softly textured, remarkably graceful wine shows impeccable balance and the structure to age awhile. A lot of earthiness and a touch of funk pops up here and there, which gave it a little character as far as I was concerned. Here (unlike with some other wines) it is reasonably restrained rather than overly dominant and I rather liked how it showed. It brooded a lot initially, but this Limited Edition also demonstrated that it should resolve into something sunnier and friendlier with time. While needing to integrate its oak a little better, it shows clear evidence of the ability to do so. I suspect that not everyone will appreciate this wine's earthiness, but those who do will rightly adore it. Give this a couple of years in the cellar; it has to grow into its potential and the aromatics may improve, but it is potentially a beauty and it has some upside potential as well. There were 13,344 bottles produced. Drink now-2020.

88 **2007 Yatir Cabernet Sauvignon**
The 2007 CABERNET SAUVIGNON was aged for 12 months in French oak. Quite charming and gracefully constructed, it is juicy on the end, yet quite elegant in the mid-palate. Aeration brings out a little complexity, including hints of game that may not be everyone's cup of tea, but that I thought added some character. A pleasure to drink, this should age gracefully for its useful life. There were 21,000 bottles produced. Drink now-2017.

88 **2007 Yatir Merlot Shiraz Cabernet**
The new 2007 RED should not be confused with the top of the line proprietary red, a.k.a the Yatir Forest brand, although it is awfully good this year. This is a new manner of designating this wine this year. In the past, it was usually called by the combination of grapes (Merlot-Shiraz-Cabernet, etc). This year's blend is 33% Merlot, 21% Shiraz, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot, 8% Malbec and 7% Cabernet Franc. It was aged for 12 months in French oak. Full bodied and mouth coating, it seems to grip the palate and dribble flavorful fruit over it. Yet, it is never sweet, jammy or cloying, and it is well supported by a nice backbone. Although it does thin a bit with air, it is a pleasure to drink and quite nicely balanced. There were 45,000 bottles produced. Drink now-2016.

89 **2009 Binyamina Chardonnay Onyx**
The 2009 Chardonnay "Chosen - Onyx" is, notwithstanding the oak, nicely balanced. Comparing it to its siblings reviewed this issue, it hardly has the "unoaked" Chardonnay's demeanor or even the lighter, more invigorating touch of the "Jasper" (both reviewed this issue), but it is well put together and handles its oak quite nicely. Elegant, focused and restrained, with a certain crisp and refreshing quality, it is quite pleasing in this vintage and one of the nicer whites I've seen from the winery. It should be early maturing and at its best on the younger side, however long it holds. Drink now-2013.

88 **2009 Binyamina Gewurztraminer Reserve Late Harvest Cluster Select**
The 2009 Gewurztraminer Reserve "Late Harvest Cluster Select" is quite sweet, laced with apricot and peach notes, and lots of sugar. With a little air, there was finally a little acidity noticeable, but the wine did flatten pretty fast and thin. This is hard to resist on some levels, but it could use a bit more focus and penetration. While these always have the potential to age, considering what they are and what they are intended to be, I like to be conservative in drinking windows as I find they often show best young. Drink now-2015.

88 **2010 Alexander Sauvignon Blanc Liza**
The 2010 Sauvignon Blanc "Liza," from vines planted in 1986, is a sturdy and solid white, with good acid and rather fine depth for its type. It is not the most invigorating or aromatic Sauvignon Blanc, although it might develop a bit as it settles down, but it does have the necessary acidity and drinks quite nicely. It may hold, but drinking it fresh will serve it and you well. Drink now-2013.

89 **2007 Bazelet Ha Golan Merlot Reserve**
The 2007 Merlot Reserve was aged for 20 months in a mixture of French and American oak. The oak treatment is not overwhelming, but the wine's texture becomes rather sexy and sensuous, while the tannins provide some serious grip on the finish. Although there is not a lot of mid-palate concentration here, this drinks quite nicely and has very nice structure and balance, with some tannins that could use a touch more time in the cellar. There is just a hint of an herbal note. This is quite charming and has a serious feel to it, although the price point may be even more serious than the wine. It is close to peak now. Drink now-2017.

88 **2010 Flam Rose**
The 2010 Rose is a Cabernet Franc. This has nice body, a feeling of fullness and grip on the finish. Fruity and tasty, but surprisingly serious at times, with that intensity on the finish, it is a pink that is likely to be a crowd pleaser, covering all the bases. This really became interesting after about 15 minutes. Drink now-2012.

88 **2009 Domaine Netofa Estate Red**
The 2009 Estate Red, with just "Domaine Netofa" on the front, is a blend of Syrah and Mourvedre. As compared to its Latour sibling, it is a bit more approachable and seems to have a touch more finesse, but that is perhaps just a sign that it is more open at the moment, seeming more aromatic and more succulent, with the sweet fruit mingling with that earthy overlay. The style is generally similar, though, with bright, good structure, some tannins on the finish and that bit of game. This is pretty nice wine, from a winery I have not seen before, and at a fairly reasonable price point, all things considered. Drink now-2017.

89 **2009 Domaine Netofa Latour Netofa**
The 2009 Latour Netofa is a Rhone-y blend of Syrah and Mourvedre, aged in French oak. This wasn't quite what I expected – quite a bit more earthiness and acidity, a bit less sweet, grapey fruit – but it showed quite well, bright and sunny, with considerable intensity on the finish and grip. It has focus and good balance, along with that earthy overlay evocative of Bandol and somewhat hard tannins on the finish. I liked the way it fleshed out in the glass as the fruit opened nicely as it aired out. It has the backbone to age a bit, but until we get there, let's be conservative in drinking windows. Drink now-2018.

88 **2009 Psagot Cabernet Sauvignon**
The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon was aged for 13 months in French oak. A bit light and a bit lacking in mid-palate concentration, this is nonetheless quite charming, delicious and elegant, with a bright, refined feel, albeit lacking depth. It is a pleasure to drink. There is a slight note of licorice on the finish. The only flaws, perhaps, are that it lacks complexity and (a related issue) it is not likely to develop much with age. It will be early maturing. It sure drinks nicely right now, though, and if encountered young, it will probably produce many happy campers, so I have to lean up just a little. Drink now-2017.

88 **2009 Psagot Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard**
The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard is from Psagot's vineyard at 900 meters above sea level, aged for 13 months in French oak. It adds a bit of the oomph that the regular Cabernet Sauvignon does not have, but it also seems far oakier, especially early on. It is hard to find the Cabernet Sauvignon initially, but after about two hours of air, the wine gained some balance in that regard. There is perhaps a high toned hint in the background, a nuance I did not particularly appreciate. While this has a bit more depth than the regular Cabernet, I liked it no better, and thought that the regular Cab (reviewed this issue) had more purity of fruit. Approachable now, it should age acceptably, although I doubt it will turn into anything more complex. Drink now-2018.

90 **2007 Segal Cabernet Sauvignon Unfiltered**
The 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon "Unfiltered" was oak aged for 25 months. While there is some oak noticeable, like most of the Segal's wines reviewed this issue, it maintains its balance surprisingly well. On the elegant side, it has focus and precision, nice bursts of flavor, and it lingers just enough to have a little gravitas, with grip on the finish and a slightly earth note. By far the most seductive of the Segal's offerings this issue, this is rather classy, probably the best wine I've seen from this old line winery. It may not be worth the price increase to you – your choice! – but it is the pick of the litter by a small margin for the wines they submitted for this issue. Drink now-2017.

88 **2007 Segal Merlot Dovev Vineyard**
The 2007 Merlot "Dovev Vineyard" was aged for 15 months in a mixture of French and American oaks. Straight-forward, friendly and surprisingly pure considering the oak treatment, it is a wine with some charm, some brightness, and it is rather tasty. For all of that, I was pleasantly surprised to see it evolve very well with an hour or so of air. It began to preen a bit, show a little power, a little earthiness, and some grip on the finish. The longer I had it open, the more it grew on me. As it aired out, it did become a bit savage – something that might not be everyone's cup of tea, but I rather liked it. It will likely hold better, but I think it will be best on the younger side. Drink now-2016.

90 **2007 Alexander Cabernet Sauvignon The Great**
The 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon "Alexander the Great" is 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, the rest Petit Verdot (6%) and Merlot (4%), all harvested, the winery says, before dawn. The Cabernet was sourced from the vineyards of Kerem Ben-Zimra, as planted in 1983. It was aged for 36 months in oak, an 80/20 French/American mixture. This adds a layer or two of depth to the regular reserve reviewed this issue. It feels far lusher and more concentrated than that wine, which sometimes seemed a touch sharp. There are some nuances of herbs and a touch of game, which add some welcome complexity and balance out the oak and this wine seems to mingle earth, oak and acidity in a rather positive way – not that it is shy on the oak, with which the winery seems to be a bit too much in love. Overall, though, this is a very positive performance that is easy to admire, a pleasure to drink and worth a bit of cellaring. Frankly, the longer this was open, the more I liked it. It is a wine that should drink well and

merit some contemplation, but it certainly isn't obvious. It does show some hints of maturity now. Whether it is worth the big price spike...that's up to you. Drink now-2017.

90 2007 Alexander Amarolo

The 2007 Amarolo is a 40/40 blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (sourced from the vineyards of Kerem Ben-Zimra, as planted in 1983) and Merlot (vines planted in 1995), with small amounts of Petit Verdot, Grenache, Cabernet Franc and Shiraz filling out the blend. So, with that blend, why is it called Amarolo? The grapes are dried on mats for 70 days, the winery says, Amarone-style, and then aged in a mixture of new and old oak (70/30 French-American combination) for 40 months and then bottled unfiltered. Owner-winemaker Yoram Shalom's family was originally from Italy and this is a style that he loves. It comes with an amazingly impressive label, with an equally impressive price. How's the wine? For fun, I drank this first in a controlled tasting with Alexander's other wines, and then with some actual Amarones. The latter was the far better context. How you feel about this will depend on how you feel about Amarone. This has the big, ripe fruit, the high toned demeanor, a raisiny note, richness and fine structure. Granting that I'm not the biggest Amarone fan – if I were, this would hit the spot pretty well and I'm rather impressed. It is quite an interesting performance, if rather pricey. Ignoring the price point, this is well conceived and meets its goals extremely well. That assumes that you like them big and bold, with no holds barred. Word to the wise – if you aren't familiar with the Amarone style, make sure you know what you're getting into before plunging into this wine. Don't blame the wine for being something a bit different. It is supposed to be. Drink now-2019.

90 2007 Barkan Cabernet Sauvignon Superieur

The 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon "Superieur" is deep and well structured, not terribly well focused, but flavorful and supported by moderate tannins. The oak overlay – Barkan does like its oak – is a touch obvious at times, but it still has some chance to integrate more and it is not really distracting, nicely absorbed by the rather deep mid-palate. There is some good acidity here, too, and the overall balance is rather good. With air, there is a slight herbal note popping up. Drink now-2018.

88 2009 Binyamina Chosen Sapphire

The 2009 "Chosen - Sapphire is 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot and 20% Syrah aged for 16 months in new French oak. This seems dominated early on by the Syrah component, showing a welcome earthy note to go with the acidity and sharp, tannic finish. Modest in the mid-palate, it has some grip on the finish and drinks quite pleasantly, likely to be a good food matchup. Whether it does enough for its price range is up to you, but there is some chance that this can still improve in the cellar and acquire better balance, so I'm leaning up just a bit. Drink now-2018.

90 2010 Domaine du Castel Chardonnay Blanc du Castel

The 2010 Blanc du Castel is oh, yum. Sorry for being too technical there. Hope you followed along. Traditionally Israel's most distinguished white wine in my opinion, this hit some bumps in the road last year. I think it is back in form. This year's version shows fine purity of fruit, very nice acidity, well

integrated oak (although it does become more obvious with air) and a certain richness to the texture early on. It is subtle, but fresh and refreshing, delicious and beautifully constructed. It is not as persistent, powerful and intense as some prior vintages. In fact, the 2009, despite its flaws, seemed more intense and piercing to me at a similar age. Nonetheless, this is utterly charming, with a lingering and delightful finish and a sunny feel. Owner Eli Ben-Zaken in fact commented to me on how he achieved the freshness in this Chardonnay by noting that it "was picked from July 26th just before the heat waves in August and September. This was very lucky as otherwise they would have lost all the freshness", he said. Drink now-2016.

92 2009 Domaine du Castel Grand Vin

The 2009 Grand Vin is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (63%), Merlot (20%), Petit Verdot (14%), Cabernet Franc (2%) and Malbec (1%). As tends to be the case, this is tighter, more focused, more powerful and a bit harder edged than the Petit Castel – not surprising considering that this is Cabernet-dominated and the Petit Castel is Merlot-dominated – but they still have similar styles. This is a moderately earthy wine this year – less earthy than the 2009 Petit Castel, though – with seductive texture and focus. It doesn't seem to have the pure power that the 2008 Grand Vin had, but its tannins seem better integrated at this young moment in its life, it seems to project a greater impression of both balance and richness and it seems more approachable. It has more finesse and elegance, than the little brother, the 2009 Petit Castel, along with some extra grip and intensity on the finish. Time will tell, but I doubt that it ultimately will match the 2008 Grand Vin, but in its own style it is immensely appealing, luscious and lovely, remarkably graceful, yet persistent. Year-in, year-out, it is one of Israel's best and most consistent performers. Drink now-2020.

89 2009 Domaine du Castel Petit Castel

The 2009 Petit Castel is quite an interesting "second" wine at this point. It offers an awful lot. Most wineries would be happy to have it as a first wine. Of course, it should be good – it isn't exactly cheap, either. While it always shows better than the Grand Vin young, on first taste this year, I thought this might be the year when it would literally match or surpass the Grand Vin. It is a Bordeaux grape blend of Merlot (54%), Cabernet Sauvignon (32%), Cabernet Franc (8%), Malbec (4%) and Petit Verdot (2%). It seemed surprisingly lush (the dominant Merlot component?) and relatively deep this year, granting that it is young and may thin and that the early impression of concentration may exceed the ultimate reality as it ages. The plush demeanor makes it seem very full bodied, very differently styled than the more focused and powerful '08, still beautifully constructed, with well integrated tannins, seductive texture and that impression of richness. It also has earthy and complex flavors, which devolves into a bit of funk on the wine. Although that nuance did moderate a bit with 90 minutes of air, it may not be everyone's cup of tea. But for that, I might well have preferred it to the Grand Vin. Despite the impression of depth, I don't think that this overall shows as well as its predecessor, the 2008, but this relatively rich, earthy and seductive Petit Castel still offers a lot in its own style. Drink now-2018.