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Pour Me

Passover wines you won't want to spit out

By A.K. Carroll

Welcome to Pour Me, a new monthly column from your friends at the Lamorinda Weekly. When it comes to the world of spirits (the kind associated with hangovers, not hauntings), there is much to know and always something new to learn. Look to this space for new trends and local products, recipes, recommendations, and profiles of local winemakers, brewmasters and mixologists. We kick off the series with a spotlight on kosher wines, under-sung contenders among the world of viticulture.

If you're anything like me,

when you read the word "kosher" the first thing you think of is salt, pickles or hot dogs. You may know something about the restrictions regarding kosher products (no gelatin, shellfish or meat mixed with dairy), but you probably know little about the world of kosher wine. If anything, you've heard that it is notoriously sweet — often made with Concord grapes or other grapes not typically suitable for wine — or just plain bad. But this is not always the case. Though making a kosher wine comes with its own set of challenges (and requires a great deal of supervision), winemakers have made headway in crafting kosher vintages that are not only palatable, but pleasant.

What's Kosher?

The question of "what" makes for a kosher wine is also a question of "who" and "how," according to David Raccach of kosherwinemusings.com and other kosher wine sources. In order for a wine to be kosher, it must be produced, handled, and supervised by Orthodox Sabbath-observant Jews. The wine can only contain kosher ingredients, which means fruit from vines that are at least three years old, no hybrid crops and no unkosher additives or enzymes. This is where it gets tricky. Many of the acid blends and fining agents typically used by winemakers are a no-no when it comes to kosher laws, which means an extra hurdle to a well-balanced vino.

In order for a wine to be kosher for Passover — a weeklong spring celebration that runs April 10-18 this year — it must also be free of corn syrup and chametz (leaven, including yeast). As the chief catalyst for fermentation, additive yeast (often a byproduct of a grain) is a major part of typical winemaking. While most kosher wines are also pesach (kosher for Passover), some, like the notorious Manischewitz, don't make the cut.

The winemaking process itself must also be kosher. Only Orthodox Jews can handle the wine and winemaking equipment at all stages of the journey, from harvest to bottle, with a lot of cleaning and supervision along the way. Consequently, most kosher wine comes out of Israel and the majority of it is made by Orthodox winemakers. Some kosher wines are boiled or flash pasteurized prior to bottling, a process called mevushal. This practice is a remnant of centuries-old ceremonial law and allows a non-Jewish person to handle and pour the wine once it has gone through the process. Non-mevushal wines, on the other hand, must be served by a Sabbath-observant Jew in order to remain kosher.

There you have it: A quick tutorial to the world of kosher wines. But, which to serve at your holiday meal? Lamorinda stores offer several options. On the lower end of the spectrum, Trader Joe's carries a Perrenal Chardonnay and



Merlot that qualify as kosher and go for under \$6, as well as an assortment of Baron Herzog wines in the \$6-\$10 range.

Barzon Harzog wines can also be found at Moraga Wine and Spirits, as well as the Orinda BevMo. The Lafayette Whole Foods carries high-end mevushal wines from Californian and Israeli winemakers at Covenant; the Mensch Zinfandel and The Tribe Chardonnay fall in the \$20-30 range.

For the biggest selection check out the new Lafayette BevMo, where wine specialists and customized tags make it easy to locate a wide range of kosher options, from a \$6 bottle of sweet Concord-grape Mogen David to Napa-made Hagafen wines, which are subtle about being kosher and considered on par with comparable non-kosher wines. You'll also find a selection of Baron Harzog bottles, as well as non-meshuval wines from Yarden of Israel. L'Chaim!

Where to find Kosher wines

Trader Joe's: 3649 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette (925) 299-9344
Perrenal: Chardonnay, Merlot \$4.99
Baron Herzog: Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc \$5.99-9.99

Moraga Wine and Spirits: 1437 Moraga Way, Moraga (925) 376-6111
Baron Harzog: Cabernet and Chardonnay \$12.99

Whole Foods: 3502 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette (925) 284-5305
Covenant: Mensch \$20.99, The Tribe \$32.99
HoneyRun Mead \$13.99

BevMo: 6 Camino Pablo, Orinda (925) 254-3161
Baron Harzog: Cabernet \$14.99 and \$13.49 Chardonnay
Barkan: Cabernet \$14.99

BevMo: 3590 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette (925) 282-8185
Mogen David \$5.99
Baron Herzog: Cabernet and Chardonnay \$12-16
Jeunesse, Black Muscat and Cabernet \$12-16
Yarden: Red blend, Chardonnay, Merlot \$16-30
Hagafen: Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot \$20-30

Jackson's Wines and Spirits: 3524 Mt Diablo Blvd # A, Lafayette (925) 284-4100
Hagafen: Chardonnay \$21.99 and Cabernet \$39.99



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