



Don't PassOver This Year's Opportunity

With roughly 50% of all kosher wine volume in February, March & April, a little focus can lead to big gains for retailers.

By Estie Wartenberg

At the conclusion of the winter holiday season, most wine and spirit shop proprietors begin to worry about the steady flow of business. As the weather warms up, customers tend to consume their preferred cocktail, spirit or glass of wine on-premise. This is precisely why the eight-day Jewish holiday, Passover, which will be celebrated this year from April 20th – 27th, cannot come at a better time for retailers.

"The seasons and holidays are what drive business," stated Mordy Herzog, vice president of the Royal Wine Corporation, a leading kosher wine company. Herzog noted that taking advantage of a holiday such as Passover that focuses on wine consumption can be quite lucrative. "There is a real opportunity here to increase store profits," he added.

Why is it that kosher wines are an integral part of the Passover holiday, as opposed to any other Jewish holiday? Passover is a special time for Jewish people to rejoice in their heritage. On the first two nights of Passover, family members and friends gather to partake in a traditional meal called the "seder." The seder is filled with symbolism and special foods that represent the significance of the holiday; drinking wine is a very important part of the seder ritual.

"During the seder, Jews get together and read the story of Exodus," explained Rabbi Moshe Elefant, COO, Kashrut (dietary laws) Division of the Orthodox Union. "Throughout the seder, each participant drinks four cups of wine, each a minimum of five ounces. Wine is used to symbolize our freedom; our being released from bondage in ancient Egypt."

Rabbi Elefant clarified what makes wine kosher. "Wine was traditionally used for Pagan services. In order to be sure that we did not use wine that was made for that purpose, Jews had to make their own wine. Only observant Jews are allowed to handle the wine from the time the grapes are crushed until they are bottled. The entire wine making process has to be supervised by an observant Jew (doesn't have to be a Rabbi)."

A Punctilious Process

Victor Schoenfeld, chief winemaker for the Golan Heights Winery in Israel, said that making wine kosher is a meticulous effort. "We cannot use some ingredients that are used in non-kosher wines, such as *isinglass*, which is a protein isolated from sturgeon (non-kosher fish) and *casein*, which is a protein isolated from milk (which makes it dairy). We compensate by using egg whites which are carefully checked for blood spots."

Schoenfeld pointed out that a large amount of the kosher wine made in the world is actually produced at non-kosher wineries. He explained that winemakers work out an arrangement with their customers to produce the kosher wine in their facility. "This is a difficult process," continued Schoenfeld. "The tanks have to be sealed to make sure nothing un-kosher gets in, and observant Jews have to be brought in to do the work while the regular winemakers explain what needs to be done. The entire time, a supervisor makes sure that everything is done according to strict kosher laws."

Most kosher wine houses keep all their wines kosher for Passover all year long. Customers looking



for kosher wine will look for the letter “P” on the label, next to the kosher symbol, indicating that the wine is certified kosher for Passover. Sometimes the word “Kosher for Passover” can be found on the back label in English or in Hebrew. When selecting wines to stock for the Passover season, it is important to make sure that there is a kosher symbol prominently displayed on the label.

Many savvy retailers, who do not ordinarily carry a selection of kosher wine, have made the Passover season extra prof-

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**Wines for every palate...
at every price point.**

Wines for under \$15:

- **Baron Herzog Zinfandel 2005** (California)
- **Recanati Cabernet 2004** (Israel)
- **Kineret Muscat Hamburg** (Israel)

Wines for under \$25:

- **Barkan Reserve Cabernet 2004** (Israel)
- **Rothberg Cellars Wine Maker's Reserve Cabernet 2004** (South Africa)
- **Dalton Oak Aged Shiraz 2003** (Israel)
- **Teperberg Reserve Cabernet 2004** (Israel)
- **Recanati Petit Syrah/ Zinfandel 2005** (Israel)

Wines for under \$50:

- **Herzog Reserve Cab/Zinfandel/ Syrah Blend 2003** (California)
- **Recanati Special Reserve 2003** (Israel)
- **Castel Gran Vin 2005** (Israel)
- **Opinioni Verdetto Rosso Umbria 2005** (Italy)

Wines for over \$50:

- **Château De La Tour Clos Vougeot 2004** (France)
- **Château Valendrad Saint Emilion 2003** (France)
- **Carmel Limited Edition 2004** (Israel)



itable by stocking up with Passover wine before the season starts (which begins in February and continues for seven days until the end of Passover, which is based on the Jewish lunar calendar). “45- to 50-percent of the kosher wine volume takes place during February, March and April,” stated Marty Siegmeister, brand manager for Allied Importers NY and NJ Markets.

Doing Your Homework

Siegmeister recommended that retailers educate themselves before Passover, so when customers need help they will be ready to accommodate them: “Retailers should take the time to get the know the wines well before the season begins, so they are familiar with the wines available instead of waiting until the last minute and ordering the same thing year after year. There are a lot of interesting kosher wines on the market, especially Israeli wine.”

Herzog advised that retailers should be well prepared to help customers who are looking for Passover wines. “Shelves should be well stocked weeks before the holiday begins. A successful store needs the right product mix and price variations, as well as being inviting to customers. Retailers that do well during the Passover season are those who have this in mind all year,” he emphasized.

Howard Wang, vice president of Metro Marketing for the Royal Wine Corporation, suggested becoming more actively involved with pre-Passover planning. “Contact neighborhood synagogues and sponsor wine tasting events and holiday discounts for members,” he explained. “Do nightly in-store kosher wine tastings. Customers will see for themselves how kosher wines have evolved.” Wang declared that variety is key when stocking shelves for Passover.



“At every seder table, there are people with different preferences,” continued Wang. “Some individuals may prefer a different wine for each cup. At my seder, we begin the first cup with a Kedem sweet traditional wine; the second is a Herzog Special Reserve Cabernet; the third cup is always something from Israel; and the fourth and final cup is either a late harvest or Port wine.”

Exceptional Quality Wines

“Israeli wines have come so far that they are now being recognized as an international category rather than a ‘kosher wine,’” Schoenfeld said. “Israel’s climate and terroir are so perfect for growing grapes that more and more winemakers are realizing Israel’s potential for quality wines.” Not all wines from Israel, however, are certified kosher.

“Passover might be a seasonal holiday, but kosher wine is superior all year,” points out Herzog. “Kosher wine doesn’t expire when the holiday is over. Most of the wines are consistently high quality and can be sold as ‘non kosher’ during the rest of the year. These wines have cross benefits to cater to the general market as well.”

Siegmeister suggested that even stores that do not have kosher clientele should take advantage of the “good Passover prices” that are offered at this time: “Many kosher wines are comparable and made for every consumer and not just the kosher consumer.” He added that many retailers are surprised to find how well the kosher wines move off the shelves even after the holiday is over.

During the past two decades, the kosher wine industry has undergone astonishing growth. The Passover season, especially, offers retailers a good opportunity to become part of the lucrative kosher wine niche. ■