

BusinessWeek

PARKER ON WINE March 6, 2008, 5:00PM EST

Heavenly Wines from the Holy Land

Wine has been made in the Holy Land for millennia, but Israel's wineries are getting better all the time, and some are superb

by Robert Parker

Wine has been made in the Holy Land for millennia, but Israel's wineries have come into the modern age since the 1980s, when producers began borrowing vinification techniques from France and the U.S. The region's wines are getting better all the time, and some are superb. My colleague Mark Squires recently spent a significant amount of time tasting through the finest wineries of Israel. Following are some of his top choices, which we tasted together over a meal in Philadelphia.

89 POINTS

[Carmel Winery 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Kayoumi Vineyard](#). Intense, with plenty of tannin, and slightly austere. It has a touch of herbs, an average finish, and a medium-bodied mid-palate. It might benefit from cellaring, but is approachable now. There are a lot of good things going on here, and the price is right. Drink now through 2014. \$30

90 POINTS

[Carmel Winery 2004 Limited Edition](#). The best structured wine tasted from Carmel, as well as the most complex. A blend of cabernet sauvignon, petit verdot, and merlot, it is a pleasure to drink, although not truly distinguished. Drink now through 2014. \$55

90 POINTS

[Yatir 2003 Cabernet-Merlot-Shiraz](#). Dominated by cabernet sauvignon, this wine feels full in the mouth on first attack but actually has an elegant mid-palate and a tannic grip on the finish. It opens quickly, and the fruit is sweet and flavorful. Drink now. \$28

91 POINTS

[Domaine du Castel 2005 Chardonnay "Blanc du Castel"](#). This Kosher wine is one of the best dry whites from Israel. The oak is obvious, particularly early on, but it recedes into the wine more and more with air. It has a respectable finish that lingers with some intensity. Drink now through 2011. \$40

92 POINTS

[Domaine du Castel 2004 Grand Vin](#). This unrefined and unfiltered cab, merlot, and petit verdot blend is beautiful. Aged for 24 months in new French oak, it is bursting with flavor and simply delicious. A short-list contender for Israel's "Best Bordeaux blend." Drink now through 2015. \$65

Wines rated from 96-100 are extraordinary; 90-95, excellent; 80-89, above average to very good.

*Robert Parker is the world's most influential wine critic. Visit www.eRobertParker.com to see tens of thousands of tasting notes, buy his books, or subscribe to his newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*.*

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