



## Israel's New Montefiore Winery Brings History to Life Again in the Judean Hills

By George Medovoy, Editor

From winning Israel's junior squash championship to putting your heart into a start-up winery is Rachel Montefiore's unlikely story.

Montefiore is vice-president of marketing and sales for Montefiore Winery, named in honor of Sir Moses Montefiore, the famous British philanthropist and visionary who built Jerusalem's iconic windmill in 1857.



**Rachel Montefiore in the new winery's busy office near trendy Rothschild Blvd. in Tel Aviv. -- George Medovoy photo**

But the young sports enthusiast-turned-wine-entrepreneur never imagined working in the wine business. A professional gym trainer who studied nutrition and Chinese medicine, she was sidelined by a knee injury and had to look for a new direction in life.

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That new direction came the day she made a lateral decision to take a job with a large retail wine shop in Tel Aviv and later accepted what she calls a "dream offer" to become a sommelier at a high-end Tel Aviv restaurant on --of all places -- Montefiore Street.

The Jerusalem windmill, which overlooks Jerusalem's lovely Yemin Moshe neighborhood, recalls Sir Moses' life-long attachment to the land of Israel.

### **A Bottle of Wine a Day**

A wine lover who drank a bottle a day and lived to be 101, Montefiore purchased land outside Jerusalem's old city walls in 1855, naming it Kerem Moshe Montefiore v' Yehudit -- Hebrew for 'the Vineyard of Moses and Judith Montefiore.' (Judith was his wife).

Now fast forward over 150 years, and the memory of Sir Moses becomes the inspiration for the Montefiore Winery -- the newest of many boutique wineries flourishing in Israel today.

Besides Rachel Montefiore, two other enterprising Israelis behind the new winery are Arnon Geva and David Montefiore.

Geva, an Israeli wine industry veteran who pioneered the Judean Wine Route, is Montefiore's CEO. He was also a founding partner of Israel's Domaine du Castel Winery and headed international business at Carmel and Yatir wineries.

David Montefiore, Rachel's brother, is a partner, but holds a non-executive role in the winery. He studied wine at the WSET in London and worked at wineries in the Barossa Valley in Australia and Monsant in Spain. Currently, he works for Tabor Winery in the Galilee.

What makes this historic chapter in Israel's unfolding wine story even more enchanting is the fact that Rachel and David, the 6th generation, are direct descendants of Sir Moses Montefiore's heir.

And their father, Adam Montefiore, is the highly-respected Israeli wine authority, who with his wife Jill and their children left their home in London over 25 years ago to carve out a new life in Israel. They became the first members of the family to go and live in Israel.

### **The 'Voice' of Israeli Wine**

In the ensuing years, Adam Montefiore became the veritable 'voice' of the Israeli wine industry, tirelessly promoting the story of a country tapping into its ancient roots to develop modern Mediterranean wines highly-prized on the international scene. He has represented Golan Heights and, more recently, Carmel, two of Israel's largest and most successful wineries.

A founder and honorary member of the Academy of Wine Service, Montefiore contributes to Jancis Robinson's *Oxford Wine Companion* and to both Hugh Johnson's and Oz Clarke's *Pocket Wine Books*. He was one of the contributors to *The Wine Route of Israel* (Cordinata Publishing House) and also has been a regular contributor to the *Jerusalem Post*, the *Jewish Chronicle*, and [www.wines-israel.com](http://www.wines-israel.com).

Because of its relative newness, Montefiore Winery produces its wine in rented space, while it sources its grapes from vineyards in the Judean Hills, whose ties to wine-making reach back to Biblical times.



**The famous Montefiore windmill overlooks the lovely Yemin Moshe neighborhood of Jerusalem at sunset. -- Noam Chen photo, Israel Ministry of Tourism, [www.goisrael.com](http://www.goisrael.com).**

The winery's founders are determined to continue their link with Sir Moses by one day building their own facility in the Judean Hills, whose forests and springs Sir Moses loved so much, writing in his diary of terraced vineyards and olive groves leading up to Jerusalem.

The Judean Hills wine region rises gently from Israel's coastal plain, generally following the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem Highway, and as you make your way into the Biblical Ayalon Valley, you're reminded of the story of King David engaging the Philistines in battle there.

Meanwhile, a stop at Latrun affords an opportunity to visit the Trappist Monastery of the Silent Monks, which holds Saturday concerts in its church and sells its own wine.

The Judean Hills soils are limestone, and the weather is generally moderated by cool Mediterranean breezes. In the higher elevations, reaching up to about 2,000 feet, there can be snow in winter and temperatures can fall to 41 degrees, with the summers ranging in the high 50's.

Montefiore Winery's approach to winemaking concentrates on wines more suitable to the Israeli climate, so instead of Cabernet Sauvignon, it looks to Syrah, Petite Sirah, and Colombard, for example.

As Rachel notes in the winery's busy Tel Aviv office near trendy Rothschild Blvd., these should be wines with "good acidity, refreshing, easy-drinking, and tasty..."

"The whole idea," she says, "is to make elegant, almost feminine wines, which are fruit-forward and not oaky in any way, refreshing to drink with a meal, even the red wines."

### **Sam Soroka, Montefiore's Wine Consultant**

Guiding this approach is Sam Soroka, Montefiore's wine consultant who graduated with a degree in Food Science from McGill University of Montreal and studied oenology at Adelaide University in Australia.

One of Israel's most experienced and talented winemakers, Soroka has worked for Hardy's in Australia and France, Charles Krug in California, Henry Pelham in Canada, and Carmel and Mony in Israel.

"What makes the Montefiore wines so special to me," he says, "is the combination of Moses Montefiore's history..., his connection to the land, his love of wine, and his vision.

"The focus on making elegant, Mediterranean-style wine from varieties that perform very well in the Israeli climate supports this vision. In the vineyards where the winery sources its fruit, very special attention is focused on getting the ripeness right and producing balanced wines with style and elegance."

Because of the region's steep slopes, some vines require planting in a terraced fashion, while others cover the shape of the valleys in curved arcs. Harvesting is carried out at night to get the grapes to the winery while still cool.

### **Wines Win Awards, Praise**

Montefiore wines have already received important awards, with Montefiore Red ranked as one of the Top Ten Wines in the New Israeli Wine Guide and, in the Israeli wine 'Oscars' in which all serious wines compete, taking first place trophies and gold medals in the last two years for Montefiore White in the Best Israeli White Blend, Montefiore Red as the Best Israeli Red Blend, and Montefiore Petite Sirah as the Best Israeli 'Other' Red Wine (other than Cabernet, Merlot, etc.).

Marketed in the U.S. by Royal Wine Corporation, Montefiore wines have also won praise from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, which noted overall that the style of the wines leans "to elegance and harmony."

"These are graceful wines," it wrote, "not bombastic wines...they are a pleasure to drink."

The Advocate found the 2011 Montefiore Petite Sirah, for example, to be "beautifully balanced, graceful and silky.... Overall... quite lovely, a wine that will grow on you at the table."

Of the 2013 Montefiore Red, it noted a "sensual texture, fruit-forward intensity of flavor and a graceful, harmonious feel... Call it a summer Red if you must. It's delicious and it's at a pretty nice price, easily the best value here... you will love the sheer, elegant, understated pleasure of it."

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Both the 2011 Montefiore Syrah and the 2012 Kerem Moshe Red were selected for the EL Al Israel Airlines wine list.

"To continue the story of Moses Montefiore is very important," notes Rachel, who studied winemaking at the Ramat Gan (Israel) Wine Academy, "because... that's the backbone of our winery... I always say we're the most start-up winery (in Israel) with the most historical story behind it."

For more information about the winery, visit [www.montefiorewines.net](http://www.montefiorewines.net). And happy tasting!