

Kosher wines improve, but there's still tradition

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By JEFFREY WEISS / The Dallas Morning News

Winemaking has been part of Jewish tradition at least as far back as the story of Noah.

Almost the first thing Genesis reports that he did after leaving the ark was to plant a vineyard.

So why is the wine that's likely to be found on most American Seder tables this Passover going to be a sweet Concord screw-top variety – a wine that serious oenophiles wouldn't pour over pancakes?

Partly, the answer is the same one Tevye sings in *Fiddler On The Roof*: Tradition!

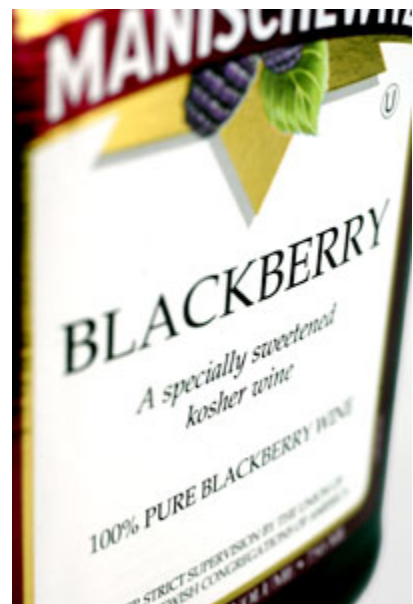
For generations, American Jews have celebrated Passover and other Jewish holidays that way. So once again, the annual celebration (that starts Monday) of the story from the book of Exodus will probably include lots of sweet wine.

Where did this American Jewish tradition start? Historians offer at least three theories, said Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz, executive vice president and founder of American Jewish Legacy and the rabbi-in-residence at Manishevitz, the world's biggest manufacturer of kosher-for-Passover foods.

One theory is connected to geography: The first Jews who came to America settled in the New York area and the easiest grapes for them to get were Concord – an acidic variety that requires lots of sugar for wine.

A second theory says that Jews in America started out making kosher raisin wine. Raisins are much easier to ship than grapes and raisin wine is easy to make. And it was easy to ensure that raisins met kosher requirements.

Like Concord wine, raisin wine is very sweet. Sweet wine became traditional even after raisin wine passed mostly into history.



EVANS CAGLAGE / DMN

People seeking wine for the Seder table have more wines to choose from today — but most still buy at least one bottle of sweet kosher wine. It's tradition.

A third theory is tied to Prohibition. Only sacramental wines – those for religious purposes – were legal.

"The people involved in kosher wine production during Prohibition saw orders skyrocket, a demand created by 'new members' of congregations who joined because of their being able to obtain wine which was not available from any other source," Rabbi Horowitz said.

The easiest and quickest wine to make – with the fastest profits – was cheap, sweet wine, he said.

For any wine to be kosher for Passover, it must be made using no animal products. Nonkosher wine is often clarified with egg whites. The barrels must be washed three times. And most kosher wine is very briefly heated to boiling.

But tradition has been giving way to more sophisticated palates and the increasing availability of good kosher wine from California, Israel and many other nations.

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WHAT'S AVAILABLE

Here are some examples of kosher-for-Passover wines:

Baron Herzog offers several California wines, including varietals that cost about \$13. Also available are the Alexander Valley and Napa Valley 2000 Cabernets for about \$35.

Israeli wines include Barkan Cabernet or Merlot (\$10) or Yarden's Cabernet or Merlot (\$25). From Australia comes Teal Lake Shiraz (\$12) and from Chile comes Alfasin varietals (\$8).

RESOURCE

American Jewish Legacy is dedicated to preserving stories, books and even ads from the earliest days of American Jewish observance. See the Web site www.ajlegacy.org for examples.

PASSOVER

For a food to be kosher, it must have been prepared following a set of guidelines that include no mixing of milk products and meat products. The same equipment cannot be used for both. For a food to be kosher for Passover, neither the food nor the equipment can have made contact with leavening agents or certain foods such as grains, corn and peas. Jewish tradition holds that only kosher-for-Passover wines be served on Passover.