

Aloha!

“Great kosher wine” (like *sipping tequila*) is one of the more famous *oxymorons* in our industry. Around this time of year (Passover), I start getting phone calls from hotels and restaurants asking me for “kosher wine.” Unfortunately I could never find anything that would live up to our standards. OK, I know this isn't N.Y. or L.A. (you just can't get good pastrami and knishes in Hawaii!). *Chateau de Valandrraud* in St. Emilion is historically the only kosher wine, that comes to mind, getting any sort of critical acclaim. This changed recently when a good friend, Jeff Morgan called announcing his new venture: **Covenant Wines** --- “kosher” Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon. Jeff is a winemaker, author, journalist and wine educator who lives in the St. Helena. His articles have appeared in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Elle*, *Food & Wine*, *Wine Spectator* and *Wine Enthusiast*.

#6818 Covenant Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003 6/750 \$408/case \$68/Btl.

93 points: Robert Parker, *The Wine Advocate*. “*Covenant may be the finest kosher wine made in the United States. Fashioned from fruit grown in the valley floor Larkmead Vineyard, north of St. Helena, by former Wine Spectator journalist Jeff Morgan in partnership with Leslie Rudd, the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon (550 cases of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon aged 14 months in French oak) is a superb effort. It boasts a dense purple color in addition to a sumptuous, sweet bouquet of black currants, flowers, and minerals. Opulent, layered, and rich, with serious concentration, this beauty can be drunk now or cellared for 12 -15 years.*” --- R. Parker.

Covenant Cabernet Sauvignon is made from grapes grown on a 3-acre parcel of the historic Larkmead Vineyard in Napa Valley, just north of St. Helena. It is 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, picked at the moment when Jeff perceives maturation to be at its peak. Vinification is carried out using a time-honored blend of Old and New World techniques that include minimal crushing of the berries, gentle handling in new French oak barrels (has to be new for the first vintage --- for obvious, I mean “*kosher*” reasons -- - and no fining or filtration prior to bottling. Jeff Morgan & Les Rudd (David Ramey of Rudd Cellars) make the wine under kosher supervision with the guidance of his good friends at Herzog Wine Cellars, While the winemaking protocols involve classic Napa Valley methodology, the spiritual parameters required to retain kosher certification date back thousands of years. Vinification is carried out using a time-honored blend of Old and New World techniques that include minimal crushing of the berries, gentle handling in new French oak barrels, and no fining or filtration prior to bottling.

Passover begins at sundown on: April 12, 2006 (Wednesday), an 8 day observance for Jewish folks, a time of family gatherings and lavish meals called Seders. The story of Passover is retold through the reading of the Haggadah. With its special foods, songs, and customs, the Seder is the focal point of the Passover celebration.

Want to be an expert on "kosher wines"? Read further:

History of Kosher Wines: The Jews may have the oldest codified relationship to wine of any people on earth, but kosher wine ironically is best known for its “unorthodox” taste. In the context of Jewish history, this dubious distinction is understandable. Thousands of years ago, the Jews lived in the Holy Land, where grape growing and wine making were common practice. But after the Roman conquest of Jerusalem some 2000 years ago, the Jews began a long period of wandering known as the Diaspora, which presented them with a serious enological challenge. Rarely were their new homes in exile blessed with vineyards such as those previously known in their ancestral land. Nevertheless, tradition as well as religion mandated the drinking of wine, and vintners did their best with whatever means were at their disposition. Wine was even made from dried raisins when necessary. Apparently the socio-economic status of the Jewish people in exile did not facilitate a steady supply of grapes worthy of a first growth Bordeaux! In fact, in Europe Jews were often proscribed from owning the land necessary to grow grapes. A century ago, Jewish immigrants to America found local Concord grapes to be plentiful. But the wine produced from these native American grapes had a so-called “foxy” character. Keeping the wines sweet made them more palatable, and this sweet style became synonymous with kosher wine. More recent history has been kinder to Jewish wine makers, and currently there is a revolution in quality among kosher wines the world over. These wines are made from such classic grape varieties as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc from both the New and Old World. With access to top notch grapes and contemporary cellar methods, kosher wine makers are now creating wines that may equal or surpass those that are not kosher. Indeed, it would appear that kosher wine makers have now restored the sensual quality of this sacred beverage to a level commensurate with its spiritual status.

What makes a wine kosher? In Jewish tradition wine is considered a holy beverage. The blessing over the wine—or Kiddish—is an important part of many religious ceremonies. For this reason, a kosher wine at its most basic level is one handled only by strictly Sabbath-observant Jews. In addition, kosher wine makers are forbidden to use any products, such as unauthorized yeasts or other potentially non-kosher ingredients that might fall outside the parameters of kosher convention. Kosher wine makers can, however, use natural, indigenous yeasts, such as those favored by many top winemakers in the U.S. and Europe. Aside from the constraints mentioned above, there needn’t be any difference between the techniques used to make a fine kosher wine or a fine non-kosher wine. That is, unless the kosher wine is to be designated mevushal, perhaps the most misunderstood term in the kosher wine tradition. In Hebrew, mevushal means literally boiled. However, mevushal wines are not quite heated to a boiling temperature. Mevushal wines are nonetheless flash-pasteurized to a temperature that meets the requirements of an overseeing rabbinical authority. The technique does not necessarily harm the wine. In fact, a few well known non-kosher wine makers believe it may enhance aromatics. But that is not why certain wines are made mevushal. For Jews, the technique simply alters the spiritual essence of a kosher wine, making it less susceptible to ritual proscription. That means anyone—whether kosher or not—can open a bottle of mevushal wine without altering its kosher status. It’s a plus for kosher catering halls and restaurants, where the wait staff may not be kosher or even Jewish. By contrast, non-mevushal, or non-heated wines, are viewed as more sensitive to religious constraints and

should be opened and poured by Sabbath-observant Jews. So what happens when a non-Jew or a Jew who is not kosher opens a kosher wine that's not mevushal? Well, to be honest, not much. Since non-kosher individuals don't follow kosher rules anyway, they are not particularly affected by ritual law. However, if they are sharing a non-mevushal wine with kosher friends, then the wine must be opened and poured by a Sabbath-observant individual if everyone wishes to partake. Those are the rules; pure and simple. But ultimately, mevushal wine is neither more nor less kosher than non-mevushal wine. These are two separate designations for equally kosher wines.

Why is Covenant non-mevushal? Although flash pasteurizing a wine may not harm it, it probably doesn't help it either. Red wines are especially sensitive to heating, and in extreme cases may develop a burned or rubbery quality during the mevushal process. For this reason, Jeff prefers to make Covenant in the time-honored tradition that encourages non-interventionist methods in the cellar. We believe that gentle handling and slow, relatively cool fermentations are the best way to make a wine of superior quality. Flash-pasteurization is simply not a part of their protocols. The word, covenant, connotes a strong connection between those who share common history, experience and values. It is an age-old concept that serves as a foundation for all civilization, and its significance is evident in the Old Testament stories of Abraham and Moses. Since those early days, the Jews have accorded wine an important role in spiritual practice, and as such, it merits a special respect. Indeed, the fruit of the vine connects us to our land, history and the longstanding bonds that come with friendship, family and tradition. Shared cultural heritage and a love of fine wine led to the partnership that gave birth to Covenant Cabernet Sauvignon. Jeff & Les' wine comes from grapes grown in a single Napa Valley vineyard, from which they strive to harness quality commensurate with the rich and profound story of the Jewish people. Covenant is made from grapes grown on a 3-acre parcel of the historic Larkmead Vineyard in Napa Valley, just north of St. Helena. It is 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, picked at the moment when Jeff perceives maturation to be at its peak. Vinification is carried out using a time-honored blend of Old and New World techniques that include minimal crushing of the berries, gentle handling in new French oak barrels, and no fining or filtration prior to bottling. The wine is made under kosher supervision with the guidance of their good friends at Herzog Wine Cellars, to whom they owe a great debt of gratitude. While the winemaking protocols involve classic Napa Valley methodology, the spiritual parameters required to retain kosher certification date back thousands of years.

Jeff Morgan Biography

Based in Napa Valley, Jeff Morgan is a winemaker, author, journalist and wine educator. His articles have appeared in such publications as The New York Times, Elle, Food & Wine, Wine Spectator and Wine Enthusiast. He is also the author of Dean & DeLuca: The Food and Wine Cookbook, The Working Parents Cookbook (written with his wife, Jodie) and soon-to-be-released, Rosé, A Guide to the World's Most Versatile Wine (all with Chronicle Books).

In addition to his writing pursuits, Jeff makes SoloRosa, a dry California rosé, and also teaches at the Culinary Institute of America's Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies

in Napa Valley. His interest in food and wine first blossomed in Southern France, where he lived and worked for nearly a decade as a flutist, saxophonist and singer, eventually becoming bandleader at the Grand Casino in Monte Carlo in the mid-1980s. Ironically, the call of wine led Jeff back to America, where he grew grapes for several years and made Chardonnay, Cabernet and Merlot commercially on Long Island, New York. In 1995, Wine Spectator hired Morgan as its West Coast editor. He moved to San Francisco, wrote over 400 articles on wine and food for the magazine and became a member of its close-knit tasting panel. In the fall of 1999, the journalist headed to Napa Valley to take on the position of wine director for the nationally recognized gourmet food and wine purveyor, Dean & DeLuca. That's when he met Leslie Rudd.

(More) Press

Robert Parker, *The Wine Advocate*: 90 - 92 points

Covenant 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley (for release in April, 2006)

"The inky, purple-tinged 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (450 cases produced) reveals a pure nose of black currants and spicy oak, a beautifully textured, dense, full-bodied palate, and admirable persistence as well as length. It should come close to equaling the impeccably high quality of the 2003. The packaging and label are both striking."

Wine Spectator: 92 Points

Covenant Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2003

"Kosher. A rich, exotic, distinctive style, with aromas of ripe currant, plum and blackberry, along with an intriguing new-leather aroma that plays in the background. Shows a measure of finesse and polish on the finish, with ripe, integrated tannins. An impressive debut.

Best from 2006 - 2012." -J.L.

**Aloha,
A hui hou!
Alan**