

## 'Nagila' arrives in time for Passover

# Germans toast success of new kosher wines

FROM REGINE WOSNITZA BERLIN

The first kosher wines to have been produced in Germany for more than 60 years have gone on sale in time for Passover.

The business venture, which is the brainchild of German merchant Wolfgang Lehmann has turned out nearly 20,000 bottles of red and white Nagila wine. The wine has been certified as kosher for Passover by Rabbi A. Hochwald of Antwerp.

At a winetasting celebrating the return of kosher wines to Germany, Gisbert Daske, proprietor of the recently opened Jewish restaurant, Am Wasserturm, in the hip Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg, spoke like a true connoisseur. "It is a wine that needs to breathe," he said, sipping the Nagila Rouge 1996. "The light brings out its brilliance and warmth. It becomes very elegant, not effusive, but wonderfully discreet and honest," Mr Daske continued.

He also waxed lyrical on the Nagila Blanc. "It has a very fine body and a lot of nuances, yet it resists being superficial," he said.

The production of kosher wine was banned by the Nazi regime in the 1930s. Nowadays, most of the kosher wine sold in Germany is imported from Israel.

Ironically Mr Lehmann first thought of re-introducing domestically produced kosher wine while sharing a few glasses of German beer with some Israeli colleagues.

He found a business partner in Guenter Schenkel, whose vineyard is in the famous German wine producing region of Schwabenheim, on the River Rhine.

Mr Schenkel's Chardonnay won international recognition in 1994. He is currently ranked by connoisseurs as one of the world's 20 finest vintners.

But Germany's 75,000 strong Jewish community has not yet taken to the new wines, perhaps because production costs have driven up their retail price to 22 Deutschmarks about £7.50.

"We used to serve kosher European wines but customers both Germans and Jews always ask for Israeli wine and don't want anything else," said Henry Wirkowski, who leases the kosher restaurant, Noah's Ark, from the Jewish community.

"We have also found that French and Austrian kosher wines have not been very popular among the people who eat at our restaurant," said Mr Wirkowski.

"However, we do carry Austrian wines for Pesach because they're much cheaper. Price is a very important factor," he said.

But Mr Lehmann said that he remained optimistic that kosher wine production in Germany would become more viable.

He told the JC that exports of Nagila to The Netherlands had increased and interest in other European countries had also been picking up.

"I am hopeful that we will be able to afford a new harvest this autumn," he said.