

## **Carmey Avdat**

Founded by Eyal Izrael after working together for several years with Yuval Ben Shoshan, this small winery is based on a private farm not far from Kibbutz Sde Boker in the heights of the Negev Desert. The vineyards of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes are planted in a wadi and relying on water from 1,500 year old water terraces built by the Nabateans. The winery's first releases from the 2005 vintage were of 4,500 bottles and from the 2006 vintage, 6,000 bottles.

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2006 (Barrel Tasting): Deep garnet towards purple in color, medium-bodied, with soft tannins and a generous but gentle wood influence. On the nose and palate berries, black cherries and currants, those with light earthy-herbal overtones. Drink from release-2009. Tentative Score 85-87. (Tasted 8 Mar 2007)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005: Dark royal purple in color, medium- to full-bodied with soft tannins and generous spicy wood, those integrating nicely to show currant, berry and herbal aromas and flavors. Drink now-2009. Score 86. (Tasted 8 Mar 2007)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2006 (Barrel Tasting): Dark, youthful purple in color, medium- to full-bodied, with still gripping tannins and already showing a generous wood influence but those in good balance with fruits and acidity and boding well for the future. On the nose and palate berries, cherries, cassis and an appealing chocolate and peppery overtones that linger nicely. Drink from release-2009. Tentative Score 86-88. (Tasted 8 Mar 2007)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2005: Deep ruby towards garnet, medium bodied, with silky smooth tannins and showing appealing berry and black cherry fruits on a spicy and lightly oaky background. Lingers nicely on the palate. Drink now-2009. Score 87. (Tasted 8 Mar 2007)

## Carmey Avdat Winery

Founded by Eyal Izrael, this small winery is based on a private farm on the heights of the Negev Desert not far from Kibbutz Sde Boker. The winery's vineyards of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes are planted in a wadi and rely on water from 1,500-year-old water terraces built by the Nabateans. The winery's first releases were 4,500 bottles from the 2005 vintage, which rose to about 8,000 bottles from the 2008 and 2009 vintages.

Carmey Avdat, Rose, 2008: Made entirely from Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, allowed 24 hour skin contact and then cold fermented. Dark pink towards garnet, medium-bodied with red fruits and, because of the long skin contact, soft tannins, somewhere between a rose and a very light red wine. Nice raspberry and red currant fruits but lacking acidity and a bit on the clumsy side, failing to refresh. Drink now. Score 82. (Tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, Someq, 2008: Unoaked, showing deep ruby in color, a light- to medium-bodied wine with clean cherry, raspberry and red currant fruits. Nothing complex here but a refreshing and charming quaffer. Drink now. Score 85. (Tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2007: My most recent tasting note holds firmly.

Dark garnet, medium-bodied, with softly caressing tannins and notes of spicy wood in good balance with currant, berry and cherry fruits, those on a light earthy background. Drink now. Score 85. (Re-tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2007: With its once heavy wood influence now subsided and the tannins integrating nicely, showing better than at advance tastings. Dark ruby towards garnet, medium- to full-bodied with good concentration and extraction, opens to show appealing blackberry, black cherry, purple plums and chocolate, all lingering nicely on the palate. Drink now. Score 86. (Re-tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2006: Deep garnet toward royal purple, medium- to full-bodied, with soft tannins and a gentle wood influence. On the nose and palate berries, black cherries and currants, those with light vanilla and earthy-herbal overlays. Round and generous. Drink now. Score 85. (Re-tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2006: Dark ruby towards royal purple, medium- to full-bodied, with still gripping tannins and generous wood influences but those in good balance with fruits and acidity. On the nose and palate berries, cherries, cassis and appealing chocolate and peppery overlays that linger nicely. Drink now. Score 86. (Re-tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2005: Holding even better than predicted at earlier tastings. Showing ruby-towards garnet with just the first hint of clearing at the rim but fully maintaining its freshness. Soft, gently caressing tannins, a light note of oak in the background and, on the nose and palate berry and black cherry fruits on a light herbal background. Drink now. Score 87. (Re-tasted 3 Mar 2010)

Monday morning(14 Mar 2011) found me on the 07:09 train to Beer Sheva, from there to make my way to the area of *Ramat HaNegev* (Negev Heights), my major purpose being to re-visit and do tastings at the wineries now in the area.

It surprises may to learn that the Negev Heights, a fully desert region, is Israel's physically largest regional council, incorporating 1.1 million acres which is nearly 22% of the land mass of the country. Despite its size the population density is the lowest in the country some residing in the town of Mitzpe Ramon and on the Kibbutzim, Moshavim and individual owner ranches (*chavat boded*)of the area, that segment of the population complementing the indigenous Bedouins of the region.

What also surprises is that this desert region hosts many archaeological sites, those including the ancient cities of the spice route (Avdat, Haluza, Nitzana and Shivta), several of which have been declared World Heritage sites. Equally fascinating is that the region has several *makhteshim* (literally craters but more accurately erosion cirques or box canyons) those of a type found only in the Negev and Sinai Deserts. The best known of these and surely one of the most exquisitely beautiful 1 sites on the planet is the Ramon Crater which is 28 miles long and five miles wide (45 x 8 kilometers).

I confess with no embarrassment whatever that as happens every time I am in this

area that while driving from winery to winery I often found myself agape at the beauty that surrounded me.

As to wine, the Ramat HaNegev wineries have yet to produce their first "great wine". What is impressive however is that as the winemakers garner further experience and the vines become more mature the wines improve on a regular basis and many are now of high quality and interest, now beginning to reflect the special nature of wines made from desert-grown grapes, that is to say, reflecting a comfortable stony minerality and generous brown spices. It is true that not a few of the regional wines show generous acidity, perhaps too generous in some cases, but this is a problem that seems on its way to control. Regional winemakers are showing wisdom by welcoming visitors to their wineries and by keeping their prices at a quite reasonable level, the prices ranging between NIS 55 and 100 per bottle.

My thanks to Raz Arbel of the Ramat HaNegev Regional Council for facilitating this trip and to the winemakers, each of whom welcomed me warmly and each of whom in one way or another typifies the very special lifestyle of the desert. Especially warm thanks to Dani Almog of Ben Gurion University for accompanying me on my travels. This is the second year running that Dani and I spent the day together and I have learned that in addition to being a thoroughly nice person, his knowledge of the history, archaeology and geography of the region is encyclopedic.

#### Carmey Avdat

Founded by Eyal Izrael, this small winery is based on a private farm on the heights of the Negev Desert not far from Kibbutz Sde Boker. Set in a physically beautiful hilly desert region, the winery's vineyards of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes are planted in a wadi and rely largely on water from 1,500-year-old water terraces built in the Nabatean period. Current production is about 6,000 bottles annually.

Carmey Avdat, Rosé, 2010: At first glance it seems that with its dark garnet color that calling this wine a rosé is somewhat of a misnomer. The depth of color comes because the early harvested Cabernet Sauvignon grapes used were allowed 18 hours skin contact. What surprises pleasantly is that both on nose and palate the wine indeed comes across as a rosé, crisply dry, light- to medium-bodied with blueberry, raspberry and strawberry aromas and flavors and a hint of minerality on the finish. Drink now. Score 86. (Tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2008: Oak aged for 12 months in new and older American oak, showing dark garnet, medium- to full-bodied, with soft tannins and, as not infrequently typifies the wines of the region generous acidity. Opens with plums and wild berries, goes on to reveal currants, spices and a hint of anise on the finish. Drink now-2012. Score 86. (Tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2008: Deep garnet, medium-bodied, with soft tannins opening in the glass to show generous blackcurrants, purple plums and blackberries, those supported by notes of fresh herbs and brown spices. Easy to drink but complex enough to get our attention. Drink now-2012, perhaps longer. Score 87. (Tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Merlot, 2007: Dark garnet with a hint of adobe, medium- to full-bodied with good concentration and extraction, its tannins and spicy wood now integrated, opens to show appealing blackberry, black cherry, purple plums and chocolate, all lingering nicely on the palate. Drink now. Score 87. (Re-tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2007: Dark garnet, medium- to full-bodied, with soft tannins and notes of spicy wood. On the nose and palate blackcurrant, blackberry and cherry fruits, those on a background of earthy minerals and a hint of mint on the finish. Drink now. Score 85. (Re-tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot, Tishrey, 2009: A blend of equal parts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Medium- to full-bodied and softly tannic. Aged for 12 months in new oak, opens with a minty and red-fruit nose, goes on to reveal aromas and flavors of currants, wild berries and brown spices all lingering nicely. Drink now-2013. Score 88. (Tasted 14 Mar 2011)

Carmey Avdat, Cabernet Sauvignon, Someq, 2008: Unoaked, showing deep ruby in color, a light- to medium-bodied wine with clean cherry, raspberry and red currant fruits. Nothing complex here but a refreshing quaffer. Drink up. Score 85. (Re-tasted 14 May 2011)