



Wine

Beyond Palwin

New York ♣ I started out on Manischewitz. I grew up drinking it, every since I was in diapers.' Alice Feiring, the tiny red-headed celebrity wine critic, and Royal Young from *Interview* magazine, are performing an interview at a Jews-and-booze-infused Manhattan launch for Feiring's new book, *Naked Wine*. This is Feiring's second tome, a tale of her travels to Europe and California to meet some of the best—and zaniest—natural vigneron in the world while she searches for the origins of the natural wine movement and confronts the controversy surrounding the very term 'natural' in this age-old independent trade. It is a tale of passion for the poison, which she refers to as both her child and her lover. Currently a contributor to the likes of the *New York Times Magazine* and *Condé Nast Traveller*, and scribe of the award-winning blog 'The Feiring Line,' she is widely recognized for her controversial stance advocating natural wines sans additives or chemicals (the opposite of most New World and California products). Less known is that she is from an orthodox Jewish family, born in Flatbush, and educated at yeshiva in 1960s Long Island. Her first book begins with a quick summary of her early journey from frum to fruity: 'When my world was still innocent, I was drinking Manischewitz mixed with seltzer, but by the time my father ran off after a neighbor's wife, I was drinking the partially fizzy Mateus.'

Set on a Friday evening in the village apartment of sassy noted New York memoirist Susan Shapiro (ironically, the author of several

books on addiction), this is an erudite and elixiry shabbos evening with plenty to taste. The gathered Manhattan crowd of literary and wino types include importers and tastemakers like Eric Asimov, chief wine critic of the *New York Times*, Josh Raynolds, wine critic for *Tanzer Report*, and noted food columnists and cookbookists Melissa Clark and Anya Von Bremzyn. The launch overflows with beverages specially curated by Feiring, including natural wines from José Pastor and Jenny & Francois Selections from southern France and the Canary Islands (Feiring is sure this is the next region).

Naked Wine, available for the first time that night, has a kosher section. 'As a lapsed orthodox Jew whose first taste of wine was kosher and sweet mixed with seltzer, I am often the one requested to show up with a bottle of super-kosher vino,' Feiring writes. 'During these moments, I scrounge around and am often completely disappointed by the mostly deplorable choices—insults, I'm afraid. My measuring stick is what can I tolerate as opposed to what I'm crazy about.'

She insists that syrupy Kiddush wines have a relatively recent provenance: 'At one time in Eastern Europe, many Jews had vineyards and wineries and made wine, but Hitler took care of that. ... the taste of the Old World kosher wines were out, and sweet wines took over.' According to the rabbis, for a wine to be kosher without being mevushal (cooked or boiled—which she considers 'an abomination') it has to be handled at all times, from the winery equipment to the bottling to the opening, by someone who observes Shabbat. As part of her organic travels, Feiring was ecstatic to come across a kosher non-mevushal independent wine maker: Benjamin Cantz. Cantz' Four Gates winery, on four acres of certified organic, dry-farmed vines in the Santa Cruz mountains, was a one-man (and several chickens and geriatric goats) operation. Adhering to talmudic laws—not harvesting until the fourth fruit, not letting anyone non-Shabbat touch any part of his process—Cantz makes a tiny yield of quality Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay, and, without using sulphur. Feiring is impressed, especially as, being kosher, he's never even tasted the benchmark gold standards. 'Benjamin's foray into winemaking,' she concludes, 'must have been guided by a higher authority.'

'What's the driving force?' Young asks as his final question. 'What's the thing that keeps pulling you back to wine?'

'For me,' Feiring replies, her eyes sparkling like a libation, 'wine is where culture, nature, history, man and art come together in a bottle. There's nothing else like it.'

— Judy Batalion