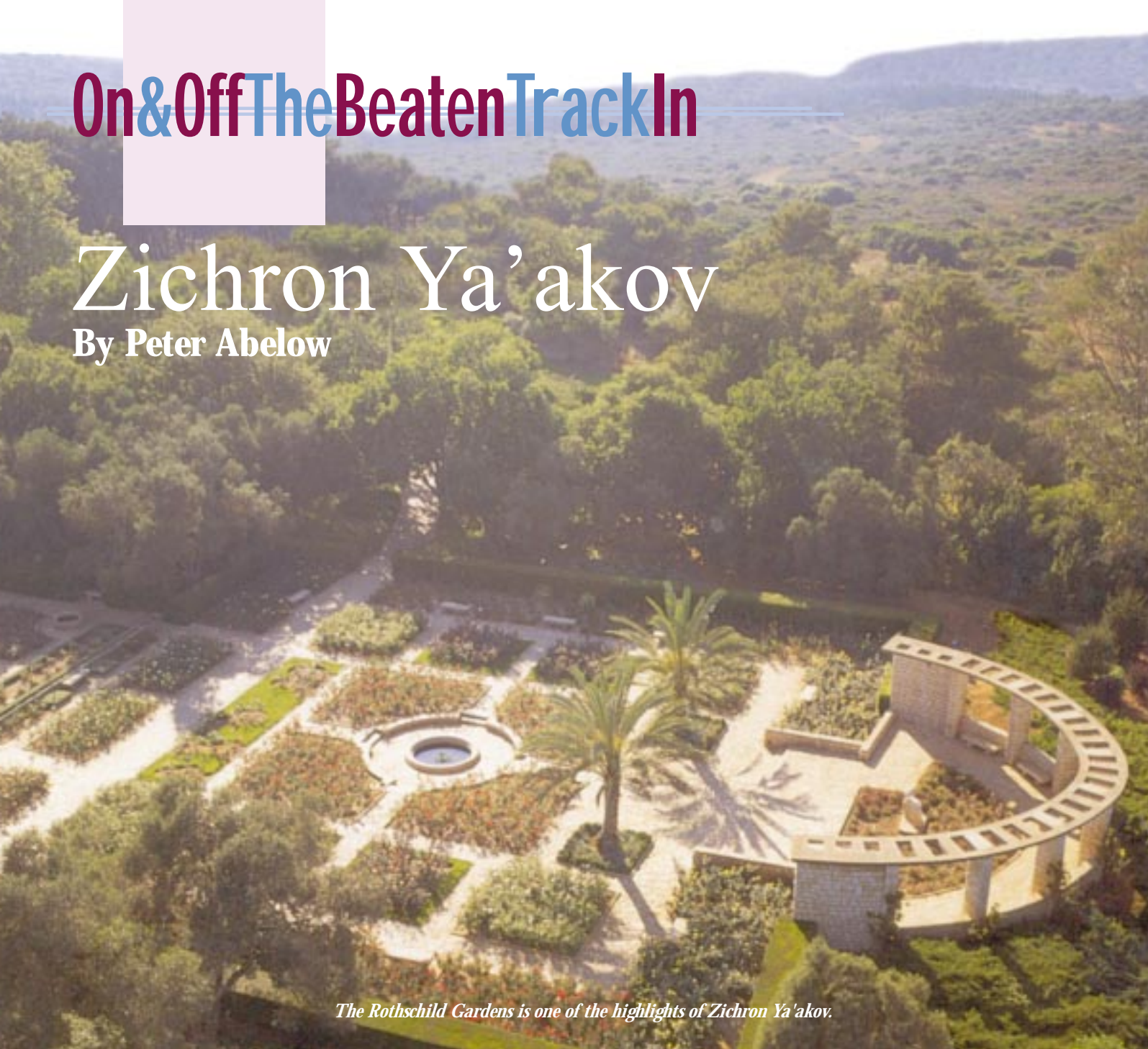


## Zichron Ya'akov

By Peter Abelow



The Rothschild Gardens is one of the highlights of Zichron Ya'akov.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven....A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted....And also that it is the gift of God that every man should eat and drink,

*Peter Abelow is a licensed tour guide and is the associate director of Keshet—the Center for Educational Tourism in Israel, specializing in family, group and synagogue tours that make Israel come alive “Jewishly.”*

and enjoy the good of all his labor” (Eccles. 3; trans. by *The Soncino Talmud*, Davka Corp.).

There is no more appropriate time than fall, the season of the grape harvest, to visit the charming city of Zichron Ya'akov, nestled enchantingly on the slopes of the Carmel Hills just 13 miles south of Haifa, and overlooking the Mediterranean. It is then that the town's main industry, the Carmel Mizrahi Wineries, suddenly comes alive with the arrival of truckload after truckload of grapes. For many, the

highlight of a visit to Zichron (as it is affectionately referred to) is a tour of the wineries and the opportunity to sample some of the fine wines produced by Carmel. Of course, the driver of the tour will have to enjoy that part of the visit vicariously but everyone will be amazed to witness the step-by-step transformation of grapes to wine. Even the driver can enjoy the intoxicating aromas of the wine cellars where wines are aged in huge oak barrels.

Major portions of this village have been preserved or restored, so that it

appears just as it did when Baron Edmund de Rothschild, known to many as Hanadiv Hayadua (the well-known benefactor), purchased the land and named it after his father, Baron James (Ya'akov). The city was founded in 1882 by Romanian *olim*, members of the Chovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement. Their efforts were supported by Baron de Rothschild who provided the pioneers with both the financial assistance and the know-how to build a wine industry. Things did not go so smoothly: the immigrants faced difficult physical conditions and occasional conflict with the Baron's appointees, the winery supervisors. Eventually, these conflicts were resolved and the winery became one of Israel's leading industries.

There is an old cemetery near the entrance gate to Rechov Hameyasdim, Zichron's "Main Street." In one section of the cemetery, there are the graves of tens of Zichron's children who succumbed to malaria in one particularly difficult year.

At the other end of Rechov Hameyasdim is Ohel Ya'akov, the original synagogue of 120 years ago, one of the first *shuls* established in "modern" Israel. Don't miss the opportunity to visit this historic synagogue and to *shmooze* with one of Zichron Ya'akov's more colorful personalities, Shmuel Friedman, the *shamash*. With a gleam in his eye, this elderly gentleman will gladly share with you fascinating stories about the *shul* and its founders. In particular, he will relate how the *shul* founders cleverly evaded the Ottoman rule against building a synagogue and how the villagers won the battle against the Baron's representatives, and instituted a *mehitzah*.

During World War I, Zichron Ya'akov became the base of operations for the earliest Jewish intelligence undertaking in Palestine: members of the Aaronson family founded the NILI (an acronym for "Netzach Yisrael Lo

Yishaker"—the strength of Israel will not lie) spy ring to aid the British in wresting control of the land from the Turks. Aaron Aaronson, a world-renowned agronomist, and son of one of the original families from Zichron Ya'akov, was aware of the Turkish maltreatment of the Armenians and believed that the future of the *Yishuv* (Jewish settlement in Palestine) would



be better served under English rule. He, his sister Sarah, and a friend, Avshalom Feinberg, among others, masterminded a plan to supply the British with information on Turkish troop movements. Their story is dramatically told in a movie (in both English and Hebrew) at the restored Aaronson home (40 Rechov Hameyasdim), which is today a national landmark. The movie includes the tragic death of Sarah, who, upon being caught and tortured by the Turks, committed suicide rather than risk revealing the names of her fellow spies. There is another rather remarkable story about Avshalom as well: he was killed by Bedouins in 1916, while on a mission in Sinai. In 1967, during the Six Day War, Israeli soldiers came upon a date palm which had been named "The Grave of the Jew" by the desert nomads. Upon investigation, it was revealed that the Jew buried at the base of the tree was Avshalom Feinberg and that the tree had grown

from a date in his pocket. Feinberg's body was exhumed and reburied in Mount Hertzl among the graves of Israel's heroes. This amazing story is also described in an accompanying museum exhibit at the Aaronson house.

In 1954, the remains of Baron de Rothschild were buried in the town he founded. Today, the mausoleum is at the center of the Ramat Hanadiv (Rothschild Gardens), a park with some of the most beautiful gardens in Israel. Allow at least an hour to stroll along the meandering paths to admire the beautiful view, often framed against the backdrop of the Mediterranean. Visit the impressive burial site of the Baron and his wife but don't miss the rose gardens and a special "scent" trail of spices and herbs where the wonderful fragrances take over. This is an especially meaningful spot for the visually impaired—all the descriptive signs are in Braille.

The Carmel Wineries, the Aaronson home, the synagogue and the Rothschild Gardens are just a few of the highlights of Zichron Ya'akov, an area that played a crucial role in the founding of modern Israel. **JA**

Above: *The restored Aaronson house. Members of the Aaronson family founded a spy ring to assist the British when Palestine was under Turkish rule. Below: Zichron's "Main Street," then and now.*

