

grape



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EDITORIAL No34

Every year, the number of visitors to Greece seems to increase, with predictions indicating that this year will set yet another record. Moreover, it looks like tourists are starting to arrive earlier each year, particularly in popular destinations such as Santorini and the rest of the Cyclades, and, of course, Athens. The tourism industry is thriving, bringing with it both advantages and disadvantages for a country that welcomes millions of visitors annually.

During our visit to Santorini in early May for our article focusing on the island's distinctive terroir and exceptional wines, we discovered that the tourist season there had already commenced. The narrow alleys of Oia were bustling with activity, and the wineries we explored were already open to visitors eager to taste the unique Assyrtiko wine and indulge in Santorini's local delicacies.

The Cycladic islands have always been synonymous with the Greek summer, offering their visitors deep blue waters, wonderful beaches, plenty of sun, great hospitality, and excellent food. Perhaps less well known is the fact that they also produce very good wine; in fact, they're home to some of the most important Greek varieties. Most of the wineries on these islands are open to visitors, offering their guests the opportunity to try some really excellent wines, often in places that allow them to enjoy stunning views of the Aegean, too. The wines are usually complemented by an array of local agricultural and dairy products, making the Cyclades a true haven for food and drink enthusiasts seeking the authentic flavors of Greece. After all, the local cuisine is based on centuries-old recipes which have been passed on from generation to generation.

The Aegean islands might be top of the list for anyone who wishes to enjoy a classic Greek summer, but Greece has a lot more to offer than its beautiful islands. The region of Messinia in the southwestern part of the Peloponnese has become a favorite destination. Thanks to one man's vision, the entire area is now attracting visitors searching for an alternative to the Greek islands, and offering those interested in exploring the region's rich history a variety of attractions from which to choose. This is a region with a rich culinary tradition that celebrates outstanding local products and has recently claimed its own spot on Greece's wine map, with the appearance of a number of wineries, most of them open to visitors.

If you're traveling to the north of Greece, you really should visit the region of Epirus, in the northwestern part of the country. This area's wild mountainous terrain, its many gorges, stone bridges and beautiful traditional villages – the most famous of which are in the Zagori area – attract a slew of visitors who enjoy hiking its trails or rafting in its rivers. The local cuisine is absolutely delicious – Epirus is famous for its savory pies, but one can also enjoy a number of other delicacies, ranging from gulf-raised shrimp in the vicinity of the town of Arta to smoked eel and even excellent fish roe; the latter, too, are locally produced. Not known to the wider world for its wine, this region is, in fact, home to some of the rarest Greek indigenous varieties; a trip here is a rare opportunity to taste wines that are really unique.

"Greece is a true cornucopia of genetic material, an inexhaustible collection of historically significant and, in certain cases, increasingly rare grape varieties," writes Grigoris Michailos, Dip WSET. "It only takes a 20-minute drive from downtown Athens to reach a hardy patch of head-trained Savatiano vines to verify this fact. Greece grows many different exciting varieties in every corner of the country. As tempting as it is to dismiss these grapes in the presence of the 'king' of Greek grapes, the amazing Assyrtiko, these other varieties are important here, too, having been grown in their places of origin for centuries."

From the sun-drenched beaches to the cool cellars of its wineries, Greece promises an unforgettable journey. Raise a glass of Assyrtiko on a Santorini terrace – or a glass of any other Greek wine of your choice wherever you may happen to be – and let the flavors transport you through centuries of winemaking tradition as you toast to the beauty and the richness of what you'll find here in Greece.

In the words of the ancient Greek poet Homer, "Wine can of their wits the wise beguile, make the sage frolic, and the serious smile." This summer, let the wines of Greece beguile your senses and create memories that will linger long after the season has passed.

Cheers to the magic of Greek summer and the timeless allure of its wines! ■



TABOO

Carafe wine or bottled wine? Well, it's complicated – but just grab the bottle!

It's happened to everyone. You visit a group of people that you know relatively well for dinner. It might even be your family! Then you do or say something. You don't stop to think before you do it, because it seems inconsequential. But it's not. Within seconds, the room is filled with tension, faces go grim, or angry, or both. Sunday lunch is well and truly ruined. And you ask yourself: "What just happened?"

If you're visiting Greece and you like wine (if you're reading this, then your chances of meeting both of these criteria are pretty good), you may find yourself in a situation like this when you order a carafe of wine. Or a bottle of wine. Wonder why? Let me explain.

Greeks have been drinking wine for at least five thousand years, probably more. During a good deal of that time, carafe wine was all there was – unless we go really back in time when we had amphora wine (before it was cool) and kylix wine.

For most of the 20th century, jugs of wine were pretty much the only option. You'd go out to a taverna and there would be some barrels of wine in the back room or, in some cases, right above your head. You'd ask for wine, and the jugs were filled from the barrel and placed on the table, invariably next to short, ugly, stemless, thick glasses.

In the last forty years, thankfully, options for restaurateurs began to improve. Wine packaged in glass bottles became more common, with prices ranging from quite affordable to sky-high. The old, bulky barrels, being difficult to maintain, became rarer, while bag-in-boxes filled with wine were suddenly a steady fixture in restaurant fridges. However, both the jug and the ugly glass remained remarkably stubborn.

Some restaurants, usually but not exclusively the upmarket ones, expelled bulk wine for good, embracing a wine list with several options. Others, usually the more casual eateries, remained faithful to the "cult of the carafe". There are also hybrids – places that offer a wine list but then, at the bottom of the page, slip in the "half a liter of white wine" one-liner. For those, that leap of faith was a touch too far.

On one side we have the traditionalists. They claim that bulk wine is pure, "true" wine, and that bottled wine is "industrial" and "full of chemicals". Price plays a role as well. Customers might want to go for the cheaper option. Restaurant owners might be afraid of pushing price per head higher by having only bottled wine available. Bulk wine allows them to keep costs low as well, especially if they dilute it with a bit of water! "Nothing wrong with that! Ancient Greeks did it as well!"

On the other side of the argument we have the wine professionals and the consumers, too, who both have a lot invested in the amazing progress of Greek wine over the last forty years. For them, bulk wine is the arch-enemy. It is the worst ambassador of the wines of our country, a product with no aspirations to quality. It is a nameless and useless wine, apart from its role in making you tipsy. Wine in a half-liter jug is the point at which half a liter becomes "litter". It's doing a huge disservice to all the people who succeeded in making Greek wine some of the best in the world.

I am not sure which side is in the worse stage of denial. Probably both. This is where you enter the picture. And I know you. I know you aren't after just flavors and aromas, you're after experiences, too. You want to get a feel for the place you're visiting, even if that includes things you would never do back home. You took your shoes off when entering that sushi bar in Kyoto, didn't you? So, in light of that, wine by the carafe fits perfectly in your couleur locale endeavor.

But experiences matter when they come from somewhere, not from anywhere. A wine poured out of a tin tube has folklore value but no identity. A bottle of Greek wine brings to your table a specific place, a specific grape variety (we have plenty for you to discover), and a whole philosophy of what wine is. It will also be a damned good wine to enjoy. And, if you do fall in love with it, chances are you can even find it back home. Try that with a jug! ■

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CELLAR RAT

A few weeks ago, I attended Vinitaly, the annual gathering of buyers, sommeliers, and wine lovers from around the world who are active in the Italian vineyard.

It took place in a huge exhibition space in Verona with thousands of exhibitors – wine producers from every corner of Italy. It sounds entertaining (the exhibition's slogan a few years ago was "Hard to believe it's business") and, indeed, it is, to a large extent, albeit with the difference that upon leaving Verona, every conscientious buyer should be carrying in their luggage accurate information and profitable agreements. In my case, my predisposition to taste wines from regions such as Apulia, Calabria, Campania, Umbria, Sicily and Sardinia made things rather difficult.

I tasted hundreds of wines that I could, in kindness, characterize as likeable – interesting ones that I would not be eager to have in my cellar under any circumstances. I remind you that "likeable" and "interesting" are the expressions that we professionals use as a polite way to refer to mediocre and forgettable wines. As the hours passed, disappointment and compromises gave way to a quiet conclusion that I could, indeed, pack away in my luggage:

The explanation for my difficulty lies in the fact that all the regions I mentioned, the areas whose wines I tasted, are extremely touristic, which means that the local winemakers can rely solely on direct sales of their wines just because those wines are local. Inevitably, these winemakers will not strive to create something competitive and memorable on a broader scale than the microcosm of their region. From another perspective, tourists, quite logically, thirst for anything local, which makes it very difficult to change the quality level of the wines. To be honest, the phenomenon I am referring to is not exclusively Italian; we encounter it strongly in the south of Spain, in the equivalent tourist areas of France, in Portugal, and certainly in several tourist destinations in Greece.

A reasonable question that may arise is how Santorini, an island that receives hordes of tourists annually, managed not only to preserve the quality of its wines but also to produce the top white wines in our country. I believe it helped that Santorini was established as a wine region long before it became a tourist destination, while the uniqueness of the soil and the microclimate in general create intense, distinctive, and unique wines that do not succumb to commercial compromises. Certainly, the wine identity of the island would be very different if the Boutari family and the local producers of the distant 1980s had not protected the vineyards from the frenzy of construction that followed that decade.

The dilemma that this discussion raises for all of us is whether we should embrace the concept of local consumption or be more selective in our tourist excursions. Is it logical, for example, if I find myself in the Basque Country, to drink Txakolina, or is it blasphemy to ask for a significantly more interesting white wine from neighboring Rias Baixas? I believe that the tourist development of each region can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how the phenomenon is managed by the local community. Many mediocre wines can be temporarily elevated to "greatness" by skilled describers of the local gastronomic school; the key is to make sure that imparted essence doesn't fade before they make it into the luggage of visitors. ■



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DOMAINE SKOURAS
EST 1986

SANTORINI

The most famous destination in Greece attracts millions of tourists each year. Famous for its sunsets, its savage beauty, its breathtaking sea views and its luxurious hospitality, the island does not really need much of an introduction.

What may not be obvious, however, to the unsuspecting visitor is its long tradition in winemaking, which was, in fact, one of the main occupations of the island's inhabitants for many centuries. Its volcanic topsoil, deposited after the eruption of the Santorini Volcano in or around 1646 BC, created a unique terroir for Assyrtiko, the indigenous grape variety which is becoming more and more popular in the wine world.

During the Middle Ages, the sweet wines of Santorini, produced from sundried grapes, were highly regarded by the Venetians who traded them under the name *Vino Santo*, or *Vinsanto*. It was not until the second half of the 20th century, however, that the dry wines of the island, considered until then inferior to the sweet ones, began to gain in popularity. The 1980s saw the arrival on the island of the Boutaris family, the leading Greek winemakers of the period, and winemaking in Santorini entered a whole new phase. The traditional wineries (called *canavas*) were replaced by modern wineries with state-of-the-art equipment, and these newer enterprises have been producing extremely high-quality wines. Unfortunately, the island's unique terroir – along with its vines, some of which are over 200 years old – is in danger because of over-construction on the island, driving some of the local winemakers to seek alternatives, acquiring land on the much smaller neighboring island of Thirasia.

A visit to Santorini simply isn't complete without a visit to at least some of its wineries, all of which are open to anyone who wishes to find out more about the long oenological tradition and the unique terroir. There are organized tours and wine tastings, food and wine pairings and even cooking classes based on traditional local products such as yellow split-peas, cherry tomatoes and capers.

A LIST OF THE MAIN GRAPE VARIETIES AND OTHER USEFUL TERMS

AIDANI

A white grape variety used in a blend with Assyrtiko to produce Santorini wines such as *Nychteri* and *Vinsanto*. Vinified as a varietal, it produces wines of a floral character with aromas of tropical fruit.

ASSYRTIKO

Santorini's signature white grape variety, it's rapidly gaining worldwide recognition. This grape produces wines of medium aromatic intensity, but with characteristic strong minerality, and has a great ageing potential.

ATHIRI

A white grape variety that's also used in the blends of Santorini wines; when vinified as a varietal, it can give wines of a fruity character, with medium to low acidity.

CANAVA

In the local dialect, the term for a traditional winery. These structures were usually underground (or partially subterranean) spaces hewn from the rock or sheltered by nearby buildings.

KOULOURA

The traditional method of training Santorini's vines into a basket-like shape to protect them from the strong winds and the high summer temperatures that dominate on the island.

MAVROTRAGANO

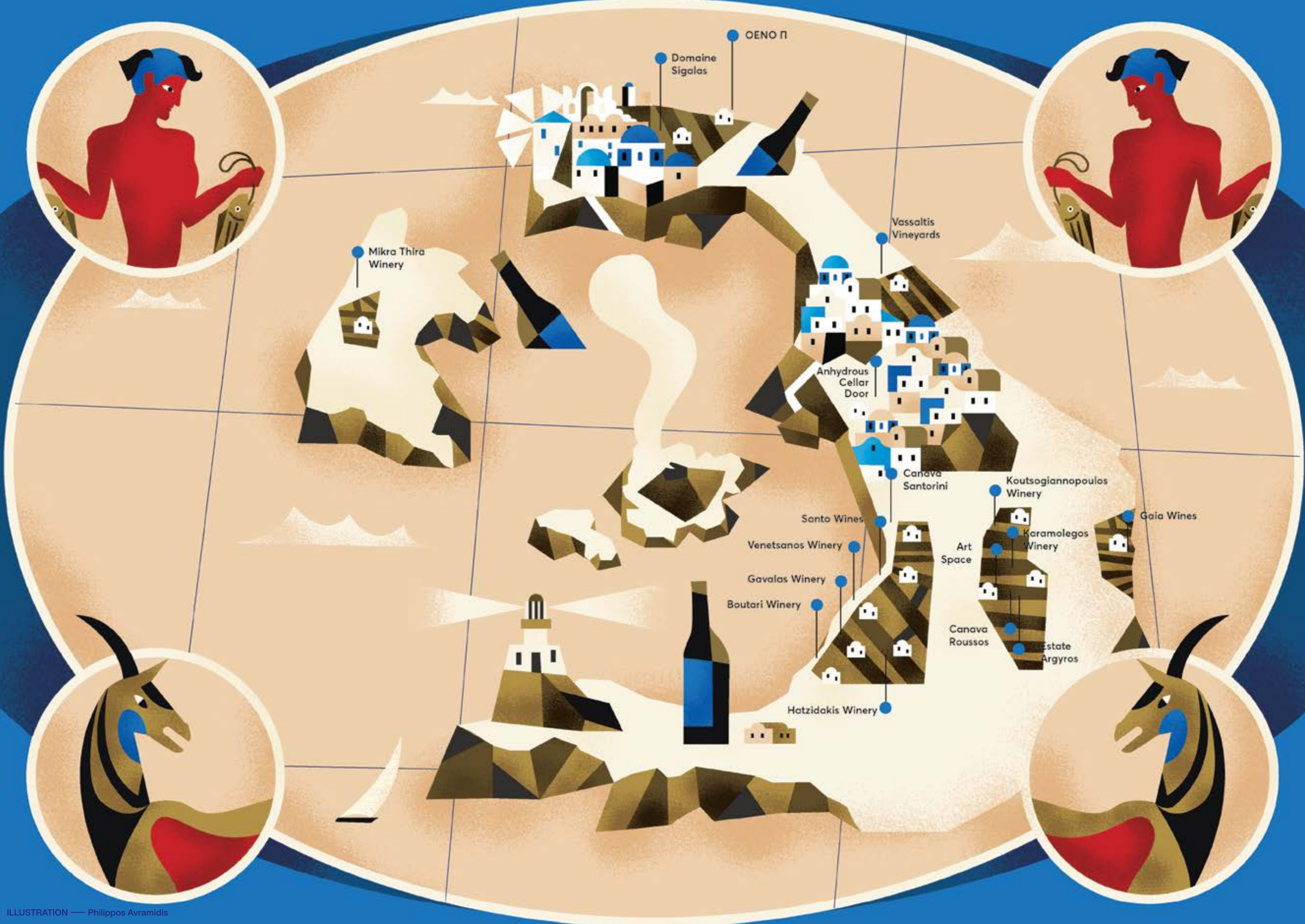
A very rare red variety from Santorini that was, until quite recently, at risk of extinction. This variety combines dense red fruit with roasted coffee and smoke, robust tannins and a rich and mineral mouth.

NYCHTERI

Santorini's traditional wine, made from a blend of Assyrtiko, Athiri and Aidani. Traditionally, grapes destined for *Nychteri* were pressed during the night after the harvest, to protect the juice from the heat of the day. That is, in fact, how it got its name; the Greek word for "night" is "nychta". (N.B. This wine is often spelled "Nikteri" or "Nykteri" as well.)

VINSANTO

Santorini's sweet wine, made predominantly of Assyrtiko, with Aidani and Athiri in the blend as well. It's made from late-harvest grapes which have been dried in the sun for 12-14 days. It ferments and then ages for at least 24 months in oak barrels.





Giannis Valampous photographed with one of his favorite wine bottles.

VASSALTIS VINEYARDS

The term “Vassaltis” is used for the rock that forms from the cooling of basaltic lava following a volcanic eruption, and it’s also the name of Yiannis Valambous’ winery.

This distinctive black stone, a symbol of Santorini, also dominates his winery’s interior spaces, which differ significantly from what you’ll find at the other wineries on the island. The minimalist, modern aesthetic fits perfectly with the natural environment around it, and it gives it a fresh new feel, too. The 2010 Greek financial crisis may strike one as an incongruous time to begin a massive venture. And yet it was exactly this event that prompted Yiannis Valambous to give up his life as a successful economist in London and return to Greece. His love of wine drew him back to the island of Santorini, where he had spent many a happy family vacation as a child.

Valambous says, “I first visited Santorini in December 1986. I don’t remember much apart from three things. There was Petros, the only taverna open in Oia at the time, and there was the incredibly strong wind that stopped six-year-old me in my tracks. But what is etched most vividly in my memory is the first glimpse of the volcano the next morning, which, despite my young age, filled me with awe. I still remember that wild beauty, which contrasted so sharply with the sunny morning. In the following years, Santorini became the place of my childhood vacations.”

His involvement with wine began at an amateur level, and remained so even when he started the winery. The first harvest took place in 2015. “To start a business, you need to be very brave or very naive,” says Valambous, reflecting on the beginning.

“Today, I feel vindicated by the results. It’s been 12 years during which I have dedicated every day of my life to this project, and for both me and my team, these years have brought both difficulties and great joys. Santorini today has more wine than ever before. The completion of the construction of the Vassaltis Winery, one of the most modern production units on the island, gives us the opportunity to produce high-quality wines from local varieties. Santorini, the first label we produced from our inaugural harvest, has now been joined by nine others. I feel proud to welcome so many visitors to our winery, proud that they come from all corners of the Earth to be initiated into Assyrtiko. I am proud too that our wines travel and are consumed worldwide.”

Vassaltis Winery in Santorini is in a phase of reorganization. Demand has increased, and so it was decided to create a new wing that includes a cooling chamber and a garage. This is logical, since the winery started with 35 stremmata (a little under nine acres) of vineyards and has now reached 250 stremmas (more than sixty acres), spread across the islet of Thirasia and around the villages of Oia and Megalochori. One hundred and seventy stremmata are new plantings made over the last four years; they are now slowly starting to bear fruit. Production depends on the year and, at present, ranges from 40,000 to 90,000 bottles. Exports are around 25% of production, and go mainly to England and other parts of Europe. A new bottling machine, already in operation, and a new labeling machine arriving soon are indications of Valambous’ intention to modernize technologically. In the cellar, there are wooden, stainless steel, and cement tanks. Fully aged bottles are stored there, too, as are bottles that are aging before being released to the market. At present, the visitor section can handle approximately 50 guests a day.

PENELOPE KATSATOU

Did you face any difficulties when you arrived?

YANNIS VALAMBOUS

Santorini is a challenging place, both geographically and due to the uniqueness of the wine it produces. Things have changed now, but the early years during the crisis were completely different. Restaurants had only two Assyrtiko wines on their menus. Success in wine never happens overnight. Today, restaurants pay close attention to their wine lists, the role of the sommelier has grown, and the whole scene has changed. However, in this place, we need to find a *modus operandi* where everyone – both the old producers and the new ones – can coexist and thrive.

PENELOPE KATSATOU

How would you describe Santorini to a foreign colleague, to someone from, say, the United States?

YANNIS VALAMBOUS

Santorini is a unique place that produces extraordinary wines almost effortlessly. It has a stunning terroir that, if respected, makes it easy to create great wines. On the other hand, it presents challenges, since it is an island destination with no rain, hot days, and low production. There are no houses available for staff, and transportation costs are high. It’s an expensive place to make wine. However, Santorini also offers the best spot from which to enjoy your wine, a natural terrace with breathtaking views and an unparalleled atmosphere.

PENELOPE KATSATOU

Are there any problems due to climate change?

YANNIS VALAMBOUS

We’re already beginning to see problems arising. Production has decreased, both last year and this year. Last April, we had hailstorms. May has become an unusually cold month for the area, and there is now an issue of plant stress due to low temperatures.

PENELOPE KATSATOU

Where would you like to be ten years from now?

YANNIS VALAMBOUS

I believe that everything in life should have a beginning, middle, and end, and should not be

stretched out indefinitely, especially in a profession like winemaking. Our goal is to establish ourselves firmly and to consolidate what we have created so far. We want to create not only wine but also an experience that will be unforgettable. We want you to want to take the wine you tasted with you. People who come here are looking for a wine experience, not a wine education. We want visitors to perceive Greek wine as something more mainstream, so it doesn’t intimidate them when they see it on a wine list.

PENELOPE KATSATOU

What about the vineyards you have on the small island of Thirasia?

YANNIS VALAMBOUS

Thirasia is an island that’s close to Santorini. It has 100 inhabitants and has not been developed for tourism. It was a great challenge and an amazing escape for us. It’s Santorini’s opportunity to reintroduce itself. There, we cultivate 100% Assyrtiko in vineyards that have been planted in a modern way on abandoned land, in rows and with support. The soil is very similar to that of Santorini, and it is part of the PDO. Because our team consists of newcomers to the industry, both in terms of age and experience, this fresh canvas, so to speak, allows us to be more daring in what we try. I am proud because we’ve brought a different voice to the conversation.

WINE TASTING AND FOOD PAIRING

Our visit concluded with an exceptional meal accompanied by the wines of the winery.

The first wine we tasted was Nassitis 23. Nassitis encapsulates the spirit of the island by bringing together Santorini’s three principal white grape varieties: Assyrtiko, Aidani and Athiri. The wine is a balanced expression of tropical and stone fruits and white flower aromas, with a palate dominated by Santorini’s characteristic racy minerality. It pairs well with many different flavors.

Gramina Cuvee des Vignerons 2022 came next. The first time the harvest for this wine took place, it was very early in the morning, and they have done the same ever since. A very refined wine is the result: a fist within a velvet glove. It has intense fruit notes but with acidity, saltiness, and strong minerality.

Alcyone 2022 takes its name from Greek mythology. Alcyone was the beautiful daughter of Aeolus, god of the winds. It is an elegant wine with a balance and a complexity stemming from the minerality of Assyrtiko, the structure and layers of the oak component, and the expressions that the use of cement imparts. Despite criticism regarding the use of oak with Assyrtiko, the fact remains that, if used properly, it adds complexity and richness, resulting in a perfectly balanced wine with a long ageing potential.

Kalupi 2020 Red Blend is comprised of 40% Assyrtiko, 30% Mandilaria, and 30% Mavrotragano. The aim was to make a much simpler wine, with an easy-to-drink finesse compared to classic Mavrotragano. The result is a summer red wine that is consumed at cool temperatures and that pairs exceptionally well with island salads. It’s a light wine in the mouth but with tannins, structure and acidity. It also pairs very well with oily dishes.

THE WINES WERE PAIRED WITH:

Tomato salad with Florina peppers, grilled eggplant, and octopus carpaccio with capers. Anchovy fillet, caper and tomato salad, and a mustard-lemon sauce. Fried squid served with mayonnaise flavored with black garlic. ■

DOMAINE SIGALAS

Well hidden on the ancient plain of Oia are the welcoming grounds of Domaine Sigalas, an oasis of serenity on the ever-bustling island of Santorini.



Santorini Barrel Assyrtiko paired with Santorini fava, smoked eel.



At the Sigalas Estate, the view from the vineyards where the wine tastings also take place.



Villages paired with Santorini cherry tomatoes, katsouni, pickled caper leaves, chloró cheese.

Arriving at the estate's beautiful courtyard in the midst of the vines, we are welcomed by smiling tourists who are already enjoying the wine-tasting menus. "The wine tourism sector is going well, despite the fact that the tourist season seems to be a bit off for the island this year" says Spyros Lemanis, General Manager of the winery, as he walks us through the small vineyard that surrounds the winery.

The tour starts in the estate's vineyards, where details are provided about the history of Santorini, followed by information about the vineyard itself, the traditional kouloura – the basket-shaped pattern into which the vines on this island are trained – and the different grape varieties, giving visitors a comprehensive picture of the island's past and its 3,000-year-old winemaking heritage.

Paris Sigalas, founder of Domaine Sigalas, is a pioneering winemaker who applied mathematical formulas and other innovative ideas to oenology and viticulture, elevating Santorini's wines to international stardom. When Sigalas took over his grandfather's vineyard, he began crafting wine according to his own guiding principle: "the dynamic evolution of tradition." He believes that innovation and technical savvy can coexist creatively with the island's ancient winegrowing traditions. He also truly enjoys improving his product; his passion for tasting and evaluating wine set the high standard for his own creations.

Stellios Boutaris, now CEO and Chairman of the Board of Domaine Sigalas, is leading the estate into a new era with an excellent group of mainly young people. Domaine Sigalas currently produces 11 wine labels and 3 spirit labels. Annual production is around 250,000 bottles, a goal that's not always achievable in bad years. The blue label, the famous Santorini Sigalas, comprises half the production. Sales are divided as follows: about a third is sold in Santorini, another third in the rest of Greece, and the remainder is exported, with the lion's share of that going to the United States.

This first-class wine tour and tasting experience featured five of Sigalas' limited edition premium wines. Each wine is vinified exclusively from grapes grown in the volcanic soils of Santorini and is paired with a specially prepared dish curated by the winery's executive chef Kyriaki Fotopoulou. The award-winning chef, backed by an expert team is known for her exceptional culinary creations, her understanding and respect for the land, the traditions, the products, and their seasonal nature.

The winery's bestselling offer is the food-and-wine-pairing menu but there is also an à la carte menu option, establishing the winery as the first on the island to operate a fully equipped restaurant kitchen. During our visit, we enjoyed a truly impressive meal paired with the estate's wines.



Vinsanto PDO Santorini paired with baklava and mastic ice cream.

FOOD AND WINE PAIRING

7 VILLAGES
ASSYRTIKO 100%
Santorini cherry tomatoes, katsouni (the local cucumber), pickled caper leaves, olives, chloró cheese.

EPTA ("Seven" in Greek) is the epitome of a fascinating, pioneering exploration of Santorini sub-terroirs by Domaine Sigalas. Seven rigorously selected vine parcels from seven villages across the island (Oia, Imerovigli, Vourvoulos, Fira, Pyrgos, Megalochori and Akrotiri) form the canvas of this unique project. Each year, they harvest and vinify the output of each village separately. This full-bodied, elegantly layered wine with a vibrant acidity that reveals a remarkable balance is a perfect match for Santorini cherry tomatoes and the flavor of the olive.

KAVALIEROS
ASSYRTIKO 100% PDO SANTORINI
Ceviche citrus fruits, ginger, chili peppers, coriander, fresh seasonal fruit

This dish of marinated sea bass is very fond of the wine Kavalieros, with the very distinctive label depicting a shepherd on one side and a Cycladic bench on the other. This is the first single-vineyard Assyrtiko from vines grown at an elevation of 300 meters. The Greek herbs and the strawberry, with its acidity and sweetness, are an ideal match for the wine.

SANTORINI BARREL
ASSYRTIKO 100%, PDO SANTORINI
Fava Santorini, smoked eel, onion, pickled okra, semi-dried cherry tomatoes, saltwort

The barrel is not very fashionable nowadays. This wine, however, is noteworthy for both its finesse and the awards it receives every year abroad, and it's possible that much of the credit for both achievement should go to the excellent influence of the barrel. Fermentation does begin in the tank, but then the wine is transferred to a used barrel. This selection has an intense body that goes perfectly with the wonderful pickled okra or, even better, the local fava. A creamy dish, after all, loves a creamy wine.

MAVROTRAGANO
MAVROTRAGANO 100%, PGI CYCLADES
Kyriaki's Moussaka with beef cheek, smoked eggplant purée, potato confit, bechamel foam

Paris Sigalas was the first to praise the Mavrotragano variety and worked hard to save it. He planted it in Santorini and showed others the best way to vinify it. This selection, the premium red wine of the zone, pairs exceptionally well with smoked eggplant and braised meat. In a dish reminiscent of the traditional Greek moussaka but with different ingredients, there are intense flavors that nonetheless blend harmoniously with a wine of equal intensity.

VINSANTO
ASSYRTIKO 75%, AIDANI 25%, PDO SANTORINI
Baklavá, Aegina pistachio, mastic ice cream

The Vinsanto is a perfect match for this homemade baklava with pistachios from Aegina. The dried grape has the both the color and the taste of caramel, and the longer it lies drying, the more its sugars come to the surface. Its alcohol level remains lower than classic Santorini wines, since not all the fruit becomes alcohol. It's not all sugars, however; the high acidity of the 2016 Vinsanto helps to balance out the sweetness of the baklava. ■

ANHYDROUS WINERY

Apostolos Mountrichas, a winemaker from the island of Evia, fell in love with Santorini and its wines in the early 2000s. Mountrichas, the accomplished owner of Avantis Estate, which had already conquered the Greek market with a great Syrah, began work on his Santorini project in 2012; by 2019, his new Anhydrous was fully operational, housed near Fira in a building that had once been an old cinema.

The building was completely renovated to accommodate a production area, an indoor wine-tasting area and a beautiful courtyard. In the production area, there are stainless steel tanks, cement and clay vats, and the large traditional oak barrels called “afoura” for the production of the wines, mainly made from Assyrtiko grapes. The winery produces six different labels, but the total production is still very small, no more than 10,000 bottles annually.

“We have a lot of people coming in but not enough wine,” says Mountrichas, referring to last year’s very bad harvest. He believes that yields are going to be extremely low this year as well, making it enormously difficult for winemakers to find enough grapes for their production. Nonetheless, he is optimistic about the future, especially after his acquisition of 100 hectares of land in one of the best parts of the island, which he has already planted with Assyrtiko.

The winery has a restaurant with tables spread out in a beautifully decorated open area. The menus, tailored to accompany the wines, are designed by executive chef Michalis Marthas, and executed by chef Christodoulos Christodoulou. Guests can choose between the four set menus on offer, or they can order a la carte. On our visit, as we were coming back to the courtyard from the production area, we came across some visitors taking a cooking class offered on the premises, learning how to prepare – among other local dishes – the island’s domatokeftedes, or tomato fritters. Mountrichas is happy to tell us that the restaurant has been a great success since it first opened in 2021 and that it now welcomes more than 30,000 guests annually.

FOOD AND WINE TASTING MENU

As there were two of us, we had the opportunity to taste a different menu each: one based on products produced on the land, and the second one based on seafood. The wines were perfectly chosen to accompany all the delicious dishes we tried.

MARE MENU

- Ospriada (a bean-and-chickpea salad) with smoked eel, tomato, zucchini, and aromatic herbs.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Santorini, a wine made from Assyrtiko, Aidani and Athiri. It has aromas of lemon and lime, and a mineral character. On the palate, the wine is dry, with refreshing acidity and a salty aftertaste that pairs perfectly with the dish.

- Grilled Octopus with Santorini fava (a local delicacy), onions, capers and sun-dried tomatoes.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Afoura, 100% Assyrtiko, a wine with a complex mineral character, with aromas of citrus against a background of nuts.

- Grilled sea bass with orzo barley, Greek saffron (Krokos kozanis), and a Bolognese sauce made with cured pork.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Icon, 100% Assyrtiko. the winery’s classic Santorini wine, it matures in an oval concrete vat for nine months on the lees, giving it great structure and complexity.

- “An alternative galaktoboureko”, a caramelized filo pastry with rice cream, honey jelly and ice cream.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Vinsanto, the winery’s version of the famed sweet dessert wine of Santorini.

TERRA MENU

- Crunchy zucchini with olive-oil pie, white cheese (anthotiro), black sesame and mint.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Two Islands, a varietal wine.

- Tomato fritter with tomato jam, yoghurt, zucchini, cucumber and crunchy gruyere.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Grace, a rosé from Mandilaria and Aidani. The aromas of fresh red fruit, raspberries and cherries pair nicely with the dish.

- Moussaka croquette with roasted pepper cream and white cheese (anthotiro).

WINE PAIRING

Avantis Syrah. The wine comes from the estate’s other winery, Avantis, on the island of Evia, and is one of that establishment’s bestselling labels.

- Carob cake with chocolate namelaka, red fruit sorbet and crunchy chocolate.

WINE PAIRING

Anhydrous Sweet Sun, a dessert wine made from a blend of Santorini grape varieties. ■



Tomato fritter with tomato jam, yoghurt, zucchini, cucumber and crunchy gruyere, paired with Anhydrous Grace, a rosé from Mandilaria and Aidani.



Ospriada (a bean-and-chickpea salad) with smoked eel, tomato, zucchini, and aromatic herbs, paired with Icon Anhydrous Santorini.



ESTATE ARGYROS

The Argyros family are considered the masters of Vinsanto and, as this was our third visit to their truly impressive modern winery, built in 2014 in the village of Episkopi, we asked Matthew Argyros, the fourth-generation winemaker who runs the estate, to focus our tasting on that unique traditional Santorini dessert wine.

In the old cellars of the estate, there are 600 barrels of Vinsanto dating back to 1947, and Mathew Argyros was kind enough to let us try some of the oldest vintages, including the one from 1947, which has never been bottled but might soon become part of the estate's portfolio in very limited editions.

The winemaking history of the Argyros family dates back to the 1850s, when they were charged with making Vinsanto for the Catholic Church. Their wine was also exported to France and Russia, in exchange for wood for making barrels; some of those containers still exist on the island. In 1903, the family was granted land by the church; this is, in fact, how one of its oldest vineyards, Monsignori, got its name.

Even as we watched our guide line up the four bottles bearing the dates of 1947, 1956, 1965 and 1974, we found it hard to believe that we were actually going to be able to try wines as old as these, wines which have been kept in barrels for decades. What was even more impressive, however, was their amazing quality. Although the differences between them were not particularly distinct – after so many years, all the wines reach a level of maturity that produces more or less common characteristics as far as aromas are concerned – what was really amazing was their complexity and the amazing acidity which balances out the sweetness. As Argyros explained, the residual sugar in these wines can be up to 400gr/lit but, thanks to Assyrtiko's high acidity, they remain really well balanced.

As I mentioned earlier, these wines are not on the market yet, but Estate Argyros does have two Vinsanto labels from more recent vintages: Vinsanto First Release 2015 (the 2016 will be available soon) and Vinsanto Late Release 2003. Both are made from the highest-quality grapes grown on the estate's best privately owned vineyards. The grapes are harvested late, towards the end of August, and are then left to dry in the sun for 12 to 14 days. After the pressing, the must goes into large cement vats and ferments for at least three years. The Vinsanto First Release label ages in oak barrels for four years while the Late Release label spends at least 16 years ageing in the barrels before it is released on the market.

Despite the fact that our focus this time was on the Vinsanto, our visit to the estate would have been incomplete if we hadn't tried the estate's three cuvées, which are the pride of Matthew Argyros. These are three labels that come from the Estate's oldest and best vineyards: Monsignori (from the 200-year-old vineyard of the same name), Evdemon (from vineyards in Pyrgos and Megalochori that are 80 years old) and the most recent one, which has just come out this year, Gerontampelo (which literally "old vineyard" in Greek). All three wines came from the 2020 harvest, and have great potential for ageing. This is the aim of this winery: to make premium wines, from Assyrtiko, which have had the opportunity to age before they are released on the market, in order to showcase the amazing terroir and exceptional grape variety. The winery is open to visitors and conducts wine tours and tastings seven days a week.



The unforgettable Vinsanto wines from Estate Argyros.

WE TASTED

- **MONSIGNORI 2020**
100% Assyrtiko from the 200-year-old vineyard in Episkopi. Steel tank fermentation, no barrel: it is one of the best expressions of Santorini Assyrtiko.
- **EVDEMON 2020**
100% Assyrtiko from the vineyards in Pyrgos and Megalochori, cultivated using biodynamic techniques. The wine is 75% fermented in stainless steel tanks, and 25% in 500-liter old French oak barrels. This is a wine focused on palate architecture that needs several years in the bottle to open up, and will not suffer in the least from cellaring for more than fifteen years.
- **GERONTAMPELO 2020**
This is the new addition to the cuvée labels; it has just been released on the market. It's made from 100% Assyrtiko grapes sourced from the Gerontampelo vineyard, and ferments in 225-liter and 500-liter French oak barrels. The barrel is still quite distinct both on the nose and the palate, but in 2-3 years, the fruit will be more pronounced as the oak aromas become better integrated with ageing. Overall potential for ageing is at least 15 years.
- **VINSANTO FIRST RELEASE 2015**
A luscious wine, with fruit at the forefront, this one is ready to drink now but can age in bottle almost indefinitely. The final yield of this would be close to 75 milliliters per square meter of vineyard.
- **VINSANTO LATE RELEASE 2003**
An intense, profound wine of breathtaking complexity, this one is ready to drink today, but you can be patient, too, as time cannot destroy this gem. The final yield of this would be close to 60 milliliters per square meter of vineyard. ■

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SANTO WINES

Santo Wines, a cooperative, is by far the largest wine producer on the island with a total annual production of 500,000 bottles.



The cooperative was first established in 1911 as Santorini Wine and Vine Protection Fund, but the winery to house the Union of Santorini Cooperatives, representing the island's cultivators, with more than 100 members, wasn't built until 1992. Nowadays, the enterprise is undergoing rebranding, separating into Santo Wines and Santo Taste, the latter of which will deal with PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) products from the island, including the island's famed cherry tomatoes, the yellow split peas used to make fava, and Santorini capers, all of which can be purchased from the winery's large deli shop.

The impressive modern building stands near the cliff edge close to the village of Pyrgos. It is surrounded by terraced vineyards, the traditional method of growing grapes on Santorini. Every year, the winery welcomes more than 900,000 visitors from around the world, eager to try their excellent wines and dine there as well. The views from the restaurant tables are absolutely breathtaking; it's hard to imagine a better setting in which to sample the island's unique wines than this spot, which overlooks the deep blue waters and the volcano out in the bay.

The grapes are sourced both from the privately owned organic vineyard from which the varietal Aidani, Athiri and Mavrotragano wines are produced and from the growers who belong to the cooperative. The winery also rents additional land, planted with Assyrtiko, which they maintain using sustainable agricultural methods.

The gravity-flow winery, one of the largest in Greece, employs all kinds of containers, from stainless steel tanks to amphorae. It is run by its dedicated chief oenologist, Nikos Varvarigos, who has worked at Santo for the last 33 years. The wines are constantly evolving, offering an amazing range of styles – everything from sparkling to still, and from dry to semi-sweet to sweet. You'll find more traditional wines, such as the Nychteri or the Assyrtiko Grand Reserve, as well as a lighter version of both the sparkling wine and the typical Santorini Assyrtiko.

In the winery's cellar, there are 225 French barriques in which red wines from the varieties Mavrotragano and Mandilari are aged (from one to two years, depending on the label); the barriques also hold the Assyrtiko Grand Reserve, which comes from vineyards more than 100 years old and ages for a year in the barrel. One of the winery's most cherished labels, Irini (derived from Saint Irini, the holy woman for which the island of Santorini is named), is aged for 18 months in barrels in this cellar. The label Irini was first released to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Santo Wines. The winery's sweet dessert wine, known as Vinsanto, is also barrel-aged in the cellar; it is aged for a minimum of three years.

WINE TASTING

- **SPARKLING BRUT 2022**
100% Assyrtiko, which undergoes second fermentation in the bottle. Aromas of white-fleshed stone fruit, green fruit and hints of dough. Round and balanced on the palate, with refreshing acidity leading towards a long mineral finish. It is a perfect aperitif wine, and pairs nicely with seafood, particularly white fish.
- **SANTORINI ASSYRTIKO 2022**
The classic Assyrtiko from Santorini, with an expressive nose full of lemon and grapefruit aromas. Dry on the palate, with crisp acidity underlined by a mineral, zesty and fruity taste. The finish reveals layers of citrus and stone fruits and an extra salty sea-breeze character.
- **SANTORINI SELECTION CUVÉE 2021**
Every year, the best tank of Santorini Assyrtiko wine is left to further age on its fine lees. The wine has a medium body with a rich oily mouthcoating texture, refreshing acidity and nuances of flint, iodine and salt over a core of fresh citrus and orchard fruit. It pairs ideally with seafood dishes featuring either shellfish or fish.
- **NYKTERI 2022**
Made according to traditional methods, it contains three varieties: 80% Assyrtiko, 15% Athiri, and 5% Aidani. It is barrel-fermented and ages for three months in medium toast French oak barrels. Expect flowery aromas on the nose, along with fruits like peach and pear. On the palate, it is dry, with crisp, refreshing acidity. This Nychteri goes great with grilled or fried fish, and white meats.
- **SANTORINI GRAND RESERVE 2021**
This is an oaky expression of Santorini's unique terroir. The grapes come from a 100-year-old vineyard in the area of Akrotiri. The wine is aged for a year in second and third-use French oak, followed by another twelve months ageing in the bottle. It is a full-bodied wine, with aromas of dried nuts, honey, herbs, tea, vanilla and toast. Serve it with fish, grilled white meat in cream-based sauces, and red meat cooked with herbs.
- **KONTARADES 2022 SINGLE VINEYARD**
One last Assyrtiko, this one comes from a single 80-year-old vineyard in the area of Megalochori. It is aged for a year in amphora vats on the lees, leaving it with aromas of mature fruit and a pronounced minerality. Enjoy it with seafood dishes. ■

GAIA WINES

This absolutely lovely winery stands right at the water's edge on Kamari Beach in the area of Exo Gonia. The large stone building, which dates from the beginning of the 20th century, was once home to an industrial-scale tomato canning factory; today, it houses a winery equipped with everything required for modern winemaking, from stainless steel tanks to amphorae and clay vats.

The wine-tasting area is right on the shore, in a small courtyard that looks more like something from a Mexican hacienda than it does a typical Santorini canava. But then again, there's nothing really typical about this winery, least of all Leto Paraskevopoulou, the daughter of the winery's co-founder, Yiannis Paraskevopoulos, one of Greece's leading winemakers. It was her father who first came up with the idea of ageing Assyrtiko bottles in the sea, launching the Thalassitis Submerged label, which created a huge stir in the wine world when it was first released in 2014.

Paraskevopoulou, who has been in charge of the winery for the last two years, is a dynamic young woman, full of passion and energy, and ready to lead the winery into its next phase. A self-proclaimed "rogue oenologist", she studied biochemistry and biotechnology in England and Scotland and came to the island to work with Santorini's pioneering winemaker Paris Sigalas.

As she takes us past the barrels and the clay vats, Paraskevopoulou says she would love to create yet another label from the wine resting in the vats, which at present goes into the blend for Assyrtiko Wild Ferment, the winery's bestselling wine. As the name suggests, this is a wine fermented with native yeasts. A part of its blend, she explains, ferments in the clay vats, allowing the wine contact with oxygen and leaving it without the oaky character it would gain from fermentation in a barrel. Next we come across a clay vat where an orange version of Assyrtiko is ageing. This is one of the winery's newer labels, Clay Assyrtiko, made with grapes from old own-rooted vineyards; she uses indigenous yeast and incorporates traditional methods into the winemaking process to create this gem.

Paraskevopoulou takes us to the next production area; it is full of stainless steel vats of different sizes. The Assyrtiko that makes up the winery's most popular label, Thalassitis, is vinified in these tanks, as is the Assyrtiko that makes up Ammonite, one of the winery's new labels, which gained immediate recognition and garnered awards when it was first released in 2021. "This is my baby", Paraskevopoulou tells us as we try the wine from the 2023 harvest. But this is not the first label she created; that was Nychteri 2019, a label that replaced Thalassitis Oak Fermented. Her Nychteri is the winery's own version of a traditional Nychteri, a wine made from riper fruit; it matures and ages in older oak than the oak-fermented Thalassitis, resulting in a much better integration of the barrel.



Leto Paraskevopoulou in front of wooden barrels and concrete tanks at Gaia Winery.

WINE TASTING

- **NYCHTERI 2020**
Fermentation and ageing take place in different kinds and sizes of barrels. The wood is present, with notes of vanilla, all totally harmonized with the aromas of Assyrtiko. As always, the classic sharp acidity of Assyrtiko is apparent, but in this case, it is allied with a roundness, a greasiness and a volume that make this wine amazingly enjoyable.
- **GAIA WILD FERMENT 2021**
100% Assyrtiko from grapes that come exclusively from the vineyard in Pyrgos. After undergoing the 12-hour skin contact process at around 10°C, the grape must is placed in small 1,000-liter steel tanks and in new 225-liter French and American oak barrels and acacia barrels. The temperature is then allowed to rise naturally, without any further intervention. The wild yeast strains that prevail are the ones which eventually determine the wine's character. ■



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ARTEMIS KARAMOLEGOS WINERY

Artemis Karamolegos belongs to the group of winemakers who wish to showcase the unique Santorini terroir by making single-vineyard wines, a trend first established by late Haridimos Hatzidakis in 2008, followed by Paris Sigalas in 2009.

This winemaker, however, has taken it a step further, focusing not only on single vineyards but on single vines, such as those in Papas in Megalochori, or others in Kamari, Exo Gonia (where the winery is located), Messaria, Pyrgos and Akrotiri.

Karamolegos' main aim is to explore all that Assyrtiko can offer, coming up with different expressions of the variety, depending on the different vineyards of Louros, Papas, or Ftelos. The parcels from each vineyard are vinified separately, mostly in stainless steel tanks and clay vats, and spend at least a year ageing, resulting in the production of wines characterized by sophistication and complexity.

"We use small tanks ranging from 500 liters to two tons to vinify individual parcels and track the differences in each vineyard," Karamolegos says. He explains that these labels come out only in the best years and never exceed 2,000 bottles. The winery also produces one more single-vineyard label, Mistirio 14, an orange Assyrtiko from vines over 100 years old located in Pyrgos. His best-known label, however, is Piritis, made from three extraordinary three vine parcels of Assyrtiko that might be more than 120 years old: two in Pyrgos, and one in Megalochori.

The winery, open to visitors, offers wine tours and wine tastings; guests can also enjoy a meal in their picturesque restaurant, Aroma Avlis, choosing from a menu based on local products. The winery also offers cooking classes.

WINE TASTING

- **PYRITIS 2021**
Classic white vinification under controlled temperatures using only neutral yeasts in order to maintain the character of the varietal. Full of minerality and flint typical of Santorini Assyrtiko, the palate shows considerable depth and genuine concentration, rich and dense with finesse and well-balanced acidity.
- **MYSTIRIO 14**
A single-vineyard Assyrtiko from Pyrgos, this is a wine produced without any additions, stabilization or filtration during the fermentation and maturation process, apart from a very small amount of sulfites added before bottling. A very intense nose, revealing another aspect of Santorini's character.

HATZIDAKIS WINERY

After the passing of Haridimos Hatzidakis in 2016, his family, including his widow Konstantina and their three children, Stella, Ariadni and Antonis, took over this unique winery, which is a part of Santorini's wine legacy and embodies a centuries-old winemaking tradition.

The winery, situated in Kallisti near Pyrgos, is a traditional canava, or wine facility; it's carved into the soft but solid volcanic rock of the island. It consists of a cellar 12 meters long where the barrels are kept and the wine tastings take place, protected from the high summer temperatures. The rest of the winery, built in 2014 as an addition to the old canava, houses the main production area. The winery produces approximately 130,000 bottles, of which about 50% are exported to markets around the world.

The late Haridimos Hatzidakis, considered one of Santorini's most talented oenologists, was the first to vinify single-vineyard wines, sourcing his grapes from the unique Louros vineyard. He also worked together with Paris Sigalas to make the first red wines from the rare variety Mavrotragano in 1997. Today, his family is continuing his legacy and has added some new labels to the portfolio: Rabelia, a single-vineyard Assyrtiko, and Liasimo, a sweet dessert wine made from the variety Mandilari and using the Solera method to draw from different vintages. The second of these has not yet been put on the market.

WINE TASTING

- **AIDANI 2022**
100% Aidani. The grapes are sourced from the first vineyard planted by Haridimos Hatzidakis in Pyrgos. Fermented in stainless steel tanks.
- **FAMIGLIA 2023**
100% Assyrtiko from Megalochori, Pyrgos and Monolithos vineyard, this label, the one that replaced Santorini Hatzidaki, is a typical stainless steel Assyrtiko.
- **SKYTALI 2022**
100% Assyrtiko. Stainless steel fermentation, aged for 12 months on the lees, this is a more complex and well-rounded wine.
- **RABELIA 2022**
100% Assyrtiko. A single-vineyard wine, 70% vinified in stainless steel on the lees and 30% in oak barrel.



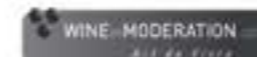
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Santorini

- **NYKTERI 2022**
100% Assyrtiko, fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged in second and third-use oak barrels. This is a classic Santorini Nychteri.
- **ROSETTE 2022**
A rosé wine from the Mandilaria variety, it has aromas of cherries and strawberries.
- **MAVROTRAGANO 2021**
100% Mavrotragano, this wine undergoes stainless steel fermentation and barrel ageing for 18 months. Aromas of red fruit, bitter chocolate and tobacco, along with a strong minerality, are joined by pronounced tannins, and high acidity on the palate, and a long aftertaste.
- **NAMA**
100% Mandilari. This is a sweet dessert wine, a blend of different vintages and different vineyards which is aged in oak barrels for 14 years.
- **VINSANTO 2012**
80% Assyrtiko, 20% Aidani, this wine is made from sun-dried grapes and aged in the barrel for 14 years.



The impressive canava where the tastings take place at Hatzidakis Winery.



The tasting area in the courtyard of Gavalas Winery.

GAVALAS WINERY

This is a small family-owned winery, one of the oldest of Santorini, located in the village of Megalochori.

Vagelis Gavalas represents the fifth generation of winemakers in his family and, together with his father Giorgos, is continuing the family tradition of winemaking. In the mid '90s, Giorgos Gavalas decided to take the winery onto a more modern path, acquiring new equipment, which replaced traditional winemaking methods. The first vinification in the new winery took place in 1998; the products were a Santorini Assyrtiko in the now-characteristic blue bottle, and a traditional Vinsanto which ferments and ages for six years in 100-year-old barrels made from oak and imported from Russia when wine trade to that country was flourishing.

The charming courtyard – where the wine tastings take place – is next to the old “patitiri”, where the stomping of the grapes used to take place. The winery’s annual production is normally around 100,000 bottles per year, but last year it fell to 60,000 bottles because of the poor harvest caused by extreme weather conditions. The grapes are mainly sourced from vineyards around Megalochori, although some do come from Akrotiri in the southern part of the island. The winery is open to visitors daily from April to October.

WINE TASTING

- **AIDANI 2023**
It's 100% Aidani, vinified in stainless steel tanks, where it spends 3-4 months on the lees. The grapes come from the area of Akrotiri. Aromas of green apple on the nose characterize this light wine that can be served as an aperitif or paired with fresh salad.

- **ASSYRTIKO 2022 NATURAL FERMENT**
The grapes come from the Megalochori vineyards, and only natural yeasts are used. Fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks, then a part of the wine spends some time in oak barrels before being returned to the blend.

- **NYKTERI 2022Q**
A classic Nychteri, vinified in large oak barrels.

- **ENALIA 2022**
100% Assyrtiko. This is the latest addition to the winery’s portfolio. Whole-bunch vinification takes place in stainless steel tanks and clay vats where it spends at least two years on the lees. The grapes come from old vineyards in Megalochori and Pyrgos. It is a more complex version of the simple Assyrtiko label.

- **MAVROTRAGANO 2022**
This is a fresh red wine made from 100% Mavrotragano grapes. It is vinified in stainless steel vats and aged for 7-9 months in small second-use or third-use barrels. With aromas of fresh red fruit, this wine can be drunk slightly chilled in the summer.

- **VINSANTO 2017**
One of the winery’s signature wines, this product makes it to market once every six years. It’s made in the traditional way, from sun-dried grapes. The oldest vintage is from 1967, which was bottled for the first time in 2012. It boasts aromas of raisins, dried fruit and dark chocolate.

DELICATE SENSES



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OENO Π

Oenop Π was founded by Paris Sigalas in an old canava belonging to his family, which is also his home. It's located right on the coast in Baxedes, near the area of the active underwater Kolumbo Volcano.

The winery was created for the production of high-quality wines and puts out a limited number of bottles, no more than 20,000 annually. Finesse and elegance are what characterize these wines, epitomizing the desire of Paris Sigalas to bring out the sophisticated side of Santorini. "Three main elements contribute to his success in attaining this goal," explains oenologist Eva Athanasopoulou, who has been working with Sigalas since 2020. "First, there's the emphasis on single vineyards, located in Fira, Akrotiri and Megalochori, a continuation of the Seven Villages project he worked on while still the owner of Domaine Sigalas. The second factor is vinification in clay amphorae that hold either 1600 liters or 750 liters. The last element is the mild pressing of the grapes, which takes place in the vertical press that Sigalas brought over from Champagne some years ago."

Athanasopoulou guided us through a vertical wine tasting of three different years of one of the winery's three main labels, Tria Ampelia, an Assyrtiko made with grapes from the three vineyards mentioned above. We had the opportunity to observe the evolution of this excellent wine. All the wines produced by Oeno Π are unfiltered and have a high-alcohol content, over 14% per volume. It's characteristic of the Assyrtiko grape which most Santorini winemakers wish to maintain, despite the international trend for more low-alcohol wines. The winery is open to visitors, who can sample the winery's achievements right at the water's edge.

WINE TASTING

- TRIA AMPELIA 2022, 2021, 2020**
This is 100% Assyrtiko, from single-vineyard grapes from Fira, Megalochori and Akrotiri. It is vinified in clay vats, where it spends at least 16 months on its lees. The common characteristic of all three vintages is elegance and finesse.
- TRIA AMPELIA PITHARI 11 2020**
This is another version of Assyrtiko, from a single vineyard in Fira, fermented with wild yeasts in an amphora where it spends 16 months on the lees. It has some residual sugar and is more floral.
- AKOLUMBOS 2021**
This wine is Paris Sigalas' version of Nychteri. It is not a typical Nychteri, since it is not vinified in a barrel; amphorae are used instead. It is made from overripe grapes and the wine ages on the lees for two years. A unique wine, it is perhaps the ultimate expression of the variety, a rich and more intense Santorini Assyrtiko, with full body, a lasting palate and a high alcohol content.
- MAVROTRAGANO 2021**
An elegant red wine from the Mavrotragano grape, it is not yet on the market but is served at the wine-tastings in the winery. It's worth trying, as it is a different expression of the traditional Mavrotragano produced on the island.

...AND NOT TO BE MISSED

BOUTARI WINERY SANTORINI

Boutari Winery has a rich legacy of winemaking expertise. Visit its vineyards, where indigenous grape varieties flourish. Witness the art of vinification in their historic cellars and try some exceptional wines that are the result of the harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation.

boutariwinerysantorini.gr

VENETSANOS WINERY

Venetsanos Winery is a testament to timeless craftsmanship. With sweeping views over the caldera (the vast underwater crater at the edge of the island) and exceptional wines, carefully crafted from hand-picked grapes, this winery is the perfect oenological destination. Explore their state-of-the-art facilities and discover the artistry behind each bottle.

venetsanoswinery.com

CANAVA ROUSSOS WINERY

Canava Roussos Winery has a history that dates back to 1836. The winery is situated in an old traditional canava, a stone structure commonly used on the island for wine production and storage, where winemaking traditions have been passed down through the generations.

canavaroussos.gr

CANAVA CHRISSOU-TSELEPOS WINERY

The wines at Canava Chrissou-Tselepos Winery reflect the winery's commitment to quality and capture the unique character of the Santorini terroir. Come to check out their charming setup and stay to find out how traditional techniques can complement modern innovation in order to produce exceptional wines that delight the senses.

tselepos.gr/canava-chrissou-tselepos

ART SPACE WINERY

Art Space Santorini Winery is a welcoming place that honors tradition and yet boasts all the contemporary technology to ensure that the winery's motto, "quality over quantity", remains a true reflection of its operation.

artspace-santorini.com



EXOTIQUE


WINE ART ESTATE
 ΚΤΗΜΑ ΤΕΧΝΗ ΟΙΝΟΥ

WineArtEstate.com

MIKRA THIRA

Just a short boat ride from the crowded island of Santorini lies an islet called Thirasia. Not a popular tourist destination – at least not yet – it is best known among locals for its rugged landscapes, its stunning views of Santorini, and its laid-back atmosphere.



The reception area at Mikra Thira Winery, where introductions take place before the tour of the vineyards and the wine tasting.



Scenes from the grape harvest in the unique terroir of Thirasia.

It was on this small island, where grapes had been cultivated for centuries, that a few Greek winemakers saw an opportunity to plant new vineyards, not on bustling Santorini, where vines are becoming scarcer and scarcer as land prices skyrocket, but still close by.

It's early morning in the picturesque port of Ammoudi when we board the small boat that will take us across the caldera. On the dock, full of sailboat crews preparing to take visitors around the island, we're greeted by a young woman who introduces herself as Ioanna Vamvakouri. She's one of the founders of Mikra Thira, the winery we're about to visit on Thirasia; the others are the renowned Greek winemakers Vangelis Gerovassiliou and Vasilis Tsaktsarlis.

After a seven-minute ride, plenty of time to meet all the locals on the small boat, we find ourselves coming ashore on this tiny island. Everything here reminds us of how the Cycladic islands used to be before tourism took over. We climb into Vamvakouri's pick-up truck and she starts to tell us her story: how she decided to come to Thirasia, meeting with Gerovassiliou, their partnership, and the birth of the winery and the vineyard on a barren stretch of land where shortly before there had literally been nothing but stones.

Having worked as an oenologist for many years at various Santorini wineries, Vamvakouri knew of the grapes that used to be sourced from the island of Thirasia and that were added to various blends. Shortly after completing a collaboration with Venetsanos Winery, she decided it was time for her to build something of her own, and decided that Thirasia was the place. By 2017, she had acquired seven terraced land parcels.

Determined to go it alone, Vamvakouri planned to build only the most modest of facilities: a small hut with one wine press and one tank. Those plans changed when Gerovassiliou, a renowned figure in the winemaking world, called her early one morning. He had heard of her departure from Venetsanos and was interested in working together to create a new winery. Though she was initially reluctant to partner with other winemakers, she liked Gerovassiliou's straightforward and honest approach. Vamvakouri decided to visit Thirasia, where she had already secured 17 hectares of land, together with Gerovassiliou and Tsaktsarlis. After two hours of mostly silent contemplation, her new partners realized the potential of the unexploited land, and their joint vision for a sustainable, organic island winery began to take shape.

The journey was challenging. The land of the winery and vineyard was divided among 27 heirs, and it took nearly two years to finalize the purchase. She had to appear every single day for months at the water company's local office, asking them to connect her land to the water network so that she could water her newly planted vineyard, and then she had to go through the same ordeal to get hooked up to the electric power grid.



The soul of Mikra Thira Winery, Ioanna Vamvakouri, between Vangelis Gerovassiliou and Vasilis Tsaktsarlis.

Despite the odds, Vamvakouri and her team built the winery in just nine months, as she juggled the project with raising her young children. They had to rent a ship out of Piraeus to transport the concrete, and used every concrete mixer available on Santorini to lay the foundation in a single night. The construction of the winery was captured in a moving video by a cinematographer friend, Nikos Korakakis, highlighting the emotional and physical effort that went into the endeavor.

The logo for the winery, inspired by an ancient script found at Akrotiri, symbolizes the collaboration of the three partners. Anna Samara designed the winery and its interior, incorporating ceramic elements from friends and color-coordinated plates. The wine-tasting room, still under development, promises to be a beautiful space for visitors.

The first harvest took place in 2022, marking a significant milestone in Vamvakouri's journey. This year, the winery will produce only Assyrtiko wines, from vines trained into the traditional kouloura patterns. At the beginning, the winemaker was apprehensive, fearing failure despite her 17 years of experience as an oenologist. Nonetheless, through perseverance, passion, and the support of her partners, she transformed a neglected piece of land into a flourishing vineyard, modeling the values of resilience and vision for the world of winemaking.

Today, as we walk through the vineyards, all of which are west-facing, Vamvakouri explains how different the Assyrtiko that comes from Thirasia tastes, due to different conditions on the island and the fact that the vineyard had been neglected for so long. "It's much less aromatic than the one produced in Santorini; it needs more time to open up, but it is a wine that will age longer."

The production area in the winery is full of state-of-the-art equipment which allows close monitoring of each of the stainless steel tanks where the must ferments. Currently, the annual production is 30,000 bottles, but there's capacity for up to 100,000 bottles. That's a figure which the partners hope to reach in the not-so-distant future, depending, of course, on the weather conditions. The winery produces three main labels: Terrasea, the Assyrtiko made from local grapes; Nychteri, the traditional Santorini Assyrtiko, also made from local grapes; and Santorini, a typical Santorini Assyrtiko from grapes sourced on Santorini but vinified on Thirasia.

WINE TASTING

- **SANTORINI 2022**
Assyrtiko 100%, from privately owned vineyards on Santorini. On the nose, it has aromas of lemon, lemon, white-skinned peach, pear and minerality. On the palate, the combination of acidity and minerality gives an intensity to the wine, a typical Santorini Assyrtiko. Still young, it has at least 5-6 years' potential for ageing.
- **TERASSEA 2020**
Assyrtiko 100%, coming from grapes grown on Thirasia. Eighty percent is fermented in stainless steel tanks and 20% in oak barrels. An intense wine, which is still very young, it boasts aromas of pear, citrus and tropical fruits and a herbal, slightly salty, palate with a long mineral aftertaste.
- **NIKTERI 2020**
The winery's approach to this traditional Santorini wine uses late-harvest grapes from three varieties: Assyrtiko, Aidani and Athiri. They are co-fermented and kept in French oak barrels for at least 3 months. The mineral backbone and concentration of Assyrtiko balances perfectly with the softness of Athiri and the floral aromatic complexity of Aidani. This Nychteri has a long finish and an ability to age for at least 10 years. ■

SANTORINI BEST BUYS

Best buys from the Santorini vineyard.



[1] CUVÉE GERONTAMPELO 2020
Estate Argyros, Assyrtiko, €52.10

Gerontabelo means “old vine” in the local dialect of Santorini. With this special bottling, Estate Argyros pays tribute to the unique charms of its oldest vineyards at Megalochori, Pyrgos and Episkopi. This wine is terroir at its extremes. Enjoy it now but save a bottle or two in your cellar for a few years and discover more of its complexity, strength, and elegance.

[2] WILD FERMENT 2022
Gaia Wines, Assyrtiko, €34.70

As the “Wild Ferment” on the label suggests, this Assyrtiko is vinified with just the wild yeasts of the grape. Gaia Wines manages to capture the authenticity and formality of the Santorini vineyard at its best. This is, no doubt, one of the most typical and value-for-money wines of the region. The grape comes from old vines that soak up and render back all the magic of the island’s volcanic terroir.

[3] GRAMINA CUVÉE DU VIGNERON 2022
Vassaltis Vineyards, Assyrtiko, €90,00

Gramina comes from the Latin word for “field”, and the winery knows very well that they have a very special one at the vineyard in the village of Vourvoulos. Fermented in stainless steel tanks, matured on its lees for 12 months, and rested for 7 more months in the bottle, this wine is a full-bodied white with intense mineral and flinty character, great complexity, and seductive aromas of citrus fruits, white flowers and stone fruits.

[4] GRACE 2023
Anhydrous, Aidani, Mandilaria, €17.60

This is a wonderful rosé, full of grace, and certainly one of the best Greek wines in this color category. Apostolos Mountrichas’ hard work in Santorini has borne much fruit, including this incredibly elegant wine. Mavrotragano blends with Aidani and, as a result, cherry, blackberry, and floral and herbal notes spring from the glass and dominate our senses lusciously.

[5] SANTORINI NYKTERI 2022
Santo Wines, Aidani, Athiri, Assyrtiko, €27.30

If you’re a fan of exuberant style in wine, you’ll definitely appreciate this wine. Nykteri (from the Greek word “νύχτα”, meaning “night”) is the perfectly austere expression of Santorini’s terroir. Rich and complex in aromas, with high acidity, luscious sip, mineral notes, long duration and even longer aftertaste, it’s the ultimate must-try from Santorini.

[6] AIDANI 2022
Hatzidakis Winery, Aidani, €28.50

Santorini isn’t just about Assyrtiko, and this Aidani varietal proudly proves that. A sophisticated white wine which flirts with an oxidative style, this was created with passion by the late Haridimos Hatzidakis. Its captivating golden-yellow color suggests a palate with strong herbal and fruity aromatic elements and complexity.

[7] KALLISTI RESERVE 2020
Boutari, Assyrtiko, €37.20

The first-ever barrel-aged Santorini wine, this undisputedly pioneering label is the perfect combination of the explosive acidity of Assyrtiko and the aromatic complexity that the barrel gives. This classic – some might say “historic” – wine is fermented in an oak barrel, giving the distinctively metallic and lemony aromas of the grape a more roasted and smokier aromatic dimension.

[8] SANTORINI NATURAL FERMENT 2022
Gavalas Winery, Assyrtiko, €40.20

Gavalas Winery has created a PDO Santorini wine using exclusively native yeasts. This process imparts an impressive complexity to the wine, reflecting the characteristics of the terroir. The result is a crisp white with amazing minerality and a hint of saltiness. Alongside medium-intensity notes of fruit, there’s a citrus palate that emphasizes the bone-dry acidity and refreshes with each creamy-textured, full-bodied sip.

[9] LOUROI PLATIA 2021
Artemis Karamolegos Winery, Assyrtiko, €60.80

The winery of Artemis Karamolegos pays homage to Assyrtiko and to the climate and terroir of Santorini. This wine is crafted from grapes sourced from a vineyard in Pyrgos that’s called Louroi Platia and features vines that are more than 150 years old. A remarkable Santorini wine, it matures for almost a year on its lees, acquiring an extremely complex aromatic profile and earning great accolades from the wine world.

[10] TRIA AMPELIA 2021
Oeno P, Assyrtiko, €70.70

Sourced from three vineyards in Akrotiri, Megalochori and Fira that average out in age to over sixty years, this wine has been vinified and matured on the lees for more than 15 months in large clay vats, unveiling a character that emphasizes lemony fruit and minerality, with hints of iodine. An Assyrtiko of unimaginable purity and complexity, it surprises with its oiliness and minerality.

UP-AND-COMING GRAPE VARIETIES

What grows best in a land of plenty? Assyrtiko could be the obvious answer, a variety considered Greece's great gift to the world. Assyrtiko is the base material for many of the country's greatest wines, including wines from the volcanic terroir of Santorini, ones that definitely stands at the pinnacle of the Greek wine industry.

It's a grape that combines dense texture and powerful character with an alluring saltiness ("guided by rocks", I usually write in my notes...) and a razor-sharp acidity that makes its wines stand out among the greatest varieties of the world. It's the one grape that launched the worldwide discussion about Greek wine, the one that managed to cross borders with its unique and inherent qualities, a true blessing in a warming climate.

Yet Greece is a true cornucopia of genetic material, an inexhaustible collection of historically significant and, in certain cases, increasingly rare grape varieties. You just need a 20-minute drive from downtown Athens to reach a hardy patch of head-trained vines of Savatiano to verify this fact. Greece grows a significant number of exciting varieties in all its corners. As tempting as it is to dismiss these grapes in front of the "king" (Assyrtiko), they are important here, too, having been grown in their places of origin for centuries.

No one can refer to the revolution that is quickly making Greece one of the world's most fascinating wine countries without taking into consideration all these grape varieties that stand at the heart of this change. They comprise fundamental materials for a talented generation of pioneering producers who craft fascinating wines – tributes to the great value of the diverse Greek terroirs, the country's long-standing viticultural traditions and the uniqueness of the Greek vineyard.

Next time you head to the Prowein, Vinitaly, or Vinexpo exhibitions, or simply to your local wine market (the one that offers a lovely selection of Greek wines), take a minute before you grab your favorite bottle of Assyrtiko to explore the other choices available. To say that Greek wine is only about Assyrtiko is like eating the same food every day in a restaurant that offers a variety of excellent dishes. And if you don't have a clue as to where to start, take a look at the following introduction to just a few of Greece's up-and-coming, tongue-twisting grape varieties with some winemaker's names worth remembering as well. Keep in mind that there are many more grape varieties and producers to explore. You just need to be a bit more adventurous; you won't regret it!

MALAGOUSIA

This one's definitely the "new kid on the block" in terms of exciting varieties. Almost extinct 30 or so years ago, Malagousia today is the personification of the way that Greek producers are rediscovering their traditions. It is hugely successful, and appeals thanks to its fragrant aromatic profile, reminiscent of stone fruits and white flowers. It's an incredibly easy-drinking wine. You can also find a herbal note, especially from cooler or earlier-harvested grapes, that gives a lovely uplift to the grape's moderate acidity.

If you have a thing for aromatic grapes such as Sauvignon Blanc or Albarino, this is your thing from Greece to try. For an irresistibly classic fragrant example, look to Ktima Gerovassiliou, which pioneered the grape's revival; an equally delicious, more restrained mineral version is made by Domaine Zafeirakis in Tyrnavos, Central Greece.

RODITIS

An "ode" to Greece's mountainous territory, Roditis is another prolific Greek variety that finds its archetypal expression in the mountainous parts of Achaia in the Peloponnese. The slopes surrounding the region of Aigialeia are the perfect spot for cultivating this pink-skinned grape if you're interested in crafting fine, mineral and energetic wines, full of bright and vibrant lemony fruit expressions and with laser-sharp high-acidity levels. Fresh styles are back in fashion and, at its best, Roditis can provide exactly that. Pair the grape with classic bush vines, extremely poor rocky soil, and high elevations, and you'll taste one of Greece's most interesting and contemporary styles of wine.

A few years in the bottle will develop a lovely honeyed mineral character and extra layers of complexity. Tetramythos Winery is a pioneer of this grape, making excellent white and orange Roditis with minimal intervention from grapes sourced from high-elevation vineyards. Sant' Or is a personal favorite, especially after a couple of years in the bottle; it has a complex mineral-driven character. The classic Asprolihi Roditis from Rouvalis Winery is the absolute value-for-money expression of the grape, a real steal considering its quality.

THEOPETRA ESTATE A SYMPHONY OF TERROIR AND TRADITION IN METEORA, GREECE

SAVATIANO

All it took was a young generation of winemakers, mainly from the region of Attica, this variety's traditional home, to embrace the local fondness for Savatiano and give it the attention that it required. This is a prolific grape variety that once found its place as an essential ingredient in Greece's most traditional wine, retsina. It still does service there, but Savatiano can be an absolute bliss when in the right hands, treated with great care and planted in the limestone soils of Attica, where old gnarled head-pruned vines predominate. Under such conditions, it restricts its yields, concentrates its flavors and shines in all its aspects. The wines are relative fruity, far less obtrusive than more aromatic grapes such as Malagousia, and are built on texture rather than on acidity or freshness.

With just a few years of ageing, they develop a lovely honeyed, toasted character. I cannot think of a grape that better represents the transition to the new era of Greek wine. A generation of producers such as those at the wineries of Papagiannakos, Mylonas, Anastasia Fragou, and Aoton are redefining the conversation around this grape, improving upon the past and repairing the wrongs of previous generations, without losing respect for tradition. It is, in short, as simple as that.

VIDIANO

Crete, the southernmost part of Greece, has a compelling story of its own; furthermore, being such a large island (the fifth largest in the Mediterranean), it can offer a variety of very interesting terroirs and styles of wine. It boasts a multitude of autochthonous white and red grape varieties, but Vidiano, a white variety, is its undisputable "diva", a grape that has earned its place as the island's leader. It has, in the relatively recent past, also been planted in other parts of Greece.

It is genuinely expressive, floral, and boasts a ripe fruit character, with lovely density and a typically creamy texture often enhanced by contact with oak barrels. Lyrarakis Winery and Douloufakis Winery are standard-bearers, both offering exciting expressions of the grape. At the winery that bears her name, Iliana Malihin and her promising project of seeking out old ungrafted organic vineyards in the grape's homeland of Rethymnon may just take this grape to a whole different level, adding a further chapter to the great story of this wonderful variety.

ROBOLA

Hailing from the extremely rocky soil of the slopes of Mt Aenos in Kefalonia, on the far side of western Greece, this is a grape variety rarely seen outside its homeland. The wines are minerally driven, moderately aromatic and fresh in their youth, like "baby Assyrtikos", developing a distinct petrol-like minerality and complexity after a few years of ageing. Very capricious, both in the vineyard and the winery, this is a grape capable of offering different styles.

From the slightly riper fruit and the broader texture of Vino di Sasso Robola from Sclavos Winery (pioneers of the natural movement in Greece) to the more mineral, energetic and high-acid version from the Gentilini Winery and Vineyards, Robola is utterly delicious and terroir-sensitive. If you're a fan of Chablis or Sancerre, you will love these wines. The local co-op of the region is another excellent producer, alongside with Petrakopoulos Wines and Sarris Winery; the latter's Panochori label, from extremely old vineyards growing on dizzyingly steep slopes is a phenomenal expression of the grape.

MOSCHOFILERO

Anyone could be forgiven for being overwhelmed by the numerous indigenous varieties found in Greece. The hard-to-pronounce pink-skinned Moschofilero, however, should be on your radar; it's an important grape from Mantinia in the Peloponnese.

The grape's beauty derives from its fragrant, fruity and floral aromatic character, reminiscent of rose petals, and from its cool-climate textured palate, bursting with elegance, freshness and lightness. The development in styles is fueling the market with some of the most exciting wines that Greece has to offer.

From the still and sparkling classic expressions of classic producers such as Tselepos, Spiropoulos and Semeli to the new wave of innovative styles (pet nats, long-macerations, low-intervention wines, and rosés), the range adds to the interest that this grape is generating. The wineries of Troupis, Bosinakis, and Moropoulos, along with the Panagopoulos Estate, are all relative newcomers that are worth seeking out.

MAVRODAPHNE

Known for its exquisite sweet fortified wines, the red Mavrodaphne grape is now being explored from a different angle, being increasingly vinified for the production of dry reds. Dense aromas of prunes, blackcurrants and angelica flowers, and an equally dense palate, with a characteristic finish that's slightly bitter, are among its excellent attributes. The winds of change and the new thirst for dry wines means that this grape is increasingly vinified to dry, with lots of experimentation from the producers. Kefalonia and the western Peloponnese are natural homes for this fantastic grape, which produces wines with balance, unique perfumes and a refined structure.

Strangely enough, because of a deeply conservative streak in Greek bureaucracy, the name of the grape variety cannot appear on the labels of dry wine styles. Look instead for such innovative names on the shelves as Sclavos Monambeles, densely dark-fruited from century-old vines, or the single vineyard Rouvalis Tsigello Dafnes, a perfect example of the grape's combined power and elegance. Parparoussis Winery, Petrakopoulos Wines, Haritatos Vineyard and, of course, Achaia Clauss are just a few more of the many names that excel when it comes to this grape.

LIATIKO

As the largest of the Greek islands, Crete is home to several of the country's indigenous varieties. I've already spoken of Vidiano, the great Cretan white variety; Liatiko is the leading red grape of the island, with many ungrafted old vines still present in the vineyard. The best examples take full advantage of the hot and dry climate of Crete. The pale colour, with a dry sensation on the palate, and the slightly rustic, yet elegant, tannins are characteristic, as is a unique flavor profile reminiscent of dried and red fruits and developing layers of herbal complexity and earthiness.

Smelling these wines transports you immediately to their place of origin; each glass is a burst of aromas with an alluring texture of great harmony. Domaine Economou, in the far eastern corner of the island, sets the benchmark for this variety; their "Antigone" is a phenomenal 20-year-old wine of unrivalled subtlety, finesse and depth that reminds one of a grand cru from Burgundy. Winemakers Douloufakis and Diamantakis are also doing outstanding work with this fantastic grape.

LIMNIONA

Definitely a rising star of the Greek vineyard, Limniona delivers wines of lovely purity, with crunchy red-fruit aromas, such as cranberry and cherry, alongside some peppery and floral notes. Especially with the younger wines, it's like walking in a garden full of roses.

The palate is very elegant, with fine tannins and a great drinkability. Stylistically, this grape is the definition of elegance, not only with its wonderful nose and ethereal character but also with its silky texture. Domaine Zafeirakis wrote this grape's comeback story, rescuing the variety from extinction. Oenops Wines, Dougos Winery and Domaine Karanika are other names to keep in mind. ■

Nestled among the emblematic landscape of Meteora, a UNESCO World Heritage site, Theopetra Estate stands as one of the most outstanding cases within the modern Greek wine world. Founded by Kostas Tsillilis and his family in 1996, Theopetra Estate is a testament to the harmonious blend of long historical tradition, modern winemaking, sustainable values, and human inspiration.

HERE, THE VISION IS CLEAR: to revive rare Greek grape varieties—like the Thessalian "star" grape Limniona—and highlight the stunning terroir of the Meteora region.

A HISTORICAL HAVEN FOR WINE

At the foot of the mystical Meteora Rocks and around the prehistoric Cave of Theopetra, grape seeds dating back to the Paleolithic era were discovered, proving the ancient relationship between this land and the vine. During the Byzantine era, monks from the sacred Rocks of Meteora continued this legacy, cultivating vines and perfecting winemaking with reverence akin to their worship.

THE UNIQUE TERROIR OF METEORA

Today, the vineyards of Theopetra Estate span 25 hectares, situated in the east of Meteora, on hilly slopes around the prehistoric cAvenue. The region's continental climate, with its rainy cold winters and hot, dry summers, is coupled with a high diurnal temperature range during spring and summer. This allows for the development of intense and complex flavors in the grapes while the slow maturation process helps retain high levels of acidity.

This unique terroir is characterized by its slate-dominated soil, providing excellent drainage. Areas rich in limestone, composed of marine fossils, are ideal for growing white grape varieties.

The sandy-clay compositions support red grape varieties, resulting in wines with complex aromas, rich tannins, and balanced acidity.

CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE

The vineyards are organically cultivated to yield low amounts of high-quality grapes, leading to wines characterized by intense flavors, balanced acidity, and high concentration. All Theopetra Estate wines bear the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Meteora, a recognition that guarantees high-quality wines of character, representative of the Meteora terroir.

Theopetra Estate is also proud to have been entrusted with one of the most iconic historical vineyards of the region—the vineyard of the Monastery of Megalo Meteoro, the largest and oldest of the Meteora monasteries. This honor allows Theopetra to preserve and develop this historic vineyard, producing wines of exceptional quality.

Theopetra Estate has gained a stellar reputation among Greek wineries, garnering numerous international awards. A notable achievement was the prestigious "Rosé Best of the Best" award, won by the Theopetra Estate's

"Syrah-Limniona Rosé" at the internationally acclaimed Concours Mondial.

In May 2024, Theopetra Estate celebrated another top-of-the-top distinction: Its "Xinomavro Rosé Meteora 2022" was awarded the Orange and Rosé Trophy (one of the top four distinctions) at the Wine Merchant Top 100 competition. The competition is annually held in the UK and is the only one judged by independent retailers, highlighting the exceptional quality and appeal of Theopetra's wines.

EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH ANCIENT ROOTS

Theopetra Estate continues to honor its roots while embracing modern viticulture and winemaking techniques.

Dedicated to producing wines that bring an authentic expression of its land's unique beauty to each glass, Theopetra Estate caters to modern wine lovers around the world.

Furthermore, the estate is committed to promoting wine tourism in the breathtaking area of Meteora through well-structured wine tours available year-round. These tours invite wine lovers from all over the globe to experience the beauty and heritage of Meteora, making Theopetra Estate a destination for both exceptional wines and unforgettable experiences.



ΚΤΗΜΑ ΘΕΟΠΕΤΡΑ
THEOPETRA ESTATE
METEORA PGI

To discover more about Theopetra Estate, its wines, activities and the Meteora wine region follow Theopetra Estate on Facebook and Instagram.

CYCLADES

The Cycladic islands have always been synonymous with the Greek summer, offering their visitors deep blue waters, wonderful beaches, plenty of sun, great hospitality, and excellent food. Unfortunately, as in many regions of Greece, visitors did not always have a great experience when it came to wine. In the past, cheap wine would fill the glasses at waterfront tavernas, leaving customers with a bad taste in their mouths. However, it's important to note that the Cycladic islands do produce good wine and that, in fact, they are home to some of the most important Greek varieties. Most of the wineries on these islands are open to visitors, offering their guests an opportunity to try some really excellent wines while enjoying stunning views of the Aegean.



SIKINOS

Sikinos is one of the smaller Cycladic islands, known for its minimal tourism development and unspoiled beauty. It's the perfect choice if you're seeking peace and quiet away from the crowds. Despite its small size, Sikinos boasts a notable wine region renowned for its unique wine craftsmanship. The island's steeply terraced vineyards, carved into the rugged hillsides, produce exquisite wines. From the indigenous Aidani and Assyrtiko grapes to the delightful Mavrotragano red variety, Sikinos wines captivate with their distinct flavors and aromas. With a rich winemaking tradition rooted in ancient times, Sikinos offers a wine experience that reflects both its stunning landscapes and the passion that its producers have for winemaking.

MANALIS WINERY

Manalis Winery will win visitors over with its charming wines. Surrounded by picturesque landscapes, this family-owned winery produces wine ranging from refreshing whites to robust reds; each bottle showcases the winery's dedication to traditional winemaking methods. Take in the serene atmosphere here, visit the family restaurant, and treat yourself to a tasting experience that will leave a lasting impression.

SIKINOS

[T] +30 693 227 2854, [E] info@manaliswinery.gr
manaliswinery.gr

SYROS

Syros is one of the first beauties you encounter when touring the Cycladic islands on ships departing from Piraeus. Ermoupoli, the stunningly picturesque port and main town, is the capital city of the entire island group as well. The rich cultural history here is notable, and there's always a full calendar of notable events. The 19th-century neoclassical architecture distinguishes Syros from the other islands of the Cyclades. With its favorable Mediterranean climate, abundant sunshine, and gentle sea breezes, Syros boasts an ideal terroir for grape cultivation. Harvesting their grapes from terraced vineyards – planted with a delightful range of varieties – that dot its landscapes, skilled winemakers craft exceptional products that capture the essence of the island.

CHATZAKIS WINERY

With experience and expertise already on its side, along with a vision for the future, Chatzakis Winery started in 2011, collaborating with the island's vine growers. With its dedication to crafting exceptional wines that reflect the island's unique terroir, the winery has become a must-visit destination.

SAN MICHALIS, SYROS

[T] +30 694 630 2920, [E] nikoschatzakis@yahoo.gr

OUSYRA WINERY

Ousyra Winery is a small, family-run winery on the Greek island of Syros, creating terroir-driven wines from rare indigenous Cycladic varieties. The winery's approach is to focus on organically farmed, ungrafted vineyards.

SYROS

[T] +30 697 747 3967, [E] contact@ousyrawinery.com
ousyrawinery.com

PARA KOPOIS WINERY

Para Kopoio Winery embraces the ethos of small-scale, artisanal production, striving for quality rather than quantity. The winery's name, "Para Kopoio," translates to "extra work" in Greek, reflecting the owners' commitment to meticulous care and attention throughout the winemaking process.

PARAKOPI, SYROS

[T] +30 697 498 9560, [E] para_kopois_winery@yahoo.com

PAROS

Situated at the center of the Cyclades, Paros is a famous tourist attraction that offers numerous beautiful sandy beaches with crystal-clear waters, as well as some stunning locations inland. Although less famous than some other islands in the group for its oenological output, Paros has, together with Santorini, the oldest winemaking history in these islands, and it's one that's worth discovering. Its sun-kissed vineyards and fertile soil produce wines of exceptional quality and character, and that rich winemaking tradition, which comes complete with a diverse range of varieties, including the white grape known as Monemvasia and the red grape variety Mandilaria, has led to a unique PDO.

MORAITIS WINERY PAROS

This family-owned and operated winery, with a commitment to quality and a deep-rooted passion for winemaking, employs sustainable and organic viticulture practices that ensure its wines are not only delicious but also environmentally friendly. Visit for a tasting and enjoy the diversity of a range that exemplifies the Paros PDO.

NAOUSSA, PAROS

[T] +30 22840 513 50, [E] visit@moraitiswines.gr

moraitiswines.gr

ASTERAS PAROS WINERY, KTIMA ROUSSOS

A new winery, Asteros Paros is located in the Asteras region, near Ysterni. Over time, on the 130 family-owned acres, new vineyards have been planted in a linear pattern with local varieties. Working to the highest of standards in wine production to ensure maximum quality, the producers of Paros can create great wines through the revival of traditional viticulture and winemaking.

RURAL ROAD NAOUSSAS-MARPISSAS, PAROS

[T] +30 22840 517 98, [E] info@ktimaroussos.gr

ktimaroussos.gr

PFC [PAROS FARMING COMMUNITY]

Nearly a century of activity has made the cooperative an inseparable part of the social fabric of the island. Always working to support the agricultural producer, PFC is evolving as it adapts to the demands of the modern market. The knowledgeable PFC team vinifies the varieties Monemvasia and Mandilaria with a spirit of experimentation, redefining their true potential.

[T] +30 22840 222 35, [E] info@parosfarm.com.gr

seiradipfc.gr

ALISSAFI WINERY

In 1995, the distinguished architect Makis (Adam) Kostikas began his wine journey on the island, but it wasn't until 2006 that the first production run, from organically grown grapes, was ready for distribution. Today, the winery produces white, red, and rosé wines from local varieties: Aidani, Monemvasia, Mantilaria, and Vaftra, with a total production of 5,500 bottles. They also produce extra virgin olive oil from the Koroneiki olive variety.

NAOUSSA, KAMARES, PAROS

[T] +30 22840 288 54, [E] info@alissafi.gr

alissafi.gr

MORAITICO, GIORGOS MORAITIS WINERY

The organic vineyard of the Moraitico – Giorgos Moraitis Winery in Naoussa, Paros, just 300 meters from the sea, is an enchanting place where nature and winemaker meet. The winery grows indigenous grape varieties organically. Two series of wines are produced: "Epochi," which includes both white and red wines, and "The Wine of the Island," which features white, red, and rosé wines. Recently, the rosé semi-sparkling wine "Afros tou Kilos" was added to their collection.

NAOUSSA, PAROS

[T] +30 22840 519 20, [E] moraiti8@otenet.gr

moraitico.gr

DOMAINE MYRSINI

Launched in 2020 by Nicolas and Marie Bourget, this small winery highlights the viticultural wealth of Paros and produces mild intervention wines from local varieties of the island. Their tools are the indigenous varieties, the old vineyards, the principles of organic farming, and the wish to produce natural wines as they came to know and love them in France. Domaine Myrsini aim to express the island's pure terroir through the wines they create.

MARPISSA, PAROS

[T] +30 698 286 2475

@domainemyrsini

NAXOS

Naxos is the largest of all Cycladic islands and the most fertile, too. Along with its size comes a diversity of landscapes, sandy beaches, castles, amazing local cuisine, and some of the most famous cheeses of Greece. This island is a very promising wine region that can delight wine enthusiasts with its exceptional selections. Blessed with abundant sunshine and volcanic soil, Naxos can produce wines of exceptional quality and depth.

SAINT ANNA WINERY

Saint Anna Winery has been operating since 2016, producing both dry and semi-sweet styles of wine. The winery's name comes from a little chapel which stands on the grounds of the estate and attracts visitors interested in its historical importance.

RURAL ROAD NAXOU-CHALKIOU, KATO POTAMIA, NAXOS

[T] +30 698 992 4945, [E] info@saintannawinery.gr

saintannawinery.gr

TERRA GRAZIA

Located in one of the most productive areas of Naxos, on a plateau at an elevation of approximately 300 meters, Terra Grazia benefits from ideal microclimate conditions for the development of its vineyard, which is cultivated according to principles of biodynamic agriculture. At the heart of the estate stands the magnificent Della Rocca-Grazia Tower, a 16th-century Venetian fortress that is one of the Sagri region's most significant landmarks.

KATO SAGRI, NAXOS

[T] +30 694 077 4422, [E] info@terragrazia.gr

terragrazia.gr

TRANAMPELO

As the name (meaning "Great Vines") denotes, this soulful wine project was inspired by the historic roots of the vineyard and the promise of potential that its traditions held. With its wines, Tranampelo achieves an interesting balance between local winemaking methods and the distinctive terroir of the island. The grape varieties Potamisi, Aidani, Monemvasia, Fokiano and Mandilaria are used to create a wide range of labels that you can sample at the winery's tasting sessions.

GLYNADO, NAXOS

[T] +30 694 208 7879, [E] info@tranampelo.wine

tranampelo.wine

ECHO WINES

Echo Wines is a promising venture by the gifted oenologist Lefteri Anagnostou and Konstantino Makridimitris. The wines produced here are the current expression of a vineyard with a character rooted in the past, with vines planted between 70 to 200 years ago. Today's wines, sourced from those vines, symbolize both a rebirth and an unbroken path back to what was. In this sense, Echo Wines is about transforming the echo into a joyous sound of the present, not a faded trace from the past.

ANDROS

The island of Andros is a Cycladic gem. Its lush landscapes, pristine beaches, and charming whitewashed villages (such as Chora and Batsi) make it an ideal vacation destination. History buffs will appreciate its ancient sites, which include a Venetian castle and other archaeological treasures. With a network of hiking trails leading to hidden waterfalls and breathtaking viewpoints, Andros offers both relaxation and adventure for visitors. It also boasts an amazing local cuisine.

STRATIS VINEYARDS

A pioneering winery, Stratis Vineyards has modernized traditional winemaking methods by adding stainless steel equipment. The vines from self-rooted indigenous varieties are organically cultivated in arid and schist soil with absolute respect for the environment and tradition. The wine here is still produced organically, with natural fermentation and minimal intervention, thus preserving its unique character.

MESA VOUNI, ANDROS

[T] +30 697 720 4610, [E] info@stratisvineyards.gr

stratisvineyards.gr

KOURTESIS WINERY ESTATE

This winery, with its impressive cellar facilities, produces a red, a white and a rosé, all products of the microclimate of Andros. From its revived vineyard in the area of Ipsilou, the estate overlooks the island's main town. The linearly aligned vines grows on stone-built terraces at an elevation of 100 meters. Guests can enjoy accommodations in the renovated traditional buildings on site and experience an all-encompassing wine stay.

RURAL ROAD ANDROU-BATSIU, ANDROS

[T] +30 694 464 7133, [E] info@kourtesiswinery.gr

kourtesiswinery.gr

TINOS

Tinos is a bewitching Greek island that delights both those travelers seeking a picturesque getaway and those wine enthusiasts in search of exquisite flavors. As a tourist destination, Tinos enchants visitors with its charming villages, pristine beaches, and stunning landscapes. The island's rich history and cultural heritage are reflected in its impressive architecture and its iconic landmarks, including the Panagia Evangelistria, a renowned Greek Orthodox pilgrimage site. Tinos boasts a thriving wine industry that attracts oenophiles from far and wide. Finds on display in the archaeological museum attest to the special devotion the people of this island felt for Dionysus; millennia later, wine is still important here. With its fertile soil and favorable microclimate, Tinos produces exceptional wines formed by the unique terroir. With crisp whites, savory rosés and amazing reds, the island's wineries offer unforgettable tasting experiences, and winery tours will show how they marry traditional vinicultural methods with innovative new technologies to create remarkable vintages that embody the essence of Tinos.

VOLACUS WINES

The story of Volacus begins in 2009 with the acquisition of a plot of land in Gardari, Falatados, which was planted a year later with Malagousia. In subsequent years, Assyrtiko and Mavrotragano were introduced. The vineyards are located at an elevation of 400 meters, in clay-sandy and granitic soil.

GARDARI, FALATADOS, TINOS

[T] +30 697 848 5671

volacuswine.gr

VAPTISTIS WINERY

The Vaptistis Winery is located in Steni, close to the vineyards of the village of Mesa, near Falatados. Its first wines were produced in 2016. Today, the winery works with such indigenous Greek varieties as Assyrtiko, Monemvasia, Roditis, Mavrotragano, Mandilaria and the rare Mavrothiriko.

STENI, TINOS

[T] +30 22830 421 55, [E] info@vaptistiswinery.com

vaptistiswinery.com

DOMAINE DE KALATHAS

Respecting the island's winemaking roots, vigneron Jerome Binda uses a natural approach with his old vines and focuses on rare local varieties such as Aspro Potamisi, Mavro Potamisi, Koumariano and the much-misunderstood Rozaki.

EXOMVOURGO, TINOS

T-OINOS WINERY AND VINEYARDS

TINIAKOI AMPELONES

With a focus on sustainability and the use of organic and biodynamic practices in their vineyards, T-Oinos embraces the island's terroir. The winery's meticulous winemaking process results in elegant and expressive premium wines that communicate the essence of Tinos to consumers in the Greek and international markets.

AGIOS DIMITRIOS, FALATADOS, TINOS

[T] +30 22830 411 20, [E] winery@toinos.com

toinos.com

CHRISTOS FONSOS WINERY

The first person who bottled his production on Tinos was Christos Fonsos, who did this in 1996, in the village of Komi, drawing on then-unknown traditional local grape varieties such as Potamisi, Koumariano and Monemvasia. Today, Fonsos produces 3,500 to 4,000 bottles a year, all of which are exclusively sold on the island.

KOMI, TINOS

[T] +30 22830 512 21

X- BOURGO

Founded by Theodore Kosmopoulos, X-Bourgo in the village of Exombourgo is a new winemaking endeavor that shows quite promising prospects. They are producing a white made from Assyrtiko and a red made from Mavrotragano and Mavrothiriko, with grapes sourced exclusively from their private vineyard. The grapes are transported to an Attica winery for vinification, but the vineyard is open to visitors.

EXOMBOURGO, TINOS

@xbourgo.wine.wine

SERIFOS

Serifos boasts a rugged and untamed landscape that captures the essence of Greek island life. The island's terrain is characterized by dramatic cliffs, rocky outcrops, and secluded coves, all surrounded by the deep blue waters of the Aegean. Amidst this wild beauty, Serifos's vineyards emerge, clinging to hill-sides on terraces carved by generations of winemakers. The island's unique microclimate, with its hot, dry summers and mild winters, provides good conditions for grape cultivation. Local varieties such as Mandilaria, Monemvasia and Assyrtiko yield wines of exceptional quality and character.

CHRYSOLORAS

Christos Chrysoloras was able to revive both the vine and the wine on Serifos by creating a small winery. Today, with the use of mostly local varieties, he is at work trying to expand the wine horizons of those lucky enough to find his products. The winery cultivates traditional Cycladic varieties – including the indigenous Serifiotikos – with the least amount of intervention possible.

SERIFOS

[T] +30 22810 512 16, [E] chrysoloras@gmail.com
chrysoloras.gr

MYKONOS

Mykonos, the jewel of the Aegean, boasts rugged landscapes as thrilling as its legendary parties. This famous cosmopolitan island offers a stunning blend of rugged hillsides, golden sandy beaches, and azure waters that stretch as far as the eye can see. The vineyards of Mykonos flourish in the island's arid climate, nurtured by gentle sea breezes and abundant sunlight. Here, the indigenous grape varieties produce wines with a distinct character, crisp acidity and some mineral notes that reflect the island's terroir.

MYKONOS VIOMA,
ORGANIC FARM AND VINEYARD

Founded in 1994 by Nikos Asimomytis, who used the family vineyards in Marathi and Koumiris and rented the vineyard of the Monastery of Panagia Tourliani in Maou, Ano Mera, (total area under cultivation: 44 acres) dating from the 19th century. The vineyards are equipped with speakers so that the plants can enjoy Mozart's music, as Mr. Asimomytis considers it beneficial for them. An authentic wine tasting and farm-to-table experience.

ANO MERA, MYKONOS

[T] +30 22890 718 83
mykonosvioma.com

XYDAKIS MICROWINERY

What began in 2001 centered around an old, garden-size vineyard of local varieties has since grown; Kostas Xydakis revived local, mostly, forgotten, Cycladic varieties, through garage-style natural vinifications, creating wines of exceptionally limited production sourced from various small vineyard plots. Among the grapes the winery uses are Xeromacherou ("Dry Knife"), Kouforogo ("Hollow Berry"), and Potamisi ("River").

MILOS

Beautiful, volcanic Milos, with its precious minerals, enchanting waters, more than 70 beaches, networks of caves and, of course, the incomparable Venus de Milo – one of the most famous artworks in Western civilization (currently on exhibit in the Louvre in Paris) – is, at the same time, one of the most food-oriented islands of the Cyclades. It is, in short, a must-visit among the island group.

KOSTANTAKIS CAVE WINERY

Located in the picturesque seaside village of Pollonia, the whitewashed "spilia" (or cave) opens its wooden doors and welcomes you to try its new production of unique flavorful wines, made with grapes from vines grown in the volcanic, porous soil of Milos under warm, dry conditions. The wine is vinified with indigenous yeasts and stored in an underground labyrinth which provides needed humidity and cool, steady temperatures.

POLLONIA, MILOS

[T] +30 698 259 4859, [E] info@kostantakiswinery.com
kostantakiswinery.com

VICHOS WINES

Vichos Wines has, through its own experimentation, contributed to research on ageing conditions for excellent wines. They produce a nice white, but it is the red dry Thalassogennitos, made from Mandilaria, that spent 22 months underwater as part of its ageing process. This unique wine, with a limited production of 300 bottles, is just the thing for wine lovers in search of the unusual.

ZEFIRIA, MILOS

[T] +30 22870 231 25, [E] info@vichoswines.gr
vichoswines.gr

ANAFI

The island of Anafi provides a serene escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Its rugged coastline is adorned with secluded coves and sandy beaches, perfect for a peaceful day by the sea. The main village of Chora is beguiling; it boasts traditional Cycladic architecture and winding alleys leading to picturesque squares flanked by tavernas serving fresh seafood and local delicacies. History comes alive at Anafi's ancient sites, including the hilltop Monastery of Panagia Kalamiotissa and the ruins of the Venetian castle. With its laid-back atmosphere and its natural splendor, Anafi beckons travelers in search of an off-the-beaten-path Greek island experience.

FLAMOUROU ESTATE

Just inland from Flamouro Beach, chef and new winemaker Stefanos Michalis has created a small yet miraculous winery. The vineyards that provide the grapes are scattered here and there and planted with local varieties such as Assyrtiko, Gaidouria, Voudomato and Mandilaria. With these, Michalis uses a mild natural vinification approach to create interesting gastronomic wines. ■

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FOOD AND WINE

In the Cyclades, the art of gastronomy transcends mere sustenance, even while simplicity reigns supreme in culinary delights. Here, cooking becomes a creative act that celebrates the purity of flavors and the essence of local produce. From quaint seaside tavernas to fine-dining restaurants on high-profile islands, the culinary scene remains firmly rooted in tradition, while always welcoming creative reinterpretations.



Mrs. Nikoleta Foskolou, a distinguished cook from the picturesque island of Tinos, has graciously agreed to share two of her signature recipes, each a testament to Cycladic culinary craftsmanship. The first of these is for a timeless dish, fresh tomato fritters from Santorini, a symphony of flavors heightened by a delicate frying technique. The other is for stuffed sardines, a dish as rich in history as it is in taste. In the Cyclades, gastronomy isn't merely about food – it's a celebration of culture, tradition, and the unyielding spirit of these enchanting islands.

Fresh Tomato Fritters [Domatokeftedes] Santorini

INGREDIENTS

1 cup cherry tomatoes OR
3 medium, ripe tomatoes
2 tsp fresh spearmint leaves, finely chopped
1 tsp oregano
1 cup onions, diced
½ tsp each salt and ground black pepper
1 cup + 2 tbsp self-rising flour
2 cups olive oil (for frying)

DIRECTIONS

Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and gently squeeze them to extract the seeds. Chop and transfer to a glass bowl. (If using the 3 medium-sized ripe tomatoes, chop and follow the same directions for deseeding. Add the spearmint leaves, oregano, diced onions, and salt and pepper.

Refrigerate for 2-3 hours.

To the bowl that holds the tomato mixture, add the flour and mix well. If necessary, add a bit of water to give the mixture the consistency of a thick batter.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet. Lower heaping spoonfuls of the mixture into the hot oil, and brown evenly. Transfer fritters on absorbent kitchen paper and let stand for 5 minutes.

Arrange on a platter and serve warm.

VARIATION

Another version of this recipe, again from Santorini, calls for the addition of 1 grated zucchini and 1 tsp of summer savory to the 1 cup of cherry tomatoes.



Stuffed Sardines [Sardéles Gemistés] Tinos

INGREDIENTS

1.6 lb (approx. ¾ kg) fresh sardines
2 tomatoes, finely chopped
Pinch of salt
½ cup parsley, finely chopped
3-4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
½ cup olive oil, divided into two equal amounts
10-15 fresh or pickled vine leaves
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tbsp coarse salt
2 tbsp fine breadcrumbs
Ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

PREPARING AND BUTTERFLYING THE SARDINES*

Scale, gut, and wash the sardines. On a flat surface, butterfly the fish, removing their backbone and any remaining small bones either by hand or with tweezers. Wash again, season with salt, and place on a wire rack over a drip pan to drain.

* Make sure you have an even number of sardines.

MAKING THE STUFFING

Chop the tomatoes and place in a colander with a pinch of salt to drain for 10 minutes. In a medium-sized bowl, mix together the parsley, garlic, chopped and drained tomatoes, salt, and ground black pepper.

STUFFING AND BAKING THE SARDINES

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Choose a round baking dish that will hold the stuffed sardines comfortably. Make a bed at the bottom of the pan with the vine leaves and pour ¼ cup of the olive oil over the leaves. Arrange half of the butterflied sardines, skin side down, right next to each other on top of the vine leaves. Apportion 1 tbsp of stuffing down the length of each sardine. Cover the stuffing-topped sardines in the pan with the remaining sardines, skin side up, pressing them down lightly.

Pour the remaining ¼ cup olive oil and lemon juice over the stuffed sardines. Sprinkle the coarse salt and breadcrumbs evenly over the surface. Bake for 25 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

PAIRING

For the tomato fritters, it's a good idea to go for a white wine with aromatic intensity and balanced acidity that stands up well to light frying, such as a Monemvasia of Paros, or a rosé with restrained fruitiness, good acidity, and a mouthful of flavors from varieties such as Mavrotragano, Mandilaria, or Fokiano of Naxos.

For the sardines, the lemon would naturally lead you to a fresh Cycladic Assyrtiko from Santorini, with good acidity, freshness, and flavor complexity; alternatively, you could pair them with wines made from Kydonitsa, Aidani, or a fresh-from-the-tank Vidiano. ■

EXPLORING LOCAL CYCLADIC FOOD PRODUCTS

Throughout an island group famed for its summer splendor, you'll find unique food products to accompany the excellent local wines.

On the island of Paros, there's a famous local cheese, the aromatic and tangy Xinotyro. This delightful cheese, made from goat's or sheep's milk, finds its perfect companion in the delicate and refreshing white variety Monemvasia. The wine's floral aromas and fruit flavors are an elegant match for the creamy and slightly salty Xinotyro, creating a delightful harmony on the palate. Syros offers culinary gems that are sure to captivate your taste buds. The island's louza, a cured pork delicacy infused with fragrant spices, pairs exquisitely with a robust and velvety local red wine, whose dark fruit flavors and hints of spices complement the savory and aromatic taste profile of the meat.

Tinos also boasts an array of delectable local products. One standout is its flavorful artichoke, a prized vegetable cultivated on the island. Tinos artichokes, with their tender hearts and delicate, slightly nutty flavor, pair beautifully with a crisp and vibrant white wine such as a refreshing Assyrtiko, either from Tinos itself or from nearby Santorini. That wine's zesty acidity and mineral undertones go well with the artichoke's subtle bitterness and earthy notes.

In addition to artichokes, Tinos is well known for its exceptional cheeses, particularly the piquant Volaki and the tangy Kopanisti. These cheeses go wonderfully well with a dry white wine, such as a well-chilled Malagousia or a lively Assyrtiko. These wines' fruit-forward profile and crisp acidity cut through the cheeses' richness, enhancing their flavors and providing a delightful contrast. Kariki, on the other hand, is a local blue cheese that needs a full-bodied Mavrotragano or an oxidative Rozaki.

The island of Naxos is renowned, among other delicacies, for its high-quality cheeses, including its famous Graviera Naxou, a delicious hard cheese with a distinctive flavor. When it comes to wine pairing with Graviera Naxou, you'll want to choose a wine that can deal with its rich and savory characteristics. Assyrtiko, known for its vibrant acidity and mineral notes, can successfully cut through the creaminess of this local delight. ■



Local products and cuisine have made the Cyclades famous. In the photo, two of the most significant products, lentils and fava.

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ALEXANDER PAYNE

Alexander Payne does not need any special introduction. Renowned for his ability to weave intricate and compelling narratives replete with poignant human insights, he's a luminary of the film industry behind whose cinematic mastery lies a rich cultural heritage that profoundly influences his work.

Born to Greek-American parents in Omaha, Nebraska, Payne's upbringing was steeped in the traditions and values of his ancestral homeland. It is his connection to his Greek roots that infuses his storytelling with a unique perspective, offering audiences a glimpse into the complexities of human experience through the twin lenses of ancient wisdom and modern sensibilities.

Among Payne's acclaimed films are "Sideways", "Nebraska", and this year's "The Holdovers", all sterling examples of his cinematic prowess. The movie "Sideways", a captivating exploration of friendship, love, and self-discovery set amidst the backdrop of California's wine country, garnered widespread acclaim and earned Payne an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. It's also said to have had a profound influence on the American wine world, a fact that, twenty years later, still seems quite incomprehensible to him. Filming "Sideways", however, did change his own understanding of wine, one of life's pleasures he had discovered for himself while still studying at UCLA Film School.

THALIA KARTALI

How did you get interested in wine?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

I got very interested in cooking while I was in film school in Los Angeles. The more I got into cooking, the more I started becoming interested in food and wine combinations. I slowly realized that wine is to food as music is to film. It's a different thing, of course, but the combination creates something unique, special and symbiotic. A meal, like a movie, has a beginning, a middle and an end; it's also about two hours long, again like a movie. So I started to get more and more interested in wine; I began subscribing to the magazine Wine Spectator. I graduated from film school in 1990 at the age of twenty-nine and I was very lucky; I got a studio deal a couple of months after graduating. So, with the little bit of money I earned – \$5000 – I bought Bordeaux futures, which I'm still drinking! I thought that, as a younger person, it's nice to give a gift to your older self, so I said "Let me give a gift to my older self by buying some futures."

I started to learn more and more about wine, and then, at the end of my thirties, I found the book "Sideways". Through the process of making that movie, I got beyond the whole ranking and tasting business, and was able to meet the farmers and the winemakers.

I spent basically an entire season studying wine-making in Santa Barbara County, which was, at the time, a well-kept secret in terms of its Burgundy pedigree, largely Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. Now, twenty years later, it's just a way of life.

THALIA KARTALI

Do you think that "Sideways" contributed to the way people perceive wine in the United States?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

Well, you read articles about this all the time. I mean, the movie is 20 years old and you still read articles about the "Sideways effect", both in terms of the effect it supposedly had on wine awareness – the temporary downfall of Merlot, the temporary uptick of Pinot Noir – and then, in a larger sense, the often-unforeseen impact on social life a movie can have. I never would have thought that this little movie would have had an impact on an industry. People have made far more money from the movie than I have or ever will; Frank Costini, who owns the restaurant "The Hitching Post" which appears in the movie, has made millions, much more than I have ever made. And now a retired Los Angeles film critic is writing a book on "Sideways", on why it has endured, both as a film and as a kind of entry-level course in wine appreciation.

THALIA KARTALI

The impact it had is really amazing, in particular since it wasn't really a movie about wine; wine was the backdrop. It was a movie about friendship, love and self-discovery, wasn't it?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

True, but the one point when all these different things come together is during a conversation between Paul Giamatti and Virginia Madsen late at night on the porch. She explains why she likes wine and he explains why he likes Pinot Noir and, of course, he is talking about himself. So that's the scene I think that really kind of penetrates the audience a bit, because the wine then becomes an embarrassingly obvious metaphor for a person. So, in a way, it "anthropomorphized" wine. At that point she tells him that wine gets better as it ages, reaches its peak and then starts to grow old, as happens with everything. All of creation is just a big river. We are born, we live we die, that's it, next...

THALIA KARTALI

Do we grow better as we grow older?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

Some people get worse, unfortunately...

THALIA KARTALI

In most of your movies, however, the characters, mostly men going through mid-life crises, come out as better people, right?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

I hope so. I mean, my co-writer and I, we don't think maybe so much that people change, but at least they can realize things. And then, once you realize something, like you do in therapy, then you judge it and you can choose to do something about it, if you can master the will power. Habits are tough to break, though...

THALIA KARTALI

Can you share any memorable experiences during filming?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

Well, one thing was that we were drinking wine while filming. Most of the time when you see wine in movies, it's fake, and you can tell. So we said we wouldn't do that. We tried with different stuff that looked real, but the actors complained about the taste, so we said it forget it, we'll just use the real stuff. Sometimes we'd start drinking at 11 am. Well, we were younger then, and our livers could take it...

THALIA KARTALI

Did Paul Giamatti become a real Pinot Noir lover after the movie?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

No, no, he's really not that guy. Another thing I remember [about the film] is this – you know how the movie makes fun of Merlot, well, it's just one joke: "I'm not drinking any fucking Merlot." But still, Merlot sales started going down. So, about six months later, I get a package in the mail, I open it up and it's a magnum of Merlot from Trefethen Winery, one of the oldest wineries in Napa Valley. With it was a letter that said: "Dear Alexander Payne, I bet Miles and Jack never had our Merlot." It was signed by Janet Trefethen. That was sweet.

At some point in the movie, Paul Giamatti asks Victoria Madsen what the moment was that turned her on to wine, and she tells him it was when she tried a 1988 Sassicaia, which was personal to me because that was the wine that made me say, "Wow, this is what it can do."

THALIA KARTALI

Moving on to your movie "Nebraska", I cannot think of two places that are more different than Nebraska, where you grew up, and Greece.

ALEXANDER PAYNE

First of all, the world we see in the movie "Nebraska" is not my world. I come from a big city [Omaha]. The world in that movie is as exotic to me as it is to you. I might be able to understand it a little bit more and be able to read the codes of these farmers, but it's not my world. Funnily enough, when I showed the movie in Thessaloniki – as I always do – one journalist said: "Hey, Mr. Payne, your movie is very Greek." I said "How so? This is a very American movie," but he insisted. "No, Mr. Payne, it shows classic Greek themes: the son dutifully taking care of the parents who drive him crazy; the idea of moving from a town back to the village..."

THALIA KARTALI

Both your grandparents came originally from Greece. They owned a number of restaurants in different parts of the United States, but none of them Greek restaurants. Do you have a favorite Greek dish?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

Pastitsio! What's better? Everyone loves pastitsio. But seriously now, Greek cuisine is amazing, the freshness of the vegetables, the fish... There's nothing better.

THALIA KARTALI

What's your favorite Greek wine?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

I'm still learning. Greek wines in the last 10-15 years have risen. Maybe because viticulture is getting better. People have been drinking white wines from Santorini; everybody loves the volcanic ash. But I'm still learning and I make it a point when I am in restaurants around the world to order Greek wines. They aren't super expensive, which is also nice. A lot of people now know Malagousia and Xinomavro, Agiorgitiko, and Assyrtiko.

THALIA KARTALI

Do you prefer watching a movie on a streaming platform in the privacy of your home, enjoying a glass of your favorite wine, or with the lights out in a movie theater?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

The movie theater, 100%. A movie theater is like a church. Church is a place where, ideally, you go to have a public, shared, transformative experience. I might be exaggerating a bit here; what I really mean is that I just worship the cinema, and I think our history, as we go forward, will be demarcated into "before photography" – and particularly "before cinema" – and after. Because we photographed the 20th century, we are going to be endlessly dissecting it.

THALIA KARTALI

What will it take to get people back to the movie theaters?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

It's already happening. It is going to take a little faith and, because of the pandemic, it might take a little time. Movies and television have been fighting since television appeared in 1950. Everybody said back then that it was going to be the end of movies, and then DVDs came and everyone said "Well, this is going to be the end of movies." Because of the pandemic and with the help of Netflix, TV seems to be winning this round. But you still have to take a girl somewhere on a Friday night and people will still want to see all the big productions on a big screen as well. Those I'm worried about are the low budget movies. Are those going to be relegated to home consumption through streaming? It remains to be seen. Some countries, such as France, for example, make sure that all movies make it to the cinemas, because they believe it's an important part of their culture.

THALIA KARTALI

Are you concerned that AI might affect the way movies are made?

ALEXANDER PAYNE

I don't know that much about AI except for what I read in the press. What I do know is that only Alexander Payne can make an Alexander Payne movie, let alone a machine. I don't think AI can substitute for humanity. But it sure is fun to type in something like: "Write a Shakespearean sonnet on how hard it is to park in Athens," and get one! ■

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EPIRUS

The region of Epirus in northwestern Greece, mountainous and isolated, has never really been known for its wines. A rather remote area before the construction of the new Egnatia Expressway that links it with the rest of the country, Epirus has only recently become a tourist destination.



KATOGE AVEROFF

Today, its wild beauty, with its many gorges, stone bridges and beautiful traditional villages – the most famous of which are in the Zagori area – attract many visitors who enjoy hiking its trails or rafting in its rivers. The local cuisine is absolutely delicious – Epirus is famous for its savory pies, but one can also enjoy a number of other delicacies ranging from gulf-raised shrimp in the area around the town of Arta to smoked eel and even excellent fish roe, which is locally produced.

Against this beautiful and unique backdrop there is one relatively small but important wine-producing region which hosts some of the rarest Greek indigenous varieties. Viticulture was first developed in the area of Zitsa and, a little later, in the area of Metsovo, on the other side of Mt Pindos, where Evangelos Averoff, a leading intellectual and a prominent politician, founded one of the country's most historic wineries in 1959. Greece's highest elevation vineyards are found in this area.

Debina is the most popular white variety, not just in Zitsa but in the rest of Epirus, as well. The most important red grapes, Bekari and Vlahiko, are mainly found in Zitsa and Metsovo, while winemakers in the rest of Epirus have recently turned to other well-known Greek varieties such as Malagousia and Roditis, as well as to international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

The historic city of Ioannina has evolved into a hub of gastronomy, boasting numerous restaurants that serve up traditional recipes with modern twists. Many of them pride themselves on sourcing their products from local producers, ensuring high quality.

Evangelos Averoff, an exceptionally forward-looking visionary, dedicated his life to transforming Metsovo, the remote mountainous area of Greece which was his birthplace, into a center for trade and culture that would serve as a model for the rest of the country. In a highly symbolic move that highlighted his affinity for western Europe (where he had served as a diplomat), he decided to create a vineyard, planting Cabernet Sauvignon grapevines. The vines were said to have been brought back secretly from France in his diplomatic pouch. The wine was made in his basement (or “katogi”) until 1973, when the winery was built. What he produced was sold locally at first, but quickly became famous in the rest of Greece.

A lot has changed since those early days; the winery is now run by Averoff's grandson, Alexandros Ioannou, and he has built a hotel next to it, transforming Katogi Averoff into one of the best wine tourism destinations of the country. Apart from the original 150-acre vineyard, the estate owns another 450 acres in the wider area and produces 14 different labels across five different wine series: Katogi Averoff; Inima, Di Munte, Flogero and the Squirrels. Cabernet Sauvignon remains the leading variety, and some of the oldest Cabernet Sauvignon vines of the country can be found here. The estate's flagship wine, Ros-siu Di Munte, is a testament to the heroic viticulture of high elevations, made with grapes coming from vineyards located at more than 1000 meters above sea level. The indigenous red variety Vlahiko is also vinified by the estate.

ZOINOS WINERY

Driving through a morning fog that embraces the city of Ioannina, we arrive at the Zoinos Winery, a cooperative winery founded in 1974. We're welcomed by oenologist Eleni Sindou, the estate's visionary head winemaker, who gives us a brief history of the winery. The vineyards are all to be found on the highest slopes of the surrounding mountains, at elevations between 500 and 750 meters. They are all organically cultivated and all grapes are hand-picked. This is perhaps the only area in Greece that has not been affected in a negative way by climate change. In fact, farmers here welcome the change in weather patterns, which have led to less rainfall and consequently to less diseases for the vines.

The main variety to be found here is Debina, from which all PDO labels are produced, but, as Sindou explains, efforts are being made to have the red variety Vlahiko recognized as a PDO variety, too, so that the area might have one red and one white PDO wine. Debina is a variety with many different expressions, producing wines that range from sparkling to traditionally vinified orange wines. Alcohol content is usually low, around 12% and the aromas of this grape are mostly floral. The sparkling wine is produced using the Charmat method and can be enjoyed as an aperitif. Debina Respect is the label of the orange wine that pairs perfectly with local dishes and is very popular in markets such as Canada. Debina Classic is – as the label implies – a faithful expression of the Debina grape, with low alcohol, relatively high acidity and a crisp, refreshing palate. The winery also produces reds from Vlahiko, Bekari and Cabernet Sauvignon. Visitors can take tours of the facilities and taste any of the 13 labels that the winery produces.

MARKATSELIS WINERY

Leaving Zitsa and its environs behind us, we take the old mountain road that still connects Ioannina to the port of Igoumenitsa. Before the Egnatia Expressway was built, this was the road that everyone used. It takes us through gorges and rivers as we wind our way slowly through the Mt Mourgana area before finally reaching our destination, a small family-owned winery right off the old thoroughfare. A young man named Alexandros Markatselis welcomes us from the doorway of a building which looks like a small farmhouse. His father, a dentist, decided in 1992 to try his hand at winemaking and planted vines on the family property. The winery, established in 2006, has recently come under the management of young Alexandros, who completed his studies in oenology at the University of Florence.

The production capacity is small, just 22,000 bottles, and winemaking is based on traditional methods without the use of controlled temperatures for fermentation, but the results are really impressive. The vineyards are organically farmed and are situated around the winery. Different grapes, such as Roditis, Muscat, Assyrtiko, Malvasia, Chardonnay, Merlot and Syrah, have been planted; all of them produce varietal wines, and some are used in blends. In total, the winery produces nine labels, of which only three are barrel-aged. RV enthusiasts interested in wine can park their vans here overnight and enjoy a tour of the vineyards and a wine tasting.



Traditional wine vessel at the Zoinos Winery Museum.

GLINAVOS WINERY

A few kilometers to the south is Glinavos Winery. The winery was founded by Lefteris Glinavos in 1978. An oenologist who had studied in France – one of the first of his generation to do so – Lefteris Glinavos was keen to continue the tradition of the area, making sparkling wines using both the Charmat method and the Traditional Method of Champagne. However, influenced by his experiences in France, he decided to create a new vineyard, based on international varieties; he planted Chardonnay Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot. Nonetheless, Debina remains the chief variety, and the winery produces three different expressions of this local grape: sparkling, dry, and orange.

The leading label is Paliokerisio, which means “like the old times”. It is made in the way that people of the area have traditionally produced their wine – skin fermented, off-dry and semi-sparkling – and is already very popular in international markets.

ZERVAS WINERY

Driving still further south, towards Igoumenitsa, we come across a small plateau near the ancient river Thiamis. A modern building with an open-air tasting room stands in the middle of this plateau, surrounded by mountains. Its owner, Giorgos Zervas, who greets us, is neither an oenologist or a trained grape grower, as he soon tells us. “When I was a young boy,” he explains, “I used to try the grapes that we grew in the small family vineyard and then taste the wine my grandfather used to make, and I remember telling myself that these grapes should be able to produce something much, much better. Then, during a road trip to Germany, we accidentally found ourselves in a vineyard and I thought, well, we have vineyards back home, too, but they definitely don't look half as nice as these.” So, on his return, he decided to take over the family vineyards, plant some more on his own and become a winemaker while still retaining his other business. It took a lot of dedication and study, he says, but with the help of the well-known Greek oenologist Giannis Flerianos, he was able to establish his state-of-the-art winery.




Alexandros Markatselis.



Emphasis. Chardonnay

KTIMA PAVLIDIS
KOKKINO GIA DRAMA

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The farm where Huso Huso sturgeons are raised to produce Greek caviar.

The main grape planted here is a Greek variety called Asproudi, the wines from which come in different styles: a white aromatic single-vineyard wine (Thiamis), a simpler white (Yades), and an orange wine. In total, Zervas produces eight labels, including a rosé made from Syrah and a red made using another Greek variety, called Vertzami, and Syrah. The total production capacity is 20,000 to 22,000 bottles. The winery is open to visitors; they can enjoy tastings in the open air as well as cooking classes organized on the premises.

JIMA WINERY AND VINEYARDS

Following the road towards the coast and the Gulf Abracian, we reach Jima Winery and Vineyards on the outskirts of the city of Arta. Panos Jimas (Dip WSET) is an oenologist who planted his first vineyard in 2013 and bottled his first wine in 2018. The main varieties planted in the area around his winery are Merlot and Cabernet Franc, which are used in blends and also vinified separately with the use of amphora and barrel fermentation. Two years ago, he planted Vertzami, a variety for which he has high hopes.

He uses the apassimento method for some of the grapes, drying them in the sun before later adding them into the blend, for the production of the most expensive label of the winery. Recently, he acquired a plot in the area of Zitsa where he is thinking of replanting Debina and Vlahiko. Right now, the winery produces up to 10,000 bottles per year, but an increase to 50,000-60,000 bottles is in his immediate plans.

GASTRONOMIC PARADISE

If you think about it, Epirus is heaven for those who really enjoy their food. There's caviar, plenty of seafood, including fish and smoked eel, a wide range of cheeses, locally sourced meat, and many different fruits; in short, nearly anything can be found in this area, which is rapidly evolving into a culinary destination.

Since we're here, we must, of course, try the local delicacy, the famous gulf-raised shrimp. A main source of income over the centuries for fishermen working the Gulf Ambracian, this is a delicacy much appreciated by locals and visitors; the latter often travel here for the express purpose of eating this dish at one of the now-numerous tavernas spread out along the shore on the outskirts of the city of Arta. Apart from the shrimp, the area is also famous for its sardines and shellfish. Lately, a new delicacy has been added to the list; the smoked eels that are produced in the area can be found also in delicatessen stores in Athens.



GREEK CAVIAR

The locals use the term "caviar" to describe another delicacy, fish roe, which is mainly produced in Missolonghi and is more properly called "avgotaracho". However, we discovered that the region is also home to "Thesauri", the first authentic caviar produced in Greece, all thanks to the efforts of the Papagiannis family. The name "Thesauri" comes from the Greek word "thisavros", which means "treasure" (and is also the source of the word "thesaurus").

This marvelous foodstuff can certainly be considered as such, thanks to its exceptionally high quality. The first sturgeon eggs were brought from Astrakhan in Russia to the company's aquafarm in 1992. The caviar is produced only from purebred species of Russian, Siberian and Huso huso sturgeon, which are raised in the family's fish farms.

THAMON RESTAURANT

Our trip in the area ends in the best way possible, as we enjoy an excellent dinner at Thamon Restaurant in Ioannina. The establishment serves traditional dishes with some modern twists, made using quality local products and accompanied by some of the wines we tasted during our tour of the local wineries. The menu was as follows:

Beets with pumpkin, basil, hazelnut and cheese, paired with Vaimaki's Sparkling Debina. Smoked trout with cauliflower, lemon and mint, paired with Liberte, Jimas Winery Cabernet Franc/Merlot. The fish of the day with marinated greens, bianco sauce and chorizo oil, paired with Lacrima Imperator, Holy Monastery of Votsa, Traminer. Venison with pecorino and fir oil, paired with Debina, Jimas/Winery and Vlahiko, Glinavos Winery. ■



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GREEK PIES AND WINE



Pies are an integral part of Greek cuisine, with a history dating back millennia. To find out more about the most traditional pies in Greek cuisine and how they best pair with wine, it's helpful to first look at the role they have played over the years.

Pies first appeared at a time when humans were transitioning from hunter-gatherers to settlement dwellers who started to cultivate crops, primarily grains, which they then turned into flour. By then adding water, they made dough and started using fire to bake it. The first pies were baked directly on the fire, in the form of flatbread. Prehistoric humans added whatever other food was available on top, depending on the season. Later, it is very likely that they baked them on hot stones to make them flat, better control the temperature, and prevent burning. In ancient Greece, there was a form of pie known as "plakountas" or "plakites". This would later evolve into what is now called a "plakopita". It's during this period that the first ovens also appear, baking the pie from above and below.

Centuries later, nomadic shepherds in Epirus and Macedonia constructed portable, make-shift ovens to bake their pies, which they made with what was at hand: fresh vegetables from the fields, fresh cheese they made themselves, and meat from animals they slaughtered for sustenance. They mixed honey with cheese, a nutritiously satisfying blend.

Today's Greek pies can be divided into three main categories. There are pies made with thin layers of pastry dough below, above and sometimes in between the pie filling. (These layers are usually brushed with olive oil or butter, so they become crispy and airy during the baking process.) There are pies made with thicker dough that's folded back on itself to enclose the pie contents. The third category consists of open-faced pies, ones made with dough only on the bottom; they are also known as tarts. For each of these classifications, there are hundreds of variations ranging from vegetable-only to cheese to meat pies. There are sweet pies as well. (It should also be noted that there is, in fact, a fourth kind of pie, one made without any dough at all.)

EPIRUS

This rugged land in the northwest of the country is the region of Greece that is most famous for its savory pies.

[1] **KASIATA**
The prototypical Epirus pie, this is made with feta and thick dough. The kasiata is a savory cheese pie that has an added richness from the butter and/or olive oil it contains. Therefore, the wine accompanying it should have high acidity to balance the saltiness of the cheese and the richness of the butter and/or olive oil. There couldn't be a better match than a Debina, an indigenous grape variety of Epirus, which complements it perfectly with its acidity.

[2] **KOTHROPITA**
This has a thinner and crispier dough than a kasiata. It contains rice and lamb and is often eaten as a meal by itself; after all, it has both starches (bread and rice) and protein (lamb). Many times it is used as a "leftover dish," as what remains from a whole cooked lamb can be used in it. Ideally, I'd look to pair the kothropita with a red wine with enough acidity and tannins to go with the lamb. A Cabernet Sauvignon from Epirus has the acidity, tannins, and fresh fruit to complement it perfectly.

[3] **BATSARIA**
It is a pie, but it's entirely different from the two listed above, as it's made with a batter that's baked together with the vegetables it contains. One could call it a shepherd's pie, as it was made by the Sarakatsanoi and Vlachs, nomadic herdsmen who grazed their animals in the mountains and cooked whatever nature gave them: greens, nettles, wild leeks, sorrel, and whatever wild herbs they found, along with some spices, and, if there was any, some fresh white cheese. They poured the batter into the base of the pan, which they had greased with oil, then added all the greens and spices and topped it up with more batter.

The result was a thin pie, very tasty and aromatic. For the batsaria, I suggest a Robola from Kefalonia, which, with its cool acidity and lemony character, pairs perfectly with the aromatic and flavorful character of the pie.

CRETE

The cuisine of Crete also features many pies; the most famous of them are the marathopita and the sfakianopita.

[4] **MARATHOPITA**
To an extent, this pie resembles the batsaria of Epirus. Yeast is used to make its pastry rise, and very often tsikoudia is added as well, resulting in a dough that gets crispy as it bakes in the oven. For this pie, both the leaves and the finely chopped bulb of the maratho (or fennel) plant are used, along with other aromatics. Among locals, it's often made during periods of partial fasting, as its rich flavor is much appreciated then. The best wine pairing is with the native Cretan variety Dafni, whose wines are characterized by a botanical nature and a lemony aftertaste.

[5] **SFAKIAN PIE OR SFAKIANOPITA**
The most famous pie of Crete, this treat is made in the pan rather than the oven; fresh cheese, called "tyromalama" and made from the whey that's removed during the production of graviera cheese, is placed between two thin sheets of dough. (If you can't source the whey, myzithra or anthotyro are good substitutes.) When the dough has been fried, honey is added, as is, depending on what is available, crushed nuts and a fragrant spice of some kind, usually cinnamon. To go with this treat, try a sweet wine made from Liatiko from Dafnes, which, with its abundant character of spices and honey, will combine beautifully.

XANTHI

[6] **LEEK AND GROUND BEEF PIE**
One of my favorite pies, which I always seek out when I go to Xanthi, is the leek and ground beef pie with its airy, buttery pastry and a flavor that combines the sweet and vegetal element of the leeks with the rich taste of chopped beef. This is an excellent pie that pairs nicely with wines from Goumenissa. Their acidity balances the richness of the pie, while the tannins pair with the proteins of the meat and the red fruit gives an additional aromatic dimension.

THE CYCLADES

[7] **LADENIA**
On the island of Kimolos, you'll find the equivalent of Italian focaccia, a fluffy and soft dough known as ladenia and used to make an open-faced pie of the same name. This amazing treat is at its best in the summer, when it's made with garden-fresh ripe tomatoes and onions and baked in a wood-fired oven, to acquire a smoky aromatic character. I really enjoy pairing it with the Aidani of Santorini, with its floral and vegetal character as well as its full body.

Before closing, I must include the Kaisareia pie, or pastourmadopita, with its airy, buttery, and crispy pastry, Greek hard yellow cheese (kasseri or graviera) – amounts added will depend on how salty we want the pie – pastourma (a highly seasoned air-dried cured beef), and plenty of tomato. The acidity of the tomato will balance the richness and the tomato's sweetness will compensate for the saltiness of the cheese and the pastourma. A pie with great aromatic intensity and full body, the Kaisareia pie needs a wine that's equal to it. The Nychteri from Santorini is an excellent choice, as it has both the body and the acidity to cope with the intensity of this savory delight. ■

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

“Everything requires a bit of luck,” Vasilis Kanellakopoulos tells me as we settle into our chairs at the always welcoming Paleo, one of my favorite wine spots in the city of Piraeus, and the place where we’ve decided to meet. Outside, the neighborhood machine shops are closing up, and the street in front of this beloved wine bar is starting to quiet down.

Kanellakopoulos, a civil engineer who became a winemaker almost by accident, begins to recount the story of the Mercuri Estate, which is celebrating its 160th anniversary this year. As I listen, it’s almost impossible not to connect it with the modern history of Greece: struggles, economic growth, bankruptcies, and resurgence...

As my companion talks, I’m picturing that uniquely beautiful estate, hidden away in the small village of Korakochori in the western Peloponnese, only a few kilometers away from Ancient Olympia. I can see the large house, a replica of a Tuscan villa; the winery, with its large, underground concrete tanks – no longer in use, of course; the own-rooted Refosco vineyard, a small part of the original vineyard planted on the estate 150 years ago, from which the Refosco Mercuri label is produced; and the old photographs on the winery walls that testify to the evolution not only of viticulture in the area but also of the raisin trade, an industry that ended with the emigration of so many local residents when downy mildew destroyed everything.

“The history of the estate began 160 years ago, when its founder, Theodoros Merkouris, returned to the Peloponnese after many years of travels in Italy, Malta and Alexandria, during the years when the Greek community there. An adventurous spirit, he had decided to leave Greece after clashing with King Otto. Leaving his village, he passed through the area where the estate is now located, in Korakochori in Iliia, noted it, and then moved on to what was then British-occupied Zakynthos; from there, he went to Italy. There, he encountered the Refosco variety for the first time, which would become the trademark of the Mercuri Estate. The cultural influences he absorbed during his stay in Italy followed him throughout his journey, until his return to Greece after Otto’s departure in 1862. Having earned some money from the cotton trade in Alexandria, he bought the area he had spotted before leaving Greece and, with the participation of some of his relatives, managed to create an estate of 600 stremmata [c.150 acres]. He planted his vineyards so as to produce raisins, the dominant crop at the time, built a large house for himself, his wife and his five children – four sons and a daughter – and started his venture.

“In 1892, downy mildew struck, destroying the crop for two consecutive years. The estate went bankrupt, was taken over by the National Bank, and Merkouris died of a stroke. The eldest son, Leonidas, a man of vision and ability, took over. He managed to pay off the estate’s debts by abandoning the monoculture approach and planting olive trees as well. In 1925, he also decided to establish a winery, to produce wine from the Refosco variety, which his father had brought from Italy and with which he had created a vineyard of 40 stremmata [about 10 acres]. He also vinified grapes from local growers. The winery produced 400 tons of wine in the underground concrete tanks, which were then transferred into barrels, loaded onto sailing ships, and exported to Trieste and from there to Central Europe.

“Unfortunately, Leonidas died at a young age; the winery had been in operation for less than 10 years. He left behind his two daughters, Maria and Katie – my mother and my aunt – who took over the estate at the age of 19. Educated and dynamic women, they kept it alive until the outbreak of World War II. After the war, they tried to restart it, and even bought new machinery, but they were hit hard by the devaluation of the drachma against the dollar during the Markezinis era. The blow was significant; they found themselves owing twice as much as they’d borrowed, but they managed to recover financially and pay off the debts. Around that time, they decided to stop the estate’s industrial activities, but the crops remained. However, as economic conditions changed and the era of raisins came to an end, a decision was made to uproot the raisin vineyards, leaving a large part of the estate fallow. Nonetheless, the 40 stremmata of Refosco remained.”

Vasilis himself had no intention of getting involved with the vineyards. “I had graduated from the Polytechnic as a civil engineer, had done postgraduate studies abroad, and my relationship with the vineyard was that of a visiting professor. I would go, see them, greet them, and leave...” His real involvement began a few years later, around 1986-87, thanks to Gerasimos Vasilopoulos, the late businessman and founder of the biggest Greek supermarket chain, with whom he’d had a professional collaboration that developed into a friendship.

THALIA KARTALI

How did your involvement with viticulture and winemaking begin?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

As a supervising engineer and technical consultant for Gerasimos Vasilopoulos’ company’s projects, I regularly visited his offices in Athens. He always had gifts for visitors, and every time I visited, he would offer me something. On one of these occasions, he gave me a bottle of Petrus. So, I drank my first Petrus without even knowing what I was drinking!

I wanted to reciprocate, so I thought of bringing him some bottles of wine that my father and I were making as amateurs at the estate, even though he didn’t drink wine himself. We had a label, Château Mercuri, from the Refosco vineyard that we circulated among friends. So, I brought him a case. The next week, he asked me, “Vasilis, how much wine can you make?” I replied that we had just one barrel, and that it went to our friends. “That’s not what I’m asking,” he said, and I looked at him, puzzled, wondering where he was going with this. “I’m asking, from the vineyards you have, how many bottles can you produce?” “Uh, 10,000-15,000 bottles with the current production,” I answered.

“Look,” he said, “I had some people taste it, and they found it excellent. So, I’ll give you the shelf space; make the wine, and I don’t want anything in return.”

I was unsure. We weren’t a business-oriented family, but I like challenges and saw this as one. My brother and I started with a small, experimental bottling run to see how it would go. We ordered labels, and I found cigarette paper at a bookstore in Pyrgos, thinking it would be nice to wrap the bottle. We loaded 1,200 bottles into the truck and took them to the Mega AB supermarket in Glyfada, which had just opened. Within two months, the wine had sold out. The next year, we doubled the production, and that’s how we started...

THALIA KARTALI

Would you do it again?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

No! I wouldn’t do it again, not because I didn’t enjoy it, but because it involves a tremendous amount of work. For thirty years, I haven’t had a single night of proper sleep. I’ve met people, traveled a lot, and I love the land. If I didn’t love the land, I wouldn’t have done it back then, either. What weighs more on the scale, joy or anxiety? That’s subjective. As a family, we’ve never had significant capital behind us; money was in short supply, and every expense carefully considered. When you spend your life trying to meet obligations, it becomes exhausting. When my brother and I started, we had a winery, with a leaky roof, that hadn’t been in operation for 20-25 years, and we had old vineyards. Everything was always tight.

THALIA KARTALI

What brought you the most joy and what was the most challenging over the years?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

The greatest joy came from the interactions and the people I met in the wine world. When we started in the ‘80s and ‘90s, there were only a few of us, all small producers, and we were friends. We traveled together and didn’t see each other as competitors because the demand was greater than our production. Now, with over 1,000 wineries, it’s hard to make new friends. What was most challenging? The problems that arose, perhaps due to a lack of experience. Fortunately, we had good collaborators – oenologists and viticulturists – but wine is a living thing, and it’s not always easy to fix mistakes. The most shocking incident for us was when the distribution company Santa Maura went bankrupt fraudulently, costing us two to three years of profits. Just as we were starting, we took this heavy hit, but we recovered by increasing production. Then came the financial crisis of 2011. But what can you do? That’s how businesses are.

THALIA KARTALI

Do you consider the emergence of so many new wineries in Greece a positive development?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

In some ways, it’s positive. There wouldn’t be so many if there weren’t a market and interest from society. On the other hand, many of these new wineries were started by people who don’t believe in wine or love viticulture but instead saw it as an opportunity – some for social status, others thinking it was a way to make money, which, by the way, you never do. Out of 1,300 colleagues, how many are truly standing strong and profitable? I don’t think the Greek territory can sustain such a large number of winemakers. I believe we’re at a point where mergers are necessary.

THALIA KARTALI

What does being a good winemaker mean to you?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

There are many ways to answer this. First, a good winemaker must also be a good entrepreneur. People call me wanting to make wine, and I tell them, “It’s better to drink it than to make it; you’ll enjoy it much more.” Making wine requires a different level of commitment. Can someone be a good winemaker if they make wine from grapes they buy? According to my definition, no. You need to believe in your product, be willing to put in the considerable effort, and insist on quality while maintaining a balance with quantity, because it’s a complex process.

THALIA KARTALI

What advice would you give to a new winemaker?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

Do it because you love it, but don’t compromise on your wine’s quality. Also, keep in mind that marketing is very important.

THALIA KARTALI

How do you see the future of the estate?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

There is a future, provided that it’s organized properly and you have the right people with you. There is the next generation, my two sons – Dimitris, who has studied oenology (although he’s not involved in production), and Lampis, who has studied engineering. We have an excellent oenologist, Dimitris Skafidas, and an excellent consultant, Kyriakos Kynigopoulos. We hope that all these factors will lead to a positive outcome.

THALIA KARTALI

With an emphasis on the Greek varieties?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

Our main variety was Refosco, but Mavrodaphne was also significant; it was included in the blends at the Mercouri Estate by my uncle, an exceptional oenologist. About 10-15 years ago, we also started vinifying it as a varietal. Later on, we began to cultivate more and more Greek varieties, although the Estate still plays around with some foreign ones. Lately, our only exception to Greek varieties is Albariño, a Spanish variety that I really like. Mercouri Estate has always been what we call a “Red Winery,” but the market is not red, so we had to adapt. I was torn between Malagousia and Assyrtiko. In the end, I chose Assyrtiko, and I don’t regret it. We were really honored when the Masters of Wine who visited Greece last year tasted the Kallisto label and voted it as the best Assyrtiko among those they tasted.

THALIA KARTALI

What’s missing from wine in Greece today?

VASILIS KANELLAKOPOULOS

Greece still owes the world a great red wine. It depends on how much effort we put into it. Who knows? Perhaps the next generation will manage it. ■

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MESSINIA

Renowned for its beautiful landscapes dotted with olive trees and bordered by sandy beaches, the region of Messinia in the southwest of the Peloponnese has, in the last few years, become a favorite travel destination for many.



Stasinis Litsas presents the wines of Navarino Vineyards.

Thanks to one man's vision, the entire area is now attracting visitors searching for an alternative to the Greek islands, and offering those interested in exploring the region's rich history a variety of attractions from which to choose. Some of the most important archaeological sites in the Peloponnese are to be found here, including the sites of Ancient Messene and the Palace of Nestor. Luxury resorts with world-class golf courses provide excellent leisure activity options. What's more, the region boasts a rich culinary tradition that celebrates outstanding local products. Until recently, good-quality wine was absent from the scene but, in the past few years, there have been significant efforts to revive vineyards in the area, a region which had long supplied grapes for bulk-wine production taking place in other areas of Greece. A number of small producers emerged in the late '90s and early 2000s.

Since the area lacks a signature local variety, most producers turned to Cabernet Sauvignon. However, more recently some have begun experimenting with Greek varieties such as Malagousia and Assyrtiko, which seem to thrive in the Messinia terroir. As a result, the Messinia Terroir initiative was launched, under the management of the Captain Vassilis and Carmen Constantakopoulos Foundation. Established in 2011, the foundation is dedicated to making Messinia a model for sustainable rural development by supporting and promoting forward-looking strategies. The history of vineyard-rich Messinia is inextricably entwined with the legends, traditions, and values of centuries-old viticulture and winemaking.

NAVARINO VINEYARDS

The views from Navarino Vineyards are breathtaking. At an elevation of 400-500 meters, the estate's western-facing slopes offer magnificent views of the sea. In the shade of a centuries-old tree which stands proudly in the midst of the well-tended vines, visitors can enjoy picnics and wine tastings. Summer temperatures can be quite cool up here, especially in the evening, contributing to the production of high-quality grapes with very good levels of acidity. Since 2022, Dr Stefanos Koundouras, professor of viticulture at the University of Thessaloniki, has been overseeing the vineyard, and he's opted for the planting of more indigenous Greek varieties.

"The area of Trifilia is mostly known for the cultivation of French varieties," says the professor, "mainly Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot and Chardonnay. There has been a great effort made to revive the old vineyards; at the same time, new vineyards have been planted, with an emphasis on local varieties of the southwestern Peloponnese, which include Assyrtiko, Mavrodafni, Kydonitsa and Agiorgitiko."

Harvested by hand and gently pressed, the grapes produce red and white vintages that are later bottled and stored in the Costa Navarino cellars. The series, aptly named "1827" in honor of the historical naval battle of Navarino, comprises a white wine combining Chardonnay with Roditis; a red Cabernet Sauvignon; and a Syrah rosé. The Kotle series – its name inspired by an ancient clay drinking vessel known as King Nestor's Cup – includes a white Chardonnay matured in a barrel for four to five months, and a red Cabernet Sauvignon matured in a barrel for 18 months.



PANAGIOTOPOULOS WINES AND SPIRITS

The Panagiotopoulos Estate claims to have the largest vineyard in the Pirgos Trifilias area. The winery, surrounded by 100 acres of vineyards, is open to visitors eager to enjoy tours of the vineyards and wine tastings. The vineyards, which are cultivated organically, feature varieties such as Malagousia, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. The estate produces 15 different labels and around 200,000 bottles per year, but with a capacity to reach up to 700,000 bottles.

Most of the labels are varietal wines, including organically grown Malagousia and Sauvignon Blanc, both of which are fermented in stainless steel tanks. The estate's flagship label is the 36 Cabernet Sauvignon, which ages in barrels for 36 months. Other labels include wine made from a local variety called Filieri, and there are plans for the production of an Assyrtiko.

Tasting Notes

MALAGOUSIA 2022

An organic white wine with a bright color, rose and citrus aromas, a rich mouth feel and a generous finish. Served at 8-10°C, it shows great affinity for Mediterranean and Oriental cuisine.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON BIO 2013

A deep color and dark fruit aromas are the first to reveal themselves, while hints of oak and spices emerge from the background. Velvety tannins characterize the rich mouthfeel and contribute to the generous finish. Served at 16-18°C, it is ideal with grilled meat, spicy food and hearty cheeses.

36 CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2005

A wine whose charms are achieved through maximum extraction and maturation for 36 months in new oak barrels. Bottle ageing adds the final touch to an exquisite flavor profile and a velvety mouthfeel. It is a single-vineyard wine.



DERESKOS ESTATE

Dereskos Estate is hidden away in a beautiful area near the village of Floka. Its owner, Theodoros Dereskos, gave us a warm welcome. After we made ourselves comfortable under the big tree outside the winery where he usually organizes the wine tastings for his visitors, he told us his story. A civil engineer by training, he was not involved with winemaking until he decided to take over the family-owned vineyard. His first harvest was in 1994; since then, he has dedicated himself to winemaking.

Production is relatively small, i.e., 50,000 bottles per year, and includes a total of 8 labels. Dereskos knows a great deal about the area and its rich history of winemaking, which, as he says, was interrupted when local producers decided to abandon viticulture and turn to the cultivation of olive trees, which they considered more profitable.

Tasting Notes

DERESKOS SAUVIGNON BLANC 2022

Light yellow-green color, crispy acidity and an intense nose, with aromas of grapefruit, mango and citrus. Overwhelming mouthfeel, with long lasting fruit flavors. It's a perfect companion to seafood – including oysters, big fat fish, and pasta with seafood – as well as soft cheeses, and white meats cooked with herbs.

DERESKOS CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2020

Deep purple-ruby color, with intense flavor aromas of black fruits and spices, such as cherries, blackberries, blueberries, black current, green and black peppers. It goes great with grilled red meat – including Mediterranean meat dishes – spicy foods, and blue cheeses such as Roquefort.



NESTOR LAFAZANI WINERY

Athina Lafazani welcomed us to this large winery, which holds the distinction of being the largest winery in the Balkans in terms of both facilities and production numbers. Originally part of the Nestor Cooperative, an agricultural and wine cooperative of Messinia founded in 1954 by local viticulturists, the winery was acquired by the Lafazanis family in 2015. It boasts a total capacity of 10,000 tons, with facilities covering 7,000 square meters and cellars spanning 3,000 square meters. The winery was designed to bring to mind the architecture and color schemes of King Nestor's ancient palace; that archaeological site is just 6 km away. The first grape variety vinified here after the Lafazanis family took over was Filieri, which, as Athina explains, remains their flagship variety.

Athina, who serves as the marketing director of Spiros Lafazanis SA, the company founded by her father, Spiros Lafazanis, believes in the tremendous potential of this local variety, which can yield various styles of wine. In addition to Filieri, the winery produces three other varieties using Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay, all under the series Pylos. They also produce Avarino tsipouro, a strong spirit made in the distillery at the Nestor facility. The winery is open to visitors who can tour its impressive facilities and enjoy unique wine-tasting sessions.

Tasting Notes

FILIERI WHITE 2022

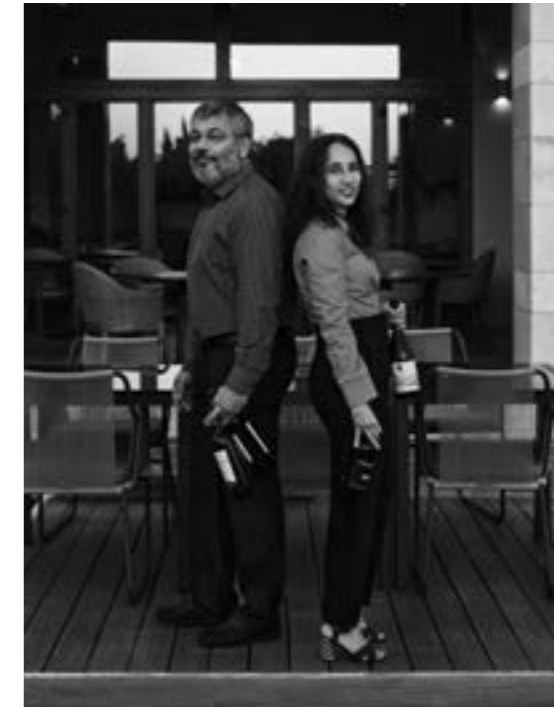
Pale yellow color. The nose reveals aromas of flowers and fruits. It is well balanced in the mouth, with pleasing freshness and a sweet aftertaste. Serving suggestions include aromatic green salads, goat's cheese, fried fish and shellfish.

PYLOS CHARDONNAY 2022

A full-bodied wine with a brilliant pale straw color, characterized by intense aromas of tropical and white-fleshed fruits. It is well balanced in the mouth, with a buttery taste and a nice, rich finish. It pairs well with pasta, grilled fish or vegetables, and either poultry or risotto served with a white sauce.

PYLOS CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2019

Deep red, and with aromas of red fruits and anilla with spicy notes, it is full-bodied in the mouth, with balanced tannins and a long aftertaste. Serving suggestions include lamb, goat, game and cold cuts.



BIOVIN – TSAVOLAKIS WINERY

Oenologist Giannis Tsavolakis founded his winery in Kalamata in 1995. Today, it is run by his daughter Maria and her husband Giannis Marios. They produce organic wines from grapes sourced from local producers with whom they have been collaborating for a long time.

Biovin-Tsavolakis Winery has 11 labels and produces around 90,000 bottles, using both international and local varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Moschofilero, Sauvignon Blanc, Roditis and Malagousia

Tasting Notes

PAMISOS 2020

A delicate white wine made exclusively from the Chardonnay variety. Fresh, fruity and aromatic, this dry wine takes its name from the river of the same name that has been flowing through Messinia since ancient times, bringing clear waters to help life flourish in the region's fertile soil.

RODOSTAMA 2020

Malagousia and Sauvignon blend. It boasts a brilliant pale yellow color with aromas of fresh citrus fruit and white flowers.

NEDON 2020

Dark red color, with aromas of red fruit, no barrel ageing.



PATSOUROS WINERY AND VINEYARDS

Stefanos Patsouros is a third-generation winemaker. His grandfather used to make wine at home, which he sold to local tavernas, a common practice at the time. After a career in the Navy, Stefanos' father decided to return and establish his own winery. Stefanos, who studied chemistry, discovered his passion for the vineyard when he planted his first vine. He enjoys experimentation and strongly supports the local variety Fileri, believing it can yield very honest wines.

The winery currently produces four labels but plans to add four more in the near future. Their main grape varieties include Grenache Blanc, Fileri, Malagousia, Syrah, Muscat, and Tempranillo. They have an annual production of 70,000 to 80,000 bottles.

Tasting Notes

RIGEL 2022

100% Fileri, bright yellow color with citrus aromas.

ILIAN 2022

100% Grenache Blanc, a full-bodied white that is a perfect match with dishes from the local cuisine.

The main annual event of the Messinia Terroirs project is the Messinia Terroirs Wine Festival, which is held at the Navarino Agora. This year's event was held from 14-16 June. Along with wine presentation and tasting events, the three-day festival featured master classes for professionals and wine lovers; seminars in English for foreign visitors; wine-pairing workshops; experiential activities and interactive courses; contemporary and classical music concerts; and dance performances.



PSAROULIS WINERY

Just a few kilometers from the site of Ancient Messene is Psaroulis Winery. The Psaroulis family has been involved in viticulture since 1948. Konstantinos Psaroulis commenced production in 2013 at the new winery, near privately owned vineyards planted on the grounds of a prehistoric lake. Here lies the largest Assyrtiko vineyard in Messinia, spanning 60 acres. Other varieties vinified here include Malagousia, Chardonnay, Fileri, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Agiorgitiko and Merlot. Total production amounts to around 90,000 bottles, a portion of which is exported.

The winery produces a total of nine labels, primarily single-varietal wines, with the Assyrtiko Retsina and the semi-sweet Malagousia particularly notable choices. For the past four years, the winery has been open to visitors and has been fortunate to welcome many who have enjoyed the tasting sessions in the vineyard.

Tasting Notes

ASSYRTIKO 2022

Bright yellow color, subtle citrus aromas followed by a banana aftertaste. It can pair perfectly with shellfish, poultry or pork in white sauces, and aromatic cheeses.

CHARDONNAY 2022

Intensely golden yellow and characterized by aromas of honey, vanilla, banana and ripe citrus fruits with back notes of smoke and nuts, it has a full, rich and mellow taste.

MALAGOUSIA 2022

In a mountain vineyard offering magnificent views of the Messinian Gulf, a quality wine is being produced with great care and constant quality control. Lots of aromas and fresh notes of unripe yellow fruits with tones of chamomile and lime.



GOTSIS WINERY

Nikos Gotsis doesn't simply identify himself as an oenologist; he emphasizes this as he introduces himself. The winery originally belonged to his grandfather, who produced both wine and olive oil. Nikos returned to the area with the aim of reviving the family vineyards, initially without plans to establish a winery. However, he expanded his vineyard holdings, and, in 2002, began his own production in collaboration with oenologist Ioanna Davleris. The winery is housed in old stone buildings, which Nikos is gradually renovating, including an old olive mill. He hopes in the future to open the winery to visitors.

The vineyards, situated in Diodia, Messinia, sit at elevations of 350 meters and more. The winery produces four series of labels – Psathi, Diodia, Nassos, and a varietal – as well as two premium-label series: Treis Kores, a Merlot rosé, and the pride of the winery, Two Worlds, an Assyrtiko. The vineyard for Two Worlds, located at an elevation of 350 meters, is a dry vineyard with red soil, yielding approximately 6,000 bottles. Total production amounts to around 70,000 bottles.

Tasting Notes

DIODIA 2022

60% Muscat 40% Assyrtiko. This is a light wine that pairs perfectly with the local cuisine.

NASSOS 2021

100% Moschofilero. An elegant white wine, it is full of freshness, with good acidity.

DIO KOSMOI 2022

100% Assyrtiko. A great expression of Assyrtiko grown outside Santorini, it boasts great acidity and minerality.

ASTIR X WINERY, XYGOROS

Astir X is the brainchild of two brothers from Kalamata, Vangelis and Stathis Xygoros, along with two Northerners, Vangelis Papaioannou and Stelios Mavromatis, who all share a passion for wine. A chance encounter brought the four together, leading them to collaborate on the goal of producing, in Kalamata, high-quality wines destined for numerous countries abroad.

The raw materials for Astir X wines are sourced from 800 acres of vineyards across the Peloponnese region. The viticultural team collaborates closely with 88 winegrowers whose grapes are vinified at the winery. Varieties include Malagousia, Fileri, Moschato, Roditis and Chardonnay for whites, and Agiorgitiko, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache Rouge, Merlot and Tempranillo for reds. The winery spans 14 acres on the outskirts of Kalamata, with covered areas totaling 2,500 square meters. Its stainless steel refrigerated tanks have a capacity of 3,000 tons.

Tasting Notes

MATI FORTUNA WHITE 2022

A Moschofilero and Chardonnay blend. Intensely aromatic with notes of citrus fruits and melon, together with roses and lemon blossom. Well-balanced in acidity, cool and fresh, it pairs well with seafood, pasta, white meat, salads and fruit.

MATI FORTUNA ROSÉ 2022

An Agiorgitiko and Merlot blend with aromas of red flowers and fruit predominating. It is notable for its crunchy finish. Fresh and sophisticated, this is a Greek rosé of great character that pairs well with pasta, seafood, light salads, fruit and cheeses.

THE PALACE OF NESTOR

The remains of the Palace of Nestor, on an olive-covered hill in Messinia, are so impressive they leave the unsuspecting visitor speechless.

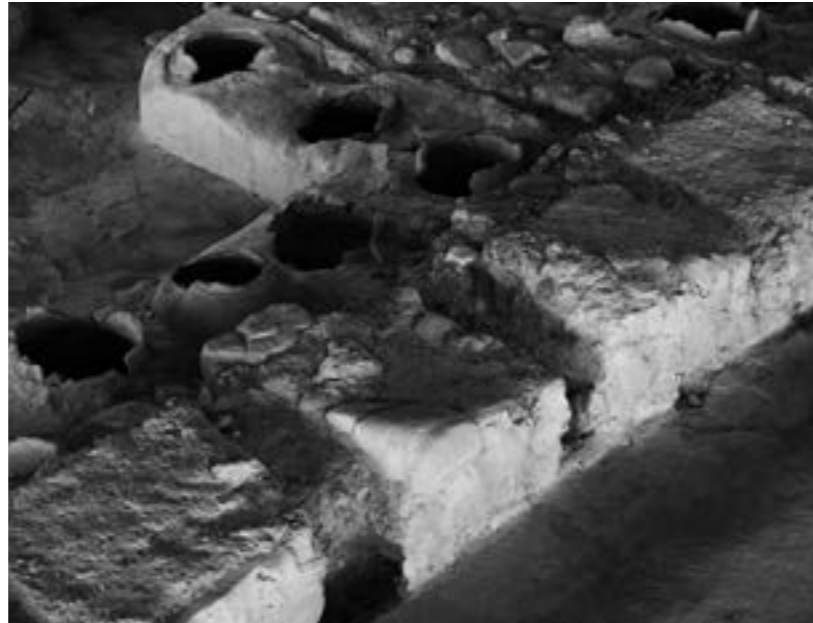
This is the most perfectly preserved palace of the Mycenaean era, brought to light in 1939 by an archaeological excavation led by Konstantinos Kourouniotis, then director of the National Archaeological Museum, and Carl Blegen, professor of archaeology at the University of Cincinnati, a long time resident of Athen, where he died in 1971. The excavation, which continues to this day, was interrupted by the start of WWII but resumed in the 1950s – without Kourouniotis, who died in 1945. Jack Davis, who holds the Blegen Chair of Archaeology at the University of Cincinnati, has led the team since 1974, along with his wife Sharon Stocker. Their efforts have brought to light Mycenaean beehive tombs full of archaeological treasures. Davis graciously showed us around the archaeological site, which the duo hope to transform into a National Archaeological Park, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and support from private entities such as Costa Navarino.

The area around the impressive palace has yielded up many finds, from beehive tombs to perimeter walls. Unique objects have been discovered inside the tombs, and are now being gathered to form part of a collection that will go on exhibit at the Archaeological Museum of Messinia in Kalamata as of 2025. Subsequently, the collection will travel to the Getty Museum in the US and then to Athens before finally taking up home at the Chora Museum, currently under renovation.

Finds at the Palace of Nestor, a two-story building adorned with colorful frescoes, include, as Jack Davis explains, some of the most significant evidence of wine culture in the prehistoric world. The palace housed a unique wine warehouse, in which 1,300 wine casks were discovered. Linear B inscriptions found on these casks contain the word “wine” and make reference to food, feasts, sacrifices, and the preparation of olive oil.

“They must have consumed a lot of wine here; the whole place was filled with wine glasses when Carl Blegen discovered it in 1939,” remarks Mr. Davis. Blegen himself dubbed this area of the palace “Nestor’s Cellar,” marking it as a unique find in wine-related history. The palace comprised several distinct buildings and served not only as a seat of power but also as a taxation center for local production. Farmers of the time transported amphorae filled with wine and oil to the palace archive, where production was documented and taxed. Storage areas housed pithoi (large amphorae-like vessels) sunk into the ground, and filled with local wine and oil. In fact, a fire, likely ignited around the 12th century BC, erupted when stored oil exploded, resulting in the destruction of the palace.

Today, the remains of the palace are safeguarded from the elements by an impressive canopy of structural steel; visitors can admire the layout from specially designed metal walkways and gain a comprehensive understanding of the building’s different spaces and functions. The palace’s association with wine and olive oil production, reinforced by the discovery of ancient grape seeds in the surrounding area, further underscores the significance of wine during the prehistoric era in Greece.



Amphorae, buried in the ground and filled with local wine and olive oil.

BEEHIVE TOMBS

The beehive tombs uncovered by Davis, Stocker and their team represent yet another remarkable archaeological discovery in this area overlooking Navarino Bay. While awaiting access to a section believed to be of archaeological interest, the archaeologists unexpectedly unearthed a beehive tomb in another location. Within it were rare and astonishing finds, including gold rings – some of which are the largest-ever examples found in a prehistoric tomb in Greece – along with a bronze mirror with an ivory handle, semi-precious stone signets, and other objects of value, all of which are currently undergoing expert analysis.

A total of five beehive tombs have been discovered in the vicinity of the palace, with the most recent one unearthed in 2018 and still undergoing excavation. These discoveries have brought to light various artifacts, including pottery, jewelry, amber beads, amethyst and ivory. The finds at this significant archaeological site not only attest to the flourishing of the Mycenaean civilization in this region of Messinia but also underscore the profound relationship that the local population has had with wine over millennia. This connection, while not always clearly evident from the historical record, was, it seems, never entirely severed. ■



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WINE BARS

BOBO, The Winebar

The two “Bo”s are for “Boheme” and “Bourgeois”, and that’s the atmosphere you’ll find here, along with warm people, and a small yet well selected wine list that puts an emphasis on Greek wines. Enjoy the tasting flight that lets you explore the indigenous varieties, and don’t forget to ask for the mushrooms or the beef carpaccio.

36 Anastasiou Zinni, Koukaki, [T] +30 210 924 4244
bobowinebar.gr

CARAVIN, Wine and Wanderlust

A chic and sophisticated environment, with friendly service, and delicious food, this establishment has a good-sized wine list that features Greek grapes. There are excellent pairing options, too, with some classic recipes that have been given innovative modern touches.

11 Akamantos, Thiseio, [T] +30 211 400 3962
@caravinwinebar

BY THE GLASS

You’ll find more than 200 wines by the glass, most of which are dispensed by the Coravin system and can be ordered in 0.25ml, 0.50ml, and 150ml portions. Alternatively, there are more than 500 wines by the bottle; these have been grouped for convenience of selection into eight different styles, ranging from creamy whites to exotic reds. Book a table in their dining area across the street on Rallou Manou Square for a memorable meal.

3 Souri, Syntagma, [T] +30 210 323 2560
bytheglass.gr

HETEROCLITO, Cave and Bar a Vin

A comfortable urban-chic space that doesn't take reservations, Heteroclito offers more than 20 wines by the glass from a constantly changing wine list that emphasizes natural or low-intervention wines. Enjoy tasty little bites and tempting finger food along with your drink selection.

2 Fokionos and 30 Petraki, Syntagma, [T] +30 210 323 9406
heteroclito.gr

OINOSCENT

This is a wine bar and bistro with a wonderful cellar and a diverse selection of very good local and international wines. Ask your sommelier for advice and make sure to pay a visit downstairs. In case you’re just not in the mood for the grape, ask for a Greek beer.

45–47 Voulis, Syntagma, [T] +30 210 322 9374
oinoscent.gr

KIKI DE GRECE

A charming wine bar known for its warm and inviting atmosphere, Kiki de Grece specializes in Greek wines, showcasing the country’s diverse wine regions. It also offers a selection of traditional Greek dishes, allowing visitors to savor local flavors while enjoying their new oenological discoveries.

4 Ipitou, Plaka, [T] +30 210 321 1279
@kikidegrece

JUNIOR DOES WINE

This wine bar takes an easy-living approach to the wine scene, making it a cozy, friendly and extremely charming place to enjoy wine in a casual yet proper way. The manageable wine list, the delicious bites and the very kind staff make a stop at this intimate little venue a real pleasure.

5 Meandrou, Athens, [T] +30 210 722 2883
@juniordoeswine

TANINI AGAPI MOU

Tanini Agape Mou, which means “Tannin my love”, is proving that love in every way possible. The emphasis is on Greek wines, with a specific focus on natural, low-intervention, organic and biodynamic wine labels. It’s a great place if you’re looking for an unpretentious approach and a cool overall set-up.

91 Ippokratous and Methonis, Exarcheia, [T] +30 211 115 0145
taniniagapimou.gr

MATERIA PRIMA, Koukaki

Located in the historic and exciting neighborhood of Koukaki, this wine bar has a long and well-curated wine list. There’s a cozy atmosphere here, helped by a few seats at the bar and interesting suggestions from the staff regarding pairings with Greek delicacies such as cheeses.

68 Falirou, Koukaki, [T] +30 210 924 5935
materiaprima.gr

MATERIA PRIMA, Pangrati

Located in a lovely square in the lively neighborhood of Pangrati, this wine bar has a lot to say for itself and does its talking through its very well-considered wine list. The staff will introduce you to and guide you through an impressive number of wineries, varieties and regions.

3 Missolonghi Square, Pangrati, [T] +30 210 725 5171
materiaprima.gr

WAREHOUSE

An inviting place any time of the day or evening, Warehouse boasts a great selection of wines, including both Greek and international labels by the glass and by the bottle, a delicious all-day food menu, a number of different spirits on offer, and several other beverage options that include high-quality coffee.

21 Valtetsiou, Exarcheia, [T] +30 215 540 8002
warehouse.gr

WAREHOUSE CO2

If you love bubbles, this is the place to be. The wine list hosts some of the most famous bubbly from around the world. From Champagne to Cremant, Prosecco to Franciacorta, Cava, and even some amazing Greek sparkling wines, you'll find what you're looking for right here.

1 Iperidou, Syntagma, [T] +30 210 324 7048
warehouse.gr

Athens’ vibrant wine scene is a testament to the city’s rich history and its contemporary allure. Whether you’re a seasoned oenophile seeking rare vintages, or a casual enthusiast eager to explore local varietals, the many wine bars that have sprung up in and around the city center promise an unforgettable journey through Greece's esteemed viticulture. Join us as we embark on a sensory adventure, where every sip tells a story and every glass gives you a glimpse into the city’s soul.

FABRICA DE VINO

One of the first establishments to get serious about wine in Athens was Fabrica de Vino, which can be found on famed pedestrianized Fokianos Negri Street in the hot-once-more neighborhood of Kypseli.

57 Fokionos Negri, Kypseli, [T] +30 210 866 8775
fabricadevino.gr

VINTAGE

Vintage is a bistro-style wine bar with a highly inspiring and appealing atmosphere. Classically elegant, Vintage serves 300+ wines by the glass and provides a great fine-wine selection that includes outstanding Champagnes and Bordeaux vintages.

66 Mitropoleos, Syntagma, [T] +30 213 029 6570
winebarathens.com

WINE POINT

One of the oldest wine bars in Athens, this establishment has recently sharpened its focus on the accompaniments it serves with its wines, offering a selection of fine Greek cheeses and traditional cold cuts to enjoy alongside your drink. The bar’s laid-back attitude and friendly staff make it a great place to relax while you explore different wine regions.

2 Porinou, Acropolis, [T] +30 210 922 7050
@winepoint.athens

WINE O’CLOCK

Located in the very lively Acropolis area, Wine O’Clock offers a small but very interesting wine list with select Greek and international labels, as well as aperitifs featuring Greek ingredients. When it comes to noshing, it’s all about Greek PDO products, fresh ingredients and superfoods.

10 Lempesi, Acropolis, [T] +30 210 924 9398
wineoclock.gr

LOST ROOTS

A group of friends came together to create this wine bar, born of their passion for what they serve. The wine list includes varieties and regions from all over the world, along with low-intervention and natural wines; there are 25 by-the-glass options that change regularly.

30 Iraklidon, Thiseio, [T] +30 210 345 7644
@lostoreots_winebar

WINE IS FINE

A contemporary version of a cave à manger, located in the heart of the city, this wine bar is exclusively naturally oriented, and the food menu walks a multicultural path while still enjoying influences and cooking techniques taken from French cuisine.

6 Vissis, Monastiraki, [T] +30 210 323 0304
@wineisfine.athens

PSYCHE, Wine Bar

An oasis of calm and greenery at the center of Athens is located in the Kornarou Shopping Arcade, an ideal after-work meeting spot with tasty seasonal bites as well. The wine list includes boutique wines, natural wines, and native and international varieties.

4 Kornarou, Syntagma, [T] +30 210 322 1271
psychewinebar.gr

GAMAY

An unpretentious new wine bar named after the French grape, this spot is located in an architectural gem – an example of local urban modernism – in the Exarcheia neighborhood. Open until late at night, this is the place to enjoy a great selection of natural wines and some tasty food.

42 Zoodochou Pigis, Exarcheia, [T] +30 210 380 7311
@gamay_wine

CINQUE, Wine and Deli

Created by wine lovers for wine lovers, this wine bar is serious about its food, too. The wine list is dedicated to Greek wine, and the menu honors Greek products. Enjoy wine flights – either three or five 75ml glasses – and discover true treasures of the local vineyards. There are two Cinque Wine and Deli locations, both in the heart of the city.

10 Voreou, Monastiraki, [T] +30 211 410 8865
15 Agatharchou, Psyrri, [T] +30 215 501 7853
cinque.gr

EPTA MARTYRES

An alternative wine bar in the Neos Kosmos area, this one has great word-of-mouth. It has a small wine list, interesting bites, and a casual atmosphere; it is, in short, a surprisingly happy marriage of French bistro and Greek tsipouradiko.

3B Menaichmou, Neos Kosmos
@eptamartyres.athens

OH! DIO

A wine spot that’s full of history, art and gastronomy, it’s ideal day or night. Discover the unique double wine list – one from each owner – that gives a great deal of love to Greek vineyards but isn’t afraid to cross borders, either.

3 Adrianou, Thiseio, [T] +30 210 324 1814
@ohdio.athens

WINE WITH ELENI

A unique wine bar with an interesting rotating wine list, this establishment occupies at a cozy little garden next to the Acropolis Museum. Here you’ll discover special Greek wines, interesting wine tastings and more, all thanks to the charming Eleni. And it’s proudly pet-friendly, too.

20 Misaraliotou, Acropolis, [T] +30 693 412 5839
winewitheleni.com

METEORA

Meteora, a stunning natural wonder in the heart of Greece, boasts a rich religious history. Formed by the forces of nature, these impressive formations are home to monasteries founded in the Middle Ages.



The vineyard in the shadow of the buttes of Meteora.



Inside the walls of the Great Meteoron Monastery.



The cellar of the monastery, founded in the 14th century, hosts treasures of Greek wine history.



The team of Tsililis Estate celebrates the end of the harvest.

The massive buttes of Meteora create a unique landscape that captivates with its natural beauty and distinctiveness. The second most important monastic complex in Greece, following Mount Athos, at its peak, Meteora was home to 30 monasteries perched atop these rocks; today, only six remain active, all of which were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1988. Monks first settled on these cliffs in the 11th century, seeking isolation and meditation.

One of the most impressive structures is the Monastery of the Great Meteoron. This is the largest monastery in the area, built in the 14th century and stands as one of Greece's most fascinating spiritual and architectural legacies. Perched on a towering rock at an elevation of 613 meters above sea level and 416 meters above the bed of the Pinios River, it commands a breathtaking view.

Initially, the Athonite monk Athanasios spent ten years practicing asceticism atop "the Rock of Stagoi". He was the first to ascend the so-called "Platys Lithos" (Broad Rock), accompanied by fourteen monks. They carved holes into the steep rock, drove in beams, constructed scaffolding, and managed to reach a place where previously only birds could go: the rock's summit. There, around 1340 AD, Athanasios the Meteorite built the monastery between earth and sky, on the edge of a vertical cliff. He organized the first systematic monastic community and constructed the Church of the Mother of God. He was also the first to establish vineyards in the area.

As is the case across Europe, monks and monasteries in Greece have preserved traditions including, elements of gastronomy. The monastic communities of Meteora engage not only in spiritual pursuits but also in producing goods such as wine. The vineyards cultivated by monks around the monasteries since the 14th century are among the most historic in Greece, as indeed, is the cellar of the Great Meteoron Monastery. Though not yet open to visitors as it prepares to welcome the public, it houses precious treasures. During a recent visit, we delved into the monastery's past and explored our wine heritage. We encountered two enormous wooden barrels, so large so large they appear to have been constructed within the building itself, likely used for storing both water and wine, along with dozens of smaller barrels for wine and tsipouro. Tools for winemaking, such as handmade and manual presses for crushing grapes, straw baskets, harvesting tools, and wine cups, threw light on the monks' centuries-old winemaking techniques.

The grape varieties cultivated came mainly from the region, but other Greek varieties that adapted well to the conditions were also used. After the phylloxera plague, the vineyard was replanted in 2013. For the past three years, the vineyard has been managed by Tsililis Estate in collaboration with the Great Meteoron Monastery. The new plantings in the initial 2.5-acre vineyard include Malagousia, Assyrtiko, Xinomavro, Moschato, and the local Limniona. In the shade of the soaring buttes is a vineyard belonging to the Monastery of Varlaam; here Tsililis Estate has also planted Limniona. ■

WINE JOURNAL

“People do not remember days; they remember moments” Wines, restaurants, aromas, moments and ideas, captured in a journal.

They say the restaurant Pharaoh is for an alternative audience. They say Pharaoh is a bit trendy. They say Pharaoh is all about “natural wines”. Well, I just went with friends and – whatever Pharaoh is – we had a phenomenal time! Just a five-minute walk from the National Archaeological Museum, this fun restaurant serves authentic Greek cuisine, heavily slanted towards Crete, cooked over wood, as in a traditional Cretan village. They don’t do international cuisine, only real Greek. Music is only from vinyl and later in the evening the DJ got a bit louder, creating a party atmosphere. The friendly and knowledgeable sommelier helped us select a fine Malagousia from Anatolikos Vineyards in Thrace, northern Greece. I loved its texture and the ability it had to complement both seafood and meat; the food, by the way, was all extremely tasty and well-prepared. Many reasons to come back!

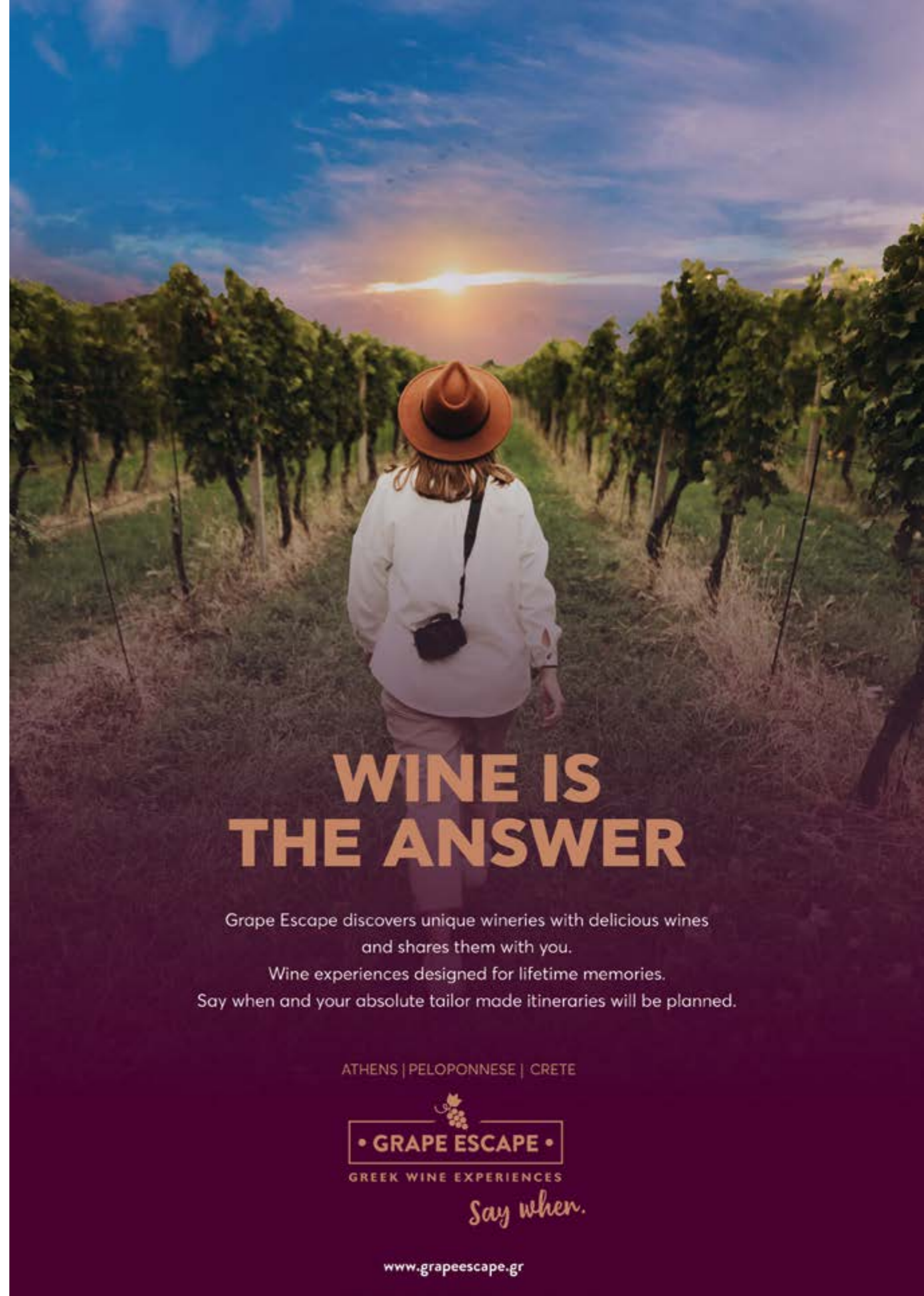
“I don’t like retsina.” Well, that’s just so “last year”! Have you tried the new Rezine Wild Ferment 2303 NV Retsina? You’ll be blown away! Beautiful aromas of mastic, pine forest, mint, lemon and green apple offer a very delicate nose, while the refreshing acidity and medium body makes an ideal pairing with small fried fish (such as sardines), fried calamari, fried cod and nearly any other Greek-style meze. Handcrafted in smaller quantities from that legend of retsina production, Malamatina, this wine is made from Savatiano, the classic retsina grape. Spontaneous fermentation in oval-shaped concrete tanks and maceration on lees for three months produces something that’s highly recommended. It does cost more than the usual mass-produced retsinas, but that’s to be expected.

Visiting Monemvasia on the southeastern edge of the Peloponnese is always a pleasure. The fortified town was founded in the sixth century, and has been continually-inhabited since then. The thick town walls and many Byzantine churches reflect the past and add to the atmosphere. In medieval times, the local wine, Malvasia, was one of the most important products of the area, with a trans-continental outreach, making Monemvasia one of the most important commercial centers in the eastern Mediterranean. The Tsimbidi family has given Malvasia wine back to Greece and the rest of

the world, working hard with the authorities to re-establish it as a protected, PDO wine (PDO Monemvasia – Malvasia). We visited their new winery and had a blast! Thanks to the Tsimbidi family, we now know what that famed medieval sweet wine tasted like (it’s delicious!); they also produce a range of dry white, rosé and red wines from local varieties such as Kydonitsa, Monemvasia and Asproudes.

My friends and I organized a private event at Metropolitan Foods, a premium food importer in Greece. Our menu was very special: burrata with cherry tomatoes, basil pesto and pepper jam; bruschetta with guinea fowl breast and kimchi mayonnaise; tuna tartare; Wagyu carpaccio; quail breast with Japanese rice and eggplant; and Pluma Iberico. We paired them with equally impressive international wines: Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2021 from Marlborough, New Zealand; Jean-Paul and Benoit Droin Fourchaume Chablis Premier Cru 2020 and Louis Jadot Lavaux Saint-Jacques, Gevrey-Chambertin Premier Cru 2020 from France; Ramey Wine Cellars Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay 2020 Carneros Napa Valley and Joseph Phelps Freestone Pinot Noir 2020, Sonoma Coast, both from Sonoma County, California; Ricasoli Castello di Brolio Gran Selezione 2016, Chianti Classico from Italy; and Hungary’s legendary Royal Tokaji Essencia 2009. It was something really special!

Sometimes you just want to be comfortable. In which case, your food and wine should feel comfortable, too! No decanting, no vintage selection, no complex pairings. Just good company and tasty, cheerful wines. Green salads, cold finger food, pizzas and two of my favorite Greek wines. First was La Tour Melas Idylle d’ Achinos 2022; a mouthwatering rosé from old vines, produced by Central Greece’s leading winery La Tour Melas. Kyros Melas began as a red wine expert but he soon became a serious rosé wine producer as well. We also enjoyed an all-time favorite red: Ktima Papaioannou Nemea Agiorgitiko 2019, with ample red fruit, sour cherries, strawberries and the silky tannins for which Agiorgitiko from Nemea in the Peloponnese is known. Comfortable is nice, we should do it more often! ■



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KECHRIS: RETSINA, UPDATED

Imagine that it's the early 1980s, and you're a Greek winemaker who has just returned to your homeland fresh from your training in France. What was the atmosphere like back then? Many foreign-trained Greek winemakers, who are now well known in the field, wanted to employ their new, hard-gained expertise to improve Greek wine and take it from being an industrial product to a respected element of modern gastronomy.

The new era called for selecting new varieties, choosing new vineyards, and establishing whole new protocols in winemaking. Given all this, what was the possibility that one of these innovative people would envision making a great... retsina? That resin-scented, traditional Greek wine that was associated with tavernas, that everyday wine "of the people" that was – at the time – just a cheap, easy-drinking wine? The answer is "Zero", unless, of course, your name happened to be Stelios Kechris!

Like his peers, Kechris had a well-rounded technical, academic and international background in oenology. However, he also had a lot of memories. He had been exposed to retsina before it had become industrialized. He had seen firsthand the enthusiasm of diners when the new batch of retsina reached their favorite tavernas. Moreover, while in France, he had observed how proud the French were of their traditional products, whether either food or wine. They were safeguarding their past and trying to support traditional products by making them relevant to contemporary needs. This inspired him to make it a life goal to put retsina back on the wine map and, most importantly, to restore its good name, as retsina had been a respected wine before certain social and historical factors post-WWII and the Greek Civil War made it less appealing.

A number of factors went into Kechris' success in achieving that goal. His family had been operating a winery and distillery since 1954. The company started exporting its products in 1974. Their brand, Kechribari, had been launched even earlier than that, back in 1939, in the old family taverna in Thessaloniki. So, the family business supported Stelios Kechris' new endeavors, encouraged by his experiences in France. Fast forward 40 years, and Kechris is now a leading Greek winery with an annual production of approximately 1.4 million 750ml bottles. They source their grapes from around 110 hectares, located mainly in Goumenissa Kilkis, northern Greece, but also with holdings in Amyntaio, Kavala, Thessaloniki and other regions of Macedonia. The winery also owns a 10-hectare vineyard in Goumenissa, which they cultivate themselves; at all their sites, however, their agronomists guide the growers, who are themselves all professionals.

The vast majority of their production is dedicated to retsina, with four different expressions on offer: their flagship "Kechribari", a lovely Roditis varietal from Amyntaio called "Afros", the acclaimed "Tear of the Pine", an oak-aged Assyrtiko from Goumenissa, and the retsina "Roza", a rosé Xinomavro from Goumenissa. "Kechribari", in the classic drop-shaped 500ml bottle, is a multi-regional Roditis sourced from Amyntaio, Goumenissa and selected vineyards in Macedonia. Wines such as "Afros" and "Kechribari", with their lovely minty and herbal aromas, citrus fruit character, refreshing acidity and a very balanced palate, are perfect with any kind of fried seafood, including calamari and sardines and a lot more, working as a sort of liquid passe-partout on the table. They can convey the concept of Greece in a glass.

Kechris also produces 350,000 bottles of non-resinated wines, not a small number! There are two wine series, Genesis and Fourth Dimension, as well as a varietal Xinomavro from Goumenissa. Genesis White is a white blend made with Sauvignon Blanc from Kavala and Roditis from Goumenissa, while Genesis Rosé (Xinomavro and Gewürztraminer) and Genesis Red (Xinomavro and Merlot) are both from Goumenissa. Fourth Dimension White follows the well-established tradition of blending Assyrtiko and Sauvignon Blanc, and Fourth Dimension Red is a blend of Xinomavro, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon from Goumenissa. All these wines are focused, balanced and extremely food-friendly.

I recently had a chat with Stelios Kechris; it's always fun, as well as educational, to listen to his stories. "I remember retsina used to be a great wine," he told me, "before it became an industrial product. Although modern technology was not available, constant trial and error had given older generations invaluable know-how. At the time, there were no white grapes available in northern Greece, and certainly not Roditis. Add to this the fact that my ancestors were from Evia and so, out of a sense of nostalgia, the family wouldn't think of buying grape must from anywhere but Karystos and Halkida in Evia, or from Santorini. Low-yielding grapes were always available, as this was the pre-industrial period, oenologically speaking. The must was shipped to Thessaloniki in wooden barrels carried on small boats. The sea kept the must cool and, upon arrival, the must had fermented already. The wine, especially in the first two weeks, was fresh, aromatic, and irresistible! We started out selling the wine in our taverna and then other tavernas began asking for a barrel or two. At some point, we were selling 500-600 barrels around Thessaloniki. This was in the 1960s, when I was a student at junior high school, and already involved in the business. Urbanism quickly made demand surpass supply; this was the main reason for the fall in quality. Thankfully, I'd already had the experience of the good retsina, and I knew it wasn't retsina's fault."

The Kechris Winery, just 8 km from the center of Thessaloniki, is open to visitors. It's located in an industrial area, with no vineyards in the vicinity. When the winery was built, proximity to town and easy access was very important; this is why Kechris is now part of the metropolitan area. Should you find yourself in Thessaloniki, a visit to the winery is a great opportunity to taste different retsinas and more, in a charming winery with an inviting wine-tasting room. It's also a chance to enjoy an authentic example of an ancient product in a modern incarnation... from the undisputed experts of that wine category! ■

These drinks are often enjoyed with meals, particularly during social gatherings and celebrations. They pair wonderfully with a variety of Greek meze dishes and are, thanks to their refreshing and palate-cleansing qualities, a particularly popular choice to accompany seafood. These spirits are frequently served with hearty meat dishes, as well as with grilled vegetables and traditional Greek cheeses. The ritual of sharing these drinks with friends and family further enhances the overall dining experience, fostering a greater sense of community and conviviality around the table.

Greek liqueurs, too, offer a vibrant and diverse array of flavors. With their smooth finish, they complement both aged and lighter cheeses, and are often perfect for sipping alongside spicy dishes, as well as classic Greek desserts such as baklava or loukoumi, chocolate desserts, or fresh fruit, adding a bright and zesty touch to all of them.

OUZO

The term “ouzo” seems to have first appeared in the second half of the 19th century and, although it means nothing in modern Greek beyond the drink it designates, etymologically it can be traced back to three words: the Latin word “uso”, which means “for use”; the ancient Greek word “ὄζω”, which means “to smell”, and the Turkish word “üzüm”, which means “grape”. Ouzo is an alcoholic beverage of distilled anise traditionally and exclusively produced in Greece. It is a high-volume distillate with a minimum alcohol content of 37.5% to 40% by volume.

Organoleptically, its characteristics are attributed to the aromas from the ingredients used in its production. The most prominent of these is anise – to be more precise, the dried ripe fruits of the anise plant (*Pimpinella anisum* rhomboidal) or, in some cases, fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), which is related to anise and whose seeds are very similar. (However, their sets of essential oils differ, since fennel extracts have a sweeter taste than anise extracts, and they have a lower anethole content.)

The alcohol serving as the base for ouzo production is 100% pure agricultural ethyl alcohol, primarily derived from grapes, molasses, and occasionally grains. Ouzo is colorless and transparent but, when mixed with water and/or ice, it turns milky. When it comes to correctly serving it, ouzo requires its own glass, a smaller version of a highball glass known as a “σωλήνας” in Greek. It is consumed in various ways, depending on personal preferences; some drink it neat, and chilled, while others add water and/or ice. Food pairing-wise, matching it with smoked fish or other seafood, spicy cheeses, black olives, tomatoes, boiled cabbage, or classic cheese-stuffed or rice-stuffed zucchini blossoms will deliver a whole new taste dimension. Most of the leading ouzo producers are family-owned distilleries and have been producing ouzo for decades, if not longer.

OUZO OF MYTILENE

Ouzo of Mytilene is produced on the island of Lesbos but not within the municipality of Plomari. The dominant aromatic raw material used for flavoring is anise that’s been grown on the same island, usually in the Lisvori area. Chios mastic, barley, and onions are also used. If sweeteners are used, the amount added cannot not exceed 50g/l, and the minimum alcohol strength is 37.5% vol.

OUZO OF PLOMARI

Ouzo of Plomari is produced on the island of Lesbos within the boundaries of the town of Plomari. The main aromatic raw material used for flavoring this ouzo is the dried ripe fruit of the aniseed plant grown in Lesvos’ Lisvori area. Ouzo of Plomari generally contains a broader range and a larger concentration of aromatic substances than other ouzo products. The minimum alcohol strength is 40% vol.

GREEN SPIRITS

OUZO OF KALAMATA

Ouzo of Kalamata is produced within the boundaries of Kalamata, in Messinia in the Peloponnese. The main aromatic raw materials used for flavoring it are anise and fennel. Coriander seeds, star anise, cardamom, Chios mastic, and fresh lemon peels are also used. Any sweeteners used must be added in amounts that do not exceed 50g/l. The minimum alcohol strength is 37.5% vol.

OUZO OF THRACE

Ouzo of Thrace is produced within the geographical limits of Thrace, which is to say in the area of Xanthi, Rodopi, and Evros, in the region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace. In addition to anise, the main flavoring material used in Ouzo of Thrace is fennel seed. Other flavoring materials are also used, such as star aniseed, coriander, juniper, and Chios mastic. Sugars are added, if needed, but never more than 50g/l. The minimum alcoholic strength by volume is 37.5% vol.

OUZO OF MACEDONIA

Ouzo of Macedonia is produced within the boundaries of Macedonia, which includes the cities, towns and regions of Grevena, Drama, Imathia, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Kastoria, Kilkis, Kozani, Pella, Pieria, Serres, Florina, and Halkidiki. The main aromatic raw materials used to flavor Ouzo of Macedonia are fennel seeds. Anise, star anise, coriander, cardamom, dried linden flowers are used in small quantities. The dry-matter content must not exceed 3.5g/l, and the minimum alcoholic strength is 38% vol.

TSIPOURO AND TSIKOU디아

Tsipouro, a traditional Greek spirit, has a rich history dating back centuries. It originated in the 14th century, when Greek monks in the monasteries of Mount Athos began distilling pomace: the leftover grape skins, pulp, seeds and stems from winemaking. This idea gradually passed to viticulturists, and the spirit, initially used for medicinal purposes, evolved into a popular drink enjoyed across Greece and around the world. Since 1988, there has been a legal framework in place regarding its production and bottling.

The etymology of the word is uncertain. It may come from the Turkish word “sapre” or it might be related to the word “sikera”, from the Hebrew “sekar”, which is a kind of alcoholic drink. Some believe it originated from the Turkish word “şıra”, which means “grape must” and which, over time, was transformed into “tsipouro” in Greek. The production process commences with the selection of grape varieties and the slow and gradual distillation of the fermented grape pomace. Factors such as the grape variety, the terroir, and the vintage can play crucial roles in terms of the final product.

The distillation fractions are separated into the head, heart, and tail. The heart, which has the highest quality compared to heads and tails, is diluted, left to mature and filtered, and is then put on the bottling line.

Certain distillates may be selected and left to age in oak casks for several years to impart characteristics of spices, dried fruits, vanilla, chocolate, smoky aromas, hints of leather, barrel wood, and more. After ageing for at least six months in oak barrels, they may be placed on the market with the indication “aged” (“παλαιωθέν”/“παλαιωμένο”).

In certain regions of Greece, aromatic seeds or plants (such as anise and fennel) are added to the still separately from the pomace, or marc. Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace traditionally produce both tsipouro without anise and tsipouro flavored by the addition of anise seeds and/or fennel during the distillation phase; this spirit turns cloudy when mixed with water.

Traditionally, tsipouro is enjoyed as an aperitif or a digestif. It can be consumed neat in small glasses, mixed with ice and/or water, or used as an ingredient in cocktails. It’s an excellent pairing with flavorful meat and seafood dishes, cheese, and a number of Greek meze options.

TSIKOU디아 OF CRETE

The geographical indication “Tsikoudia of Crete” is used to denote tsikoudia produced in Crete. Organoleptically, its characteristics are derived solely from the grape varieties used and from the production details, such as the type of still used or the distilling practices employed. No aromatic plants or seeds are added during the distillation of the grape marc or redistillation of the product. The minimum alcoholic strength by volume is 37.5%, and sweeteners may be added when the grape marc spirit is ready for bottling, albeit in a quantity less than 20g/l.

TSIPOURO OF MACEDONIA

Historically, tsipouro production within the borders of Macedonia was, according to sources dating back to the Byzantine era, mainly confined to the Mount Athos area. There are two types. The fennel-flavored variety of “Tsipouro of Macedonia” has seeds from Macedonian fennel plants added during distillation (In Macedonia, fennel is traditionally called “anise”, or “Macedonian anise” when a distinction needs to be made.) and achieves a minimum alcoholic strength of 42% vol. The non-fennel-flavored “Tsipouro of Macedonia” may have caramel added to it but only if it is to be aged, and sweeteners can go in only when the grape marc spirit is ready for bottling, and then in a quantity of less than 20g/l. The minimum alcoholic strength of this variety is 38% vol.

TSIPOURO OF THESSALY

The tsipouro produced in Thessaly was, according to historical evidence, first made by monks in the monasteries of Meteora some time in the 14th century; it was these monks who initiated the surrounding area and later all of Thessaly into the secrets of distillation. Aromatic plants and seeds may be added, in line with traditional practice, during the distillation of the marc or the redistillation of the spirit. If flavored, the most common practice is with anise, fennel, and/or star anise. The minimum alcoholic strength by volume is 40% vol.

TSIPOURO OF TYRNAVOS, TIRNAVOS

The geographical indication “Tsipouro of Tyrnavos” is used for tsipouro produced in the area historically referred to as Tyrnavos, a place name dating back to the Byzantine era. At least 50% of the grape marcs used in the production must come from the vinification of Tyrnavos’ Black Muscat (“Moscato Mavro Tyrnavou”) grape variety. During the production process, some of the aromatic compounds that characterize this variety are transferred from the marc to the spirit, giving a particular organoleptic profile with intense and distinct characteristics. If flavored, it is common practice to do so with anise, fennel, and/or star anise. The minimum alcoholic strength by volume is 37.5%; any further addition of alcohol is not permitted.

MASTIHA OR MASTICHA OF CHIOS

Mastiha is an exquisite liqueur produced on the island of Chios. It takes its name from mastic, a resin widely known since ancient times for its beneficial and therapeutic properties, obtained from the mastic tree (*Pistacia lentiscus* or *latifolia*), a dioecious evergreen shrub flourishing in the southern part of Chios.

Local producers realized the importance of mastic early on, and one of their very first products in the 18th century was Mastic Ouzo, made by using anise seeds together with natural mastic during the distillation process.

Today, the Mastiha liqueur recipe includes water, ethyl alcohol of agricultural origin, flavored by distillation with Chios mastic, sweeteners and, in some cases, Chios mastic oil. It is transparent and generally colorless, although occasionally it may have a yellowish tinge. The minimum sugar content of the beverage is 150g/l, and the minimum alcohol content is 20% vol. This traditional Greek liqueur is currently exhibiting enormous potential in the international market; in their efforts to raise its profile, its producers have demonstrated tremendous respect for its history.

Alongside its production of wine, in which great progress and great changes have been made, Greece can also boast some excellent products in the category of spirits, ones that offer a delightful range of flavors rooted in tradition. Strong alcoholic beverages such as ouzo, tsipouro, and tsikoudia have close connections to Greek gastronomy and to the nation’s culture of food.

As local tradition suggests, Mastiha of Chios can be served with dessert or with coffee. It’s also an excellent choice served ice-cold as an aperitif-shot, enjoyed in an old-fashioned glass with plenty of crushed ice, or as an ingredient in cocktails.

KITRO OF NAXOS

Naxos is the home of a unique traditional liqueur, Kitro Naxou. There is written evidence of the presence and common use of “Kitrorako” on the island of Naxos from as early as the beginning of the 19th century. This drink derives its characteristic flavor from its aromatic constituents: the leaves and fruit of the citron tree. Its production involves careful distillation and blending techniques that result in a delightful and aromatic drink.

Kitro Naxou comes in three different types: green, yellow, and clear. Each variety offers its own characteristics and taste profile. Green Kitro, with an alcoholic strength of 25-30% vol. and a minimum sugar content of 16%, has a vibrant and herbal flavor, while the yellow version, with 33-36% vol. and a minimum sugar content of 10.5%, suggests a warmer, more complex and slightly bittersweet result. Clear Kitro, also known as White Kitro, on the other hand, with an alcoholic strength of 30-33% vol. and a minimum sugar content of 12%, provides an intense, pure citron taste. This locally produced liqueur is enjoyed on its own but it also serves as a key ingredient in various cocktails and mixed drinks. Its versatility allows it to complement a wide range of flavors.

KOUM KOUAT OF CORFU

The liqueur Koum Kouat of Corfu is a unique and flavorsome yellowish to orange drink produced exclusively on the island of Corfu. Its name comes from the Chinese term “kam kwat”, meaning “golden orange”. It is made from the citrus fruit known as kumquat, which has been extensively cultivated on the island of Corfu since 1924.

The small, oval-shaped fruit is usually harvested from January to February and infused in alcohol (ethyl alcohol of agricultural origin) together with sugar to create this delightful liqueur. Koum Kouat has a bright, citrusy aroma with a bittersweet and tangy taste, capturing the essence of the Mediterranean sunshine. Its golden color and refreshing flavor make it a popular choice for cocktails and mixed drinks, but it’s also enjoyed on its own as a digestif. Koum Kouat represents the vibrant flavors of Corfu and has become a beloved part of Greek culinary tradition. The minimum alcoholic strength is 20% vol.

TENTOURA

Tentura is a traditional liqueur produced exclusively in Greece, with a history dating back to the 15th century. The geographical indication “Tentura” is used for the liqueur produced within the borders of the municipalities of Patras, Erimanthos, and Kato Achaia. While there is much speculation about the origin of the name, the most likely possibility seems to be the Latin word “tinctura”, used to describe its deep reddish-brown color and rich and complex flavor profile.

Sweet local wines such as “Mavrodaphne of Patras”, “Muscat of Patras”, and “Muscat of Rio”, ingredients in the liqueur, contribute to Tentura’s unique aroma and flavor without obscuring the dominant notes of the spices it always contains, foremost of which are cinnamon, clove and nutmeg. Nonetheless, each producer’s Tentura, made following traditional secret recipes that use various amounts of spices, citrus fruits, and local wines, is distinctively different.

The minimum alcoholic strength is 18% vol, and the minimum sugar content, expressed as invert sugar, is 120g/l. Tentura can be consumed as a digestif after a meal, as a bar drink (neat or with soda or tonic), or as a cocktail ingredient. Mainly, however, it is enjoyed as a chilled shot and makes an excellent accompaniment to dried fruits, walnuts, and desserts. ■

KOSTAKI WINERY

Kostaki Winery is a brand-new wine project on the island of Samos, created by Evmorfia Kostaki and Lorenz Immerfall. The venture has already drawn admiring glances from both professionals and wine lovers, garnering continued interest and praise.



Evmorfia Kostaki and Lorenz Immerfall, founders of Kostaki Winery.

Kostaki, a native of Samos, and Immerfall, who was born in Bavaria in Germany, met during their winemaking studies in France and have been a couple ever since. Together, they have explored the world of wine, earning Master's degrees in Viticulture and Oenology, as well as the WSET Diploma. Their journey has taken them to France, Italy, and the United States, as well as across Europe and beyond, where they have sought out exciting wines in remote corners and met the people behind the labels.

In 2020, they decided to embark on a joint venture, founding Kostaki Winery on the Greek island of Samos. After navigating through mountains of paperwork and enduring what both of them described as years of construction chaos, 2023 marked their first harvest.

If you ask them about their relationship with wine, Kostaki will say that it is an emotion that's often overwhelming, especially since she became a Master of Wine student. "I wouldn't think of attempting this almost impossible qualification without loving the world of wine," she says. "However, the constant studying has made me very analytical, causing wine to lose some of its romance and magic. Nevertheless, the spark hasn't faded, and I enjoy every opportunity I can to relax with a glass of wine and good company." Meanwhile, Immerfall responds disarmingly, "What's my relationship with wine? I drink it!"

Immerfall's personal taste is for fresh, acidic dry wines such as Chenin Blanc, Riesling, or Albarino. These are also the wine styles they strive to achieve at the winery. On the other hand, Kostaki is more of an old-fashioned enthusiast, opting for a nice Bordeaux to delight her senses!

As for their responsibilities, there's practically no aspect of the work that they don't get involved in! For them, no two days are the same; that, as they say, is the exciting part of owning a winery. Their tasks vary depending on the time of year, shifting from vineyard work to winery operations or sales.

The months leading up to the first harvest were more demanding than the harvest itself. The winery is situated in a brand-new building, which meant that the construction had to be completed in order to receive the grapes. Everything ran close to the wire, from installing the floor tiles to setting up the cooling system for the tanks. Fortunately, they did get everything ready on time for the harvest. What's more, they entered the harvest season with a clear idea of the wine styles they wanted to produce. This clarity helped them remain focused and organized, despite it being their very first vintage, but it could not dispel a lurking worry that perhaps producing what they dreamed of wasn't feasible, at least not in the first year. That's why the moments they cherished the most came after the harvest, as each passing day saw the wines taking shape. Ultimately, their hard work and determination were rewarded.

After the frenzy of harvest time, spring days are the next busiest. Mornings typically begin early in the vineyard for shoot thinning, followed by activities in the winery such as labeling the new vintage and preparing orders. Evenings are spent on the other side of the island, showcasing the wines to hospitality professionals.

THE GRAPE

With the establishment of Kostaki Winery, Evmorfia and Lorenz have set themselves a simple yet essential goal: to become the benchmark for Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. This is why they have opted to exclusively work with this particular variety. Their aim is to thoroughly understand how to manage it, both in the vineyard and the winery, in order to achieve the best possible results. They're keen not to dilute their focus by working with other varieties. By concentrating solely on this often misunderstood grape and crafting exceptional wines with it, they're looking to enhance the overall appreciation for Muscat and to foster its growth, both on Samos and globally.

The task they've set themselves isn't easy. Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains is among the most demanding grape varieties. Its thin skin renders it vulnerable to various vineyard diseases, making disease management a top priority throughout the growing season. The high morning humidity on the island of Samos aids in cooling down the

vineyard, but then that humidity in the bunch zone needs to be alleviated, so as to minimize disease pressure; this means a thorough leaf removal process is essential. As all the vineyards are trained in bush form, the canopy above the grapes serves as a natural shield against the sun, mitigating the risk of sunburn.

The hard work doesn't cease once the grapes reach the winery. The must and wine of Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains react very quickly with oxygen, potentially compromising the precision in the aromas they're trying to achieve. Therefore, they employ a highly reductive approach and exercise extreme caution when handling the wine, to minimize any excessive contact with oxygen. The decision to use screwcap closures across the entire still wine range directly reflects this commitment – they seek to ensure that all their efforts in the cellar are preserved, allowing the wine to reach consumers' lips as crisp and bright as they intend it to be!

THE WINES

There's no denying that Samos has become synonymous with sweet wines. However, at Kostaki Winery, they're not making the traditional sweet wines their priority. Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains is a variety that can yield every possible wine style, and Evmorfia and Lorenz want to prove that the Samos terroir can be both modern and fun, so they've decided to be innovative with the grape, adopting revolutionary practices in both the vineyard and the winery. Nonetheless, their main focus is on dry wines, and its their hope that, in the near future, what they produce in this field will be considered among the top Greek wines.

The first harvest of 2023 produced four different wines, all from Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, which capture the wildness of Samos and the crispness of the Aegean Sea in one bottle.

[1] KOSTAKI DRY

THE FLAGSHIP WINE

A structured, gastronomic dry wine, with delicate aromas of lime, sea shells and orange blossoms.

[2] KOSTAKI ALO

THE "OTHER" STYLE OF DRY WINE

a much more approachable wine, with a rounded palate and attractive aromas of green apple, citrus fruit and yeast.

[3] KOSTAKI ANCESTRAL METHOD

THE BRUT NATURE

A sparkling wine with gentle bubbles, and crisp palate, at just 10.5% abv.

KOSTAKI EARLY HARVEST

The off-dry style: An elegant wine with high acidity (due to the early harvest) balanced by just the right amount of residual sugar, and a surprisingly low 9% abv.

Last but not least, they've also produced a limited edition rosé that will enter the market next year, coming from a new vineyard planted with Muscat Noir à Petits Grains, the red-skinned mutation of Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. This is a variety that's never been used before for varietal wines, at least in Greece, and they've had pleasantly surprising results, bringing out a wine that exhibits a stunningly juicy red-fruit character.

Kostaki and Immerfall are determined to bring Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains to new levels of excellence. In addition to their current range, they're also working on a traditional-method sparkling wine. Remaining steadfast in their commitment to never introduce commercial yeast in the winery, it won't be bottled until the next harvest. They plan to use a pied de cuve to start the second fermentation. A special note for those looking forward to visiting the winery; Evmorfia and Lorenz have created a beautiful balcony with incredible views over western Samos that's particularly amazing at sunset. It overlooks the vineyard and will be hosting tastings as of the summer of 2025. ■

SUMMER BEST BUYS

Greek vineyards are treasure troves of unique and rare grape varieties, each offering a glimpse into the country's rich viticultural history.



Among these gems are varieties such as Kydonitsa, grown primarily in Laconia and producing crisp, balance-driven whites with intense quince notes, and Negoska, hailing from northern Greece and known for its folksy, tannic reds. Mavrokountoura, once nearly extinct but now making a comeback, presents aromatic rosés with floral and fruity characteristics, while Mavro Kalavrytino, grown in the Aigialeia vineyards, offers fragrant, lively reds with a touch of spice. These varieties, along with many others, reflect Greece's diverse terroir and contribute to its vibrant wine culture, making them all must-tries for any wine enthusiast seeking something truly unique.

[1] **NOVITA**
Grampas Winery, *Goustolidi*, €14.80

Grampas Winery has made great (and thankfully successful) efforts to save and promote Goustolidi, a rare local grape variety. This wine shows the variety's great potential and the importance of having revived it. Along with charming aromas of lemon blossoms, citrus fruits, jasmine and pear, the nose is round and well balanced, while the lemony and floral flavor in the mouth lasts through to the aftertaste. It pairs ideally with seafood, cheese and tapas as well as with lemony versions of greek "ladera", or dishes cooked in olive oil.

[2] **TACHTAS**
Douloufakis Winery, *Tachtas*, €11.50

Crete has an inexhaustible wealth of hidden wine treasures, including the white variety Tachtas. This wine is unique and particularly versatile at the table. The deep yellow hints at an aromatic profile of ripe pears, peaches, apricots, and white flowers, while the velvety texture and creamy sweet sensation harmonize perfectly with a mildly refreshing acidity. There's a sweet sensation that's also found on the palate in the form of softness and roundness.

[3] **NEGOSKA ROSÉ**
Mikro Ktima Titos, *Negoska*, €14.80

The Goumenissa region, known for its quality wine production, has a new member in its wine club, a 100% Negoska rosé that will amaze you as much as the fairytale set-up of this captivating winery, hidden in the dense oak forest. Red fruit aromas, floral notes, and hints of pink grapefruit, lime and bergamot create a pleasantly fresh, silky sip. It's an excellent choice as an aperitif or paired with Greek tapas and other summer bites.

[4] **DIASELO KYDONITSA WILD YEAST**
Ktima Palivou, *Kydonitsa*, €21.10

Palivou Estate redefines the profile of the ultimate up-and-coming white Greek grape, Kidonitsa, in a terroir-driven wine with a touch of French and American oak (two months each, in a row). There are complex aromas of citrus fruit, quince (the characteristic of the variety), peach, honey and caramel butter. The refreshing acidity balances perfectly with the creamy, almost full-bodied texture and leads to a long-lasting finish.

[5] **SKLAVA**
Zacharias Winery, *Sklava*, €12.50

Rescued by Ilias Zacharias, the Sklava variety may have patiently waited for years on the vine, but once this unique and rare grape from the area of Nemea in the Peloponnese was bottled, it became irresistible. Aromas of pear, green apple, citrus fruits, herbs, tea leaves, and chamomile, along with mild acidity and a light finish, make for a tasty and special wine.

- [6] VOUDOMATO
Gavalas Winery, *Voudomato*, €31.00

In a place where Assyrtiko dominates – and not unjustly so – Gavalas Winery embraces Vou-domato, one of the many forgotten varieties of the Santorini vineyard. This rosé is undoubtedly a great wine, both as a varietal and as one that is mostly terroir-driven. It is crystal clear, refreshing and mellow, with a sense of freshness and aromas of red fruit. The acidity pays tribute to its native land and, together with its mineral elements, works wonderfully with seafood meals.

- [7] METHYMNAEOS ORANGE
Methymnaeos Winery, *Chidiriotiko*, €17.20

On an island which is largely noted for its ouzo production, Methymnaeos Orange highlights what a blessed land Lesvos is and what a wonderful terroir it has. Made from the local Chidiriotiko variety, Methymnaeos is an orange wine whose grapes come from a vineyard that's been carefully tended for years. Orange and orange marmalade aromas, as well as quince, apricot and a hint of tofu, dominate the nose. With its round mouthfeel evoking sweetness, its minerality and its soft tannins yet earthy finish, this wine can pair perfectly with both meat and seafood.

- [8] AOSPERITIS
Lipsi Winery, *Fokiano*, €22.30

This award-winning sweet red wine from sun-dried Fokiano grapes put the island of Lipsi on the wine map of Greece. This wine is produced as it was in the past, by pressing the overripe grapes with the must and then maturing the result in oak barrels for at least two years in order to give it a complex character. It's full-bodied, thick and well-balanced, with aromas of honey, sweet grapes and dried fruits that match perfectly with mature cheeses and traditional desserts.

- [9] PETITE FLEUR
Parparoussis Winery, *Sideritis*, €11.20

Sideritis, one of the white varieties of the Peloponnese, is in very real danger of becoming extinct. The late Thanasis Parparoussis created unique wines from this rare grape, and Petite Fleur is one of them; it's an unusual (by Greek standards) rosé with a bright and light salmon color close to the style of Provence, boasting subtle floral aromas, strong fruity character and a nose of cherry and strawberry, grapefruit and caramel.

- [10] PAMIDI
Vourvoukeli Estate, *Pamidi*, €16.10

Pamidi is one of the main varieties of Thrace, a red grape that, with suitable vinification, is ideal for the production of rosé wines with a rich aromatic character. Vourvoukeli Estate, which has a record of investing in native varieties, is trying to revive the winegrowing tradition of the area and put it back on the wine map of Greece. In this wine, they have created an amazing rosé with bright, lavish fruity aromas and charming character. It's ideal with saganaki, fried vegetables and Greek pasta recipes.

- [11] PLYTO PSARADES
Lyrarakis Winery, *Plyto*, €14.90

The Lyrarakis family saved the rare and promising Cretan variety, Plyto, from extinction and revived it. They planted it in the "Psarades" vineyard at an elevation of 480 meters in the early '90s, following organic cultivation practices. The result is an excellent grape that produces a quite elegant and unique wine. The island's soil imparts both fruity and mineral characteristics, with chalky notes, a full-bodied sip, vibrant acidity, and a slightly creamy aftertaste.

- [12] MOUCHTARO
Muses Estate, *Mouchtaro*, €22.20

Mouchtaro is a rare red variety from the region of Central Greece which owes its existence in part to Muses Estate from Askri Boeotia. This wine is a serious red, simultaneously both fruity and soft; it demonstrates the potential of the variety and augurs well for its anticipated future growth. The wine boasts a juicy flavor, with high botanical acidity and velvety noble tannins that pleasantly stimulate the palate right through to the aftertaste. Paired with pastitsio, lamb, or even tuna fillet, it is certain to impress.

- [13] IAMA
Vriniotis Winery, *Vradiano*, €14.30

A private vineyard hosts the indigenous variety Vradiano in the Vrinioti Winery, on Mt Telethrio in north Evia. A juicy rosé, with charming aromas of red fruits such as blackcurrant, cherries, and strawberries, it's enticing to the senses. It presents a seductive, floral and fruity bouquet, with an essence that sweetly and pleasantly refreshes the palate, while maintaining strength of flavor over time. Pair this dominant freshness in the mouth with grilled vegetables and small fish, and you can thank me later.

- [14] PETROULIANOS
Vatista Winery, *Petroulianos*, €14.00

Maria Vatista is pioneering the varietal Petroulianos wine, daring to promote this white variety from Laconia by creating a wine solely from it. This grape, known for its subtle acidity, has previously only been used in blends. The wine undergoes fermentation and maturation on its fine lees in stainless steel tanks. The result is quite elegant, with distinct citrus and white fruit aromas. Treat yourself and pair it with fried calamari and seasonal greens.

- [15] AVGOUSTIATIS
Ktima Brintzikis, *Avgoustiatis*, €18.10

Due to the rarity of this grape, varietal bottlings are hard to come by. However, Ktima Brintziki cultivates it at its Iliia vineyard, and produces a varietal version that is truly exciting. If you are open to exploring new and challenging pathways, try this pleasantly soft, ripe but not heavy dry red wine, with velvety tannins. Pair it with roasted meat and hard cheese to experience elegance combined with boldness.

- [16] PLAGIES GERAKION
Avantis Estate, *Mavrokountoura*, €15.50

Apostolos Mountrichas is nurturing this gifted, rare, top-quality variety and creating an impressive range of labels. One of the most notable is this rosé version. It offers a truly new expression of the grape, with dense aromas of very crisp, fresh red fruits both on the nose and palate; hints of florality and botanical character add a particularly attractive dimension to the wine. Plagies Gerakion is not a wine that demands specific food pairings; it is very food-friendly. It does, however, go exceedingly well with lobster, tuna steak, or Asian cuisine, although you can also enjoy it on its own, as an aperitif.

- [17] MAVRO KALAVRYTINO NATUR
Tetramythos Winery, *Mavro Kalavrytino*, €12.60

If you're a lover of natural wines, you simply must try this wine, a classic version of a rare grape called Mavro Kalavrytino. It's planted at high elevation and vinified with indigenous yeasts. Low-intervention, practices in the winery bring out the freshness of the fruit, along with charming and finesse-filled herbal notes. Balanced acidity, medium body, and easy-going tannins create a soft sip, perfect with tuna fillet, Greek tapas, and oven-baked eggplants.

- [18] PREKNADI
Diamantakos Winery, *Preknadi*, €10.70

It's more than obvious that when a winemaker produces only two wines, these wines should be exceptional. Diamantakos White is made from Preknadi, a very rare, almost extinct, indigenous white varietal from Naoussa. It owes its name to its freckles ("prekna"), small brown spots on the grape's skin. This unique and delicious wine boasts fruity aromas, balanced acidity and – surprisingly – a relatively high alcohol content. It's a gastronomic wine that complements a wide range of food pairings. ■

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Street, Athens — DRY BISTRO 5 Koumbari Street, Kolonaki — FABRICA DE VINO WINE BAR 3 Em. Benaki Street, Athens — FITA 1 Ntourm Street, Athens — FREUD ORIENTAL Athens 48 Ch. Trikoupi Street, Kifissia — GREECE AND GRAPES 20 Lykourgou Street, Kallithea — HETEROCLITO WINE BAR 2 Fokionos and 30 Petraki Street, Syntagma — IT RESTAURANT 29 Skoufa Street, Kolonaki — JONA'S WINE BAR 31 Ch. Vournazou Street, Athens — K2 DESIGN 34 Veranzerou Street, Athens — KEDROS BOOKSTORE 3 G. Genadiou Street, Athens — KOKOTOS ESTATE WINERY Stamata Attiki — KIKI DE GRÈCE Wine Bar 38 Voulis and 4 Ipitou Street, Syntagma — LAFAZANIS WINERY 89 Afon Kypriaou, Eleysina — CHATEAU LAZARIDIS Kapandriti Attiki — LOLLO'S ATENE PIZZA 3A Ethn. Antistaseos Avenue, Chalandri — MATERIA PRIMA WINE BAR 68 Falirou Street, Koukaki — MATSUHISA ATHENS SUSHI 40 Apollonos Street, Astir Palace, Vouliagmeni — MELIA HOTEL 14 Chalkokondyli Street, Athens — MONK GRAPES AND SPIRITS WINE BAR 4 Karori Street, Athens — MONSIEUR DIDOT 48 Sina Street, Athens — BENAKI MUSEUM 1 Koubari Street, Kolonaki / 138 Piraeus Avenue, Gazi — MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC ART 4 N. Douka Street, Kolonaki — NOEL WINE BAR 59B Kolokotroni Street, Stoa Kourtaki — NOAH Eleftheria Park, Athens — NORA'S DELI 11 Anagnostopoulou Street, Kolonaki — OINOSCENT WINE BAR 45 Voulis Street, Syntagma — PALEO RESTAURANT 39 Polidefkous Street, Piraeus — PANDAISIA DELI 41 Agiou Ioannou Street, Agiou Paraskevi — DOMAINE PAPAGIANNAKOS WINERY Pousi-Kalogeris, Markopoulo — POEMS N' CRIMES WINE BAR 17 Agiou Eirinis Street, Athens — SEMELI WINES 3 Mitropoleos Street, Athens — TAZZA D' ORO WINE BAR 5 Petraki and 9 Pentelis Street, Syntagma — TANINI AGAPI MOU 91 Ippokratous Street, Athens — TO THEIO TRAGI PUNK BISTROT 36 Kydantidon, Petralona — VAROULKO SEASIDE 52 Akti Koumoundourou, Piraeus — VASSILAINAS RESTAURANT 13 Vrasida Street, Athens — VILLA GRIZIO 46 46 Agiou Alexandrou

Street, Palaio Faliro — VINS OENOTOURLISM 20 Ithakis Street, Pallini — WAREHOUSE WINE BAR Mavromichali and 21 Valtetsiou Street, Athens — WINE KINGDOM — WINE UP WINE BAR 86 EI. Venizelou Street, Petroupoli — WINEPOINT 2 Porinou and Ath. Diakou Street, Acropoli — WSPC ACADEMY 11 Glaukou Street, Palaio Faliro — YOLENI'S CAFE 9 Solonos Street, Athens — Zoumboulakis Galleries 20 Kolonaki Square, Athens — CAVA ABATZIS 12 Aristotelous Street, Thessaloniki — CAVA ABELI Korissia, Kea — CAVA EYOI EYAN 24 Kypron Square, Gargalianoi Messinias — CAVA IOSIF Paroikia, Paros — CAVA LENIS Wines 4 Vas. Balkou, Preveza — CAVA Kritsinis 30 Street Proiou, Syros — CAVA OINOCHOROS Komiakis, Naxos — CAVA OLYMPIA 57 Kerasountos, Thessaloniki — CAVA SEIRIOS 160 Karamanlis Avenue, Thessaloniki — CAVA TSINAS 146 EI. Venizelou Street, Larissa — CAVA VINAMORATO 5 Ioustinianou Street, Kastoria — CAVA WINE KIOSK 39 Aristomenous Street, Kalamata — CAVA WINE VINTAGE STUDIOS 93 Dimokratias Avenue, Irakleio, Crete — 10 GR HOTEL AND WINEBAR 16 Polydorou St, Old Town, Rhodes — 18 GRAPES Hotel Agios Prokopios, Naxos — AERINO 9 Grevenon Street, Florina — ALPHA ESTATE Amyntaio, Florina — Andriakon Deli Karavostasi Gavrio, Andros — APALLOU 51 Mitropoleos and K. Ntil Street, Thessaloniki — ESTATE AVANTIS Mytikas Lylantiou, Eyvoia — BOTTIGLIA DI VINO Alykes Potamou, Corfu — CARDOON G. Drosou Coast, Chora, Tinos — CASABLANCA SOCIAL CLUB 18 Vas. Olgas Avenue, Thessaloniki — CAVINO WINERY Aigio — COSTA NAVARINO Pylos Messinia — DALAMARAS WINERY 30 Ch. Alexandrou Street, Naoussa — DOME 16 Asklipiou Street, Thessaloniki — DOUGOS WINERY Itea, Larissa — DUCATO WINE HOTEL Megalochori Square, Santorini — GEROVASSILIOU WINERY Epanomi Thessaloniki — GRAPPA VINO AND APERITIVO 1 Dim. Kontaratou Street, Volos — KIR-YIANNIS ESTATE Giannakochori, Naoussa — KLIMAX WINEBAR 2 Ifaistou and Venizelou Street, Larissa — KONTOSOROS Xino Nero

Amyntaio, Florina — LA CASA DEL VINO 69 Sissini Street, Gastouni — LOCAL 17 Palaion Patron Germanou Street, Thessaloniki — LOCAL ASSOCIATION OF Nemea Winemakers 30 Dervenakion, Nemea — Marathia Agios Fokas Beach, Tinos — MARGIORA Chora, Kythnos — MARMITA RESTAURANT 30 Eth. Antistaseos Street, Skiathos — MONMARTI 92 Sofouli Street, Thessaloniki — MY MYKONOS HOTEL Chontros GreMOS, MYKONOS — OENOPS WINES PROSOTSANI, Drama — OENOPS WINEBAR VERGIOTI Avenue and 1 Ithakis Street, Kefalonia — OPSOPOION Maganie 6 Komotini Street, Thessaloniki — PANTHEON P. Koromila and K. Ntil Street, Thessaloniki — PATRAS WINE CLUB 38 Norman Street, Patras — PAVLIDIS ESTATE Kokkinogeia, Drama — PERILION OINOTHIKI 5 Ermou Street, Katerini — POSEIDONION GRAND HOTEL Dapia, Spetses — REWINE 25 Tsagri Street, Rethymno, Crete — ROUSSAS WINERY 34 Papadiamanti Street, Almyros — SALTO 6 K. Ntil, Thessaloniki — SCENARIO WINE BAR 1 Maronias Street, Komotini — SCLAVOS WINES Kechrionas-Lixouri, Kefalonia — OUZERI SKOTADIS 46 Dimokratias Avenue, Aegina — DOMAINE Skouras Malandreni, Argos — SOUL BAR 16 Ath. Diakou Street, Lamia — TSANTALIS WINERY Agios Pavlos, Chalkidiki — VASSALTIS WINES Vourvoula-Oia, Santorini — VENETIAN WELL Kremastis Square and 1 L. Dessyla Street, Corfu — VILLA INCOGNITO 1 Deligianni and 43 T. Sechioti Street, Tripoli. ■



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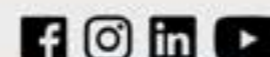


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