

grape 42



Rosé

under the Sun



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A SUMMER MEASURED IN WINE

When we were children, summer had its own way of measuring time.

Not through calendars, deadlines or appointments, but through endless hours spent in the sea, through the number of ice creams that melted in our hands, and through a countdown of those final evenings before school started up again. Even as it wound down, summer felt eternal, because somehow, the memories it created remained with us long after the season itself had passed.

Years later, summer still carries that same promise. Not simply because it marks the time for vacations, but because it gathers together experiences that stay with us: places, flavors, conversations and moments that continue to resonate. Much like wine, its significance often lies not only in the moment itself, but in the memories it leaves behind.

This summer carries additional importance, marking as it does an important milestone for Grape. Ten years have passed since the magazine's first issue. Ten years filled with journeys, stories, tastings, discoveries, friendships and countless glasses that became the starting point for new conversations. More importantly, it has been ten years spent exploring the relationship between wine, people and time. When we began this journey in 2016, we could not have imagined how many different facets of Greece we would encounter through wine, or how many remarkable people we would meet: individuals whose passion and dedication have shaped the country's modern wine culture. Today, a decade later, that same curiosity remains as strong as ever, and there is perhaps no better season in which to reflect on what we've discovered so far than the Greek summer.

A season of unplanned detours, of small discoveries that become unforgettable memories, of landscapes transformed by light and sea: summer is a time that invites us to slow down, to look more closely, and to reconnect with the people and places that give wine its meaning.

In this issue, we travel through some of northern Greece's most compelling wine regions. From Naoussa and Amyntaio to Goumenissa and Drama, we meet the people forging the future of Greek wine while remaining deeply rooted in their heritage. We visit wineries investing in innovation without losing sight of tradition, and we explore communities whose history continues to leave a profound mark on the country's wine identity.

Northern Greece is often associated with powerful reds and

dramatic mountain landscapes, but its character extends far beyond these familiar images. It is a region of striking contrasts and remarkable diversity, where centuries-old traditions coexist with a vibrant contemporary culture. Its cities, vineyards and culinary traditions reveal a Greece that is at once historic and forward-looking.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Thessaloniki. Multifaceted, cosmopolitan and utterly honest and true to its own identity, the city embraces its past while constantly reinventing itself. It remains one of the most exciting gastronomic destinations in the country: a place where cultures, histories and flavors converge with extraordinary ease.

The Cyclades, for their part, have long been one of Greece's most beloved destinations. Among the islands we have come to cherish, Tinos holds a special place. Once known primarily for its spiritual significance, the island is now quietly crafting one of the most compelling wine stories in the country. Driven by a new generation of ambitious producers, the revival of old vineyards and a deep respect for its unique terroir, Tinos has emerged as a destination where wine, gastronomy and culture intertwine in a way that feels both natural and exciting.

In Greece, summer seems inextricably linked to the sea, not only as far as where we spend time and what we customarily do but also through our food. The sea offers an abundance of exceptional ingredients and flavors that are fresh, delicate and full of character, often requiring very little preparation (and therefore less time spent in a hot kitchen) to truly stand out. Few things capture the essence of a Greek summer better than seafood enjoyed alongside a crisp white wine.

As Grape enters its second decade, we continue to believe that wine is one of the most compelling ways to understand a place and the people who inhabit it. It is a lens through which landscapes gain meaning, traditions find new expression, and stories find new narrators.

So wherever this summer finds you – on an island terrace, in a mountain village, beside the sea or simply sharing a bottle with friends – we hope these pages inspire new discoveries. Because, much like summer itself, the best wines are never only about the present moment. They are about the memories that endure. Enjoy!

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TABOO

Text by Konstantinos Lazarakis MW

The horrors of the Greek grape varieties. Unnecessary complexity? Necessary evil? Not really. Think again.

I know, I know. Wine is dauntingly complex. It is too much information sometimes. I've dedicated my entire life to wine and I still feel stressed when someone hands me the wine list in a restaurant. I might know the wines on the list, but I have no clue what my fellow diners will enjoy. More often than not, however, I don't know the wines, the producers, the regions or even the grape varieties presented because, for some years now, many sommeliers think that the more obscure their selection, the better.

Is picking out a wine in a restaurant the ultimate, yet most subtle form of social anxiety?

Traditionally, wines have been named after their provenance or, if you like, their appellation. You ask for a wine from Tuscany or Crete, but this information has very little to do with what you're about to taste. A wine from Crete can arrive under any number of guises.

An appellation wine is a different story. There are laws governing the production of what you are about to have. When drinking a Chianti, you're supposed to be drinking a wine produced from grapes from a specific region, from specific grape varieties, and vinified using specific techniques. You don't care about all this, but you know more or less what to expect when you do order a Chianti – a flavorful, slightly tart red wine that is lovely with pizza or pasta – although Chianti Rosé has just been approved!

Or forget about wine. Parmigiano Reggiano cheese is an appellation with a very specific set of rules governing the production of this cheese, so every time you bite into a rock of Parmesan you get that familiar crunchy/salty sensation. But then, making sense of appellations is a nightmare. You think you know Bordeaux wines, but the appellation accommodates sparkling wines, white wines, rosé wines, dry wines and sweet wines. Go figure! Even if you're old guard and have decided that a Bordeaux has to be a red wine, you can still be in for a surprise, since Bordeaux reds can be light or heavy, oaky or not, soft or tannic, immediately quaffable or made to last for decades.

Salvation for the wine drinkers that not keen on completing a WSET wine course came sometime in the 1980s, in the form of varietal labeling. A wine was named after the grape variety that produced it; this, more or less, defined the style of wine. Suddenly, wine was easy.

If you had chicken once and you liked it, then you can order chicken wherever you are, at an Italian, French or even at an Indian restaurant, and you pretty much know that you'll enjoy what lands on your plate.

In the same vein, perhaps you tasted a Merlot or a Chardonnay, and then you even had a second glass. You memorized the name of the grape (sort of easy) so that the next time you visit a restaurant, any restaurant, you can confidently order a bottle of this or that. There's a high chance that the restaurant will have it, and a high chance, too, that you'll have a nice evening out.

Many people think that naming wines after the grape variety benefited the world of wine at large, but that's incorrect. It was hugely advantageous for wines made from a handful of grape varieties that managed to become household names. The rest of the wine world – making wines from grapes that no one knew, let alone could pronounce – was left out in the cold. It was just noise and frankly too much of it. The wine world was morphing into something more homogeneous and, quite possibly, more boring.

For millennia, Greek wine producers have been cultivating a breathtaking array of indigenous, mainly endemic, grape varieties. No one really knows how many; some say 200, other estimate more than 300. We are, it seems, re-discovering a few new ones every year. Every single one of these varieties are adding their individuality to the fascinating matrix of wine, contributing more nuances and more beauty. This beauty is out there for us; it is definitely not just more noise.

Greek grape varieties are there, creating a dazzling flavor and taste universe for you to explore: the softness of Agiorgitiko, the mineral raciness of Assyrtiko, the peachy whites of Vidiano. There's also the uplifting Moschofilero, the graceful bite of Xinomavro, the silky nature of Limniona, the lemony leanness of Robola, and the yin-and-yang sweet-and-dry faces of Muscat. And this is just scratching the surface.

You can and you will get lost in this universe, but trust me, you'll love it, too.

Wait though, there's more. Numerous wine producers from all around the world have been planting Greek grape varieties for years now. There are multiple reasons behind this trend. These varieties offer a way out of the boring dictatorship of the "international grapes". Moreover, they're simply delicious. Finally, in a world where water is becoming scarcer by the minute, such drought-tolerant vines offer a glimmer of hope.

Greek grape varieties are not a complexity that we must bear or eschew. They are a vinous wonder that we should embrace...



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CELLAR RAT

Text by Yiannis Kaimenakis, Wine Sommelier

I recently met up with my favorite drinking buddies after we'd all spent quite some time apart.

This gathering carried a particularly emotional significance. Manolis, a founding member of our little gang and a dear friend, had overcome a serious health challenge, and had decided to celebrate by taking his own holy grail out of its resting place: a bottle of Château Mouton Rothschild 2004. After months of chemotherapy, this was the first time we would be reunited with medical approval, which lent the occasion a deeply moving dimension. Then again, a bottle of Mouton Rothschild is, by itself, reason enough to cancel a dentist appointment, skip football, neglect your social calendar or rearrange childcare duties in order to indulge your palate.

We followed the operating protocol to the letter and every precaution was taken; we made sure the bottle stood upright for twenty-four hours, and that it was opened and decanted several hours before serving. Yet, unfortunately for us, the wine never came close to meeting our expectations. It was not corked, nor was it flawed in any obvious way. It was simply, and stubbornly, underwhelming, showing little of the house style or the grandeur one expects from such an illustrious estate.

As for provenance, this particular bottle had not fallen victim to poor storage. It had been purchased en primeur from highly reputable merchants and had spent most of its life at a controlled temperature in what we jokingly call our friend's "incubator" – his temperature-controlled wine cabinet. Incidentally, it was also one of the rare occasions when we showed some restraint and resisted the familiar temptation of opening a parade of great bottles. That rather foolish habit of wine-fueled showmanship, where mul-

tiples prestigious wines are subjected to a kind of crash-test comparison, often strips away much of the individual charm and mystery that makes each bottle special. My first reaction, finding myself in the unenviable position of making the initial assessment, was to call the rest of the group – everyone except our host – and suggest that we pretend there was something magical in our glasses. Looking back, it was the first time in my career that I consciously delivered a false evaluation. We quickly agreed that there was little point in subjecting the wine to forensic analysis and dismantling the beautiful expectations our friend had built around that evening.

Subconsciously, I was reminded of all the other occasions when I had found myself in a similarly awkward position: bottles affected by cork taint, oxidation, indifferent vintages, or any of the countless manifestations of what we broadly refer to as bottle variation. Inevitably, no matter how much one wishes otherwise, these things happen, even in the finest houses.

What would have been truly unfortunate, and thankfully did not happen in our case, would have been to revel in the disappointment, triumphantly dissecting a wine's failure while sitting in front of a friend who had chosen it with such anticipation and affection.

Perhaps it was meant to happen this way, forcing us to shift the spotlight onto the evening's true protagonist. Our friend had beaten cancer, and that alone was what really mattered. In the end, the greatest wine in the world is not the liquid in the bottle. It is the company gathered around the table, and the reason they have for raising their glasses.



VERTICAL

Text by Grigoris Michailos, Dip WSET

Roditis has long been one of the most misunderstood grape varieties in Greece. Despite significant plantings throughout the country, the variety became largely associated with simple, easy-drinking wines from high-yielding vineyards, wines often destined to prioritize quantity over character.

To be fair, there is absolutely nothing wrong with honest, approachable, value-for-money wines for the everyday table. This is, after all, a category that resonates with most consumers, and the region of Achaia has traditionally been a reliable source of exactly this style.

Scratch a little beneath the surface, however, and there is far more to Roditis than many people realize. That was definitely my impression after attending a vertical tasting of Asprolithi, organized to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the wine's market launch. Could a wine retailing for less than €10 in Greece genuinely claim serious ageing potential? Curiosity may have killed the cat, but fortunately that was not the case here. Instead, the tasting generated enthusiasm among the lucky few participants as bottles dating back to 2016 gradually surrendered their secrets in the glass.

For those unfamiliar with the Asprolithi label, this is a wine that represents an important chapter in the evolution of modern Greek wine. Back in the early 1990s, it was a pioneering release that, arguably, influenced many wines that followed. Crisp, clean, lemon-driven and distinctly mineral, Asprolithi was nearly revolutionary during an era when oxidized white wines still dominated much of the market. More importantly, it introduced and defined a style deeply rooted in that part of Aigialeia that calls the mountains its home.

For several days I kept trying to find the right word to describe what Asprolithi truly is. "Iconic" immediately came to mind, although I hesitated for a moment. Does a wine that originally sold for less than €10 really deserve that description? After giving it considerable thought, I believe it does. Irrespective of rarity, prestige or price, it has the ability to transmit place with remarkable precision, and to develop over time. And if that is not terroir, then what is? Throughout the different vintages, this is a wine that consistently reflects its mountainous origins, translating the nuances of the region directly into the glass.

And that was perhaps the most important afterthought of this vertical tasting: not only the ageing potential of Roditis, but also the remarkable consistency through each year's different climatic conditions. Warm years, drought, rain pressure or delayed harvests may have altered the expression of the fruit, but the identity of the wine remained surprisingly intact. Fruit character changes, texture evolves and complexity gradually increases, but the mineral backbone and freshness persist throughout the entire range of vintages.

If Santorini's Assyrtiko has become the benchmark for age-worthy Greek whites, then Roditis from the mountains of Aigialeia quietly makes a very compelling case for joining the conversation. Is Asprolithi an iconic wine? In a sense, yes. Is it still an underdog? Absolutely. Sit back and enjoy six vintages of one of Greece's most underestimated white wines.

- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2025**
A very youthful and energetic style. An expressive lemony character that dominates both nose and palate is accompanied by fresh melon aromas and a slightly ester-driven profile. Extremely high acidity gives it a razor-sharp structure while minerality remains evident throughout. With a medium finish with plenty of freshness and tension, it is pure and vibrant.
- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2024**
Already showing a surprising evolution after just one year in bottle. The fruit appears riper and more generous, while the aromatic intensity remains relatively restrained. Delicate petrol hints and a subtle Riesling-like character emerge on the palate. With beautifully integrated acidity and a long mineral finish, it is elegant and quietly complex.
- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2023**
Golden color with an evolved aromatic profile. Honey, toasted notes, dried nuts and ripe lemon curd dominate the nose. More textural and richer on the palate with lovely balance between refreshing acidity and a subtle creaminess, and a long nutty finish with excellent persistence. It is delicious and highly expressive.
- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2022**
A more unusual expression of the wine. It is, when compared to other vintages, less lemon-driven and has a more herbal and savory aromatic profile. Salinity feels more pronounced, and an almost peaty character adds complexity. A distinctive and slightly more austere style.
- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2021**
Perhaps the most complete and elegant wine of the tasting. Aromatically restrained and fresh, it shows beautiful purity and precision. There's intense lemony fruit on the palate, supported by tremendous energy and balance, and a fine length and subtle oxidative complexity to the finish. It's a wonderful expression of high-elevation Roditis.
- **ASPROLITHI RODITIS 2016**
Deep golden color with visible signs of evolution. Nutty aromas, honey and oxidative notes dominate, although the wine still retains a surprisingly fresh acidity. Slightly leaner on the palate compared to younger vintages, it loses some intensity with air but is still remarkably lively and an excellent example of the ageing potential of Roditis. And don't forget; this may have sold for under €8 when it first hit the shelves.

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WINE JOURNAL

Text by Gregory Kontos, Dip Wset

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

When the temperature rises in Athens, we tend to head to Kifissia, the beautifully green and chic suburb of Northern Athens. The weather here is always cooler and fresher than downtown Athens. You may even want to drink a deep red wine in the heart of the summer! This is what happened to us at least, when we visited Oak Cava Kifissia; a premium wine store and delicatessen on the border of Kifissia and Nea Erythraia. So, we got a Terra Petra Rapsani from Apostolos Thymiopoulos, a Xinomavro blend from PDO Rapsani, Thessaly, in the shadow of Mt Olympus, home of the Greek Gods! We also had a glass of Psi (from the Greek letter Ψ) from Spain, the side project of visionary Danish winemaker Peter Sisseck, the founder of the legendary Dominio de Pingus. This is a Ribera del Duero based on Tinto Fino (Tempranillo) sourced from over 700 tiny plots (only old vines) across 20 different villages. Respect!

Some say red wines are more unpopular nowadays, and especially during summer. Well, I don't understand this. Especially when the “juice” is as delicious as the three distinct Xinomavro wines I tasted again recently, which stole my heart. Kir-Yianni Ramnista 2015 is a PDO Naoussa wine (thus 100% Xinomavro), fruity, savory and earthy. I loved the refreshing acidity and grippy tannins, yet what I really love about a Xinomavro is its seductive nose. Another Xinomavro gem I tried recently is Magoutes Parcel Selection Xinomavro 2018, from the high-elevation (750-890 m.) terroir of Siatista in Kozani.

Co-owner Dimitris Diamantis crafts a cool-climate wine with character and delicate aromas of red fruits (strawberry, sour cherry, raspberry) intertwined with floral notes of violet and beautiful tertiary notes. It's elegance over power on the palate. Last but not least, there's Diamantakos PDO Naoussa Xinomavro 2017, fermented in stainless steel and aged for 12 months in French oak barrels; then aged for several months in bottles before release. Remarkably aromatic and multi-layered, it tastes just how a top-class Xinomavro should.

Low & Slow. This is how they like it at the beloved Bib Gourmand-certified BBQ restaurant Fine Mess Smokehouse, on the border where the chic style of Kolonaki meets the alternative energy of Exarchia. I just love this place. We tasted plates such as the Hanging Tender Skewer; the foie gras soup; the duck pastrami salad with beetroot, gorgonzola and

blackberry; the Wagyu tartare with coffee cannoli and madeira; the salt, pepper and smoke brisket, and more. An optional, yet outstanding wine pairing menu is offered as well and when we visited we tried the juicy, fruit-forward Trumpeter, a sparkling Malbec from Mendoza Argentina; the fresh and vibrant Mount Pleasant Semillon from Hunter Valley; the jammy and mouthwatering Backwoods Reserve Zinfandel from Lodi; and the Evan Williams Kentucky straight bourbon. The whole experience was warm, welcoming and pure fun!

We recently visited Tokyo on business and decided to experience Teppanyaki. Teppanyaki refers to a Japanese style of cooking that utilizes a flat iron griddle to prepare food. We chose the outstanding (and I do mean “outstanding”) restaurant New Matsusaka at Shinjuku, and watched from the semi-circular counter as the chef prepared everything in front of us. I particularly loved the seared Wagyu sirloin sushi, the sautéed Chinese cabbage, the snow crab grilled in butter, the yummy sautéed lobster and the delicious Japanese Black Wagyu sirloin beef steak. Drinks? We got delicious local craft beer, German Rieslings, red Bordeaux and more, all by the glass. Can you open a branch in Athens, please? I promise I'll be a regular. Highly recommended!

I admit that I've spoiled my palate recently with many premium imported wines that I often have the opportunity and pleasure to try and enjoy. As a Greek, I often find myself being jealous of the level of quality some imported wines offer. And then out of the blue, I come back to tasting some Greek wines that are so WOW and get over those thoughts. Some Greeks truly can offer wines with character, enjoyment and a solid identity, even by fine-wine standards.

This is what I thought recently when I revisited tasting the Ktima Mega Spilaio White 2020, a blend of 80% Assyrtiko and 20% Lagorthi. It was just astonishing. The grapes are sourced from monastic vineyards at an elevation of 750m-830m overlooking Vouraikos Gorge in the northern Peloponnese, and a portion of the must ferments in new 300-liter oak barrels and undergoes two years of bottle ageing before release. It has razor-sharp lemony acidity; peach, lime, green apple and pear; underlying notes of roasted nuts; and a distinct minerality.

It's truly exceptional.

A GLASS OF TIME

Take the long way around, choose the path few would take, where time is savoured not spent. Only cut the corners that should be cut, because time flies fast enough. Capture all it has to give. Just like us, masters of our winemaking craft, waste it not. Because time brings the finest to light, in the purpose-built cellars of our private vineyard and winery, where our estate wines mature. No leaf has been left unturned, no labour spared, no moment rushed. As guardians of an ancient winegrowing land, at Ktima Biblia Chora, we make expressive wines that celebrate tradition as much as excellence.

Our wines are for you to appraise, not by length of time but by the memorable quality they impart - time and again.

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MACEDONIA

Few regions in Greece are as closely connected to wine as Macedonia.

Lakes, mountains, fertile valleys and vineyards come together to create a landscape that has nurtured viticulture for centuries. From Amyntaio and Naoussa to Goumenissa and Drama, each area tells its own story through its wines, its people and its traditions. Combined with a vibrant gastronomic scene and warm hospitality, Macedonia offers one of the most fascinating wine journeys in Greece.

AMYNTAIO

The sense of serenity that radiates from the landscape of Amyntaio is intoxicating. Nestled among lush green plains and mountain ranges, on a water-dominated plateau surrounded by four lakes – Vegoritida, Petron, Heimaditida and Zazari – the region feels almost dreamlike.

These lakes offer not only breathtaking scenery but also form important wetlands that host rare bird species. The surrounding countryside is defined by fertile plains, ideal for agricultural production, and hills that create a perfect microclimate for viticulture. In recent years, the area has gained increasing recognition for the wines it produces.

Yet Amyntaio is drawing attention for another significant reason as well: its transition into the post-lignite era. The region is now called upon to adapt to a new economic and environmental reality, facing the challenge of redefining itself through sustainable development and new opportunities for its local communities.

CLIMATE AND LOCAL PRODUCTS

The climate of the region is continental, with cold winters and warm summers. The significant temperature fluctuations between day and night, combined with the influence of the lakes, have a beneficial effect on vine growth, giving the wines of the area their distinctive character.

The economy of Amyntaio is based primarily on agriculture, live-stock farming and winemaking. The region is known for its high-quality local products, including beans, peppers and dairy products. The beans cultivated in the fertile plains of Amyntaio are especially prized for their flavor and nutritional value, while the famous red Florina peppers are equally renowned.

It is the viticulture here, however, that has experienced the most remarkable growth in recent decades. Vineyards are cultivated at elevations ranging from 500 to 700 meters. Covering extensive areas, they have transformed the region into one of Greece's most important winegrowing zones.

THE WINES OF AMYNTAIO

Amyntaio is the only Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) zone in northern Greece recognized for both sparkling and still wines. The undisputed star of the region's vineyards is Xinomavro, one of Greece's most celebrated indigenous grape varieties.

Xinomavro from Amyntaio stands out for its intense aromatic profile, offering notes of red fruits, tomato and sweet spices, along with naturally high acidity that makes it exceptionally suitable for ageing. Compared to Xinomavro wines from neighboring regions such as Naoussa and Goumenissa, Amyntaio expressions tend to display notably softer tannins.

Three main styles of wine are produced in the region: reds, rosés and sparkling wines. The sparkling wines of Amyntaio – crafted primarily from Xinomavro – are especially acclaimed, rivaling prestigious international sparkling wines thanks to their complexity and freshness. The rosé wines are equally popular, offering vibrant fruit-driven aromas and a lively character that beautifully reflect the unique microclimate of the area.

1. KIR-YIANNI ESTATE

On the very spot where the legendary paranga ("hut") of this estate's founder once stood – a humble structure that later inspired the name of one of the estate's most iconic labels – there now rises the winery's new production facility. Waiting for us at the entrance was the estate's head winemaker, Antonis Kioseoglou, who could hardly conceal his excitement as he welcomed us into this new space, home to production areas, administrative offices and an exceptionally elegant tasting room.

Such enthusiasm is understandable. Located in the village of Agios Panteleimonas, the winery commands breathtaking views over Lake Vegoritida. At sunset, the lake takes on an almost otherworldly beauty under the fading light. It is easy to imagine that this same magnificent view inspired the founder Yiannis Boutaris himself when he built that first humble shelter here as he set out to vinify grapes from the estate's privately owned vineyards.

The view of the lake from the Kir-Yianni winery is magical.



The new Kir-Yianni winery building is a real gem for the region.



The shop and tasting room offer truly breathtaking views of the lake.

Alongside Xinomavro, the vineyards are planted with several other varieties, including Sauvignon Blanc, Assyrtiko, Roditis and Syrah. Thanks to the persistence and vision of Stelios Boutaris, a fifth-generation winemaker – who had long dreamed of transforming this Kir-Yianni winery into a fully visitable destination – the facility has expanded significantly and now welcomes visitors eager to discover the estate’s Amyntaio labels firsthand. The architecture combines industrial aesthetics with warm terracotta-red tones on the exterior, while the interior design, featuring exposed industrial-style ceilings, reflects the meticulous and highly thoughtful approach to the renovation that has taken place.

The new production area itself is spacious and functional, designed to accommodate both the estate’s established labels and its growing number of experimental wines.

One of the latest additions to the ever-expanding list of projects conceived by the restless and innovative minds behind Kir-Yianni Estate is Scaperdas Frères – a new range of traditional-method sparkling wines made from Xinomavro. The project already occupies a substantial section of the production space with its specialized equipment. Kioseoglou spoke enthusiastically about the initiative, which has already begun to show promising results, although he admitted that “there is still a long road ahead.”

This new range takes its name from the successful fur company that Stelios Boutaris’ great-grandfather Spyridon Scaperdas, who left Kastoria with very limited means, founded in Paris in the early 20th century. Tanks, barrels, amphorae and even glass fermenters are all lined up at the winemaker’s disposal – tools for a man who never tires of experimenting with new winemaking techniques and grape varieties not traditionally associated with the region, such as Vidiano, Dafni and Kydonitsa.

Many of the estate’s well-known labels are produced here, including Akakies, Samaropetra, Diaporos, Tessaris Limnes, Palpo, Tarsanas and Kali Riza. Soon, the market may also see new bottlings, such as the outstanding Rasko: one of the finest expressions of Amyntaio Xinomavro, sourced from the single vineyard of the same name and widely regarded as producing some of the region’s best fruit for dry red wine production.

Standouts

- SCAPERDAS FRÈRES BLANC DE NOIR BRUT**
Produced from 100% Xinomavro using the traditional method, this sparkling wine comes from the 2018 vintage, with secondary fermentation in bottle beginning in 2019. It remained on its lees for two years, resulting in a wine with vibrant acidity, remarkable finesse, and exceptionally refined mousse.
- DROUMO 2025**
A 100% Sauvignon Blanc single-vineyard wine sourced from the Droumo vineyard site. Considered one of the finest vintages of this label to date, it stands out for its elegance and complexity and rightfully ranks among the top Sauvignon Blanc wines produced in Greece.
- KALÍ RIZA 2021**
A highly characteristic expression of Xinomavro from the cool-climate vineyards of Amyntaio. A particularly strong vintage for this label, showing excellent acidity, supple tannins and significant ageing potential of up to 20 years.

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The Alpha Estate winery, surrounded by vineyards.



An autumn view from the Karanika Estate of the lake, with the vines in the foreground.



An installation featuring wine bottles in the reception area of the Vegorititis Winery.

2. ALPHA ESTATE

Alpha Estate hardly needs an introduction. Founded in 1997 by the highly respected winemaker Angelos Iatridis and the viticulturist Makis Mavridis, it is widely regarded as one of the most notable wineries of the Amyntaio region. Their profound knowledge of viticulture and winemaking, combined with an unwavering commitment to innovation and cutting-edge technology, has established the estate as one of the most recognizable names not only in Greece but also internationally. Wines from the estate appear in the cellars of acclaimed restaurants around the world and continue to earn distinctions both in Greece and abroad.

The estate's single privately owned vineyard lies at the heart of the Amyntaio appellation, in the Ambelia area of Vegora, at elevations ranging from 620 to 710 meters, covering approximately 220 hectares. The state-of-the-art gravity-flow winery is equipped with an integrated management system that allows production processes to be monitored remotely from virtually anywhere in the world.

The principal grape varieties cultivated at the estate include Xinomavro, Syrah, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Tannat, Malagousia, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Assyrtiko. Among its best-known labels are the red S.M.X. (PGI Florina) – a blend of Syrah (60%), Merlot (20%) and Xinomavro (20%) – as well as two PDO Amyntaio wines: the single-plot Barba Yannis Xinomavro Reserve Vieilles Vignes and the single-vineyard rosé Skantzochoiros, produced entirely from Xinomavro.

Innovation has long been synonymous with Alpha Estate, and every visit seems to reveal a new project taking shape. This time, our fascinating conversation with Angelos Iatridis focused on the estate's latest ventures, now being driven by a new generation of winemakers who have entered the business with remarkable dynamism.

Angeliki Iatridi and Emorfili Mavridou are behind the creation of a new sparkling wine label, reflecting the estate's growing interest in the sparkling wine category. The wine, Anda Lune Vine Rosé, belongs to a new brand being developed under the name GHOINOS at a newly established winery near Xino Nero.

Produced according to the traditional Champagne method, the wine comes from what is deemed the oldest recorded Xinomavro vineyard in Greece: the historic Barbagiannis vineyard, planted in Amyntaio in 1919. At the same time, another ambitious project was recently set in motion: a new winery named Philos, located close to the current facilities. Dedicated to the vinification of white grape varieties, this project aims to address a segment of the market not currently covered by the estate's existing labels. Beyond expanding the portfolio, the initiative is also designed to support local grape growers and strengthen the region's viticultural community.

3. AMYNTAIO COOPERATIVE · AMYNTAS WINERY

Amyntas Winery, founded in 1959, stands as one of the most important institutions in Greek winemaking, combining the rich viticultural heritage of the region with modern production technology. Its creation was the initiative of local grape growers who joined forces to establish a winery capable of expressing the unique identity of Amyntaio and its wines.

Today, with more than 100 hectares of vineyards and approximately 60 members, the cooperative continues to play a central role in the wine production of the region.

The PDO Amyntaio zone, renowned for its flagship grape variety Xinomavro, is unique in Greece for producing PDO-certified red, rosé and sparkling wines. In addition to Xinomavro, varieties under cultivation include Roditis as well as international grapes such as Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Syrah and Merlot.

With an annual production reaching approximately 300,000 bottles across 13 labels, the cooperative has earned a reputation for consistent quality. Certified integrated vineyard management practices are applied throughout production, and winemaking operations comply with ISO 22000 and BRC standards.

The original winery building, constructed in 1959, remains a physical reminder of the cooperative's long history, as winemaker Maria Tsviki and winery director Elena Kyriakou explained during our tour of the facilities. The old concrete fermentation tanks that once held fermenting grape have now acquired almost museum-like significance, standing as testimony to the region's deep-rooted winemaking tradition. Production now takes place in modern stainless-steel tanks with a total capacity of 2,000 tons, equipped with temperature-control systems that ensure optimal conditions during fermentation and stabilization.

The cooperative was also a pioneer in the production of sparkling wines in Greece. Experimental trials began as early as 1971 and ultimately contributed to the official recognition of the PDO Amyntaio appellation in 1972. Its sparkling wines are produced using the Charmat method, in which the secondary fermentation takes place in specially designed pressurized tanks. This process preserves both the effervescence and the distinctive aromatic profile of the wines. Bottling is carried out using isobaric systems that minimize oxidation and safeguard the quality of the finished product.

The cooperative's connection to the history of the region is reflected in a number of its historic labels, including the iconic Douchessa, which evoke the long-standing winemaking tradition of Amyntaio. At the same time, the cooperative maintains a forward-looking vision, exporting to numerous international markets and collaborating on the production of new private-label wines. It remains at the heart of the region's viticultural life, serving not only its own production needs but also producing wines on behalf of third parties, further reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of the Amyntaio wine community.

Standouts

- **AMYNTAS BRUT ROSÉ**
Made from 100% Xinomavro, this newly released label is a sparkling wine produced using the tank (Charmat) method. It offers a beautifully expressive interpretation of Xinomavro, with an especially attractive aromatic profile. A distinctly gastronomic sparkling wine, it is equally enjoyable as an apéritif.
- **AMYNTAS BLANC DE NOIR SEC**
Also produced from 100% Xinomavro and crafted using the tank method, this sparkling blanc de noirs displays bright acidity, floral aromatics and notes of white-fleshed fruit on the palate. Its layered complexity makes it an excellent companion to the rich local cuisine of the Amyntaio region.

4. KARANIKA ESTATE

As we drove toward Karanika Estate, our curiosity to meet the people behind some of Greece's finest sparkling wines grew stronger by the minute. Upon our arrival, we were warmly welcomed by Annette Van Kampen, who left her life in the Netherlands and journeyed to Amyntaio in the mid-2000s together with her husband Laurens Hartman, modern-day "Flying Dutchmen" determined to devote themselves to winemaking.

The region's cool climate, combined with the remarkable versatility of the Xinomavro grape, led them to focus on producing sparkling wines using the traditional method. In doing so, they became pioneers in an appellation historically associated with sparkling wines produced through the tank (Charmat) method.

They acquired and planted vineyards across different sites within the Amyntaio zone, carefully studying the characteristics of the fruit produced by each individual terroir. In the vineyards surrounding the winery – located on land that once formed part of the shores of Lake Vegoritida – Limniona and Assyrtiko have been planted, as the soils there are particularly suited to these varieties. The vineyards located near the shores of Lake Petron, some of them own-rooted, provide the Xinomavro used for the estate's premium sparkling cuvées. Old vines from the Rasto vineyard site supply the Xinomavro to be vinified as a dry red wine for the Palaia Klimata label.

Committed advocates of organic viticulture and biodynamic winemaking practices – faithfully following the biodynamic calendar – they produce wines with minimal intervention, inspired by the kinds of wines that Laurens first encountered as a student in the Netherlands, when he first became captivated by wine. As he explains, those wines possessed personality and reflected their terroir, before the wave of commercialization in the 1990s transformed many winemaking practices.

Working tirelessly alongside the vineyard team is Fanouris, the mule that pulls the plow through the estate's vineyards. Here, all vineyard work – including plowing – is carried out manually, underscoring the estate's deep commitment to traditional, low-intervention farming practices.

Standouts

- **KARANIKA CUVÉE SPECIAL EXTRA BRUT**
A Blanc de Noir made from premium Xinomavro grown in the cool-climate vineyards of Amyntaio. It is the ideal apéritif, yet shows enough structure and precision to pair beautifully with dishes such as smoked salmon, or cured meats such as Spanish jamón.
- **KARANIKA CUVÉE ROSÉ**
A more complex expression with slightly higher residual sugar than the previous cuvée. It offers depth, finesse and balance, making it a compelling alternative to rosé Champagnes.
- **KARANIKA EXTRA CUVÉE DE RÉSERVE 2017**
The flagship wine of the estate, this Blanc de Noir is produced from own-rooted Xinomavro vineyards. It embodies Laurens Hartman's relentless pursuit of excellence and captures the full depth, precision and character of his vision for sparkling wine in Amyntaio.

5. VEGORITIS WINERY

One might say that Vegorititis Winery is yet another spiritual offspring of Yiannis Boutaris, founder of Kir-Yiannis Estate, a visionary figure who consistently encouraged his collaborators to pursue ventures of their own whenever they felt inspired to do so.

As Christos Boskos, who welcomed us to the winery, explained, his many years of experience working alongside Boutaris ultimately led him to establish his own winery in 2011. The project initially began with the production of wine in bag-in-box format before gradually evolving into bottled wines and the creation of the Mylos label series, the name inspired by the traditional windmills of the area. The winery focuses on varieties such as Xinomavro, Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer; more recently, it has also expanded into the production of sparkling wines using the tank method. It owns approximately seven hectares of vineyards and also collaborates closely with local growers.

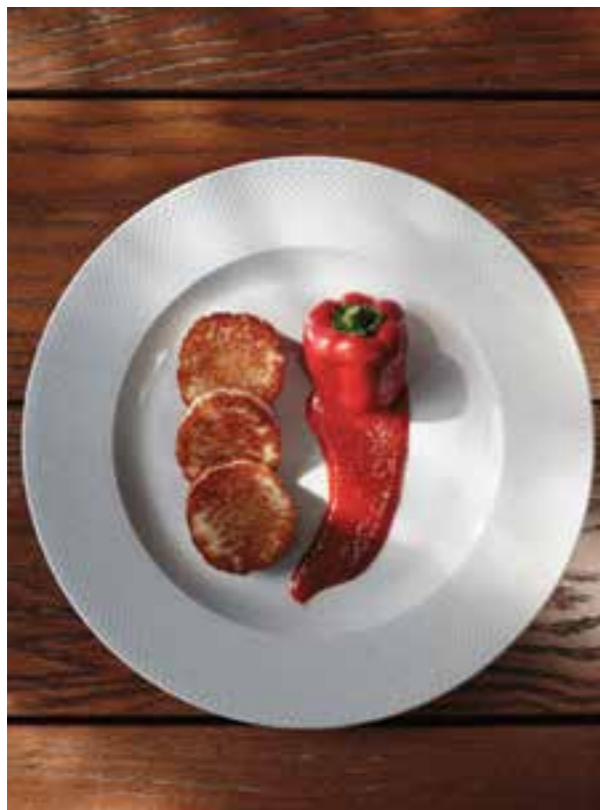
Grape varieties include Greek grapes, such as Xinomavro and Roditis, and international varieties, including Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. The winery's location, close to four lakes, benefits from an ideal microclimate for viticulture, enhancing aromatic intensity while also promoting the vines' natural resistance to disease.

Annual production reaches approximately 140,000 bottles across 14 labels, including red, white, rosé and sparkling wines. The most popular range is the Mylos series, featuring blends such as Xinomavro-Merlot and Xinomavro-Syrah. A significant portion of production is exported to markets such as Germany and Netherlands.

Vegorititis Winery has, Boskos told us, consistently invested in innovation, experimenting with new grape varieties and production techniques, including sparkling wines developed in collaboration with Amyntas Winery. Vegorititis is open to visitors, and is making every effort to promote wine tourism in the Amyntaio region.

Standout

- **XINOMAVRO 2019**
A wine of intense fruit expression and pronounced tannins. On the nose, it shows a distinctive vegetal character, expressed primarily through notes of tomato, red pepper and ripe red fruits.



One of the most popular dishes at the Thomas Taverna, made with Florina peppers.



A delicious pairing at the restaurant Kontosoros: local cuisine accompanied by local wine.

6. DIMOPOULOS ESTATE

Dimopoulos Estate was founded in 2015 by the Dimopoulos family, with a philosophy centered on crafting wines that authentically express the character of the Amyntaio vineyards. The estate's privately owned vineyards cover approximately 50 hectares at an elevation of around 600 meters and are planted with both white and red grape varieties, with Xinomavro serving as the undisputed flagship variety.

The winery's portfolio includes red, white and rosé wines, with Xinomavro playing a leading role throughout the range. The labels include both single-varietal wines and blends that seek to capture the complexity and balance of Amyntaio's distinctive terroir. Among the estate's standout wines are the Xinomavro Reserve PDO Amyntaio, aged for 25 months in oak barrels, and Konti Karydia PGI Florina. Particularly noteworthy is the estate's rosé wine made from Xinomavro under the PDO Amyntaio designation.

7. NOEMA

A relatively recent arrival to the region, Noema is the venture of American investor David Wittig. The winery is still in its infancy and, for the moment, only two PDO Amyntaio labels have been released to the market: Eruption, a rosé made entirely from Xinomavro, and Invicta, a red wine aged for eight months in oak barrels.

Where to eat and stay

• THOMAS TAVERNA

The eatery Thomas Taverna is located on the edge of Sklithro, a verdant village in the foothills of Mt. Vitsi. In operation for more than half a century, it was founded by Thomas and Eleni Paspali.

This family-run establishment continues a strong culinary tradition, serving dishes that highlight the local cuisine, accompanied by an impressive wine cellar of around 500 exclusively Greek labels – including mature vintages. The wine list here rivals that of many well-known fine dining restaurants, with a strong emphasis on local production, primarily featuring wines from Macedonia and northern Greece, while also extending to selected bottles from the rest of the country. Directly opposite the taverna stands the stone-built Guesthouse Agnonari, offering ten rooms – three of which feature fireplaces – and a complete hospitality experience that combines food, wine and accommodations.

• KONDOSOROS

In the nearby village of Xino Nero is the restaurant Kondosoros, founded in 1989 by Nikos Kondosoros and Petroula Seltza. It quickly evolved into a gastronomic landmark for the wider region of Western Macedonia, offering dishes that blend tradition with contemporary culinary influences. Its most notable dish is the legendary sout makalo: fried beef meatballs served in a velvety sauce made from flour, chicken stock and saffron.

Following the untimely passing of Nikos Kondosoros, the culinary vision of the establishment has been preserved through the efforts of Petroula Seltza and her daughter, ensuring that the restaurant's reputation remains stellar. The wine cellar includes over 200 labels, including some rare gems, with a strong focus on regional wineries. Adjacent to the restaurant is the family guesthouse, offering six traditional rooms and allowing visitors to combine an outstanding dining experience with a comfortable overnight stay.

Worth visiting

• ARCTUROS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

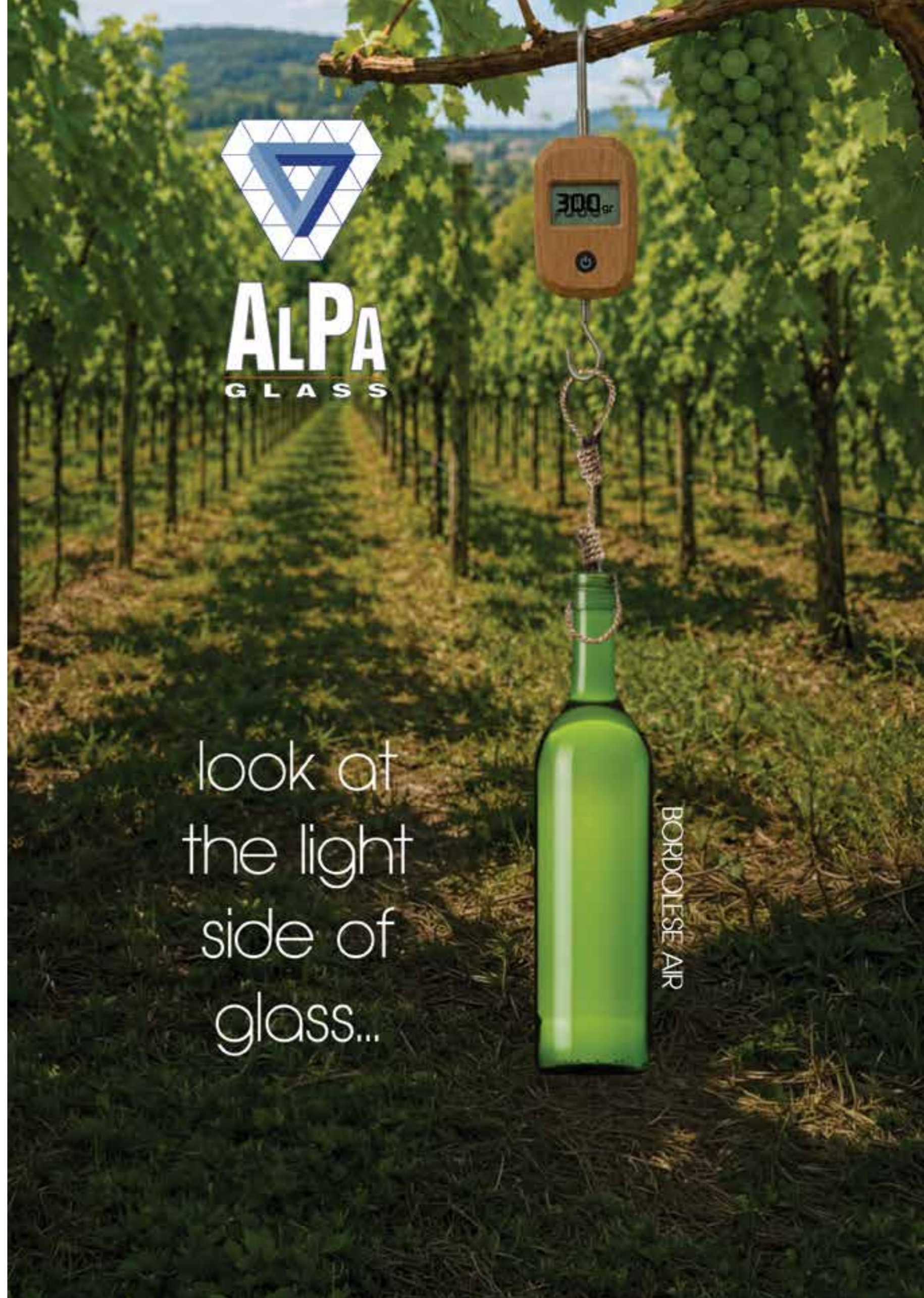
Near Xino Nero in the lush countryside of northern Greece is the Arcturos Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the most important destinations for nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts.

The sanctuary provides a safe haven for bears, wolves and other wild animals, offering them a second chance at life after rescue from illegal captivity or other harsh conditions. The facility is designed not as a traditional zoo, but as a rehabilitation and protection space focused on animal welfare and conservation.

Walking trails guide visitors, who remain always under the supervision of specialized staff, to observation areas where bears and wolves can be seen in environments that closely resemble their natural habitat. The rescue stories behind each animal highlight the essential work carried out by Arcturos, emphasizing both protection and education.

The surrounding region offers numerous opportunities for exploration, with the nearby village of Nymfaio being of particular interest. Its stone mansions and other elements that have helped preserve its traditional character make it one of the most charming mountain settlements in Greece.

A visit to Arcturos is not simply a nature activity; it's an experience that raises awareness and inspires reflection, reminding visitors of the importance of harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.



ALPA
GLASS

look at
the light
side of
glass...

BORDOLESE AIR

LAURENS HARTMAN

Text by Thalia Kartali

INTERVIEW

Photo by Luisa Vradi

What business does a Dutchman, even one with roots from Volos on his mother's side, have making wine in Amyntaio?

And not just any wine, but sparkling wine crafted using the traditional method – the very same method used in Champagne, France? Who is the man behind the label of Karanika Estate, and how did he end up in Greece? Laurens, who became known as “Lavrentis” after he settled in Greece, arrived in the Amyntaio region in 2006 with his wife Annette, carrying a vision of creating wines reminiscent of those he drank as a young student in the Netherlands. And he succeeded.

Restless by nature, Laurens Hartman decided sometime in the early 2000s to leave behind his position as an executive at a major publishing company in the Netherlands and completely reinvent his life. His deep love for wine had begun long before, during his student years, when it had taken him and a group of fellow students on countless trips through the famous wine regions of France, tasting wines that, as he puts it, “were made during the 1970s and bear no resemblance to today’s wines.” That experience proved pivotal in his decision to leave the Netherlands and to begin searching for the ideal place to build the winery he envisioned.

Together with his wife, who had grown up on a small farm in the Netherlands, Laurens explored different wine regions, but without finding what he was looking for. Then, one day, he happened to taste a Xinomavro from Amyntaio. That encounter ultimately led him to the region that would become his new home.

He already knew Greece through the summers he spent in Volos, the birthplace of his mother, but he’d never imagined that one day he would come here to make wine. His mind was shaped by the wines of France’s great appellations, wines he believed expressed terroir without the interventions that, in his view, define much of modern winemaking. He was searching for the place and the grape that could lead him to the wine he wanted to create, not the other way around.

Thalia Kartali

Why did you choose Greece?

Laurens Hartman

“I was living in Amsterdam and working in Rotterdam. The hours were brutal: countless hours spent on the road. Somewhere along the way, I hit a middle-age crisis. I began searching for regions where I could make the wines I dreamed of. I had in mind the wines I discovered before technology invaded winemaking...

“Greece wasn’t even on the list. As far as wine was concerned, for me Greece meant the era of the Dimitra Cooperative. I simply didn’t believe the country could produce fine wine. Then, one day, I happened to taste a Xinomavro that I found fascinating.

“I went to Naoussa, and tasted Boutari’s Grande Reserve wines and a rosé from Chrysochoou that I really liked. I started asking whether there was a cooler region producing Xinomavro. People told me about Amyntaio, but everyone warned me: ‘Don’t go there. It’s terrible. The grapes never fully ripen. Conditions are difficult.’

“Now, when you have Vlach roots and you’re also Dutch, the more terrible people say a place is, the more interesting it becomes. So we came to Amyntaio. We spoke with growers, visited the cooperative and, for the first time, felt truly welcomed. That’s when we decided this was where we would create the wine we had in mind.

“I had promised my wife we would do something serious and quality-driven, but we didn’t want to build a business empire. It would just be the two of us.”

TK Was sparkling wine always part of the plan?

LH “No. But when you grow up loving northern France, you know that when the vintage is not good, you make sparkling wine. We quickly realized that we would only be able to make truly good red wine once every three or four years.

“So we needed something more reliable; after all, I also had to feed my family. Lentils and olives from Pelion are wonderful, but you can’t live on them forever.

“The first years were difficult, but they were also the happiest years of my life. We both worked in the vineyard, with our child sleeping in a cradle among the vines. Local growers would come by and say to me, ‘Where did you find this woman? Ours can’t even find the vineyard!’

“For us, the challenge was to prove that Xinomavro could produce world-class sparkling wine. I believed it had the same potential as Pinot Noir. Coming from a marketing background, I knew exactly what I wanted to make. I wanted to create wines that reminded me of the wines I had tasted as a student, wines without intervention, wines that reflected their terroir.

“Xinomavro succeeded. It performs miracles in sparkling wine. It has the capacity to age for 30 or even 40 years. I’m not the magician here – Xinomavro is. It simply found its purest expression in these sparkling wines.”

TK What has contributed most to the success of your wines?

LH “We are obsessed with quality. We evaluate every vineyard parcel separately and decide which plot is best suited to each label. We’ve discovered that some of the region’s most celebrated vineyards, such as Rasto and Xino Nero, are not necessarily the best for sparkling wine.

“But what truly sets us apart is that not a single bottle leaves the winery unless we are certain it is flawless. We are almost obsessive in our production approach because we work blind. This isn’t like tasting wine from a tank. With sparkling wine, you work blind, and you cannot leave anything to chance.”

TK Does climate change concern you?

LH “It’s certainly an issue, but we fight it. I see many producers worrying, but not really searching for solutions. Solutions do exist, and it’s not only about irrigation. Growers could, for example, return to bush-vine training systems. I believe we need to adapt to the new conditions.

“Some grape varieties won’t survive. Xinomavro still seems resilient. But harvesting earlier is not enough. We need to rethink many things. I wasn’t born into winemaking, so I can question whether everything we’ve been taught is actually right. It’s also in my nature to challenge assumptions.”

TK What does a French winemaker think when tasting Karanika sparkling wines?

LH “I travel to Champagne twice a year. I have my own heroes there. The reactions are mixed. Some people refuse to believe they’re tasting Xinomavro; they think I must be secretly using Pinot Noir. Others find it fascinating, and wonder whether they should experimentally plant Xinomavro themselves in Champagne.

“But overall, they find it intriguing. The wines never leave people indifferent. They spark strong reactions: both positive and negative.”

The truth is that when a sparkling wine of this caliber reaches the glass, it is because it has something meaningful to say. These are sparkling wines that confidently claim their place both within Greece and internationally, wines with a distinct identity and story of their own. Born from the vision of a boldly unconventional man who gambled and won, they continue to win over devoted sparkling wine lovers around the world.



KTIMA VOYATZIS

Text by Gregory Kontos, DipWSPC

WINERY

Photo from the Ktima Voyatzis archives

Located in Velvento, in the region of Kozani, Ktima Voyatzis belongs to the renowned Voyatzis wine family.

It was founded in 1997 by Dr. Yannis Voyatzis, a chemist-oenologist, together with his brother Nikos Voyatzis. Many wine lovers first came to know Yannis Voyatzis as the chief oenologist of the legendary Boutari Winery, a company that, especially during his tenure, has stood at the forefront of Greek wine in terms of science, creativity and commercial success. Wines such as Grand Reserve Naoussa, Moschofilero Boutari, Santorini Boutari and 1879 Boutari Legacy all bear his signature influence.

What inspired Voyatzis to begin a small private project in his hometown of Velvento? Perhaps it was a deep sense of belonging, a respect for his roots, and a love for his birthplace. What started as a side project has today evolved into a modern 120-acre estate winery approaching three decades of continuous operation. A key role in the winery's current development is being played by his daughter, oenologist Margarita Voyatzis, who has undertaken both commercial and communication responsibilities, bringing a fresh and youthful spirit to the estate.

Velvento, in the prefecture of Kozani, is widely known for its peaches and nectarines, as well as for Lake Polyfyto, an artificial lake created on the Aliakmon River in 1973 after the construction of a hydroelectric dam. Beyond its social and economic impact on the region, the lake has greatly enriched local biodiversity. It serves as an important habitat for birds of prey and migratory species while also attracting numerous mammals to its shores. This is one of the reasons that the labels of Ktima Voyatzis wines feature elegant depictions of animals from the surrounding ecosystem: a graceful little egret portrayed as a ballerina, a pair of deer captured in a tender moment on the Lafista label, a deer with a swan-like neck on the estate's Xinomavro bottling, and the famous frog adorning the Tsapournakos label, crowned like the prince from the classic Brothers Grimm fairy tale.

The view from the winery terrace is breathtaking. Visitors gaze out over the estate vineyards, the tranquil lake waters, and the mountainous landscape surrounding nearby the town of Servia. At an elevation of 300 meters, the vineyards benefit from cool temperatures that preserve freshness and balance in the grapes, while the vast body of water moderates extreme weather conditions such as frost and heatwaves. The gentle lake breeze creates ideal conditions for healthy vine growth and supports the organic cultivation practices that the estate has followed since its founding. Sandy-clay and clay-rich soils retain moisture efficiently, reducing the need for irrigation.

The winery produces two main wine collections. The introductory range consists of three blends sourced from collaborating vineyards across the wider Macedonian region:

- **THREE WISHES WHITE**
Assyrtiko, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc
- **THREE WISHES RED**
Xinomavro, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon
- **A BUTTERFLY'S FLUTTER ROSÉ**
Xinomavro, Moschomavro, Tsapournakos

The second collection comes exclusively from the estate vineyards in Velvento and carries the PGI Velvento designation. Here we find two of Greece's most important grape varieties: Assyrtiko and Xinomavro, expressed through the wines Lefkotsiknias and Xinomavro respectively.

The Assyrtiko Lefkotsiknias is crafted from a blend of 50% tank-fermented wine, 25% oak barrel-aged wine and 25% amphora-aged wine, resulting in remarkable structure and complexity. The estate's Xinomavro differs significantly from the classic Naoussa style due to its unique clone, soils and climate. A small portion of the must begins fermentation with indigenous yeasts before being integrated into the main fermentation tanks. The wine then matures for one year in French oak barrels.

The Skepasmeno Gorge of Velvento, also known as the Lafista Gorge, is considered one of Macedonia's most mystical places, closely associated with the worship of Dionysus and the Muses. According to local legend, followers of Dionysus lived as deer within the forest.

The name "Lafista" derives from the Greek word for deer, inspiring the estate's wine Lafista, a blend of Xinomavro and Moschomavro featuring a male and female deer on the label.

The collection is completed by perhaps the estate's most renowned wine: Tsapournakos, available in three versions: barrel-aged red, young tank-aged red and rosé. Tsapournakos is the local name for a grape variety cultivated in the area for decades. Historical accounts suggest it was introduced by French soldiers who passed through or camped in the region during military conflicts in the 18th or 19th century. Research later revealed that the variety is none other than Cabernet Franc, one of Bordeaux's great grapes, especially prominent on the Right Bank.

The rosé Tsapournakos is pale in color and delicately aromatic, with limited skin contact. The young red version is fresh and vibrant, showing purple hues and lively fruit character, while the classic barrel-aged Tsapournakos reveals black fruit, blackberry, cherry, dried nuts and chocolate notes. Its elegant structure is enhanced by 12-16 months of ageing in French oak barrels.

Ktima Voyatzis is currently experiencing a remarkable period in its continuing development. Alongside its high-quality wines, it offers exceptional wine tourism experiences and opportunities to explore nature. It's a winery worth visiting throughout the year, not only in order to admire the spectacular views of the vineyards and lake from the winery terrace, but also to discover Assyrtiko, Xinomavro and Tsapournakos wines that taste as if they, too, would be right at home in a fairy tale.



The view from the winery overlooks vineyards stretching towards Lake Polyfytos.

Homes are like wines. They need notes of oak.

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SIATISTA MAGOUTES WINERY

Text by Nikos Ioannidis

WINERY

Photos by Nikos Ioannidis



Perched on a rocky slope in Western Macedonia, the historic wine town of Siatista is quietly reclaiming its viticultural identity through projects such as the Magoutes Winery.

Named after the area where its vineyards lie, the estate represents a modern revival of a wine tradition that had shaped the region for centuries before gradually fading with the rise of the fur industry in the mid-20th century.

“Siatista once had nearly 10,000 stremmas of vineyards; today, barely 2,000 remain,” says Dimitris Diamantis, the winemaker behind Magoutes. His family has worked with vines for generations. While many growers abandoned viticulture during the economic shift toward fur trading, Diamantis’ father chose to preserve the rare local grape Moschomavro, a variety that today has become one of the region’s most distinctive assets. “We saved Moschomavro because we wanted to continue making sun-dried wines. That’s the only reason it survived,” Diamantis explains.

After taking over the family vineyards during a difficult personal and financial period, Dimitris Diamantis decided to focus entirely on indigenous grapes such as Xinomavro and Moschomavro, resisting the temptation to plant international varieties. “I closed my ears to Cabernet, Merlot and Pinot Noir,” he says. “If I hadn’t done that back then, we wouldn’t have what we are presenting today.”

Recognition arrived early, and it first came from abroad. Julia Harding MW, collaborator of Jancis Robinson MW, wrote about Moschomavro, while New York Times wine critic Eric Asimov later referenced the variety alongside some of Greece’s most important wines. The attention gave Diamantis confidence that Siatista’s forgotten terroir still had a place on the modern wine map.

Today, Magoutes Winery follows a philosophy centered on old vineyards and minimal intervention. The vineyards lie at elevations of 700-900 meters, on poor, rocky soils with limestone and clay subsoils. Dry-farmed conditions, low yields and slow ripening produce concentrated grapes with freshness and structure.

Viticulture is almost entirely non-interventionist: no irrigation, no fertilization and continuous massal selection from the estate’s oldest vines, some of which are over 80 years old. In the cellar, indigenous yeasts, concrete tanks, large neutral oak barrels and minimal filtration define the winemaking approach. Stainless steel is used sparingly, mainly for certain white and rosé wines. “Wood and concrete: that’s the winery,” says Diamantis. “We want the fruit to speak, not the intervention.”

The winery’s production remains small but highly focused. Alongside traditional sun-dried sweet wines, Magoutes has demonstrated the potential of dry Moschomavro and Xinomavro to express both elegance and a strong sense of place. Much of the production is exported to selected markets including the UK, Sweden, Germany and France, and the estate continues to expand through new vineyard plantings, modern facilities and wine tourism investments.

The winery is also helping reposition Siatista as an emerging destination for Greek wine tourism. Its contemporary facilities, surrounded by old vineyards and dramatic mountainous scenery, offer visitors an oppor-

tunity to experience a lesser-known side of Greek wine culture, deeply rooted in local tradition yet unmistakably forward-looking. For Diamantis, preserving authenticity remains essential. Rather than pursuing scale or trends, the focus stays firmly on expressing the identity of the region through native varieties and careful vineyard work.

Despite significant growth and investments reportedly reaching €9-10 million, the philosophy remains unchanged: authenticity, local identity and respect for Siatista’s unique terroir. “We cannot imitate other regions or countries,” Diamantis says. “We must showcase our own land and our own varieties.”

Wines we tasted

- **BLANC DE NOIR 2024**
A white wine produced mainly from red grapes, complemented by a small percentage of a local white variety. Fermented in concrete tanks and large used oak barrels, it combines freshness with texture and subtle complexity.
- **ROSÉ XINOMAVRO AND MOSCHOMAVRO**
A blend of 70% Xinomavro and 30% Moschomavro. Floral aromas and vibrant red fruit create a fresh yet layered rosé with notable character.
- **MOSCHOMAVRO 2022**
Produced from old hillside vineyards with low yields, this wine is vinified in stainless steel and concrete tanks. Fresh, structured and distinctive, it highlights the personality of this rare native variety.
- **XINOMAVRO 2020**
From vineyards aged 10-20 years, this vintage was vinified and matured in a wooden fermenter, resulting in a wine with depth, evolution and a clear expression of terroir.
- **XINOMAVRO PARCEL SELECTION 2018**
The winery’s flagship bottling, sourced from individually selected old vines and released only after extended ageing. Produced in extremely limited quantities, it showcases the finesse and ageing potential of Siatista’s terroir.
- **LIASTOS 2008**
A traditional sweet wine made from Moschomavro and Xinomavro using a Solera-style system that incorporated wines from three decades. Complex, concentrated and fully expressive of Siatista’s historic sweet wine tradition.



NAOUSSA

Text by Thalia Kartali and Penelope Katsatou

TRAVEL

Photos from the wineries' archives



A bottle of Naoussa 1988 rests patiently in the cellar, continuing its valuable journey through time.

Naoussa is one of the most important appellation areas for the production of Xinomavro, used for producing dry, medium dry and medium sweet red wines.

CLIMATE AND SOIL

The region is located to the southeast of Mt. Vermion, at elevations ranging from 50-450 m (165-1480 ft). The climate is semi-continental, not as cold as in the Amyntaio area, and is affected by the presence of Mt. Vermion. The chilly northern winds may bring frost in the spring. The composition of soils varies, ranging from limestone to loamy clay and sandy soils. A typical Naoussa wine is usually medium in color, with high acidity, frequently firm and dry tannins, a medium body, broad structure and fruity, non-sweet primary aromas.

INTRODUCING A NEW GENERATION OF WINEMAKERS

No matter how many times we visit the town of Naoussa, it always seems to reveal something new – proof that this historic wine region of northern Greece possesses an extraordinary dynamism. Its title, “The City of Wine and Vine,” is far more than a slogan; the town has truly evolved into a place where wine stands at the center of local identity, something that becomes evident during even the briefest walk through its charming streets.

This is a region that continues to generate fresh ideas and new energy. A new generation of winemakers – almost all around thirty years old or younger, and nearly all friends with one another – is determined to push both Naoussa and its beloved Xinomavro grape even further. Building upon the invaluable experience of those who came before them, they are experimenting fearlessly and crafting wines of real ambition. These wines, confidently seeking their place among the great expressions of Xinomavro, are often created with limited means but always with immense passion.

It was these young producers we most wanted to meet during our latest visit, and the decision proved rewarding. Yet our journey did not begin with the boutique wineries we'd initially planned to visit. Seeking the roots of Naoussa's viticultural identity, we first found ourselves at the doorstep of VAENI, one of the most important pillars of the region's wine culture – a living example of how collective effort can safeguard a place's wine-making tradition while simultaneously paving the way for future generations of producers.



The tanks at Maras Winery.

1. VAENI WINERY

The Vaeni cooperative is among the oldest wine cooperatives in northern Greece. Its history is deeply intertwined with that of the Naoussa appellation itself, as many of its founding members were growers who later established their own wineries, names that today rank among the region's most respected producers.

Founded in 1984, the cooperative once counted as many as 390 active members. Today, that number has declined to 135, yet the scale of production remains impressive, exceeding 5,500 tons of wine annually. Everything here feels monumental: enormous tanks, expansive cellars and a large bottling facility, all designed to process grapes sourced from 2,250 stremmas of vineyards spread across the slopes of Mt. Vermion.

More than two million bottles are produced every year, alongside significant quantities of bag-in-box wine destined for local tavernas. The cooperative also produces industrial wine, i.e., Xinomavro vinified at Vaeni and later sold to other wineries throughout Greece.

"We collect 55% of all the Xinomavro produced in Greece here at Vaeni," said Petros Balliger, who welcomed us upon arrival. "Wine comes here, and we also supply other wineries."

Walking through the production facilities reveals the true scale of the operation: tanks holding 50, 75 and 100 tons of wine, containing not only Xinomavro but also Syrah and Merlot among the reds, and Malagousia and Roditis among the whites. The cooperative produces 35 labels, excluding the many private-label wines made for supermarkets in Greece and abroad.

The cellar itself is equally impressive, housing more than 1,000 French oak barriques of 250 liters each. Only red wines are aged here, anywhere from six to thirty-six months depending on the label. After bottling, the wines continue ageing in a separate storage area for an additional six to twenty-four months. Certain premium labels, such as "Mavri Drys" ("Black Oak"), spend a total of five years ageing before release.

The cellar also stores the winery's archive collection, with vintages dating from 1984 through 2016. Every ten years the corks are replaced, and older vintages are periodically released to the market, where some bottles fetch prices of up to €300 depending on the vintage. In one corner lies a dedicated private cellar where collectors can store their own bottles under ideal ageing conditions, a practice common abroad but still relatively rare in Greece.

Tastings were once held directly inside this remarkable cellar, but in order to protect the older bottles from curious hands, a dedicated tasting room was eventually created upstairs. There, visitors – many of them international wine tourists – can sample the cooperative's wines. According to Mr. Balliger, visitor numbers remain high, with groups frequently arriving from Germany, Britain, Belgium and Israel.

We tasted

- **DAMASKINOS 2019**
100% Xinomavro aged in heavily toasted oak barrels. Aromas of dried fruit, olive, and tomato dominate, alongside pronounced oak influence.
- **MAVRI DRYs 2015**
100% Xinomavro aged for 36 months in oak barrels and an additional two years in the bottle. A full-bodied wine with soft tannins and aromas of black fruit and vanilla.

2. MARAS WINERY

Leaving behind the massive scale of the cooperative, we headed toward the small family-run Maras Winery, where we were welcomed by Sokratis Maras, one of two brothers who, together with their father, decided in 2021 to establish their own winery and dedicate themselves to producing quality wines.

They began with a tiny five-stremma vineyard planted with Merlot, which today produces a single-varietal bottling. Their true passion, however, is Xinomavro. Over the following years, they gradually acquired another thirty stremma in the Strantzia and Gastra areas, planted entirely with Naoussa's signature grape.

Sokratis and his brother Thanasis grew up in a world full of wine. Their father, Thomas, worked as an oenologist at Vaeni, while the family produced homemade wine every year. "Wine always belongs beside a plate of food" – that was the philosophy they learned from childhood. For that reason, their first Xinomavro project was a gastronomic rosé named Premier Pas, one of the winery's four current labels.

The production space is modest and carefully organized, reflecting the deliberate pace at which the brothers are building their dream. Thoughtful yet grounded, Sokratis speaks with the confidence of someone who knows exactly what he wants to achieve: wines that are recognizable and that faithfully reflect the quality potential of Naoussa.

Together, the two brothers divide their time between vineyard and cellar, placing enormous emphasis on the quality of the grape. Current production remains small – between 10,000 and 15,000 bottles annually – but their goal is to acquire additional vineyards and gradually increase output.

Having gained experience working in the vineyards of Kostis Dalamaras and later at Kir-Yianni, Sokratis has developed a clear philosophy that he now pursues with consistency. Instead of rushing to expand the winery's infrastructure, which currently includes stainless-steel fermentation tanks and 250-liter and 500-liter barrels for ageing, he prefers to refine his methods by first using the tools already at his disposal. He learns through mistakes, adapts and continues experimenting. The results already speak for themselves.

We tasted

- **NAOUSSA 2023**
100% Xinomavro, PDO Naoussa. Bottled last March and expected to reach the market early next year. Intense red-fruit aromas alongside the grape's signature tannins and acidity. Aged for twelve months in 500-liter oak barrels.



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Winemaker Yiannis Mittas poses proudly next to his vats.



The cozy tasting room at the Kokkinos Winery.

3. MITTAS WINERY

Just a short distance downhill from Maras Winery is a space that hardly resembles a winery at all. This is true garage winemaking: the building where young winemaker Yiannis Mittas now crafts his wines was once a bicycle and car repair shop. After working alongside winemaker Kostis Dalamaras and completing an internship at the VAENI cooperative, Mittas decided that, once he had finished his military service, he would cultivate his own vineyards and produce his own wines.

His family has long been involved in agriculture and, in recent years, has also expanded into pasta production, working out of a small facility located next door to the wine cellar. We met Yiannis inside the inviting café run by his parents, where his mother Eleni welcomed us warmly.

Mittas began with an eighteen-stremma vineyard in the Paliokalia area, from which he produced his first label, Naoussa 2019, released in December 2021 in a very small production run of roughly 1,000 bottles. Today, the winery produces approximately 22,000 bottles annually.

The young winemaker, whose features and facial hair are strikingly reminiscent of a hero from the Greek War of Independence, spoke passionately about the four labels currently being produced at the estate. Organic grapes, low-intervention practices, minimal or even zero sulfur additions, and unfiltered wines define his philosophy. Despite limited resources, experimentation is constant. His wines are bold, distinctive and impossible to ignore.

We were able to try – directly from the tanks – a Malagousia, a Xinomavro rosé and a still-fermenting Xinomavro from the latest harvest, and while we enjoyed those, the jewel of the winery remains, unquestionably, the 2022 Naoussa.

“Perhaps it’s the best Xinomavro we’ve produced so far,” Mittas said. “For us, 2022 was an exceptional year. We achieved exactly what we wanted, and in the quantities we needed.” Subsequent vintages proved more difficult, he explained, as extremely hot and dry summers made it harder to reach the same level of quality achieved in 2022. Production may remain small and resources limited, but by the end of our visit we were convinced that Mittas represents one of the most exciting new voices emerging from Naoussa today.

We tasted

- **NAOUSSA 2022**
100% Xinomavro, PDO Naoussa. A wine confirming that 2022 was indeed a landmark vintage for the winery. Red fruits, tomato leaf, classic Xinomavro structure, vibrant acidity and excellent ageing potential.

4. KOKKINOS WINERY

Just a kilometer and a half outside Naoussa is Kokkinos Winery; there, we encountered a family whose remarkable work ethic has been passed down through generations. The setting, too, is extraordinary: a valley embraced by forests, ravines and dramatic elevations shifts that shape the character of the wines.

Konstantinos Kokkinos welcomed us warmly and shared with us a story that begins in 1912, when his great-grandfather returned from America and purchased the land where the winery stands today. The modern chapter of the estate began in 1999, when Konstantinos’ father Stavros Kokkinos abandoned fruit farming to pursue his viticulture dream. Stavros’ greatest inspiration was Paliokalia, a historic vineyard that has since expanded from ten to fifty-five stremmas. With a soil rich in magnesium and other minerals, these vineyards produce concentrated, structured Xinomavros with ripe tannins and remarkable ageing potential.

The Dalamari vineyards surrounding the winery itself sit at higher elevations of 400–450 meters and benefit from extraordinary biodiversity and cooling mountain winds descending from Mt. Seli. The resultant wines possess finer tannins, brighter acidity and a more elegant profile.

The winery remains boutique in philosophy: small tanks, gentle extraction, classical red vinification, ageing in French Ermitage oak barrels, and extended bottle ageing before release.

We tasted

- **RODITIS 2024**
Fresh and vibrant, with floral aromas, green apple, citrus and refreshing acidity.
- **SKANDALIA ROSÉ 2024**
Aromas of unripe strawberry and grapefruit with crisp acidity and soft tannins. A gastronomic rosé exhibiting elegance and precision.
- **PETEINOS RED 2022**
A straightforward blend of Xinomavro and Merlot without oak ageing. Juicy cherry fruit and excellent value.
- **NAOUSSA 2020**
A classic Xinomavro expression with tomato, olive and red fruit, framed by structured tannins and ageing potential.
- **NAOUSSA 2021**
More elegant and fruit-driven than the 2020 vintage, with superb balance and long-term potential.
- **PALIOKALIA 2022**
An exceptional vintage. Herbal, terroir-driven, intensely structured and still youthful, this is clearly a wine destined for long ageing.





Eleni Charalambaki and Tassos Karagiozidis – a wonderful couple.



The vineyard at the Argatia Winery is ablaze with beautiful autumn colors.

5. ARGATIA

Returning after several years to the small family estate of Argatia on the slopes of Rodochori, we were warmly welcomed by brothers Christoforos and Konstantinos Georgiadis, who now lead the winery while continuing the vision established by their parents. Supporting them is their mother, Charoula Spinthiropoulou, one of the region's most respected figures and a longtime veteran of the Kir-Yianni Winery.

Argatia now cultivates thirty stremma of vineyards and produces approximately 15,000 bottles annually. Organic farming remains central to the estate philosophy, with Xinomavro clearly at the heart of production. Winemaking here focuses on minimal intervention. Some wines ferment with indigenous yeasts, oak use remains restrained, and older 500-liter French barrels provide structure without overwhelming the delicate aromatics of Xinomavro.

We tasted

- **WHITE BLEND**
Assyrtiko – Malagousia – 7% Xinomavro. Fresh and mineral-driven, with green apple, apricot and floral notes, and remarkable balance.
- **ROSÉ XINOMAVRO**
Darker in color than most contemporary rosés, with vibrant acidity and a gastronomic character.
- **“CHAROULA” RED BLEND**
A blend of Xinomavro, Mavrodaphne and Negoska that combines structure with softness and ripe fruit.
- **ARGATIA NAOUSSA PDO**
100% Xinomavro from the Laka vineyard. Tomato leaf, cherry, olive, crisp acidity and refined tannins define this classic expression.

6. KAPPAS WINERY

At Kappas Winery, the true essence lies not only in the wines but in the people themselves. This small, unpretentious winery in Angelohori left us deeply impressed by the strong personalities behind it. We were welcomed first by Eleni Charalambaki, a woman with Cretan roots but whose heart clearly belongs to Naoussa.

Everything began in the 1990s, when Kyriakos Karagiozidis – nature lover, instrument maker and carpenter – planted the family's first vineyards. Years later, his son Tassos returned from Germany and, together with Eleni, transformed a family dream into reality by building the new winery in 2021.

Their philosophy is uncompromising: intense vineyard work, total devotion to quality and extremely low yields. “Above 600 kilos per stremma, I no longer consider it Xinomavro,” Tassos stated firmly.

The winery combines modern precision with deep respect for tradition. Alongside stainless-steel tanks and controlled fermentations, handcrafted Georgian clay amphorae lined with beeswax are used for small experimental lots of Xinomavro and Assyrtiko.

We tasted

- **ANAMNON ROSÉ**
Barrel-fermented Xinomavro rosé with aromas of peach, strawberry and subtle vanilla. Rich, textured, and far from a conventional rosé, this is a wine for all seasons.

Where to eat

Two excellent choices stand out, both located in the center of the old town:

- **SPONDI RESTAURANT**
It offers an authentic experience combining traditional Macedonian dishes with the innovative ideas of chef and owner Angelos Hatzistilis. The local ingredients are a perfect match for the exceptional wine list, which is, of course, focused on Xinomavro.
- **OINOMAGEIREMATA**
A more traditional approach to the local cuisine, this restaurant offers deeply comforting regional dishes and traditional wine-focused gastronomy in a warm, authentic atmosphere.



The rosé side of Moschofilero

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1. ARGYRAKIS ESTATE

It all began in the Asia Minor city then known as Smyrna, in the early 20th century. Georgios Argyrakis, a horse trader with a deep love for the land, made his own wine on the family estate. After the city burned during Greco-Turkish conflict in 1922, the family settled in Thessaloniki, carrying with them memories, resilience and their connection to viticulture. In 1997, his grandson Giorgos produced a wine of his own – without labels or a business plan, only barrels, friends and a quiet devotion to a love that he had inherited. In 2016, that devotion became a winery. Giorgos' sons Konstantinos and Spyros built their bioclimatic winery with the aim of continuing a legacy that began a continent away and ultimately found its voice in the vineyards of Greece. The 5-hectare vineyard in Trilofos is planted exclusively with 43-year-old Xinomavro vines.

2. BOUTARI WINERIES

The story of these wineries begins in 1879, when Ioannis Boutaris founded the company that would bear his name. In 1906, Boutari opened its first privately owned winery and retail cellar in Naoussa. During the 1980s, Ioannis' grandsons Konstantinos and Yiannis Boutaris expanded Boutari's viticultural and winemaking activities across Greece. Over the course of 146 years, the company has pioneered numerous innovations in Greek wine, from wine tourism initiatives and experimental labels to its leading role in shaping the evolution of modern Greek winemaking. Today, the winery is part of the Hellenic Wineries Group.

3. DALAMARA ESTATE

Located at the edge of the town of Naoussa, Dalamara Estate continues a long family winemaking tradition. Today, Kostis Dalamara and his wife Katerina carry the torch passed down by his father, Yiannis Dalamara. In 1963, Kostis' grandfather transformed a stable into a winery, although the estate's history actually dates back to 1840, when Ioannis Georgiou Dalamara planted the family's first vineyard. With certified organic farming and a philosophy of minimal intervention both in the vineyard and in the cellar, the estate produces wines that faithfully express their origin. Its 5-hectare vineyard allows for extensive manual vineyard work and meticulous care.

4. DIAMANTAKOS ESTATE

Diamantakos Estate is a family-owned boutique winery in the Mandemi area. Its story begins in the vineyard of Giorgos Diamantakos, a first-generation grower, on the Isvori site, where the School of Aristotle was eventually uncovered beneath the roots of a massive walnut tree uprooted by the wind. In 1978, the family acquired the land where the current winery stands and planted the surrounding vineyard. In 1998, Evangelos Diamantakos bottled the first wine produced by the estate. Today, Giorgos Diamantakos, a third-generation winemaker raised within the winery itself and in charge of the estate since 2005, is leading it into a new era.

5. KARYDAS ESTATE

More than twenty years have passed since Konstantinos Karydas founded Domaine Karydas in Ano Gastra, one of the best-known viticultural zones of Naoussa. The meticulously tended 2.5 hectares of Xinomavro vineyards are located on Gastra Hill, in sandy-clay and limestone soils renowned for their excellent drainage. In 1992, Konstantinos built the winery in the middle of the vineyard, and soon afterward his son Petros joined him to create his own first vintage under the family label. Their mission remains the production of a traditional, single-vineyard Xinomavro crafted with minimal intervention.

6. KASTANIOTIS WINERY

In 1976, Georgios Kastaniotis decided to replant a vineyard in Galika Marina, reviving the vines once cultivated by his father. His son Dimitris learned viticulture at his side, continuing the family tradition. Today, Kastaniotis Winery is a family-run estate of approximately 10 hectares of vineyards, eight of which are planted with Xinomavro. From these vineyards comes a Naoussa wine that belongs firmly to the traditional school of winemaking.

7. KELESIDIS ESTATE

Located in Giannakochori, Kelesidis Estate traces its roots back to 1935, when Merkhalis Kelesidis and his brother Ioannis planted the family's first vineyard. Decades later, in 1985, Merkhalis' grandson Konstantinos Kelesidis established new vineyards that led to the release of the estate's first bottled wines in 1998. Today, the family cultivates 4.5 hectares of certified organic vineyards, cared for by Konstantinos and his wife Maria, together with their children Myrto and Yiannis, who are continuing the family tradition with dedication.

8. KOSMIDIS WINERY

For a full century, viticulture have been the main occupation of the Kosmidis family. Since 1926, they have been producing quality wines from quality grapes. Kosmidis Winery is located in Trilofos of Imathia, on the eastern edge of the village, beside its privately owned 10-hectare lot of vineyards. The vineyards were planted in 1980 on clay-sandy soils at an elevation of 160 meters on the foothills of Mt. Vermion.

9. KLONAS BOUTIQUE WINERY

Located in the Paliokalia area, Klonas Estate is a family-owned boutique winery. The first vineyards were planted at the end of the last century by Takis Klonas. From the earliest harvests, the fruit displayed remarkable aromatic complexity, inspiring the family to begin bottling their wines. Today, the winery is under the direction of his grandchildren and consists of two buildings: the original cellar where everything began, now upgraded with modern equipment, and a second facility completed in 2023.

10. LOUSSIS VINEYARD

In 1981, the Loussis family from Thessaloniki acquired their first vineyards on the slopes of Mt. Vermion at an elevation of 280 meters. Today, Giorgos Loussis farms organically and on a small scale, producing wines deeply rooted in their place of origin, with an emphasis on terroir and the winemaking traditions of Naoussa. Limited production allows for meticulous vineyard work and careful vinification.

11. MARANTIDIS WINERY

About four kilometers from Veria, on the main square of the village of Patrida in Imathia (a settlement populated by the descendants of Pontic, or Black Sea, Greeks), stands the small Marantidis Winery, founded by a family of oenologists. In 1996, Georgios Marantidis began cultivating vineyards, making wine and marketing his own production. Today, his daughters Eleni and Fotini are continuing that work and helping the family winery to further evolve.

12. MARKOVITIS WINERY

Markos Markovitis is among the new generation of winemakers who have played a defining role in shaping the modern culture surrounding Xinomavro. After studying oenology in Germany, he returned to take over the family winery in Polla Nera, site of the estate's 14-hectare single-block vineyard, originally planted in 1972 by his grandfather and regarded as the first organic vineyard in Greece. From the outset, Markovitis sought to redefine the identity of the winery. Believing strongly in monoculture and in the exceptional potential of Xinomavro, he undertook a complete restructuring of the historic vineyard. In 2012, he renamed the winery from Château Pegasus to Markovitis Winery, marking the beginning of a new era.

13. MELITZANI ESTATE

The story of Melitzani Estate begins in 1918 with Dimitros Melitzani, one of the finest coopers of Naoussa, who also produced his own wine. His work was continued by his three sons – Grigoris, Tonys and Memos – all of whom grew up inside the winery. After Grigoris passed away in 1985, the other two brothers continued the family tradition. Their lives were inseparably linked to wine, as indeed was their tragic passing in 2011 when both brothers drowned in a large vat filled with fermenting must. Despite this devastating loss, the family persevered. Stelios Yamalidis and his wife Elisavet Melitzani, daughter of Grigoris, took over the estate. Today, the third and fourth generation of winemakers from the Melitzani family are busy producing wine from their 2.2-hectare organic vineyard on Gastra Hill.

14. TAZOGLIDOU ESTATE

Efstratia Tazoglidou, a graduate of the School of Agriculture at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, has spent many years working among vineyards. After a long career as a viticultural consultant and expert in grape growing and wine production, she decided to establish her own winery, Tazoglidou Estate. The privately owned vineyard lies in the Amygdalia area of Trilofos at an elevation of approximately 170 meters. Production remains extremely limited, making this very much a boutique winery focused on quality.

15. TARALAS ESTATE

The Taralas family has roots in the world of wine that date back to the late 19th century. Nikolaos Taralas, grandfather of the current owner, planted the family's first vineyard in Eastern Rumelia, in what is today Bulgaria. During the population exchange of 1925, his son Christos relocated to Greece, bringing with him grafted vines from those family vineyards. These plantings eventually developed into hundreds of hectares of vineyards in Agia Varvara of Imathia. Christos' passion for wine was inherited by his son Dimitris, who in 2006 founded a modern winery together with his wife Aspasia and their twin children, Christos and Nikoleta.

16. TASIONA WINERY

Tasiona Winery is located in Ramnista in Giannakochori, just five kilometers from Naoussa. The Tasionas family's connection to wine dates back to the late 19th century, when they carefully cultivated vineyards and produced their own wine. In the 1970s, Thomas Tasionas, a fourth-generation grape grower, purchased and planted the vineyards that remain in use today. In 2020, his son Nikolaos, who had apprenticed beside him in the vineyards, fulfilled his father's dream by founding the winery. Today, the next generation – his two daughters – is continuing the family vision with fresh ideas and renewed energy.

17. FOUNDI ESTATE

The Foundi family originates from Strandzha in Eastern Thrace. In 1914, after ten years of peregrination, the family settled in Naoussa. There, Georgios Foundi and his son Theodoros planted their first Xinomavro vineyard in 1930. In the decades that followed, Nikolaos Foundi expanded the vineyards through new plantings; at present the family holdings total seven hectares. In 1992, he founded the winery and released its first label. Today, the third generation of Foundi winemakers – Georgia and Eleni, together with their husbands – is continuing the family tradition while adding its own contemporary perspective.

18. CHRYSOCHOOU ESTATE

Four kilometers outside the "City of Wine and Vine," in the area of Strantzia on the southeastern slopes of Mt. Vermion, lie the vineyards and winery of the Chrysochoou Estate. The family's roots in wine date back to 1948, while the first commercial labels were released in 1965 by Ioannis Chrysochoou. The second generation of winemakers, Keimis and Betty, carried the vision forward in 1977 with the purchase of vineyards and the construction of the traditional winery. Today, the third generation – Nana and Yiannis – and the fourth generation, Hector and Orpheus, continue to develop the estate.

Where to stay

In the heart of historic Naoussa, Palea Poli Boutique Hotel blends traditional Macedonian architecture with understated luxury and warm hospitality. Elegant rooms, intimate courtyards and a deep connection to the region's wine culture make it an ideal retreat for travelers exploring the vineyards and vibrant gastronomic scene of the area of Naoussa.

A GUIDE TO THE OTHER

WINERIES OF NAOUSSA

APOSTOLOS THYMIPOULOS

Text by Thalia Kartali

INTERVIEW

Photos by Alexandros Avramidis

The man who redefined Xinomavro.

The enfant terrible of Naoussa hardly needs an introduction. Nearly twenty years have passed since Apostolos Thymiopoulos first emerged as a young winemaker with a Xinomavro that radically changed consumers' perception of this notoriously demanding grape variety from northern Greece. Recognition came years later, when the world's most influential wine magazine, Decanter, named him a Rising Star winemaker. He succeeded in breaking into difficult and even previously inaccessible markets for Greek wine, earning recognition from some of the world's most demanding sommeliers in search of something distinctive and original.

Persistent, hardworking and wholly devoted to the grape variety that defined his career, Thymiopoulos has remained unwavering in his mission: to reveal the immense potential of Xinomavro. Born into a family of grape growers, he knew from an early age that wine would shape his future. Even during his student years, he envisioned creating a Xinomavro label called Earth and Sky – a wine that would ultimately shake the foundations of Naoussa and redefine the region's identity.

Today, as president of the Association of Winegrowers and Winemakers of Naoussa, he hopes to lead the entire appellation along the same ambitious path he carved for himself.

Thalia Kartali

About a year ago, you became president of the Association of Winegrowers and Winemakers of Naoussa. What is your main goal in this role?

Apostolos Thymiopoulos

"One of my immediate priorities is to stand beside all the winemakers of the region. The Thymiopoulos brand has reached a very high level internationally, and now I would like to see Naoussa as a whole reach that level. Naoussa is not just Thymiopoulos; it is a region with a great history. Every wine region usually has one or two wineries that pull the rest forward, but what truly matters is for all wineries to move ahead together. When the region itself gains recognition, everyone benefits. Consistency is the key. And now that international attention is focused on us, consistency matters even more."

TK Can we already speak about Xinomavro as an international brand, or is there still some distance to go?

AT "Xinomavro is gradually achieving a level of recognition comparable to Assyrtiko. Many wine lists abroad now feature Xinomavro, often even vertical vintages. The more wineries that produce it, the better; there will be more voices speaking about this grape. As professionals and buyers discover increasingly better expressions of Xinomavro, they'll continue to place it on wine lists, to cellar it, and to recommend it as something exciting and new."

TK Many young winemakers see you as a role model. Do you feel a greater sense of responsibility toward them now, especially as president of the association?

AT "I certainly do feel that, but I don't experience it as pressure. Through open dialogue and the right approach, we've built a very healthy atmosphere within the association. We discuss things openly, we support one another, and there are no major conflicts. We're all friends."

TK Naoussa seems unique in this collaborative spirit. You rarely encounter this elsewhere in Greece.

AT "That's true. And we're not a small group either; we're nearly thirty wineries. It all begins with the older generation, who never look down on newcomers. On the contrary, we try to give them a platform. That is one of my own priorities as president. Most people already know the older producers, and have tasted our wines. The newcomers also deserve visibility."

TK The international success of Thymiopoulos has been remarkable. Were exports always part of your strategy?

AT "From the very beginning, yes. In those days, Greece was primarily a white-wine-drinking country, so I focused on markets that consumed more red wine. Comparisons with great red wine appellations, particularly Nebbiolo from Italy and Pinot Noir from France, because of their organoleptic similarities to Xinomavro, helped immensely. That gave us an opening.

"At the same time, our prices were extremely competitive compared to more established regions. There was also a growing movement among younger sommeliers searching for new wine origins and alternative terroirs. Around that period, regions such as Etna and Ribera del Duero were also emerging dynamically. Young sommeliers were looking for something new, and we fit perfectly into that moment.

"Of course, the Greek wine brand wasn't as strong as the Italian one, but we worked constantly through national and European export programs. The Greek state also supported us significantly by covering part of our promotional expenses."

TK Yet you entered the market with a wine unlike any Xinomavro that people had tasted before. Earth and Sky marked a turning point.

AT "That turning point had everything to do with raw material. High-quality grapes and absolute control over the fruit. The great challenge with Xinomavro is taming its tannins. If you can balance the acidity and the tannins, then you have nothing else to fear. But achieving that requires investment: barrels, cellars, infrastructure. You cannot succeed without investing.

"Earth and Sky remains our most recognized wine; it was the wine that opened international markets for us. I had envisioned creating a Xinomavro with that name ever since my student years, and it was finally released in 2006 from the 2003 vintage.

"Later came other Xinomavro-based labels: Naoussa Alta, sourced from high-elevation vineyards, as well as a gastronomic rosé with ageing potential, also from mountain vineyards. Then came the single-vineyard wines such as Vrana Petra and Kaiaphas, and an ungrafted-vine bottling, too.

"After several years, the time had come to show the world how differently Xinomavro could express itself across distinct terroirs. I deliberately chose three very different terroirs so people could understand how soil and place interact with the variety."

TK How much of the work happens in the vineyard, and how much in the winery?



Apostolos Thymiopoulos poses alongside a selection of the wines that have helped establish his reputation as one of Greece's most respected winemakers.

AT "One hundred percent in the vineyard, and one hundred percent in the winery. You need an enormous amount of work in the vineyard to obtain the best possible fruit, and then you must give your best in the cellar to preserve that quality. Both stages require equal seriousness and attention, because even exceptional fruit can be ruined by poor decisions in the winery."

TK What did it mean to you when Decanter named you a Rising Star winemaker in 2022?

AT "It gave me tremendous momentum. We started receiving emails from everywhere in the world. It opened markets for us – difficult markets, even places like Mexico. At the same time, it was both validation, and a challenge: the challenge of remaining consistently high in quality."

TK Many people say you changed Xinomavro and made it more approachable for consumers. What do you think about that?

AT "I don't believe I changed it. I believe I brought it back to what it was before phylloxera.

"There's an old saying that the wines of Naoussa were once so concentrated that you could carry them in a handkerchief. Xinomavro was never meant to be dilute or watery; that came later. After phylloxera, viticulture was largely abandoned, and farmers turned toward crops that rewarded quantity rather than quality. That approach was completely contrary to what vines require. With grapes, quantity and quality do not coexist easily.

"We returned to pre-phylloxera planting methods – around 10,000 to 12,000 vines per hectare. That made all the difference. Essentially, I brought Xinomavro back to where it had once been and restored the reputation it had previously held.

"Managing tannins was always the major challenge. For many years, the aromas would ripen beautifully, but the palate remained aggressive and unbalanced. That was largely the result of poor vineyard practices. Once we cultivated the vineyards correctly, Xinomavro quickly regained its former reputation."

TK Was the softer, more approachable style of Xinomavro something the market demanded, or did you lead the market in that direction?

AT "I've often wondered about that myself, but I believe I pulled the market in that direction after these vineyard changes naturally resulted in softer tannins. Organic farming also played a major role. All of our vineyards, including those of our partner growers, are organically farmed."

TK You also seem to enjoy experimentation in the cellar.

AT "Absolutely. I like working with different materials: concrete tanks, barrels of various sizes, amphorae. These are all tools in the hands of the winemaker.

"Xinomavro loves oxygen because of its tannic structure. One of the winemaker's essential skills is understanding how to manage oxygen in order to make the wine more pleasurable for consumers.

"All my experiments revolve around the same grape: Xinomavro. Every vintage leads us to different conclusions. The process never ends. Each year is different: different ripeness levels, different tannin structures, different aromas. Drought, humidity, climate conditions – every vintage shapes the wine differently. There is no single recipe. That's the beauty of wine."

TK Your wines have strong personalities. Do they reflect your own character?

AT "In this business, you cannot afford not to have a strong personality; otherwise, your wines will not stand out.

"The truth is that we never stop experimenting and trying new ideas. We continue planting Xinomavro in increasingly challenging terroirs, and not only in Naoussa."

TK Recently, the company portfolio expanded with the acquisition of the Glinavos winery in Zitsa in the area of Epirus, right?

AT "Yes. I went there and saw a beautiful terroir. I decided we should produce wines based on the local grape varieties that truly express that terroir.

"We'll focus mainly on white wines, sparkling wines and semi-sparkling wines, experimenting with Debina, the region's indigenous white grape. The goal is to do for the Zitsa area what we did for the Xinomavro grape variety: position it on the world wine map.

"Today there's clearly a global shift toward white wines. Consumption trends are moving in that direction, and not only during summer."

TK During these twenty successful years, did you have role models, or follow a particular recipe for success?

AT "I was certainly inspired by some of the winemakers in Burgundy who never abandoned Pinot Noir.

"It never crossed my mind to plant anything other than Xinomavro. That commitment proved important because, through my international contacts, I realized that people appreciate wine-makers who genuinely believe in what they do and who are not opportunistic.

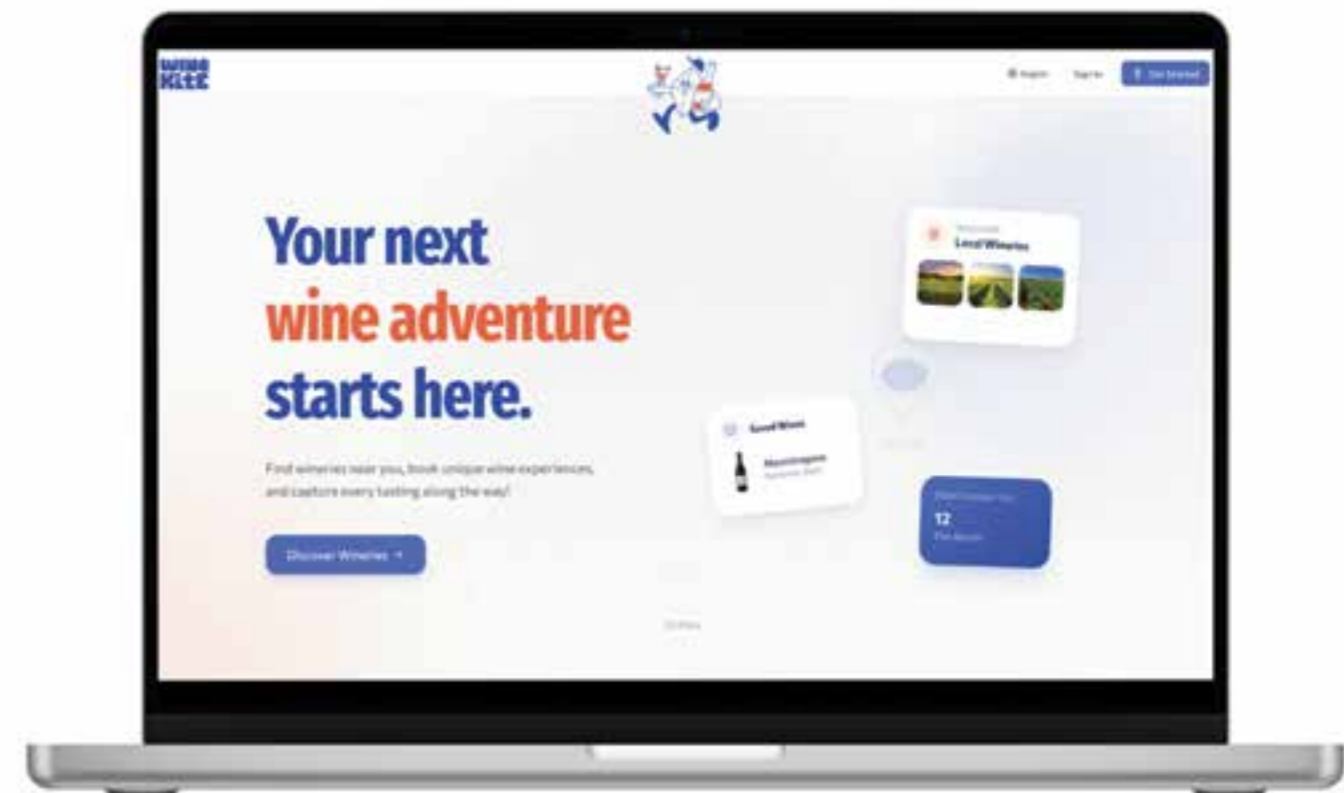
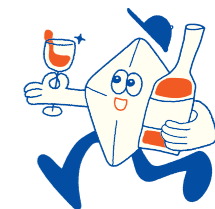
"When someone plants only Xinomavro and dedicates himself fully to that variety, people recognize that as authentic passion and feel it is worthy of their attention. And once the wines themselves confirm that belief, success follows naturally."

TK What advice would you give to young winemakers?

AT "First, they must define the philosophy that they want to serve. Then they must focus on it completely and work to achieve it.

"They should not behave opportunistically or chase trends. They need to make firm choices from the beginning. At the same time, within that clear direction they should continue experimenting and exploring."

WINE KITE



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MIKRO KTIMA TITOS AND THE REVIVAL OF A GOUMENISSA STORY

Text by Nikos Ioannidis

WINERY

Photos from the Mikro Ktima Titos archives

At a site known as Dyo Potamia (“Two Rivers”) just outside the town of Goumenissa, the waterways known as Megalo Potami and Mavro Potami meet to form the Seirios River.



An aerial view reveals an estate in the heart of the distinctive landscape of Naoussa.



Enjoying the wines while surrounded by the remarkable natural beauty of the region.

There is a road here that winds beneath a canopy of plane trees and into a clearing hidden within the forest. Vineyards framed by oak trees surround the winery that stands there; Mt Paiko rises in the distance.

Goumenissa remains one of Greece's lesser-known wine regions. It lacks the reputation of Naoussa or Nemea and has never achieved the recognition enjoyed by some of the country's other prominent wine areas. Yet anyone familiar with Xinomavro knows that the wines produced here possess a character all their own. The PDO Goumenissa appellation, established in 1979, is built around a blend of Xinomavro and at least 20% Negoska, a local variety found almost exclusively in the area and largely responsible for the distinctive profile of its wines.

Mikro Ktima Titos (“Small Estate of Titos”) forms part of that story, although its own journey began with a man who had no connection to either wine or Goumenissa. Titos Eftyichidis was a tobacco merchant from Thessaloniki. Through his work, he became familiar with the Macedonian countryside, traveling extensively throughout the region and, for a period, accompanying organized tours throughout Europe.

In 1972, he found himself in Goumenissa and decided to buy land there. Not a single large estate, but small parcels scattered across the area: half a hectare here, another plot higher up the hill, another one a little further. It took years to assemble what would eventually become the core of today's vineyard.

“He had absolutely no ties to wine or to the region,” says oenologist Nikos Bersos, who worked alongside him from 1997 onwards. “He simply believed something worthwhile could be created here.”

The estate as it stands today gives little indication of the challenges of those early years. The area was isolated, the local infrastructure was limited and viticulture looked very different from what it does now. Nonetheless, Eftyichidis persisted. He planted vineyards, built the winery over time and began vinifying his own grapes, releasing the estate's first bottled Goumenissa from the 1991 vintage.

Those who knew him describe a sociable man with a sharp sense of humor and an extraordinary ability to build relationships. He was the kind of person who could walk into a restaurant in Thessaloniki and know half the room. Long before social media campaigns and carefully designed marketing strategies became industry standards, the growth of the estate depended largely on those personal connections.

His passing in 2017 raised serious questions about the future of the winery. With no clear successor, the threat of his decades-long legacy fading away felt all too real. However, the long-standing friendship between Vangelis Gerovassiliou and Titos Eftyichidis proved decisive. With faith in the people that her late husband valued most, Angeliki Eftyichidis entrusted the vineyard to Vangelis Gerovassiliou and Vassilis Tsaktsaris, owners of Ktima Biblia Chora, who officially acquired the estate in 2018.

Familiar with both the man and the place, the new owners chose to preserve the estate's identity, albeit while redefining its role within the appellation. Subsequent replantings focused on the varieties that define Goumenissa itself. Today, the focus is placed exclusively on Xinomavro and Negoska, with vineyards now spread across several sites in Gerakonas, Filiria and Pentafolos. According to the oenologist Dimitris Mainos, the different soils play a decisive role in shaping the character of the wines.

The landscape combines forested slopes, rolling hills and vineyards at elevations that are notably high for Greece.



Stainless-steel tanks in the winery's production area.

Here, the climate is noticeably cooler than in many other parts of northern Greece, with Mt Paiko exerting a significant influence on temperatures, an influence that helps preserve acidity in the grapes. Historically, abundant rainfall and natural water sources were vital to the region's viticulture, and today's growers speak of declining precipitation with increasing concern. The soils are largely sandy-clay with good drainage, although stony formations are present in several vineyard sites.

A vertical tasting of the estate's Goumenissa bottlings from the 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023 vintages suggests a winery steadily finding its stride. The wines gain complexity, ageing potential and a clearer expression of both place and vintage conditions with each successive release.

Equally vital has been the team's commitment to investing in wine tourism facilities and experiences. Members of the team recall a time, just a few years ago, when finding a bottled Goumenissa wine was a challenge, even in the town's local restaurants. That picture has shifted considerably. The winery, which now welcomes visitors on a daily basis, has developed a program of wine-related activities and has connected the experience of visiting the estate with explorations of the natural landscape of Mt Paiko.

Today, groups from Thessaloniki arrive every Sunday at Dyo Potamia. Some come for the wine tasting, others to walk the Negoska Trail that passes through the vineyards, and many simply want to discover a region that still exists largely outside the spotlight. During events such as Open Doors, visitor numbers now reach into the hundreds.

The fact that more people are traveling here to meet the growers, taste the wines and understand the landscape may be the most significant change that Goumenissa has seen in recent years, perhaps even more important than new vineyard plantings or new releases.

Standing in the clearing among the oak trees today, it is difficult to imagine that it all started with a tobacco merchant who decided to buy a few fields in a region to which he had no family connections at all. More than fifty years later, Mikro Ktima Titos is still writing new chapters in this story.

DRAMA

Text by Penelope Katsatou

TRAVEL

Photos from the wineries' archives



The vineyards of Costa Lazaridi Estate extend across the gently rolling countryside of Drama.

Drama isn't one of those places that reveals itself immediately. It doesn't have the fame or the effortless tourist recognition of other Greek destinations, yet the more time you spend here, the more you understand why wine has taken such deep root in this land.

Mountains closing the horizon from every side, forests, abundant waters – this year perhaps one of the rainiest in recent memory – wide temperature shifts and a distinctly continental character rarely found elsewhere in Greece all come together to create an ideal oenological landscape. From the Old-Growth Forest of Rodopi and the Aggitis Cave to the archaeological site of Philippi, the region is gradually gaining a new outward-looking energy, shaped as well by the growing cultural impact of the Drama International Short Film Festival and the annual Dramoinognosia wine festival.

GEOGRAPHY AND WINE

Mountains such as Pangaio, Menikio and Falakro have created a complex mosaic of microclimates, protecting the vineyards and giving the wines of Drama a freshness, an aromatic intensity and a vibrant acidity. Within just a few kilometers, elevations, soils and ripening periods shift dramatically, creating completely different expressions of even the same grape variety. A reflection of this is the fact that Sauvignon Blanc in Drama may be harvested in early August in the lower-elevation vineyards and yet almost forty days later in the mountainous areas of Nevrokopi and Katafyto.

The region first gained a name for international grape varieties and for a more contemporary, outward-looking approach to Greek wine. Distinctive and highly successful blends such as Assyrtiko with Sauvignon Blanc were born here, while varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Syrah found a different expression through Drama's cooler climate.

In recent years, however, more and more producers have turned once again towards indigenous Greek varieties, recognizing in them the truly unique identity of the Greek vineyard. Assyrtiko seems to have found a second home here, Malagousia from here has a fresher profile, and Agiorgitiko, Xinomavro, Limniona and Mavroudi are being planted with increasing frequency across the region's vineyards.

Drama's relationship with wine, however, goes back much further than the modern rise of its large wineries. From the Dionysian cults at the foothills of Mt Pangaio and the ancient wine presses found there, to the refugee food traditions, the tobacco warehouses and the waters that

shaped its landscape, the region preserves an authenticity rarely encountered in the more "touristic" zones of the Greek wine world. Water remains one of Drama's defining elements. The name of the city itself is often etymologically linked to the word "Ydrama", a reference to the abundant springs and waters of the area.

GASTRONOMY

Drama carries a strong refugee heritage dating from the forced expulsion of the Greek communities in Asia Minor following the 1922 defeat of Greek forces fighting there. This legacy is reflected in its gastronomy: pies, kavourmas, cured meats, bulgur wheat, smoked delicacies and other items with strong Pontic (i.e., Black Sea) and Asia Minor influences remain part of the local food culture. The region also has a long and important history in tobacco production. The old tobacco warehouses, many of which are now being transformed into cultural venues and exhibition spaces, offer striking examples of transition from industrial heritage to contemporary cultural life.

In the village of Kokkinogeia, we sampled savory pies prepared by the local women's cooperative; these tasty treats, made with simple ingredients, were examples of home cooking at its best. Equally well known are the cured meats from Sary, one of Drama's most historic food brands, with a tradition dating back to 1935 and passed down since then from generation to generation. The region's famous pastourma, kavourmas and smoked meats carry deep, authentic flavors that pair beautifully with Drama's rich red wines.

The fact that Drama never became a "tourist showcase" like other regions now almost works in its favor. It still preserves a sense of authenticity and everyday life that feels perfectly aligned with the character of its wines. Recently, we returned to Drama after a hiatus of several years since our last visit, wanting to see how the region's major estates had evolved, how the vineyards, wines and the people behind them had changed and, above all, how a region once considered a rising force in Greek wine now seems to have firmly established its place within the modern Greek wine landscape.



The cellar of Wine Art Estate, connected by underground tunnels running beneath the road, offers visitors a truly unique winery experience.

We returned to Drama several years after our last visit, wanting to see how the region’s major estates had evolved, how the vineyards, wines and the people behind them had changed and, above all, how a region once considered a rising force in Greek wine now seems to have firmly established its place within the modern Greek vineyard landscape

1. WINE ART ESTATE

Early in the morning, our first stop in Drama was at Wine Art Estate, one of the wineries most closely associated with the modern history of the Drama vineyard. Older visitors may still remember the enormous wine bottle that once stood at the entrance; today, it has been replaced by a large sculpture, giving the estate a more contemporary feel. Waiting to greet us were Yiannis Papadopoulos and agronomist Iraklis Topalidis.

The story of the winery begins in 1993, when Yiannis Papadopoulos, then working as an engineer, started making small quantities of wine for friends and family in a small underground space. A few years later, Yiannis Kalaitzidis joined the project and together over time they invested in new vineyards and more modern equipment. A major turning point came in 2007, with the construction of the new production facility and the estate's significant expansion. One of Wine Art Estate's most distinctive features; today is an underground cellar passage connecting the winery's facilities running beneath the road, it was created as the estate expanded.

Since 2009, winemaking has been led by Akis Papadopoulos, following his studies in Bordeaux; around the same time, agronomist Iraklis Topalidis joined the team, focusing his efforts largely on vineyard management and fruit quality.

Particularly interesting are the estate's newer mountain vineyards in the Nevrokopi area, at elevations reaching approximately 1,000 meters, where mainly Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are cultivated as part of a clear adaptation strategy to climate change. "By the time the harvest of the red varieties has been completed here, we are only just beginning to sample Sauvignon Blanc there," the winemakers told us.

Today, Wine Art Estate produces around 450,000 bottles annually, with a significant part of production exported abroad. Despite its growth, however, the people behind the winery insist on keeping it at a scale they can fully control, believing that this balance is essential not only for the quality of the wines, but also for their own quality of life.

Wines tasted

- **ANAFORA LIMNIONA**
A fresher and more elegant expression of Limniona, with lower alcohol, soft tannins and aromas of red fruit, herbs and sweet spices. The winery spent nearly a decade working with the variety to achieve the desired balance, aiming for finesse and drinkability rather than power.
- **IDYSMA DRIOS XI**
A Xinomavro with vibrant acidity, structure and layered aromatic complexity, balancing intensity with refinement. Dried fruit, spice and savory notes that bring to mind an old delicatessen define the nose. The winery considers it a wine with significant ageing potential.
- **PLANO MALAGOUSIA**
A particularly refined interpretation of Malagousia, avoiding the overly exotic profile often associated with the variety and focusing instead on freshness and elegance. Aromas of white flowers, stone fruit and herbs lead to a crisp palate with refreshing acidity and a clean finish.



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2. ESTATES COSTA LAZARIDI

Smiling and far more confident in their roles today, Gerasimos and Giorgos Lazaridi welcomed us this time at Domaine Costa Lazaridi to guide us not only through the winery itself, but also through the estate's new era. We had first met them a few years ago, when they were just taking their first steps into the family business. Today, their roles are clearly defined: Gerasimos focuses on management and strategy, while Giorgos oversees production and the vineyards.

Our tour began among the vines, with the mountains of Drama surrounding us and the conversation constantly returning to climate change and the shift toward cooler, higher-elevation vineyard sites. In Katafyto, at an elevation of around 900 metres, Sauvignon Blanc can be harvested up to forty days later than in the lower vineyards of the region; it's a clear indication of where viticulture in Drama is heading today.

Equally significant is the estate's new direction toward regenerative viticulture. Estates Costa Lazaridi has become the first winery in Greece to receive certification for this, applying practices aimed at restoring the vineyard ecosystem, improving soil fertility, reducing water consumption and creating more resilient vines capable of adapting to climate change. It is an approach that increasingly connects the future of wine with sustainability and the care of the landscape itself.

The tour continued inside the impressive winery building. Beneath the large metallic sphere in the central hall, a glass artwork of the god Dionysus filters the natural light falling onto the estate's bottles; a number of the marble works appearing throughout the space trace the family's history. As we moved among the concrete tanks, amphorae and wooden vats in the cellars, it became clear to us that the estate is committed to constant experimentation with new approaches to vinification and ageing.

The estate's tsipouro Idoniko still holds a special place here, as does the iconic Amethystos, the Sauvignon Blanc-Assyrtiko blend that became closely associated with the modern identity of Drama and remains a benchmark wine for the estate. The winery continues to place strong emphasis on both international and Greek grape varieties, although, as they explained, interest in recent years has increasingly shifted toward indigenous Greek grapes. Their use of Malagousia from Katafyto and of Agiorgitiko, as well as new projects involving Savatiano and other Greek varieties, all reflect this direction. "Greek varieties are ultimately what we have that is truly unique to present abroad," they told us.

Today, Domaine Costa Lazaridi produces approximately 1 million bottles annually, with around 35% of production exported internationally, and a portfolio of roughly 18 labels.

Wines tasted

- **AMETHYSTOS BLANC**

The iconic Drama blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Assyrtiko, balancing freshness, vibrant acidity and exotic aromatics. Tropical fruit, lime and citrus notes define a wine that remains a benchmark for white wine-making in the region.

- **AMETHYSTOS FUMÉ**

A more complex expression of Sauvignon Blanc from the high-elevation vineyards of Katafyto at 900 meters. Exotic fruit, passion fruit, sweet spices and subtle oak are supported by vibrant acidity and impressive length.

- **COSTA LAZARIDI BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT**

A traditional-method sparkling wine from 100% Vidiano grown at 900 meters in Katafyto. Brioche, green apple, lemon and citrus aromas shape an elegant and refreshing sparkling wine that reflects the evolution in the estate's direction.

3. CHATEAU NICO LAZARIDI

At Château Nico Lazaridi we were welcomed by Nikos Kampanatis, the estate's wine tourism manager, for a tour that felt more like a journey through the history, art and identity of Drama than a typical winery visit. From the very beginning, it became clear that wine tourism is taken very seriously here. The modern visitor facilities host tastings, music events, open-air cinema nights and even stargazing sessions with telescopes. Last year alone, the winery welcomed around 8,000 visitors.

Facing the winery stands Mt. Pangaion, the "Magic Mountain" that gave its name to the estate's iconic wine range. The influence of that wine range on the winery's own identity is visible everywhere. In the dedicated gallery space, visitors can see the original paintings that have appeared on the labels of Magic Mountain wines since 1990, works by Greek and international artists created exclusively for the estate's bottles.

The estate's vineyards are spread around the winery and cover nearly 900 stremmas; the company also operates another winery in Platanotopos, Kavala, on the opposite side of Mt Pangaion. Together, Mt Falakro, Mt. Menikio and Mt Pangaion create a distinctive microclimate that protects the area from extreme weather conditions and strongly benefits viticulture. However, as Nikos explained to us, it was water, not stone, that shaped the ancient morphology of the region, once essentially a vast lake.

In recent years, the winery has invested heavily in modernization, with new tanks, automated bottling systems and even automated harvesting, while at the same time increasingly focusing on indigenous Greek grape varieties. Particular attention is being given to Mavroudi, an old variety from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace that the winery considers one of the most promising grapes for the future of the region.

Today, Château Nico Lazaridi produces slightly over 1.5 million bottles annually, with around 30% of production exported abroad. The success of the winery is mirrored in the growing popularity of the region; Drama is becoming a destination that combines wine tourism with natural and cultural attractions to keep people coming throughout the entire year.

Wines tasted

- **AMPHORA ASSYRTIKO 2024**

One of the winery's newest and most experimental projects, this 100% Assyrtiko spends nine months in amphorae, gaining extra texture, depth and a slightly oxidative character, while still preserving the vibrant acidity and minerality of the variety. Produced at only around 4,000 bottles, it is clearly designed as a highly gastronomic wine.

- **MAVROUDI 2024**

One of the varieties the winery strongly believes in. This 100% Mavroudi spends 12 months in oak, resulting in a full-bodied and structured wine with dark fruit, spice and a character that recalls Syrah in several ways. A powerful red with firm tannins and significant ageing potential.

- **PERPETUUS RED**

The winery's most premium and limited-production label, with around 3,500 bottles produced. Based primarily on Mavroudi, Perpetuus represents the estate's flagship work with the variety. Its name, which means "eternal" in Latin, reflects the philosophy behind a wine built for long ageing in the bottle.

4. OENOGENESIS

Amid the vineyards of Drama, surrounded by mountains and the region's distinctive northern light, rises the imposing Macedonian-style building of Oenogenesis, a winery that resembles a stone manor house more than a contemporary production facility. Around it stretch the vineyards of Doxato, forming one of the most recognizable wine landscapes in northern Greece. During our visit, we were welcomed by Alexandros Tsalkos, the second generation of Tsalkos winemakers, continuing the work initiated by his father, Bakis Tsalkos, one of the figures closely associated with the modern development of Drama wines. Oenogenesis was founded in 2007 with the aim of combining French winemaking philosophy with Greek grapes and, above all, with the wine identity of the region itself.

The estate's privately owned vineyards extend across Drama and Kavala, in areas defined by strong day-to-night temperature shifts, constant airflow and diverse soils that range from limestone to semi-clay compositions. The winery works with both indigenous and international grape varieties, although in recent years the focus has increasingly shifted toward the Greek grapes. "Our greatest advantage lies in Greek varieties and local products," Alexandros Tsalkos said, and added that wine should remain connected to food, conviviality and everyday life, and not become something intimidating or elitist. That philosophy is reflected throughout the wines themselves. The ranges Feggites, Dekka, Mataroa, Thyrsus and Skertso move between freshness, gastronomic character and long ageing potential, and the winery continuously experiments with blends, extended lees ageing and low-intervention winemaking approaches. Particularly interesting are the small-production natural wines of the Mataroa series, originally created for the American market.

Today, Oenogenesis produces around 110,000 bottles annually, maintaining a distinctly boutique character, with a strong presence in fine-dining restaurants and on wine lists seeking wines with personality, balance and a clear sense of place.

Wines tasted

- **DEKA RED**

The winery's flagship label, built around long ageing and a more classic philosophy. A wine with concentration, ripe fruit, spice and firm structure, and still one of the labels that help define Oenogenesis.

- **MATAROA ORANGE WINE**

One of the most distinctive wines we tasted, coming from the winery's low-intervention range. With skin contact, aromatic complexity, gentle tannins and a strong gastronomic character, it clearly reflects the more experimental and contemporary side of Oenogenesis.

- **FEGGITES WHITE**

A wine that best expresses the freshness and purity of fruit that the winery increasingly seeks today, it is vibrant, balanced and highly enjoyable at the table, with an emphasis more on finesse than on power.

DRAMA



Alexandros Tsalkos oversees grape sorting at Oenogenesis Estate.



Gerasimos and Giorgos Lazaridis share a moment while tasting their wines.



The impressive cellar of Château Nico Lazaridi.



The striking Pavlidis Estate winery building stands proudly above its surrounding vineyards.

5. **KTIMA PAVLIDIS**

No matter how many times we visit Ktima Pavlidis, we always find ourselves impressed by the imposing winery building rising among the vineyards, with the mountains of Drama surrounding it in every direction. The clean architectural lines, the extensive use of marble and the carefully maintained grounds constantly reflect not only the family's long connection with the marble industry but also the philosophy behind the estate itself: born from Christoforos Pavlidis' passion for fine wine and his desire to express his homeland through it.

Waiting for us this time was Chronis Lalas, the estate's marketing manager, who guided us through the vineyards stretching around the winery and further up into the more mountainous areas of Perichora and Agios Minas, on the slopes of Mt Menikio. Today, the estate owns around 800 stremmas of vineyards, the first of which were planted in Kokkinogea in the late 1990s, in the area's distinctive red clay-loam soils.

As you move towards the higher-altitude vineyards, the landscape changes noticeably. Elevations reach up to 700 meters, temperatures drop, and strong mountain winds create ideal conditions for slower ripening and greater aromatic intensity in the grapes. Here, varieties such as Assyrtiko, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Syrah, Agiorgitiko and Tempranillo are cultivated. Particular care is paid to the estate's experimental vineyard, where varieties including Vidiano, Robola, Verdejo, Mavrotragano and Mavrodaphne are being tested. At the same time, another 200 stremmas planted at even higher altitudes are expected to enter production in the coming years, reflecting Drama's gradual move towards cooler vineyard sites in response to climate change.

Today, Ktima Pavlidis produces around 450,000 bottles annually, with approximately 25% exported to 15 different countries. Our visit concluded with a tasting alongside the estate's winemaker Athanasios Exarchou, and the results confirmed yet again the winery's consistent focus on precision, purity and a distinctly modern expression of the Drama vineyard.

Wines tasted

- **THEMA WHITE 2025**
The winery's signature white blend, combining 50% Assyrtiko and 50% Sauvignon Blanc. Fresh, aromatic and vibrant, it is crafted through a combination of stainless steel, oak and ceramic ageing vessels to balance fruit purity with texture and complexity.
- **EMPHASIS Assyrtiko 2025**
A single-vineyard Assyrtiko from the premium EMPHASIS range, focused on structure, minerality and ageing potential. Part of the wine matures in oak and ceramic vessels, while preserving the sharp acidity and tension typical of the variety.
- **EMPHASIS Agiorgitiko 2023**
A more structured and refined expression of Agiorgitiko from a single-vineyard site in Drama. Ripe fruit, spice and balance define this wine, a strong representative of an EMPHASIS range that consistently focuses on low yields and greater depth and complexity.



Stainless steel, wooden and concrete vessels coexist at Oenops Winery, reflecting a philosophy that embraces multiple winemaking techniques.

6. **OENOPS**

At Oenops, we were welcomed by Nikos Karatzas, the man behind a winery that, in just ten years, has built a remarkably clear identity and earned significant recognition both in Greece and abroad, collecting awards and international acclaim along the way. Based in Drama but working with growers across northern Greece, Oenops was founded on a rather unusual philosophy: no privately owned vineyards, but instead a close network of growers who share the same mindset when it comes to farming, sustainability and respect for the land.

From Thrace and Drama to Naoussa, Rapsani and Mesenikola, the Oenops team seeks out old vines, cooler vineyard sites and poor soils capable of producing wines with freshness, tension and balance. Greek varieties are firmly at the center of their work, with Limniona standing out as one of the winery's most emblematic expressions.

The philosophy of Oenops revolves around purity and precision. Each vineyard parcel is vinified separately in order to preserve the identity of the site and express, as clearly as possible, the character of both the grape variety and its place of origin. In the cellar, concrete tanks, amphorae and large neutral vessels coexist, though none of them are used for showmanship or stylistic masking. "We don't want the wine to shout; we want it to speak clearly about the grape and the place," Karatzas told us.

The winemaker's relationship with growers is equally central to the philosophy of the winery. The producers are treated as an extension of the Oenops team itself, with long-term collaboration and trust shaping every stage of the process. "Our growers are our family," Karatzas said, emphasizing that everything begins in the vineyard and with the people who cultivate it.

What ultimately stands out at Oenops is a sense of calm precision that runs through the entire winery. Nothing feels excessive or ostentatious; instead, there is a very deliberate effort to express the Greek vineyard in a modern, transparent and deeply thoughtful way

Wines tasted

- **APLA ROSÉ**
One of the most approachable and expressive wines in the Oenops portfolio, based primarily on Limniona. Fresh red fruit, vibrant acidity and a very clean, energetic character define the wine, reflecting the winery's philosophy of balance, drinkability and minimal intervention. The same varietal composition is also used for Apla Red, although the grapes are sourced from different vineyard sites and handled with a different approach.
- **OENOPS VIDIANO**
Oenops has worked extensively over the past few years with this variety, employing different vinification techniques and ageing methods. The result here is a Vidiano with greater texture and complexity that still maintains freshness and a purity of fruit, perfectly reflecting the winery's low-intervention philosophy and its focus on letting the variety express itself.
- **ICONIO KONIAROS**
This is a more premium, limited-production label that highlights Oenops' close collaboration with selected growers and specific vineyard sites. With greater structure, depth and ageing potential, Iconio Koniarios approaches a more serious and layered style, while still preserving the freshness and balance characteristic of the overall philosophy of Oenops.



Emphasis. Assyrtiko

KTIMA PAVLIDIS
KOKKINO GIA DRAMA

follow us on

THE ART OF BALSAMIC AGEING AT DOMAINE COSTA LAZARIDI

Text by Penelope Katsatou

TRAVEL

Photos from the Domaine Costa Lazaridi archives



The small barrels used in the final ageing stage alongside a precious bottle of aged balsamic.

One of the most unexpected highlights of our visit to Domaine Costa Lazaridi was hidden neither in the cellars nor among the vineyards, but in a separate space, within the winery itself, one dedicated exclusively to the production of balsamic vinegar.

There we were welcomed by Yannis Oxyzidis, production director and winemaker of the estate, for a tour in a setting that felt far more like a traditional acetia in Modena than a Greek winery.

The atmosphere changes the moment you step inside. The scent of wood, aged vinegar and time itself fills the air; rows of barrels of different sizes line the room, creating an almost ceremonial setting. The windows remain open throughout the year to allow natural ventilation, because the acetic bacteria require oxygen in order to function properly. Temperature, humidity and airflow play nearly as important role here as the wine itself.

The estate's balsamic vinegar story began back in 2001, after the Lazaridi family traveled to Modena and Reggio Emilia and decided to create a product in line with the philosophy of traditional Italian balsamico tradizionale. The process starts with wine from the estate itself, placed into oak barrels together with a small amount of older vinegar – the so-called “mother” vinegar. Slowly, through natural acetification, the alcohol transforms into acetic acid, in a process that can take up to two years.

The vinegar is then blended with concentrated grape must from the same harvest and enters its long ageing period. Gradually, the balsamic

is transferred into smaller and smaller barrels, where natural evaporation slowly concentrates the liquid, adding density, depth and complexity. In some of the traditional barrel “batteries”, a tiny portion of the very first vinegar placed there nearly 24 years ago still remains today.

As we taste the liquid at different stages of ageing, it becomes clear that balsamic vinegar here is treated almost like a fine aged wine. The older samples reveal aromas of dried fruit, cocoa, wood, caramel and spices, with a sweet-and-sour balance that feels closer to a concentrated elixir than to a classic vinegar. The most mature balsamic vinegars are bottled in small quantities and sold to be drizzled, drop by drop, over aged cheeses, grilled meats, strawberries or even ice cream.

Today, production has reached approximately 17,000-18,000 liters per year across six different product categories, with part of the production already being exported to markets such as Germany, Dubai and beyond. More than anything else, however, what stays with you after a visit to this part of the winery is the sense of patience and time. In a world where everything is moving faster and faster, the vinegar here continues to evolve slowly, following almost the same rhythm of ageing and care as a great wine might.

Barrels of different sizes house balsamic vinegar during its long ageing process, while high windows create the natural airflow essential to maturation.



Nikos Karatzas poses with one of his wines, reflecting the passion and personality behind Oenops Wines.

NIKOS KARATZAS

Text by Penelope Katsatou

INTERVIEW

Photo from the Oenops winery archives

Ten years after founding Oenops, one would expect Nikos Karatzas to be talking about growth, exports, new markets, investments and plans for the future.

Instead, apart from his wines, he talks mainly about the people behind them and the hard work that goes into making them. He speaks about the growers he knows better than ever before, about a team that has developed alongside him. He talks about the need to listen to each vintage rather than trying to dominate it. Even when describing how he imagines himself ten years from now, his first wish has nothing to do with wine.

“I hope to be healthy and more balanced. To be able to balance work and life even better.” He pauses. “We are five years more mature [than the last time we talked] ... We have spent five more years alongside our growers, which means much better results in the vineyard. We have become stronger as a group. I have invested a tremendous amount of time in people and in how we can work together as a team.”

The maturity he describes is not about wine. It is about the way an organization functions, and about the way one approaches work itself. And perhaps that is why one of the most honest answers in our conversation concerns something he feels he did not do well enough in the early years.

Pinelopi Katsatou

What would you change if you were starting all over again today?

Nikos Karatzas

“I would change the way I approached marketing. I believe very strongly in word of mouth. If you ask around, people will tell you, ‘These wines, these people.’ But that also needs to be communicated. Marketing is something we are only now beginning to pay attention to.”

This admission is interesting because it comes from someone who has managed to build one of the most recognizable Greek wine projects of the past decade. At the same time, it explains something else: Oenops was not built around a business growth plan, but around relationships.

The same becomes evident in the way he perceives the role of the winemaker. Years ago, he described himself as being “invisible” in the winery. The phrase still resonates with him today.

PK What does it really mean to be invisible in winemaking?

NK “Being invisible does not mean that I am not there, literally doing the work. I want you to taste Vidiano and get the taste of Vidiano. I want you to taste Assyrtiko and get the taste of Assyrtiko. There is the makeup artist who comes in and completely changes your features, and there is the one who helps you look as much like yourself as possible. I am the second one. The winemaker is not there to impose himself on the raw material but to help it express itself. You cannot make grapes better after they have been harvested. The only thing you can do is not ruin them.”

PK How important is it for you to follow the vintage?

NK “My philosophy is to react to what happens. We do not determine what happens. A warmer season comes along? Then I need to change things both in the vineyard and in the winery. There cannot be a single protocol that applies everywhere.”

This approach is also connected to his decision to invest in Greek grape varieties, a choice that was far from the obvious one in Drama ten years ago.

“For the region, it was groundbreaking. We put out the word loud and clear that we work with vineyards belonging to growers willing to collaborate and that we invest in Greek varieties. Today, I’m happy to see more and more people following that path.”

PK What habit would you most like to see change in Greek wine culture?

NK “The fear of trying something new. There are people who are afraid to order a wine outside the four or five very well-known wineries. You should not be judged for choosing a label you do not know. The worst thing that can happen is that you drink a glass of wine that you don’t like.”

PK Can Drama develop a more complete wine identity?

NK “Yes. Progress has been made. The next stage is how we can turn it into a complete experience. To be able to say: I want to go to Drama because I will visit wineries, eat well, hike in the mountains and get to know the place. We’re still missing that piece.”

PK Were there any certainties you lost along the way? Things you believed when you started that you see differently today?

NK “Nothing has changed in my mind. I left the moment I felt something was no longer mine. In that sense, I always work as if it were my own. Even in the army, when I was doing my military service, they would give something and I tried to take it to a different level from the one I inherited. That’s how I operate. Wherever I am, I want to leave things better than I found them.”

PK Do you think we have made wine more complicated than it needs to be?

NK “I believe Greek wine needs to be demystified. It needs to move away from excessive pretension and rediscover its natural place at the table. In Italy or France, wine is part of everyday life. People are not afraid to open a bottle. Here, we’ve often made it excessively serious or excessively expensive. And that distances consumers.”

PK What is wine, ultimately, for you?

NK “For me, wine has never been a basic necessity. It’s something much greater than that. It’s part of the experience, part of the moment, part of the table, part of the company of friends. What we often forget is that wine can add value to a moment and transform it into a memory. That is where its true essence lies. That is what we try to serve through our work. To focus not only on the wine itself but on the entire ecosystem around it: the people, the place, the experience. “Today, the overall quality of Greek wine has improved dramatically. It is difficult to find a truly bad wine. The real challenge is no longer quality alone. It is to keep wine accessible, vibrant and genuinely connected to the experience of food and companionship. Because that’s where it truly belongs.”

KTIMA BIBLIA CHORA: A MODERN GREEK ICON ROOTED IN ANCIENT VINEYARDS

Text by Thalia Kartrali

WINERY

Photos from the Ktima Biblia Chora archives



Arriving at Ktima Biblia Chora Winery on a warm late-spring day, I couldn't help thinking that I was long overdue in putting a face to one of Greece's most celebrated premium wine labels.

I was welcomed by the man whose name has become synonymous with the estate, Vassilis Tsaktsarlis. In the early 2000s, Tsaktsarlis decided to join forces with Vangelis Gerovassiliou, one of Greece's most renowned winemakers, and create a winery which has since gone on to achieve acclaim both in Greece and abroad.

Perched on the slopes at the foot of Mt. Pangaion, just outside the city of Kavala, the winery is surrounded by 80 hectares of vineyards stretching across the landscape. The view is nothing short of breathtaking.

"We're in a region where winemaking dates back to antiquity," Tsaktsarlis explained. Phoenician traders who once arrived here in search of gold and other minerals from Mt. Pangaion brought with them vines from their homeland. These gave rise to the legendary Biblinos Oinos, the ancient wine from which the estate takes its name.

While the continuity of viticulture in the region may have been interrupted over the centuries, a remarkable discovery suggests a tangible link with the past. Several years ago, a local herbalist known by the nickname "Perseus," who knows every corner of the region, informed the winery of an ancient vine producing grapes unlike any variety he'd ever encountered. Fascinated, the winery team led by Tsaktsarlis undertook the painstaking process of identifying the grape.

The variety remains officially unnamed, but Ktima Biblia Chora vinifies it today under the Biblinos label, producing both a rosé and a red wine in extremely limited quantities: fewer than 3,000 bottles annually. Greek authorities are expected to complete the formal registration process in the near future and grant the mysterious grape an official name, adding it to the catalog of rare indigenous Greek varieties.

As we discussed the origins of the winery's name, a gentle breeze drifted up from the Strymon Gulf. According to the winemaker, the region benefits from a unique combination of Mediterranean and continental climatic influences, giving the wines their distinctive character.

"This is particularly evident in our white Ktima Biblia Chora, our best-known label both in Greece and internationally," Tsaktsarlis told me. "The wine, a blend of Assyrtiko and Sauvignon Blanc, comes from vineyards throughout the region. As a result, it combines both tropical fruit and green fruit characteristics. This is our only label made from a blend of grapes sourced from all over the region. All the other wines we produce here come from single vineyards and are vinified separately."

The estate's certified organic vineyards are carefully matched to the terrain. The hillside plots are planted with red varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Agiorgitiko, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir, while the vineyards surrounding the winery are home to white varieties such as Assyrtiko, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Vidiano.

Tsaktsarlis has every reason to feel proud of the winery's achievements. Its flagship premium white wine, Ovilos White, a blend of Assyrtiko and Semillon, was once featured on the cover of Decanter as one of the world's seven finest white wines. Yet despite his reputation as a leading oenologist, he insists that everything begins in the vineyard. "Without exceptional fruit, it's impossible to achieve the result we seek and the consistency of quality that remains our ultimate goal," he says.

The winery itself is truly state-of-the-art. Construction began in 2000 and was completed in 2007. Today, annual production ranges between 750,000 and 800,000 bottles. Modern production facilities are equipped with stainless-steel tanks used for most vinification processes, while two impressive underground cellars house approximately 1,000 barrels for the ageing of red wines and selected whites, including Ovilos and Plagios, the latter a wine made entirely from Chardonnay.

The next generation is already deeply involved in the estate's future. Tsaktsarlis is now joined by his children, Michalis and Areti, both trained oenologists who have taken active roles in production. During the tasting session, it became clear that experimentation is a family passion. The younger winemakers are constantly exploring new possibilities and hope that some of their projects will eventually lead to new labels. This may, however, require patience; as their father points out with a smile: "For an idea to reach the bottle, it takes at least ten years."

Wines we tasted

- **BIBLINOS ROSÉ 2025**
Produced from the mysterious Pangaion variety that bears no resemblance to any known Greek or international grape, this rosé displays aromas of red fruits such as cherry and blackberry, complemented by citrus notes. The palate is rich and fresh, with excellent structure, balance and a long, persistent finish.

Food pairing

Exotic cuisine, poultry served with fruit-based sauces, and a variety of savory pies.

- **BIBLINOS RED 2019**
Intense aromas of red fruits and flowers are layered with notes of vanilla and chocolate. Full-bodied and generous on the palate, it combines refined tannins with vibrant fruit character, leading to an impressively long finish.

Food pairing

Slow-cooked meats, oven-braised dishes and mature cheeses.

An aerial view of the beautiful Vivlia Chora winery.

RIGHT: The estate captured at night, illuminated against the surrounding landscape.

THESSALONIKI: A CITY YOU SAVOR

Text by Carolina Doriti

GRAPE FOOD

Photos by Carolina Doriti



Multifaceted, contradictory, multicultural, traditional and at the same time truly modern, Thessaloniki has a way of pulling you close and never letting go.

It is one of those cities you experience by walking; you taste it, drink it in, and never quite have enough. Every visit feels both familiar and new at once, a return to what you know and a curiosity for everything that has freshly emerged along the way.

The city center wakes early. Shutters roll up, coffee cups settle onto marble tables, scooters slip through narrow streets. Seductive aromas of coffee and freshly baked bougatsa mingle with the sea air.

In Thessaloniki, mornings begin almost ritualistically: with a crisp koulouri or a warm bougatsa. The bougatsa at Anoteron, opposite the former Government House (the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace), remains one of the best in the city center. Whether it's filled with ground meat, cheese, spinach or custard cream, whichever one you choose arrives freshly cut and piping hot, flakes from its delicate pastry coating the paper wrapping. Good koulouri can be found all over the city: at the traditional bakery of Bakolas Bakery, at Ouzounian, or even from the woman with the small stand, one of the city's enduring fixtures, on the corner of Tsimiski and Aristotelous streets.

Thessaloniki is famous for its coffee culture, and finding an excellent cup is never difficult. The Caravan Café is ideal for serious brunch and excellent toast, while The C. Through even organizes seminars dedicated to coffee. Near the city's iconic White Tower, Tabya stands out as a distinctive café with books and a character all its own.

A VIBRANT AND RICHLI DIVERSE FOOD MARKET

In a narrow alley just above Kassandrou Street as you climb towards the Upper Town, you'll find the tiny shop of cheesemaker Christos Kontonikolas. He makes his cheeses in Dryovouno, Kozani, using milk from free-grazing animals and constantly experimenting with new ideas. His small-batch cheeses are truly remarkable, as are his butter and yogurt. On Pavlou Mela Street, Trome Katsikisio focuses entirely on goat's milk, goat meat and other goat by-products – from exceptionally fresh and delicious soft-serve ice cream made with goat's milk to unusual pet treats crafted from goat meat. At 1 A. Svolou Street stands Vasilius tou Dromou ("King of the Road"), an unconventional kiosk with a conscience, selling products sourced exclusively from businesses that have been certified as 100% Greek.

The old Agora Vlali, also known as To Kapani, is the city's oldest market; it carries two centuries of memories, traditions, aromas and per-

sonalities. Everything here happens at the pace of the market itself: the cries of the vendors, the clatter of metal shutters rising, the rustle of paper, the scent of spices mingling with the smell of freshly cleaned fish and the earthy scent of vegetables. Stalls piled high with olives, cheeses, herbs, cured meats, fabrics, household goods and every imaginable necessity line the narrow passageways.

The vendors are seasoned masters of the trade: sharp-witted, theatrical and direct. Their shouts, their teasing banter, even their silences form part of the ritual. Jewelers, grocers, fishmongers, butchers and spice sellers form a living mosaic of old Thessaloniki. Hidden among them are tiny workshops, old coffee shops and modest tavernas where time seems to have stopped. Here, history is not displayed behind glass; it breathes, bargains, argues and laughs. Kapani is not simply a market. It is the city itself, condensed into a few tightly packed alleyways.

Leaving the market behind, you will come across yet more small stories and moments of insight. A few steps further down, at the old Modiano Market, another side of the city reveals itself: more open, brighter, yet equally alive with memory and voices. Restored and vibrant once more, Modiano today gathers delicatessens, wine bars, bakeries and small eateries under its historic roof, drawing both locals and visitors. People drift slowly between the counters, stopping for a glass of wine, a small plate of food, a conversation.

The old and the new coexist naturally here, without effort. At Extravaganza, one of the city's most beloved spots, the menu encompasses both comfort food and inventive dishes, while at Charoupi the cuisine of Crete finds a home in the heart of Thessaloniki, with flavors both earthy and refined. Nearby, at Mair & Margarita, wine takes center stage alongside select meze. At Salumeria del Greco, Italian delicacies, cured meats, and cheeses turn every visit into a small feast. All around the market, old cafés and new bars fill steadily from morning until late into the night, preserving the timeless rhythm that defines this city.

From the waterfront to the Upper Town, Thessaloniki moves between sea breeze and stone walls, between Byzantine echoes and modern conversations. The sun sets slowly over the Thermaic Gulf, painting the horizon in soft gold and deep orange. And somewhere in the distance, another coffee is poured, another table fills with patrons, and another story begins.

A generous display of Thessaloniki delicacies, from cured fish and meats to artichokes and peppers.

RIGHT: A smiling market owner poses in the heart of Thessaloniki's historic food market.

ANASTORO: RECLAIMING THE MEMORY OF PONTIC CUISINE IN THESSALONIKI

Text by Nikos Ioannidis

GRAPE FOOD

Photo by Konstantinos Tsakalidis

One of the most compelling recent additions to Thessaloniki's restaurant scene is Anastoro.

Here, Aphrodite Georgiadou has managed something rarely achieved with such conviction: bringing the cuisine of the Pontic region (i.e. the Black Sea) into a contemporary restaurant setting without stripping it of its memory, techniques or sense of place. The Pontic Greeks – refugees who settled largely across Macedonia and Thrace following violent expulsions from the southern shores of the Black Sea and the Caucasus between 1919 and 1923 – carried with them not only their language and customs, but an entire culinary system. It was a cuisine shaped by preservation and scarcity: fermentation, cheesemaking, dried foods, homemade pasta and an uncompromising use of every available ingredient.

Georgiadou's father, Theofilos, descends from Pontic and Asia Minor refugee families; her mother, Lena, comes from Xanthi in northern Greece. Their farm in Kilkis and the family grocery store, Ragian, in Thessaloniki became the foundations of her relationship with this food culture. From an early age, she was involved in cheesemaking, fermentation, winter preserves, foraging and a way of approaching food that was deeply tied to the rhythms of the land.

Cooking eventually led her into professional kitchens. She trained under Vassilis Mouratidis in Halkidiki and later alongside Lefteris Lazarou at Varoulko Seaside before deciding to create a project of her own in the center of Thessaloniki.

At Anastoro, she presents a modern interpretation of Pontic cooking rooted in ingredients and home products from the family farm. Together with her parents, she produces her own cheeses, gathers vegetables, herbs, nuts and edible flowers, and maintains a small-scale artisanal production model that has become increasingly rare. Every Monday, she returns to Kilkis to prepare ferments, pickles and preserves for the restaurant. The Ragian farm, meanwhile, hosts a communal table once a week for a select group, offering a menu based entirely on whatever the farm is producing at that particular moment.

The word "Anastoro" in the Pontic dialect means "I remember," "I recount," or "I bring to mind." That is, more or less, how Georgiadou cooks. In the thirty-seat restaurant which opened in March on Lori Margariti Street, she works with the flavors and techniques she grew up with, without attempting to polish them into a refined version of Pontic cuisine. Her experience in serious kitchens simply allows her to handle those recipes and raw materials with greater precision and a more contemporary touch.

Many of the ingredients arrive directly from the family farm in Kilkis: cheeses made with the farm's own milk, butter, vegetables, herbs, pickles, and preparations that require patience and constant care. The names of the dishes, written in the Pontic dialect, feel like a quiet introduction to what follows. The varenika (a kind of dumpling) are filled with wild boar and served with smoked eggplant, pear and cave-aged cheese. One pasta dish on the summer menu is made from a dough of wild greens and semolina, served with cheese matured inside tulum skins using kefir cultures, topped with tsiligania – slow-cooked wild boar fat rendered until crisp – and finished with fried beet leaves.

A salad of wild greens, thogala (milk cream), potato chips and a broth of roasted peppers and basil captures the same balance between freshness and depth. Then there is perek, the traditional Pontic savory pie, filled with Gais cheese, xygalo, noutyo and parcharotyri, all cheeses produced by the family and rooted in the Pontic dairy tradition.

The menu changes frequently, although the philosophy remains consistent. Georgiadou cooks according to what is available, wastes almost nothing and carefully repurposes whatever remains. The drinks list occasionally includes cocktails built around house ferments, alongside beers and Greek spirits. The select wine list leans towards small Greek producers and low-intervention wines, options chosen to match both the intensity and the directness of the cooking.

SEAFOOD AND WHITE WINE

Text by Nikos Loukakis, Senior Lecturer WSPC

WINE PAIRING

Illustration by Philippos Avramidis

In Greece, summer seems inextricably linked to the sea, not only as far as where we spend time and what we customarily do but also through our food.

The sea offers an abundance of exceptional ingredients and flavors that are fresh, delicate and full of character, often requiring very little preparation (and therefore less time spent in a hot kitchen) to truly stand out. Few things capture the essence of a Greek summer better than seafood enjoyed alongside a crisp white wine. Let's discover some of the most delicious pairings together.

- **BOTTARGA (Avgotaracho)**

One of Greece's most revered delicacies, with a history that goes back centuries. In 1994, the bottarga of Messolonghi received Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status. It is made from the roe of grey mullet, locally known as bafa, caught in the lagoon there. The roe sacs are cured in salt and then coated with natural beeswax for preservation.

The flavor of the bottarga is intensely maritime, rich in salinity and umami, with a delicate oiliness and full body. Thinly sliced, it is considered a luxurious meze. That salty and umami-driven character pairs beautifully with wines that offer bright acidity to balance the richness. Choose a traditional-method sparkling wine made mainly from white grape varieties, or a crisp unoaked white wine with citrus and green fruit aromas. For a different approach, try pairing it with chilled white spirits such as tsipouro, grappa or premium vodka, all of which cleanse the palate and soften the intensity of the bottarga.

- **SEA URCHIN (Achinoos)**

Abundant along the Greek coastline, sea urchin is one of the most celebrated delicacies of Greek seaside cuisine. Beneath its round shell and long spines lies a remarkable treasure traditionally enjoyed raw with fresh lemon juice.

Its flavor is intensely briny, with pronounced maritime notes. It is often served with grilled sourdough bread, whose smoky, toasted character complements the sea urchin beautifully. Nothing pairs better with urchin than an Assyrtiko from Santorini, whose vibrant acidity and mineral character mirror the freshness of the sea. Another excellent choice is a cool-climate Sauvignon Blanc with herbal notes and pronounced minerality.

- **VENUS CLAMS (Kydonia)**

A shellfish commonly found throughout the Mediterranean and beloved in Greek cuisine. Their heart-shaped shells hide delicate flesh with subtle salinity and gentle briny notes. They are traditionally eaten raw with lemon, directly from the shell.

Their elegant and delicate flavor makes them an ideal introduction to shellfish. Crisp white wines with refreshing acidity and green fruit character work beautifully. A Robola from Kefalonia is considered one of the finest pairings for this meze. Alternatively, a traditional-method sparkling Moschofilero offers lively freshness and cleanses the palate after every bite.

- **SMOOTH CLAMS (Gyalisteres)**

Extremely popular in Greece, similar to Venus clams but with a smoother, shinier shell. Their flesh is slightly redder and richer, with more texture and oiliness but the same fresh sea character.

A Roditis from the mountainous vineyards of Aigialeia is an excellent match, thanks to its crisp acidity and vibrant fresh aromas. Another wonderful option is a traditional-method sparkling wine from Amyntaio, whose bubbles will refresh the palate while adding complexity to the pairing.

- **MUSSELS (Mydia)**

A staple of the Greek summer table. Unlike most shellfish, mussels have elongated dark blue or brown shells and flesh that is softer, richer and less aromatic. For this reason, they're often cooked with ingredients such as ouzo, garlic and herbs to enhance their flavor. Here, aromatic intensity is more important than sharp acidity.

Greek varieties such as Thrapsathiri and Dafni from Crete, with their herbal and botanical notes, make excellent companions. An Italian Verdicchio from Marche, known for its fennel aromas, is another outstanding choice.

- **FRIED SQUID (Kalamari)**

Alongside such classics as Greek salad and moussaka, fried squid is an iconic Greek taverna dish. Its tender, slightly sweet flesh contrasts beautifully with the crisp golden coating achieved through battering and frying.

Pair it with a light-bodied white wine with lively acidity and aromatic freshness – and skip squeezing lemon over the squid, so the crispy texture remains intact. A Moschofilero from Mantinia or a Debina from Zitsa in Epirus both offer the freshness and acidity needed to balance the richness of the dish.

- **SEA SQUIRTS (Fouskes)**

Among the rarest seafood treats found in Greece and considered an exceptional delicacy, they grow attached to rocks among sea plants, making them difficult to harvest. Their irregular dark outer layer, or tunicate, hides flesh with an extraordinarily intense briny flavor.

Their salinity calls for wines with high acidity and slightly fuller body than those paired with other shellfish. An Assyrtiko from Santorini is ideal for its structure and mineral depth, while a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc offers aromatic intensity and freshness. If you prefer spirits, try them with a high-quality gin served ice cold and neat.

- **YOUNG SARDINES (Papalines)**

From the island of Lesbos and the Gulf of Kalloni comes one of Greece's most treasured seafood delicacies. Sardines are fished here from July through October, and the prized young sardines, known locally as miniarikes, are especially sought after. Rich, oily and delicately maritime in flavor, they're an exceptional treat, whether marinated or grilled over charcoal.

For this pairing, local tradition is unbeatable; enjoy them with a high-quality ouzo whose fresh taste and anise aromas will cut through that fishy richness and refresh the palate.

- **OYSTERS (Streidia)**

Oysters are also harvested in Greece, mainly in the Thermaic and Maliac Gulfs by specialized divers. Their thick limestone shells contain rich, briny flesh with a pronounced maritime character. They are usually enjoyed raw with lemon – adventurous diners also add Tabasco sauce – or they may be served lightly cooked.

One of the classic pairings is a fine Chardonnay-based Champagne, whose freshness and long finish go perfectly with the oysters. For a sharper, palate-cleansing contrast, try well-chilled white spirits such as tsipouro or vodka.

- **CAVIAR (Haviari)**

Caviar has been produced in Greece for several years now by Theusari, a company located on the shores of the Ambracian Gulf. The roe of the female sturgeon is delicately cured with high-quality salt in order to preserve the pure flavor of this remarkable product. Their finest quality, Beluga caviar, comes from the Huso huso sturgeon. Its eggs are large, and range in color from dark to light grey. The texture of the caviar is creamy, while the flavor is rich, elegant, and intensely reminiscent of the sea.

To pair harmoniously with such a refined delicacy, you would need a white wine with depth, complexity and a long finish. A fine white Burgundy from Puligny-Montrachet would be an excellent match, as its finesse and layered character complement the caviar beautifully. Equally impressive would be an Assyrtiko from Santorini, one made from carefully selected vineyards and old vines and offering remarkable concentration and mineral intensity.





Golden bottarga, one of Greece's most treasured delicacies.

BOTTARGA AS CULTURAL MEMORY

Text by Carolina Doriti

GRAPE FOOD

Photos from the Trikalinos archives



Fishing on the lagoon, a photo from the Trikalinos family archive.

The story of Trikalinos and the Greek “gold” of the Messolonghi lagoon.

In the lagoons of Messolonghi and Aitoliko, where the salty waters of the sea meet the fresh waters of the mainland, one of the most distinctive products of Greek gastronomy has been produced for centuries. Bottarga is a product that's about much more than taste; it is linked to memory, family, the sea and the history of an entire region.

My first encounter with the Trikalinos family did not take place in the lagoon itself, but at their facilities in Dafni, where the heart of the company's production has been based since 2006. As you enter the space, you notice that the entrance is awash in shades of blue. Images of grey mullets and reflections of light create a serene atmosphere and the feeling of being underwater.

I was welcomed by Zafiris Trikalinos and his wife, Lila Kourti, and our conversation about bottarga began. They spoke about generations

of people who grew up around the lagoons, about fishermen, families and people whose lives were defined entirely by the sea. And as I listened to them, I realized that behind the success of Trikalinos lies something very simple: a genuine love for what they do.

Bottarga is made from the roe of the female grey mullet, known in Greek as “bafa”, which is collected between late August and mid-September, when the roe sacs reach perfect maturity. At that stage they are carefully removed by experienced fishermen, naturally dried and then coated in beeswax, a traditional technique that protects the product while allowing it to mature properly. The process may sound simple, but in reality it requires enormous experience to get everything just right. The balance between moisture, salt and time ultimately determines the flavor, texture and overall quality of the bottarga.

The history of bottarga stretches back thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians were among the first to recognize the nutritional value of mullet roe, and they developed preservation techniques that allowed it to be transported and traded. The ancient Greeks later adopted this knowledge and spread it throughout the Mediterranean. The word itself carries history and meaning. According to Professor Dimitrios Georgakas, the term “bottarga” derives from the Ancient Greek word “ootarichos” or “votarichos”, oo meaning “egg” and tarichos meaning “preserved”.

During the Byzantine era, bottarga occupied a special place on the tables of aristocrats and merchants. In his book “Tastes of Byzantium”, Andrew Dalby describes a cuisine built around preservation techniques, salinity and layered flavors. Within this gastronomic culture, bottarga was considered a product of status, associated with hospitality and prestige. In Messolonghi and Aitoliko, however, bottarga became something far more personal. It was linked to family meals, celebrations and important moments. It was the delicacy brought to the table whenever there was reason to honor or celebrate someone.

The lagoons themselves play a defining role in the product's quality. The unique balance between fresh and salt water creates ideal conditions for the grey mullet. The fish move freely and feed naturally, directly influencing the quality of the roe and, ultimately, the flavor of the bottarga. This unique flavor is the reason that Messolonghi bottarga received PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status as early as 1994. Its quality is inseparable from the lagoons, the traditional fishing grounds and the artisanal methods of preparation and preservation passed down through generations.

Within this tradition, the story of the Trikalinos family began nearly 170 years ago. The family's ancestors, originally carrying the surname Trygonis, arrived from Trikala in Thessaly in 1825 to support the struggle of Messolonghi. Their arrival was announced with the phrase “The Trikalinoi have arrived!”, a nickname that eventually became the family surname. After the war, they remained in the area and turned to the sea and the lagoon fisheries for a living.

As Zafiris spoke about his father, Panos Trikalinos, it became clear that this family's relationship with the sea is not simply professional, but deeply personal. Panos spent almost his entire life in the fisheries, enduring storms, long difficult nights at sea and decades of relentless work. Even today, the family's stories sound more like fishermen's tales than the history of a company.

An equally important figure in the family's history was Vasiliki Trikalinou, Zafiris' mother. She was, they said, one of the people constantly pushing for better quality, better techniques and greater attention to detail. She worked in production for years and played a defining role in shaping both the company's philosophy and its evolution.

When Zafiris Trikalinos took over the family business, bottarga was still heavily salted, very dry and largely unknown to the wider public. It was his mother, Vasiliki, who encouraged him to improve the product, and who supported him throughout the process with her instinctive understanding and her experience. After years of experimentation and persistence, Zafiris succeeded in refining the traditional production method, creating a bottarga with less salt, higher moisture and a much finer, almost buttery texture.

This transformation completely changed the character of the product and reintroduced bottarga to contemporary gastronomy as something far more refined and balanced. The company's fresh bottarga – either completely wax-free or covered only by a thin layer of natural beeswax – is considered by many to be the finest expression of the product. Clean, balanced and intensely marine, it leaves a long finish on the palate.

Ferran Adrià has included it among the world's most important gastronomic products, while chefs such as Thomas Keller, Joan Roca and José Andrés use Trikalinos bottarga in their kitchens. Throughout this journey, an important role was also played by Gerasimos Vassilopoulos, founder of the AB Vassilopoulos supermarket chain and a close family friend. It was he who encouraged Zafiris Trikalinos to move the company from its small facilities in Messolonghi to Athens, believing this was the only way it could truly grow. The move to Dafni gave Trikalinos the space and infrastructure it needed to modernize production, obtain the necessary certifications and develop its export activity more efficiently. At the same time, however, the company managed to preserve the handcrafted nature of its production and its close connection to the lagoon and its people.

Although Trikalinos has grown into an international company, exporting today to more than 42 countries – with France remaining one of its strongest markets – production still follows an almost ritualistic rhythm. The roe sacs are still carefully selected, subjected to strict quality control, naturally dehydrated and finally coated in natural beeswax, which acts as a traditional method of preservation and protection.

Today, in addition to classic bottarga, the company produces an entire range of products built around it: from bottarga powder, often used as an umami-like seasoning, to coarse bottarga granules that add depth and texture to pasta, eggs or raw dishes. A special place belongs to Psyche, the “fillet” of each roe lobe: the most delicate and refined part of the bottarga, left without a wax coating, with a creamy texture and subtle flavour reminiscent of caviar.

There are also limited edition products such as Golden Age Bottarga, made from the palest and highest-quality roe sacs. It remains fresh, high in moisture and has a shelf life of around three months, maintaining an exceptionally refined and almost creamy character.

The company has also developed a wider collection of products inspired by the flavors of the sea, including bottarga mousse, reminiscent of an elevated taramasalata; spreads with artichoke or fava beans and bottarga; marinated anchovies mackerel and sardine fillets; and natural sea salt and fleur de sel.

The flavor of bottarga is difficult to describe in a single word. It is briny, buttery and strongly umami-driven, with a salinity that enhances rather than overwhelms. When properly crafted, its texture becomes almost silky. At the table, the simplest pairings are often the most satisfying. Bottarga works particularly well with bitter and rich flavors that highlight its marine intensity. It can be enjoyed in thin slices on bread or crackers with good olive oil and lemon, alongside pasta and fish tartare, with raw shellfish such as oysters, or even with eggs or fried potatoes.

Lila Trikalinou spoke of some more unexpected combinations: thin slices over brioche with foie gras, or even putting it on lightly buttered toasted bread with white chocolate, sliced strawberries or a drop of butterscotch. As for wine, bottarga pairs beautifully with labels defined by freshness and minerality. An Assyrtiko, a Champagne or a sparkling Blanc de Blancs, a mature Robola from Kefalonia or a dry sherry all work beautifully alongside it.



The precious roe of the female grey mullet, known in Greece as “bafa”.

Beyond its enchantingly rich taste, bottarga also has significant nutritional value. The roe of the bafa is naturally rich in good fats and omega-3 fatty acids, elements closely linked to cardiovascular health. Trikalinos was among the first companies to approach bottarga not simply as a delicacy, but as a product with important nutritional potential. Research published as early as 2008 in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry suggested that the daily consumption of small amounts of low-salt bottarga may help protect against cardiovascular disease and thrombosis.

These findings led to further research into the product's potential anti-atherogenic properties. Preliminary studies conducted by the Pasteur Institute produced particularly encouraging results, presented in 2011 at the 15th International Symposium on Atherosclerosis and Related Risk Factors organized by the Hellenic Cardiological Foundation. For several years now, Zafiris Trikalinos has also been collaborating with Harvard University on clinical research exploring the properties of bottarga and its contribution to human health.

Good for health and great on the palate, this very special product has both a bright past and a brilliant future. From the lagoons of Messolonghi to some of the world's finest restaurants, bottarga continues to travel without losing its connection to the place where it began. It remains something profoundly Greek and a product that carries with it a sense of regional history, of family and of a proud maritime tradition.

TINOS

Text by Thalia Kartali

TRAVEL

Photos from the Messarea Winery's archives



The iconic dovecotes of Tinos, among the island's most distinctive sights.

In the heart of the Cyclades, between the glamour of Mykonos and the sacred silence of Delos, lies Tinos, an island that has quietly become one of Greece's most compelling cultural and gastronomic destinations.

Long known to Greeks as a major pilgrimage site thanks to the Church of Panagia Evangelistria, Tinos today attracts travelers seeking another kind of grace: authenticity, artistry and a slower rhythm of life. Unlike many of its neighboring islands, Tinos has preserved an untamed beauty shaped by strong Aegean winds, terraced hillsides, marble-working villages, and many other traditional settlements scattered across the landscape.

Villages such as Volax, famous for its lunar-like granite boulders and basket-weaving tradition, and Pyrgos, renowned for its marble craftsmanship, reveal a living connection between nature and culture that defines the island's identity.

What truly distinguishes Tinos, however, is its remarkable culinary renaissance. Over the past decade, the island has emerged as one of Greece's most exciting food destinations, a place where ancient Cycladic traditions meet refined contemporary gastronomy. The island's fertile terrain, unusual for the Cyclades, produces exceptional local ingredients: artichokes, capers, thyme honey, sun-dried tomatoes, figs and aromatic herbs flourish in Tinos' microclimate. Local cheeses such as kopanisti and graviera accompany recipes passed down through generations, while

tavernas serve slow-cooked goat, handmade louza and seafood caught daily in the surrounding Aegean waters. Dining on Tinos reflects both seasonality and hospitality; meals are often shared beneath vine-covered courtyards overlooking stone terraces and the sea. The island's celebrated "Tinos Food Paths" initiative further highlights this commitment to culinary heritage, combining gastronomy with local traditions and sustainable tourism.

Wine has also become central to the island's growing reputation. Viticulture on Tinos dates back thousands of years, and the island's dry, windy landscape offers ideal conditions for indigenous grape varieties such as Assyrtiko, Monemvasia and Mavrotragano. Internationally acclaimed wineries such as T-Oinos have been creating elegant wines produced from vineyards planted on granite-rich slopes battered by the meltemi (a strong dry summer wind). It is on this land that Konstantinos Papageorgiou and his wife Nilüfer founded Messarea Winery, in operation since 2022.

In an age of increasingly commercialized tourism, Tinos remains refreshingly genuine – an island where Greece's past and present continue to meet around the table.

MESSAREA WINERY: WINE, MEMORY AND THE LANDSCAPE OF TINOS

Text by Carolina Doriti

WINERY

Photos from the winery's archives



I arrived at Messarea Winery in the village of Mesaria on a quiet morning, where I was welcomed by Konstantinos Papageorgiou and his wife, Nilüfer.

The winery began operating in 2022: a bioclimatic structure discreetly woven into the landscape, following the geometry of terraces and dry-stone walls without interrupting the continuity of the terrain. Its architecture serves the natural flow of winemaking, with gravity moving the process from one stage to the next, in a system that combines modern infrastructure with a more elemental, nearly silent approach to production.

We began with a magical walk around the historic estate (now known as Under the Linden Tree) that once belonged to Ursuline nuns and today has been revived – with profound respect for the untamed nature of Tinos – as both a working farm and a place of hospitality. We wandered among vineyards, orange groves, olive trees, enormous fig trees, and other fruit orchards. At the center of the estate stands a monumental centuries-old linden tree, the symbol of the winery, spreading its commanding shade in a great circle. Fairy-tale ponds filled with water lilies appear unexpectedly in the landscape, and an old dovecote still stands as a reminder of the island's past. It is in the dovecote that the orange marmalades made by Nilüfer from the estate's intensely aromatic oranges are stored so that they can later be served alongside local cheeses during the winery's tastings.

Within this setting – where both an appreciation of the past and a reverence for nature coexist with contemporary winemaking – our conversation began about the birth of the winery and the relationship between wine and place.

“THE PLACE ADOPTED US”

“What connected you,” I asked, “so strongly to Tinos before the winery even existed, and how did the idea for Messarea Winery come about, despite your having no family background in wine?”

Papageorgiou explained that Tinos was initially chosen simply as a vacation destination many years ago. What captivated them on that and subsequent trips was the island's landscape, history and cultural depth – something still visible today in the island's people and communities. Over time, this connection became almost imperceptibly profound. “The place adopted us,” he said simply.

Mesaria itself, Papageorgiou told me, had long been a center of education and a place of retreat for Ursuline nuns and their students. Beyond this, the land and archival records revealed something older still: for more than five centuries, vineyards had coexisted here with essential agricultural crops. Evidence of this tradition survived not only in documents but in the landscape itself, in the form of long-abandoned grapevines.

The decision to enter into wine production was not driven by family tradition or commercial ambition, but by what he described as an existential need: a form of exploration. “We do not explore in order to conquer, or to launch a product,” Papageorgiou said. “We explore in order to liberate ourselves by creating something beautiful and unique.”

The name “Messarea”, the Venetian form of “Mesaria”, functions less as a geographical reference than as a metaphor: the cultivation of land once left barren, the transformation of what lies between what has already been made and what is to come.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LINDEN TREE

The estate's emblem is the linden tree (filyra in Greek), a rare and imposing presence on the island. Papageorgiou speaks of it not only as a natural monument but also as a mythological symbol. In Greek mythology, Philyra was the nymph transformed into a tree after giving birth to Chiron, the wise centaur and teacher of heroes. The figure of Philyra was associated with healing, fragrance and renewal, motifs that reappear in the winery's philosophy and on its labels.

For Papageorgiou, wine itself is a form of metamorphosis. “Fermentation is a process of transformation,” he told me, “which we use to sharpen, not dull, the mind and the senses.”

ARCHITECTURE ROOTED IN THE LANDSCAPE

The winery's bioclimatic design was a fully conscious decision. Papageorgiou was both passionate and eloquent about the danger facing many islands today: uncontrolled development, the exploitation of inherited landscapes, and the erosion of historical continuity.



The winery has been carefully designed to blend harmoniously into the surrounding landscape.

Architect Elena Stavropoulou designed the winery so that it disappears naturally into its surroundings. Traditional techniques – from dry-stone masonry to local plastering methods – coexist with contemporary winemaking technology.

The buildings call to mind historical Cycladic agricultural complexes while still remaining entirely functional for modern production. Once the grapes leave the sorting tables for the presses, gravity-flow vinification takes over, guiding the liquid to concrete tanks, stainless steel vats, oak barrels and amphorae.

REVIVING INDIGENOUS VARIETIES

Messarea focuses strongly on native Tinian and Cycladic grape varieties, particularly Potamisi and Rozaki. Papageorgiou credits pioneering producers such as Christos Fonsos and wineries like T-Oinos for revealing the potential of the island's terroir. He also spoke of the encouragement from wine figures such as Panos Zoumboulis and oenologist Eleni Aleura, particularly regarding the use of the Potamisi grape variety.

Today the winery produces three labels

- ALKAR – made from Potamisi
- ALKI – from Rozaki
- ASTRAIOS – from Assyrtiko

A new label, Alos, blending Assyrtiko and Potamisi, is set for release this year, while future plans include expanding into red varieties such as Koumariano and Mavrotragano.

WINE SHAPED BY ADVERSITY

The harsh climate of Tinos – relentless winds, drought, and limited water resources – is not viewed as an obstacle but as a formative force.

Papageorgiou likes to compare the grapevine to the human character, maintaining that it is shaped and strengthened by adversity. The island's indigenous varieties, long adapted to these conditions, yield wines not of abundance but of identity, depth and precision.

Organic cultivation is treated not as a trend but as an ethical necessity. On an island ecosystem, he explained, everything is interconnected: plants, animals, soil, water, landscape and people.

THE FUTURE OF CYCLADIC WINE

Papageorgiou sees the Cyclades as “a constellation” of geological, cultural and human diversity, where each island contributes something distinct. Rather than competing through scale, the future of Cycladic wine lies in small productions of exceptional quality and strong identity.

Wine tourism on Tinos, he believes, is driven precisely by this search for uniqueness. Visitors are not looking for familiar international varieties, but for rare indigenous grapes and wines that express the island's singular terroir. For these explorers, the experience extends beyond wine tastings to include walks through the island's granite landscapes, terraced hills, scattered vineyards and serene villages, creating memories that will linger long after they return home.

“GOOD WINE ELEVATES”

When asked what “good wine” means to him, Papageorgiou offered perhaps the clearest expression of the winery's philosophy. Good wine, he said, is not about escape or intoxication. It is ritualistic, connected to joy, human connection, and what the ancient Greeks called eudaimonia: a flourishing, satisfying life.

“Excellent wine does not promote vulgar hedonism,” the winemaker told me. “It does the exact opposite: it elevates. Through the sharpening of the senses, it creates a space for a deeper spiritual experience and brings people closer together.”



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THE ARTICHOKE OF TINOS: THE ISLAND'S LANDSCAPE ON A PLATE

Text by Carolina Doriti

GRAPE FOOD

Photos by Margaret Jaszowska

Every spring on Tinos, against a windswept and arid backdrop, the sheltered fields of Komi fill with thousands of artichokes. Tight little bundles of intense flavor, they carry within them all the defining traits of this rugged terrain.

Though treated culinarily as a vegetable, the artichoke is, in fact, the flower bud of the plant before it blooms. When left in the field rather than picked, it opens into a striking purple flower related to the thistle. For consumption, however, it is harvested early, before the blossom begins to unfurl, when the stem is still flexible, the texture is tender, and the flavor is at its most concentrated.

The value of the artichoke extends beyond taste alone. Since antiquity, the plant has also been prized for its beneficial properties, particularly in supporting digestion and liver function. Infusions made from its leaves and stems were considered restorative tonics, a practice that, in milder forms, still survives today. The plant thrives in poor, well-drained soils, often rich in limestone, conditions also found in the vineyards of Tinos. It makes sense, then, that both the island's artichokes and its wines express a similar purity and intensity.

The area of Komi remains the island's principal cultivation center. In a protected valley framed by mountains and terraced hillsides lined with dry-stone walls, artichokes have been systematically cultivated for decades, with a significant share of the production destined for the markets of Athens. Farming conditions on the island are far from easy. Water is scarce, and the winds are constant and unforgiving, leading growers to rely more on the resilience of the plant than on intensive agricultural practices. The result is not necessarily high yields, but produce with unmistakable character.

The dry, mineral-rich soil, the strong northern winds, and the lack of water are, therefore, not disadvantages, but precisely the elements that imbue the artichoke with its flavor. Growers consciously avoid excessive irrigation, believing that while it may increase size, it weakens the final taste. As a result, the artichoke of Tinos remains smaller, firmer and marked by a clean, almost mineral aftertaste that is in many ways reminiscent of the sensation left by the island's wines as well.

Alongside the cultivated variety grows the wild artichoke, a plant related to *Cynara cardunculus*. For many, the wild version captures this character even more intensely. Hardier, yet far more demanding to manage,

it has sharp thorns that make harvesting and cleaning more difficult, and it yields less edible flesh, but its flavor is deeper and its texture finer. Producers such as Favianos Rouggeris have played a decisive role in preserving and promoting it, working with plants that grow with almost no intervention and highlighting their distinctive qualities. Through this effort, the wild artichoke evolved from a marginal ingredient into a product with a place in contemporary gastronomy, eventually finding its way into markets beyond the island itself.

It is the cultivated artichoke, however, that remains the backbone of local production. We visited the fields of Antonis Prelourentzos, who produces approximately 20,000-30,000 artichokes annually, depending on the conditions. Around 80 percent of the harvest is sent to Athens, while the remainder stays on Tinos, supplying mainly local restaurants as well as small-scale food entrepreneurs who preserve them in jars.

In the cuisine of Tinos, the artichoke enjoys both a prominent role and remarkable versatility. It is traditionally cooked a la polita, but it can also be stuffed or simmered with rice, incorporated into pies and salads, grilled, fried, turned into omelets or fritters, or paired with meats or seafood. After blanching, it can be preserved in vinegar or in olive oil, allowing it to be enjoyed beyond its season. The artichoke is, in short, seemingly a constant presence: on restaurant menus, in jars on the shelves of the island's shops and grocery stores, and in abundance at the morning market near the harbor in Tinos Town.

When it comes to wine, the artichoke presents a particular challenge. Its natural bitterness and its well-known effect on the perception of sweetness can make pairing difficult. In practice, however, its intensity also points the way forward. Wines with high acidity and a clean structure, such as a vibrant Assyrtiko, can stand beside it, not to overpower it, but to balance its flavor. With this in mind, a Potamisi from Tinos can offer a more local and particularly harmonious interpretation of the pairing, while in lighter preparations even a chilled red made from the local Koumario grape can produce intriguing results. In this sense, the artichoke acts less as a compliant companion to wine than as a lively conversational partner.



AGINAROPITA: CHEESY ARTICHOKE GRATIN FROM TINOS

From "The Greek Islands Cookbook" by Carolina Doriti, Murdoch Books, 2025



Serves six

- 6 trimmed artichokes, fresh or frozen
- 80ml (2½fl oz) olive oil
- 1 large leek, chopped (use the green part too, if tender)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 spring onions, chopped (use the green parts, too, if fresh)
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 zucchini, diced
- 4-5 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 4-5 tablespoons chopped dill
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the sauce

- 4 eggs
- 100ml (3½fl oz) crème fraîche
- 200ml (7fl oz) full-fat milk
- 150g (5½oz) Parmesan, grated
- 160g (6oz) anthotiro or ricotta
- 150g (5½oz) feta, well crumbled or coarsely grated

Tinos holds a special place in my heart and so does its cuisine. This beautiful island, renowned for its mineral-rich soil, yields exceptional wines and the most flavorful artichokes. Apart from the distinctive purple cultivated variety, fields of wild artichokes thrive here, too. They have a much shorter season, are smaller in size and have fewer, thicker leaves and formidable thorns. Despite the challenging process of trimming them, these wild artichokes are cherished by locals who find them incredibly rewarding in flavor. The artichokes are usually preserved in olive oil or vinegar and served as a traditional meze that pairs perfectly with the local raki, a grape distillate infused with fennel.

Every restaurant on Tinos proudly features artichokes on their menu, showcasing their versatility in preparation styles ranging from fried or stewed to stuffed or baked. One stand-out local recipe is for aginaropita, an artichoke pie that is usually made without pastry and leans more towards a soufflé or a gratin, enriched with vegetables, eggs and cheeses. Traditional versions often incorporate thin slices of stale bread, creating a delightful texture similar to that of bread pudding.

One of my favorite versions of this dish comes from a colorful taverna named To Koutouki tis Elenis after its owner; it can be found in a narrow alley of Tinos Town. This taverna has been a beloved spot on the island for decades, renowned for serving authentic local recipes and home-made cheeses. Inspired by Eleni's culinary prowess, I've adapted her recipe a bit by allowing for the use of frozen artichokes and switching out local cheeses for more readily available options that deliver a similarly delicious result.

Chop the artichokes into roughly 1.5cm (½ inch) pieces. Brush a deep baking dish (I use one measuring 30 x 23cm/12 x 9 inches) with olive oil. Place a large, deep pan over a medium-high heat. Add the olive oil, then the leek, onion and spring onions, and sauté until soft. Add the artichokes, carrots and zucchini, then season with a little salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes or until softened. There should be no liquid left in the pan; if there is, drain off any excess liquid or cook for a bit longer until it evaporates, and then transfer the vegetables to the oiled baking dish, spreading them out evenly with the back of a spoon or a spatula. Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/360°F.

In a separate bowl, beat the eggs until frothy and then mix in the crème fraîche and the milk. Set aside half of the Parmesan for the topping, then stir all three cheeses into the sauce. Pour that cheese sauce over the vegetables and scatter the remaining Parmesan over the top. Bake the gratin in the hot oven for 50-60 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbling and the top is golden.





Sunset over the beautiful island of Tinos.

MY TINOS

Text by Denny Kallivoka

GRAPE STORY

Photos by Yiannis Alpanezos



Denny Kallivoka, photographed by her son against the island's dramatic scenery.

I was, in a way, born a child of Mykonos.

Every summer, my mother and I would board the ferry from Piraeus that ran the Syros-Tinos-Mykonos route. I still remember some truly rough crossings, the kind of seas that occasionally forced passengers to disembark at Mykonos in tender boats.

Quite often, though, we would get off for a short spell at Tinos, with its grand Holy Church of Panagia Evaggelistria, for my mother's annual pilgrimage because, by the end of every winter, one of us had usually managed to break a leg, crack a head, sprain an ankle, or suffer some other childhood disaster that required divine assistance. Then, after she had said her thanks, we would catch the next ferry and continue on to Mykonos.

I never really cared for Tinos. To me, it was simply that boring port where the ferry stopped before reaching Mykonos. Until 2008. Until I met Dimitris. Through him, I met Tinos.

We came to the island for the first time during the long weekend break marking the Pentecost. That first morning, when I looked out over Rohari Bay, I fell in love. And then I started discovering it – the villages, the dovecotes, the footpaths and the tavernas that always seemed to appear exactly where you needed them. And, of course, its beaches.

For many years, it felt to me as though Tinos was keeping a secret. Most visitors stayed in Chora and around the Holy Church of Panagia Evaggelistria, on what was called pilgrimage tourism. The rest of us enjoyed everything else the island quietly held back from the masses.

In recent years, however, that has changed. Tinos is no longer the Cyclades' best-kept secret. It has become a destination in its own right. It appears in travel guides, on social media feeds and on every list of summer "must-visits". And rightly so: it is a beautiful island.

Still, there are moments when I find myself missing the Tinos I first came to know. The quieter one, the more unpretentious one.

The real secret, if you ask me, is timing. Come in May. Come in June. Come in September and October, when the sea is at its best. Come in March or April if you want to see the island green and covered in wildflowers. Let me show you. Shall we discover Tinos together?

THE WIND

It's the first word that comes to mind when you think of Tinos or, at least, it should be. The wind can be relentless here, especially in July and August. There have been summers when, out of thirty days, we managed to sit on our veranda for coffee no more than two or three times.

You know you've earned your stripes as a Tinian – Ntinaiakos, as locals affectionately call themselves – when you start loving the north wind. It took me a while.

THE SMELLS

You turn the bend at Rohari, where our house is, and the scent of wild thyme hits you. You walk down to the beach and everything smells of salt and sea. Even in that moment that you step off the ferry, before you've properly arrived, the north wind already smells of Tinos.

WHAT TO SEE

Kardiani. It remains one of my favorite villages on the island, a medieval Cycladic settlement where you wander through cobbled alleys lined with stone walls as thick as fortress ramparts. It was built high on the cliff for protection from pirates back in the day. Take a stroll to see the village's marble plystres, what used to be the "washing machine," fed by natural springs. Tinos never had an easy relationship with water. That's why these communal washhouses became small social hubs of village life.

As you walk, you'll inevitably catch a whiff of Mrs Dimitra's meatballs frying at the village café-taverna that bears her name. The scent of fresh mint is in the air, too. Come to Kardiani after a swim or, better yet, in the evening, when everything slows down. Then there's Aetofolia, not one of the island's busiest villages, but beautiful all the same: the perfect stop after a swim at Kolymbithra. At Mrs Zozefina's taverna Koumaria, tomatoes still smell like tomatoes, the cheeses are local, the potatoes are fried the way they used to be (in olive oil), and the courtyard feels as though it has been left untouched since a Greek summer from an earlier decade.

Once she cooked me okra that she had picked from her mother's garden earlier that day. I am still chasing that flavor.

Ysternia. What a beautiful village, with Tinos' own little caldera. It's elegant, aristocratic and suspended above the Aegean. In its narrow lanes you'll find Bayou, the perfect spot for a drink, a dessert and that magnificent view. A little further down, just before the church, is Kyrilos for lamb chops, fried potatoes, wild greens and salads. It's a wonderfully old-school place that I absolutely love.

Then there is Agapi.

The first time I visited, I hiked there from Komi. Tinos is criss-crossed with mapped routes and marked walking trails, and this particular one was not exactly easy for someone with my fitness levels. But the reward was worth it.

At Kamara tou Agapiou, with three tables on a veranda and not much more, we found exceptional food: the best boiled wild greens, local beans and beautifully cooked traditional dishes.

Among the other classic eateries, there is Drosia and Agnanti in Ktikados for traditional Tinian cooking; the meat taverna Lefkes in Falatados for lamb chops and welcome shade during the summer months; and Katoi in Smardakito, set in a magical square beside the Catholic church and the old fountains. Their soutzoukakia and moussaka are reason enough to make the journey.

And while we're talking about villages and food, Komi is beautiful, too. Its square is always lively, as is the village of Triantaros. Stop for breakfast at Triantaraki for good omelettes, well-made sandwiches and the kind of atmosphere that makes you slow down and smile.

Most people love Volax. The giant round boulders alone make it unlike anywhere else in the Cyclades. Had Däniken ever visited, I'm sure he would have had a field day with his theories. Me? I know I'm in the minority, but the energy of the village has always felt a little heavy. I admire it more than I enjoy it.

Of all the villages on Tinos, by far the most beautiful is Pyrgos.

Not because it's "our" village – my father-in-law's, to be precise – nor because it is the birthplace of the great sculptor Yannoulis Chalepas. It simply is.

Surprises await you: the marble bus stop, the village square with its beautiful fountain, the craftsmanship everywhere you look. But to understand Pyrgos, don't just follow the main street towards the square, lined these days with shops that all sell more or less the same things. Instead, turn into the side alleys. Walk up towards the Church of Agios Nikolaos. Head for the cemetery, then down towards the stream and the primary school, which looks as though it was ripped from the pages of a children's picture book. Everywhere you look, the architecture is extraordinary, the houses immaculate, whitewashed and well-maintained.

Come early in the morning before the buses arrive, or later in the afternoon, when the light softens and the village becomes almost cinematic. Have a Greek coffee beneath the plane tree in the square.

Eat a piece of galaktoboureko. Visit Chalepas' house. And buy something made of marble. Not machine-made, but from a sculptor: It carries a different value.

Back in Pyrgos, perhaps after a swim, you'll find excellent Italian food at Dough & Shaker, where Antonis makes his own doughs and fresh pasta. In Panormos, head to Maistros for seafood: wonderful calamari, skate, a salad of raw zucchini, and fish caught by Yiannis himself on calm evenings when he takes his boat out beyond the bay to fish.

And since we're talking about seafood, you simply must visit Thalassaki. Sit close enough to the water that the waves almost reach your chair every time the ferry passes by. The best time is about an hour before sunset. A couple of Antonia's local cheeses, the black tarama salad, a few steamed clams and a glass of local wine, and you've reached a state of complete bliss.

You should also visit Mikro Karavi in Chora. If Michelin inspectors had tasted the Tinian green beans I ate there last summer, they might have been tempted to invent a fourth star. The beans, which came with cherry tomatoes, were resting on a light skordalia. It's such a simple dish, yet it somehow contained everything I love about the Cyclades. It was, truly, one of the most memorable dishes of my recent summers.

Panormos itself is equally beautiful. If someone asked you to draw the Cyclades from memory, this is probably what you would sketch: white-washed houses, fishing boats, the sea, and children diving from the pier. And right there on that same pier, Katerina at Agia Thalassa makes wonderful omelets and crêpes for breakfast. Her desserts are delicious as well.



Denny's welcoming table captures the spirit of Tinian hospitality.

AND FINALLY, THE INGREDIENTS

The first time I tasted a melon in Tinos, I thought I was eating sorbet.

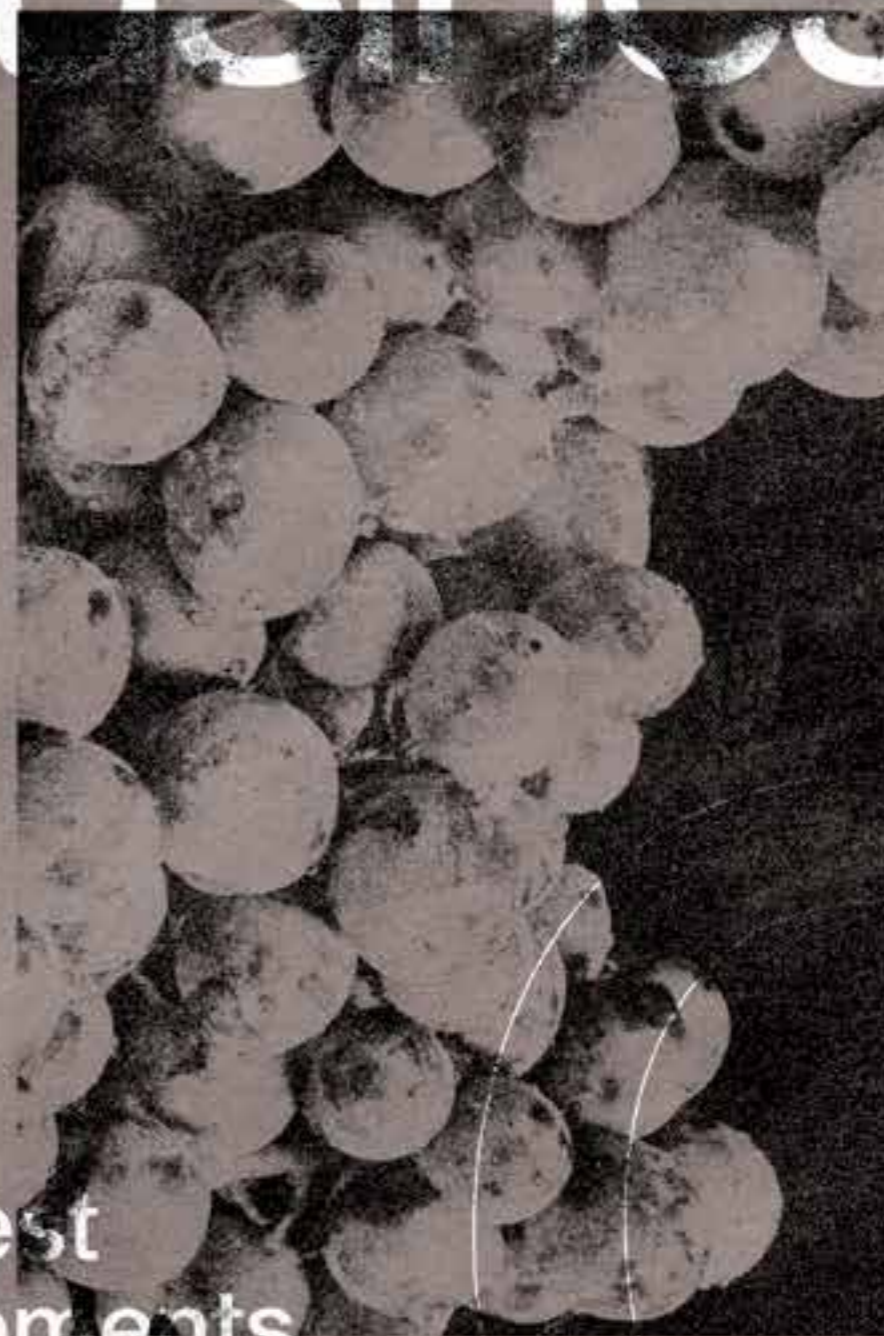
Here, you know where your produce comes from: from Koris near Pyrgos, from the fertile plain of Komi, or from Aetofolia. The sellers arrive in small trucks and suddenly everyone gathers, hoping that they're there in time for the tomatoes, the melons, the green beans. The really good ones disappear first. The first time I tasted a Tinian tomato, I was genuinely stunned. It felt as though my taste memory had rebooted itself. These tomatoes grow without irrigation, forcing them to concentrate every bit of flavor the land has to offer.

One thing you should know. Tinian kopanisti (whipped cheese) makes first-class fishing bait. Mastrogiannis, my father-in-law, born and raised in Pyrgos, mixes it with bread and a little olive oil. We use it when we cast from the pier at Panormos and, more often than not, we catch some fish. The local dairy cooperative makes kopanisti from the milk of cows and goats raised on the island. Tinians spread it over barley rusks, usually after rubbing the rusks with a ripe tomato, and the result is one of the simplest and most delicious meze you'll ever taste. You'll find the cheese on sale at the Cooperative Shop in Chora. While you're there, pick up some butter, milk and graviera as well. I personally prefer the more mature graviera, with its deeper flavor.

You might also want to buy local butter and eat it in the morning with local thyme honey. And, of course, you have to try some Kariki. It's a remarkable blue cheese that has been aged inside a dried gourd; production has been revived by local cheesemakers over the last decade, and it's now considered one of the island's great gastronomic treasures.

People often ask me why I love Tinos so much. I don't know if there is a simple answer. Maybe it's because, for years, I passed it by on my way to Mykonos. And then I discovered that the real destination had been one stop earlier all along.

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AN OBJECTIVELY SUBJECTIVE GUIDE TO GREECE'S BAR SCENE

Text by Denny Kallivoka



People often ask me where to go for a cocktail in Athens. It sounds like a simple question. It isn't.

The truth is that Greece has quietly become one of the most exciting cocktail destinations in the world. Think about it; a country of just over ten million people now boasts three bars on The World's 50 Best Bars list – Baba au Rum, Line Athens and The Bar in Front of the Bar – while Barro Negro sits proudly among The World's 100 Best Bars, and The Clumsies was on the list for years.

And yet, such rankings only tell part of the story. What impresses me most is not what happens at the very top, it's what happens everywhere else. Today, you can walk into bars across Athens, Thessaloniki, Crete, Patras, the islands, or even places such as Ioannina and tiny Kardamyli, and find people who care deeply about what they do. People who obsess over ingredients, hospitality, music and atmosphere. People who have elevated bartending from a side job into a craft. And yet, for all the laboratories, fermentations, sustainability programs and technical wizardry, the essence of a great bar remains unchanged.

HOSPITALITY

If you want to understand modern Greek bartending, you have to start with Baba au Rum. When Thanos Prunarus opened Baba in 2009, very few people could have predicted what would follow. More than fifteen years later, it has become an institution. This year, Baba received the Rémy Martin Legend of the List Award, recognizing its extraordinary longevity among The World's 50 Best Bars, where it has remained for eleven consecutive years.

Baba is famous for its remarkable rum collection, its joyful atmosphere and, of course, its Mai Tai – still one of the finest I have ever tasted. But what makes the place special is Thanos himself. Long before cocktails became fashionable, he was helping to shape a culture. Today, he is one of the most recognizable Greek names in international bartending. And while you're there, cross the street and visit In Love Again, his boutique pastry shop. It may sound unusual, but here cocktails become desserts.

Pina Colada, Baba au Rum and other iconic drinks are transformed into elegant pastries. Inventive, playful and genuinely delicious, it's one of the most original concepts to emerge from Athens in recent years.

If Thanos helped shape modern Greek cocktail culture, Yiannis Petris helped preserve its soul. At Tiki Bar Athens, near the Acropolis Museum, Petris has remained remarkably loyal to classic cocktails and classic bartending. While trends have come and gone, he's never felt the need to chase them. In a world increasingly obsessed with novelty, that consistency has become part of his charm.

Then there is The Clumsies. I've watched Vasilis Kyritsis and Nikos Bakoulis grow from ambitious young bartenders into internationally respected bar owners. Few people realize how many flights, books, seminars, experiments and sacrifices took place to create that success. When The Clumsies opened, it didn't simply become popular. It helped change international perceptions of what a Greek cocktail bar could be. If you only order one drink, make it the Aegean Negroni. I genuinely believe it deserves a place among the modern classics.

The same duo are also behind Line Athens, currently one of the most fascinating bars anywhere in the world. If Baba helped establish Athens as a cocktail destination, Line Athens represents where the industry is heading next. Sustainability is often discussed in hospitality, but at Line, it's simply how things are done. Fruit wines, collaborations with local producers, minimal waste and a philosophy that manages to be both highly technical and completely approachable: it's a bar that proves environmental responsibility and world-class hospitality can sit comfortably at the same table.

INNOVATION

In Greek bartending, innovation isn't just about what ends up in the glass. Right now, Greece is also home to the world's first pilot implementation of VISION by Metron Ariston™, an accessibility initiative operating across 11 bars and one restaurant. Through bilingual audio menus, accessibility tools and a dedicated hospitality protocol, the program aims to help blind and visually impaired guests enjoy a more independent experience.

I've spent enough years around bars to know that the best venues are not necessarily those with the most awards. They are the ones that make more people feel welcome. One of the initiative's ambassadors is Konstantinos Theodorakopoulos, co-owner of The Bar in Front of the Bar and one of the most respected figures of Greece's new bar generation. Konstantinos and his partner Alexandros Tselepis belong to a generation

of Greek bartender-entrepreneurs who understand that great bars are built as much on hospitality as on cocktails. Running a venue that serves extraordinary volumes while maintaining remarkable quality is no small achievement. Yet somehow, they make it look effortless. Warm, energetic and genuinely welcoming, they've created one of the most important bars in Greece today. Come see for yourself and try their playful Taco Margarita.

For agave lovers, Barro Negro is an essential destination. It has done more than any other Greek bar to introduce mezcal and contemporary Mexican drinking culture to local audiences. Often, even those who think they don't like mezcal leave having discovered a new favorite spirit. For visitors to the city, I always recommend at least one stop at 360 Cocktail Bar. There are plenty of rooftop bars around the world. Few, however, have the Acropolis quite so close. Sometimes the view really is worth the hype.

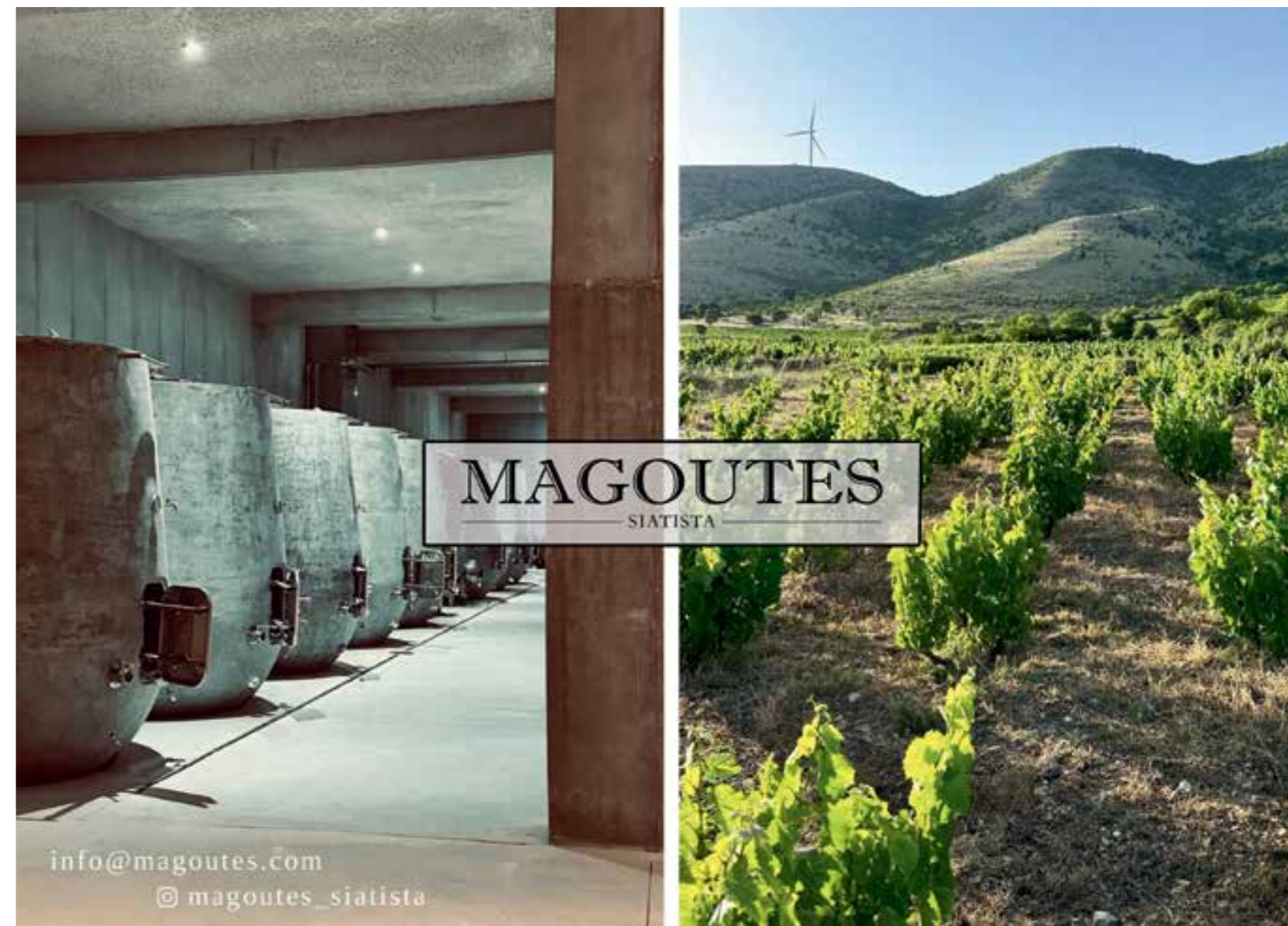
I also have a soft spot for Naked Athens. Thanos Krimpouras has created one of those bars that always seems to be full of life: good cocktails, a happy crowd, music, energy and people who genuinely enjoy what they do. It's the sort of place that reminds you why Athens has become such a fun city to drink in. If your travels take you north, drink on! In Thessaloniki, Gorilla and Purovoku continue to prove that some of Greece's most exciting drinking experiences happen well beyond the capital. Both have developed loyal followings through creativity, consistency and a deep understanding of hospitality.

I could easily add another twenty bars to this list. And then another twenty. I'm immensely proud of what Greek bars have become, of the awards, the innovation and the international recognition. And yet, if I'm being completely honest, when I have a rare evening entirely to myself, I usually end up at Galaxy Bar, in my comfort zone.

Years ago, after finishing work at the magazine, I'd head straight to the bar. If there wasn't a seat available, Mr. Yiannis would somehow find me one. Before I'd even ordered, an extra-dry Martini and a glass of water would be waiting for me. Today, his son carries on the tradition with much the same understated grace.

The Martini probably wouldn't win any cocktail competition. I honestly don't care. Some drinks taste of technique. Others taste of welcome, of familiarity and of good memories. For me, that Martini will always be one of the best in the world.

Another must is To Locali. Dimitris Kiakos, the owner, was one of the first to create cocktails with Greek spirits. And, as a member of the British Gin Guild, his gin cocktails are also a must. Try the rooftop with the views and summery atmosphere.



MICHALIS MARTHAS REMAGINES THE CUISINE OF KALYMNOS

Text by Nikos Ioannidis

GRAPE STORY

Photos from the Kapadiko archives



Kalymnos, the rugged Dodecanese island nestled between Kos and Leros, has long been synonymous with Greece's sponge-diving heritage.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, generations of Kalymnos divers sailed across the Mediterranean in search of natural sponges, forging connections with distant ports and cultures while shaping the island's economic and social identity.

This maritime legacy also defined the island's cuisine. While men spent months at sea, women remained behind to care for their homes, children and land, preserving culinary traditions rooted in resilience and resourcefulness. Today, Kalymnos offers one of the purest expressions of Aegean gastronomy: unpretentious, ingredient-driven food connected to both sea and soil. Dishes such as spinialo (marinated sea squirts), octopus fritters, mououri (stuffed lamb) and mirmizeli (a rich salad) tell the story of sponge-diving families, whose lives in the kitchen and at sea revolved around preserving food and getting the most flavor from the simplest ingredients. On the beach of Kantouni, where he first learned to swim, chef Michalis Marthas is now writing a new chapter in that story at Kapadiko, the restaurant he launched last summer upon returning to his homeland. His vision is clear: contemporary gastronomy stripped of unnecessary spectacle, focused instead on substance, technical skill and authenticity.

Born in Florida and raised in Kalymnos from the age of seven, Marthas left the island early to study, travel and work in kitchens across Greece and abroad. His journey led him to acclaimed culinary institutions that included Heston Blumenthal's three-Michelin-starred The Fat Duck, Michel Roux's legendary The Waterside Inn in Britain, and Sweden's two-Michelin-starred Daniel Berlin Krog. More recently, during his time on Tinos, Marthas immersed himself in the practice of fish ageing, a technique he has now brought back to Kalymnos, along with years of culinary experience. Despite those international influences, Marthas' connection to Kalymnos remained constant. "After all these years away, I realized I wanted to create something deeply rooted in the place I know best," he says.

A CUISINE BORN FROM NECESSITY

Kapadiko itself takes its name from one of the island's most prized natural sponges, considered the strongest and most durable of them all. "For us, the sponge was both practical and precious," Marthas explains. "It's inseparable from the identity of Kalymnos."

That same philosophy of endurance and practicality defines the island's food culture. Preservation techniques such as salting, curing and storing food in fat were once essential for survival during long voyages at sea. Today, Marthas sees these traditions not as nostalgic relics, but as living culinary knowledge.

"People talk about preservation as if it's something newly discovered," he says. "But these techniques were born out of necessity here." This perspective informs his approach to fish ageing, a method he considers an evolution of traditional preservation practices. "When fish is aged correctly, the water leaves the flesh and what remains is pure flavour, aroma and fat," Marthas explains. "You taste the sea in its most concentrated form."

At Kapadiko, there is no fixed menu. The dishes change constantly according to what fishermen, farmers and producers bring each day. "If I can't source something properly, I won't force it," Marthas says. "Flexibility is essential if you truly want to support local producers." That commitment extends to ingredients often overlooked in modern dining culture. Small fish such as sardines and anchovies feature prominently in his cooking. "That's where the essence of our cuisine lies," he says. "For years we underestimated these fish, even though they are incredibly flavourful and nutritious."

The balance between innovation and tradition remains central to his philosophy. "I'll reinterpret tradition, but only to the point where I don't disrespect it," says the chef. "Once the essence changes, there's no reason to continue."

One dish that perfectly encapsulates this approach is spinialo, the intensely briny shellfish delicacy that divides opinion even among locals. At Kapadiko, Marthas transforms it into a tarama-style spread, introducing it to newcomers in a more approachable form. "Ninety percent of people end up loving it," he says with a smile.

Kantouni itself remains refreshingly untouched by the excesses of tourism. Families return year after year, friends gather on its beach, and life continues to move to the rhythm of the Maistro wind and the slow descent of the sun into the Aegean.

It is precisely this sense of continuity that Marthas hopes to preserve while helping Kalymnos gain wider recognition as a gastronomic destination. "I want Kapadiko to reveal what already exists here," he says. "Not to invent something artificial, but to show the richness the island already has."

Kapadiko reopened in May with a renewed culinary concept and an entirely new menu, continuing Michalis Marthas' vision of bringing the gastronomy of Kalymnos into a contemporary context while remaining deeply rooted in local tradition. Later in the summer, the restaurant will host a gastronomic festival featuring chefs and guests from across Greece, further establishing the island as one of the Aegean's emerging culinary destinations.

Michalis Marthas on Kantouni Beach holding a natural sponge, a symbol of Kalymnos' rich maritime heritage.
RIGHT: One of the chef's remarkable culinary creations.

SUMMMER BEST BUYS

Text by Giovanna Lykou, Sommelier

Greek summer is cool, bright and unmistakably white. Like that dazzling midday light that makes everything seem a little more beautiful, a little more carefree, Greek white wines have a way of illuminating the table.

They do it with fruitiness, salinity, vibrancy and that signature sunlit-wise freshness that is hard to translate yet instantly recognizable in the glass. This is why this year's Best Buys feel like little escapes bottled up: some evoke whitewashed courtyards and freshly cut peaches, others carry the crispness of the sea and the scent of lemon trees after they've been watered. Their common thread? They prove that Greek white wine can be both effortlessly unpretentious and strikingly elegant, much like an unforgettable Greek summer itself.

Enjoy summer best buys!

- 1 PARANGA BLUE, Ktima Kir-Yianni Moschofilero**
The legendary Paranga by Kir-Yianni steps away conceptually from the warmth of the winery and creates a remarkable standalone brand. With Paranga Blue, a non-vintage semi-sweet white wine made from 100% Moschofilero, it introduces us to a delightfully fruity and floral wine with a beautifully balanced sweet character. Freshness-friendly, eco-friendly and vegan-friendly, it captures an effortless eternal-youth feeling in every glass. Ideal for sharing, for aperitif moments, for laid-back coolness, and for relaxed gatherings where meze dishes are served. € 8. 90
- 2 DIALOGOS, Ktima Dio Ipsi Assyrtiko, Kidonitsa**
A compelling blend of Greece's iconic Assyrtiko and the rising star Kidonitsa, this organic white offers both vibrancy and finesse. Aromas of lemon blossom, quince, lime and citrus lead to a crisp palate with bright acidity, mineral tension and a long aromatic finish. Fresh, elegant and highly versatile at the table, it pairs beautifully with fried fish, shellfish, white-sauce pasta and poultry. A standout summer must. € 15. 30
- 3 ASSYRTIKO, Akrahtos Newland Winery Assyrtiko**
A striking Assyrtiko from northern Greece, combining vibrant fruit with the mineral precision and high acidity reminiscent of Santorini. Notes of pear, green apple, lime zest and citrus peel emerge alongside a subtle lees depth and saline complexity. Elegant yet intense, this vegan-friendly white delivers freshness, texture and impressive ageing potential for such a young winery. A sophisticated match for fish, shellfish and lemony white-meat dishes. € 20. 50
- 4 ELIXIR, Semeli Estate Gewürztraminer**
An expressive Gewürztraminer from the Peloponnese, bursting with tropical fruit, stone fruit, white flowers and hints of honeyed spice. Dry yet intensely aromatic, it balances exotic richness with fresh acidity and a lingering peppery finish. Charming, extroverted and highly approachable, this is a crowd-pleasing white that shines alongside Asian cuisine, seafood (including sushi) and goat cheeses. € 18. 40

- 5 ORANGE DR-DEBINA RESPECT, Zoinos Debina**
A distinctive PDO orange wine from Zitsa, crafted from Debina with minimal intervention and deep respect for local tradition. Fermented with native yeasts and skin contact, it delivers layered aromas of citrus marmalade, ripe peach, apple, almond and orange peel. The palate is textured and complex, with vibrant acidity, gentle tannins and a savory, nutty finish. A fascinating value-for-money Greek orange wine with character, depth and excellent food-pairing versatility. € 13. 10
- 6 ARX, Vaios Ganis Organic Wines Gewürztraminer, Malagousia**
A lively blend of Gewürztraminer and Malagousia from Domokos, crafted with organic, vegan and low-intervention practices by Vaios Ganis. Intensely aromatic, it bursts with floral notes of rose and jasmine alongside stone fruit and pink pepper spice. Crisp acidity and a crunchy texture keep the palate fresh, playful and highly drinkable. An easygoing yet characterful white, perfect as an aperitif or for pairing with salads, pies and light pasta dishes. € 9. 80
- 7 MALAGOUSIA, Ktima Gerovassiliou Malagousia**
An elegant and expressive Malagousia from Thessaloniki, showcasing the grape that Vangelis Gerovassiliou famously helped revive and establish in the modern Greek wine world. Aromas of apricot, peach, pear and tropical fruit intertwine with floral rose notes and refreshing hints of mint. Dry and beautifully balanced, it offers vibrant freshness, medium body and a long aromatic finish. A benchmark for the variety, it pairs effortlessly with seafood, poultry and fresh vegetable dishes. € 17. 70
- 8 MANTINEIA, Domaine Skouras Moschofilero**
A refined PDO, showcasing an expressive interpretation of Moschofilero. Delicate yet vibrant, it opens with lifted aromas of jasmine, honeysuckle, orange blossom and rose petals, layered with hints of lemon candy and citrus zest. A short lees ageing adds subtle texture and gentle creaminess, balancing its high acidity and floral drive. Crisp, elegant and highly aromatic, it shines both as an aperitif and alongside fresh seafood, vegetable dishes and light risottos. € 11. 40
- 9 APLA, Oenops Wines Assyrtiko, Vidiano, Malagousia**
Crafted by acclaimed Greek oenologist Nikos Karatzas, Apla ("Simple") is a bright blend of Malagousia, Assyrtiko and Vidiano that celebrates the beauty of simplicity through precision and balance. Aromas of apricot, peach, grapefruit and white flowers are lifted by subtle herbal notes, while the palate combines freshness, finesse and juicy citrus-driven energy. Playful yet polished, this aromatic white captures the charm of modern Greek winemaking and offers outstanding value. € 12. 80



- 10 **X-BOURGO**, A. Kosmopoulos Assyrtiko
A striking Assyrtiko from the island of Tinos, highlighting the growing reputation of the island's high-elevation vineyards. Named after the historic hill of Exombourgo, this mineral-driven white combines smoky complexity with vivid aromas of peach, grapefruit and cookie-like lees character. Bright acidity and taut structure give the wine energy and precision, while time on the lees adds depth and texture. A sophisticated and age-worthy Greek white, ideal for shellfish, fish and Mediterranean cuisine. € 25.00
- 11 **NOUS**, Scalarea Estate Vidiano, Athiri
From the historic Boutari Winery, Scalarea Nous is a refined Cretan blend of Vidiano and Athiri that captures freshness and purity. Bright citrus, peach, pear, melon and grapefruit aromas lead into a textured soft and velvety palate with lively acidity, subtle minerality and a delicate peppery finish. Elegant yet approachable, this modern Greek white pairs beautifully with seafood, grilled vegetables, local dakos, fresh cheeses and herb-driven Mediterranean dishes. € 21.00
- 12 **EKHO WHITE**, Ekho Wines Potamisi, Aidani, Karaibraim
A distinctive field blend from Naxos, crafted mainly from Potamisi and Aidani alongside the rare local variety Karaibraim. Created by the talented and gracious winemaker Lefteris Anagnostou, the wine comes from 150-year-old own-rooted mountain vineyards on the slopes of Mt Zas. Fresh and delicate, it layers green apple and unripe quince aromas with a subtle saline edge and mineral undertones, offering a beautifully authentic expression of Cycladic terroir. € 30.40
- 13 **PNOÉ ARKTOS**, Arktos Elevation Vineyards Assyrtiko, Sauvignon Blanc, Xinomavro
A vibrant high-elevation white from Amyntaio, blending Assyrtiko, Sauvignon Blanc and a touch of Xinomavro into a strikingly aromatic and refined expression. Fermented entirely in stainless steel to preserve purity and freshness, it's bursting with notes of lemon, lime, grapefruit, white peach and flowers, layered with hints of wet stone and citrus blossom. Juicy yet precise, with crisp acidity and a long citrus-driven finish, this is a beautifully seafood-friendly Greek white. € 14.90
- 14 **PET NAT**, Paros Farming Community Monemvasia
The Pet-Nat from Paros Farming Community offers a fresh, contemporary take on the wines of Paros. Crafted from the traditional Monemvasia variety using the ancestrale method, it delivers delicate natural bubbles, vibrant freshness and a charming cloudy appearance typical of unfiltered natural wines. Aromas of pear, peach and citrus mingle with subtle yeasty notes and island minerality, while the semi-dry palate is crisp, balanced and irresistibly lively. € 11.50
- 15 **ASSYRTIKO WILD FERMENT**, Gaia Wines Assyrtiko
From the volcanic vineyards of Santorini, Gaia Wines Wild Ferment Assyrtiko is a striking expression of Santorini's iconic variety, crafted exclusively with indigenous wild yeasts. Sourced from old, ungrafted vines, it reveals intense aromas of lemon zest, peach, pear and flinty minerality, while the palate is layered and vibrant with crisp acidity, saline notes and impressive length. Precise yet powerful, this distinctive Greek white pairs beautifully with grilled or fried seafood and with shellfish platters, too. € 52.10
- 16 **ROBOLA OF KEFALONIA**, Sarris Winery Robola
High on the slopes of Mt. Ainos in Kefalonia, Panos Sarris is helping redefine the island's modern wine identity through this striking PDO Kefalonia white. Sourced from high-elevation vineyards in the Fagia area, the wine delivers vivid aromas of lemon, grapefruit and delicate mineral notes. Crisp and finely textured on the palate, it combines vibrant acidity with a pronounced mineral backbone and a refreshing saline finish. Elegant and intensely expressive, it pairs beautifully with grilled fish, seafood prepared with lemon sauces, and traditional fried cod with skordalia (a garlic dip). € 17.60
- 17 **FOUR ANGELS**, Malamatina Winery Malagousia, Chardonnay
Best known for its historic association with retsina, Malamatina showcases a modern, expressive side through its Four Angels white range. This expressive Chardonnay-Malagousia blend delivers fresh citrus, green apple, pear and jasmine aromas, followed by a balanced palate with crisp acidity, gentle texture and subtle herbal notes, creating an easy-drinking yet characterful white that is ideal for everyday enjoyment. Elegant yet approachable, it's a versatile everyday white wine that pairs effortlessly with white meat, grilled fish and semi-hard cheese. € 8.20
- 18 **IDISMA DRIOS**, Wine Art Estate Chardonnay
A refined expression of barrel-aged Chardonnay from the cool vineyards of Drama, this wine combines richness with precision and balance. Oak maturation lends subtle spicy notes and a gently mellow fruit profile, while the natural acidity keeps the wine fresh and vibrant. Full-bodied and layered, it shows creamy texture and impressive length on the finish. A multi-talented match for the table, it pairs exceptionally well with grilled squid, smoked cheeses, curry dishes, roast chicken and smoked salmon. € 19.80
- 19 **OREIVATIS**, Akriotou Savvatiano
With a fresh and vivid expression of Savvatiano from old vines in the foothills of Mt. Cithaeron in Plataies, Akriotou Microwinery reveals this variety's refined, modern potential. The nose is lifted and aromatic, with notes of peach, melon, citrus zest and white flowers, supported by subtle herbal hints. On the palate it shows a soft, rounded texture with juicy fruit depth, balanced acidity and a smooth, gently oily finish. Fresh, approachable and fruit-driven, it pairs beautifully with salads, grilled fish, seafood pasta and even a Sunday roast chicken. € 9.30
- 20 **RETSINA**, Tetramythos Winery Roditis
This modern retsina from Tetramythos Winery redefines that wine style with elegance and restraint, showing delicate aromas of citrus, mango, melon and white blossoms, lifted by subtle notes of mastic and rosemary. Fresh and well-structured on the palate, with bright acidity and clean fruit, it moves away from traditional heavier styles. A Greek summer simply doesn't feel complete without retsina and sizzling fried meze (such as calamari and zucchini) by the sea. € 11.40
- 21 **MUSCAT OF LEMNOS**, Domaine Chatzigeorgiou Muscat
A standout expression of sweet Muscat from Limnos, this liasto ("sun-dried") wine shows why the island's aromatic tradition is held in such high regard. Intensely honeyed and floral, with notes of citrus peel, ripe fruit and blossom honey, it balances richness with surprising freshness thanks to its lively acidity. Smooth, generous and long at the finish, it's a dessert wine that elevates everything from fruit and pastries to cheese boards, or simply a quiet moment on its own. € 11.20



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INOTROPOS
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