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SANTORINI SUCCESS



Top Greek wines are led by outstanding whites from this lovely island

BY KIM MARCUS

Greek winemaking involves a daunting array of grape varieties and many different wine styles. Quality is sometimes inconsistent, and the country's plethora of appellations doesn't make life for the average wine consumer any easier. • But there is a simple way to begin understanding the burgeoning ranks of wines available from this ancient land: Look to Santorini. The whites from this romantic island are providing new peaks of quality that should soon garner them a place on the world stage.

With his top-quality white and dessert wines, Yiannis Argyros is drawing the wine world's attention to the island of Santorini.

Since my last report on the region ("Greece at the Crossroads," Dec. 31, 2006–Jan. 15, 2007), I have reviewed more than 70 Greek wines; all the outstanding releases were made from white grapes. In addition to Santorini, the island of Rhodes is beginning to make its mark with the Athiri grape, while the Mantinia district of the northern Peloponnese continues to deliver well-structured wines made from Moschofilero. The best whites of Greece show impressive structures and deep flavors; they are delicious to drink on their own or with fresh seafood, roasted poultry or salads.



Paris Sigalas co-founded Domaine Sigalas in 1991 using his family's old winery. His wines offer some of Santorini's best values.

Santorini is clearly dominating the race to the top of the Greek wine charts. Its wines are based on the native grape Assyrtiko and at their best present distinctive flavor profiles. Creamy and mineral, with apple, pear and hints of citrus, they are backed by firm structures and an unusual depth of richness that draws on high levels of dry extract—the measure of the nonvolatile components in wine, such as sugar, proteins and glycerol.

The top-scoring dry wine of this report is the Argyros Santorini Barrel 2004 (92 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale, \$32), which is a barrel-fermented version of Assyrtiko, with small amounts of Athiri and Aidani. This is an unctuous white, filled with plenty of ripe fruit flavors that are joined by spice and mineral notes. Its structure indicates that it should age well over the next five years or so. Argyros also makes an outstanding unoaked Assyrtiko, the Santorini Canava 2004 (90, \$20), a very crisp, juicy wine, with flavors of apple, peach and cherry and a spicy finish.

Argyros also made the highest-scoring wine in this report: the dessert-style Vin Sa'nto 1987 (93, \$130/500ml). This is reputed to be Greece's most sought-after sweetie, and it is easy to understand why, with its thick, rich flavors of ripe apricot, vanilla,

cream and honey. This blend of Assyrtiko, Athiri and Aidani is aged 14 years in barrel and topped off with a younger vintage before being bottled.

Argyros is a family-run operation founded in 1903. It has slowly evolved from selling its grapes to the local cooperative to making its own wines, beginning in 1987. Today, owner Yiannis Argyros continues to modernize viticultural and winemaking methods at the 65-acre estate.

It's a challenging task. Grapegrowing on Santorini pushes the limits of practicable cultivation. The steep slopes that rise above the famed submerged caldera—with its vertiginous, white-washed villages—are composed of volcanic soils. Dry summer winds can be so desiccating that the traditional method of grapegrowing involves wrapping the vines around a small basket, which sits in a hollow in the soil. In addition, tourist pressures are intense, with vineyard land threatened by hotel and villa development.

Other top whites from Santorini include outstanding releases from Domaine Sigalas, with its rich, exotic-tasting Santorini 2006 (90, \$22) and its Asiritiko-Athiri Santorini 2005 (90, \$16), which is very lush and complex, with flavors of almond, ripe pear, peach and

spice. Another producer to look for is Gaia. Its Santorini Thalassitis 2006 (90, \$25) shows good structure, with concentrated peach, mineral and crunchy apple flavors. The finish features bright notes of ruby grapefruit.

East of Santorini, across the Aegean Sea and near the Turkish coast, lies the island of Rhodes. Enoteca Emery, one of Greece's largest wineries, ranks as its top producer. Founded in 1923, Emery winery is owned by the Triantafyllou family; they cultivate vineyards about halfway up the 4,000-foot slopes of the island's highest peak, Mount Attaviros. Their best release is the excellent-value Athiri 2005 (90, \$11), which offers lush flavors of Fuji apple, pear, hazelnut and custard.

Other well-priced Greek whites include a mix from the Peloponnese: Oenoforos Patras Asproliithi 2006 (89, \$10), a fresh, crisp white with citrus and apple flavors made from the Roditis grape; Antonopoulos Mantinia 2006 (88, \$15), fragrant, with concentrated fruit flavors and appealing herbal notes; and Tselepos Moschofilero Mantinia 2005 (88, \$14), showing crunchy green apple and peach flavors, with notes of vanilla on the rich finish.

Another distinctive Greek white grape is Robola, grown mostly

on the Ionian island of Cephalonia off the west coast of Greece. One of the best recent releases is from Domaine Foivos, its Robola of Cephalonia 2006 (88, \$18). This wine has concentrated flavors of apple, pear and spice, with hints of gooseberry.

The red wines of Greece need more work in order to approach the increasingly high and consistent quality of the whites. The most palatable of them hail from the Nemea district of the northern Peloponnese and are made from the Agiorgitiko grape. The best that I tasted is the pricey Palivou Nemea Terra Leone Ammos 2004 (89, \$35), which is rich and full-bodied, with concentrated red plum and cherry flavors and a creamy



finish. Palivou also makes a value-priced version: the Agiorgitiko Vin de Pays de Péloponnèse 2006 (87, \$15), a medium-bodied wine with fresh, crushed red fruit and sandalwood flavors.

Greece still captivates the modern imagination with its deep history, vibrant culture and magnificent landscapes. While its winemakers want to compete head-to-head with the best of the winemaking world, they still have some way to go. But sparks are starting to fly, especially with the distinctive whites from the country's storied and beautiful Aegean islands.

Managing editor Kim Marcus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Greece.

Kim Marcus' Recommended Wines From Greece

For complete reviews, see the Buying Guide of this and previous issues or the Wine Ratings search at www.winespectator.com.
An alphabetical listing of all wines tasted for this report is available at www.winespectator.com/111507.

WHITE

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
ARGYROS Santorini Barrel 2004 Impressive for its unctuous, well-structured array of smoky, mineral flavors joined by loads of ripe apple and pear.	92	\$32
ARGYROS Santorini Canava 2004 Crisp and juicy, with concentrated flavors of apple, peach and white cherry. Long finish shows vanilla and spice.	90	\$20
EMERY Athiri Rhodes Rhodes 2005 Ripe, spicy aroma, with lush flavors of Fuji apple, pear, hazelnut and custard. Pineapple and tropical fruit in the mix.	90	\$11
GAIA Santorini Thalassitis 2006 Concentrated peach, mineral, McIntosh and spice. Long finish is filled with mineral, ruby grapefruit and cream notes.	90	\$25
DOMAINE SIGALAS Asirtiko-Athiri Santorini 2005 Mouthfilling flavors of salted almond, ripe pear, peach and spice. Mineral finish features piecrust notes.	90	\$16
DOMAINE SIGALAS Santorini 2006 Aromas and flavors of beeswax, apricot, tropical fruits and spice. Very creamy, this is filled with custard notes.	90	\$22
OENOFOROS Patras Asprolithi 2006 Very fresh and crisp, with citrus, McIntosh and mineral.	89	\$10
ANTONOPOULOS Mantinia 2006 Fragrant, with extracted peach, apple, citrus and spice	88	\$15

WHITE (cont.)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
TSELEPOS Moschofilero Mantinia 2005 Crunchy green apple and peach. Vanilla and spice finish.	88	\$14

RED

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
PALIVOU Nemea Terra Leone Ammos 2004 Concentrated flavors of red plum, cherry and raspberry are joined by luscious cream on the bright finish.	89	\$35
PALIVOU Agiorgitiko Vin de Pays de Péloponnèse 2006 Fresh, lively flavors of raspberry, boysenberry and sandalwood. Fruit and spice give the finish a lush allure.	87	\$15

DESSERT

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
ARGYROS Santorini Vin Sa'nto 1987 Rich flavors of ripe apricot, vanilla, spice, cream and honey. Beautiful amber color with a long finish featuring exotic flavors.	93	\$130 500ml
DOMAINE SIGALAS Santorini Vinsanto 2002 Honeyed and rich, with lovely flavors of dried apricot, crème brûlée and cream. Seductive, with a long, sweet finish.	91	\$25 375ml

ARGYROS WINES. IMPORTED BY HELLASIMPORTITO

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GREECE

93 Argyros Santorini Vin Sa'nto 1987 \$130/500ml

A very thick and seductive dessert wine from Greece, with rich flavors of ripe apricot, vanilla, spice, cream and honey. Has a beautiful amber color, with a long finish featuring exotic flavors of dried tropical fruits, including mango and hints of ginger. Assyrtiko, Athiri and Aidani. Drink now through 2020. 20 cases imported.—K.M.

88 Montofoli Greece 2005 \$55/500ml Reminiscent of oloroso Sherry, with plenty of dried apricot, fig and maple flavors. Has good acidity and structure, which carries the fruit through to the lush, spicy finish. Assyrtiko, Aidani, Athiri and Liatiko. Drink now through 2012. 50 cases imported.—K.M.

88 Pavlou-Kagas Xynomavro-Syrah Macedonia Kappa P62 2005 \$30 A bright, elegant red, with delicious red cherry, plum and currant flavors, backed up by medium-grained tannins. Has a long, spiced-filled finish. Drink now through 2010. 500 cases made.—K.M.

87 D. Kourtakis Mavrodaphne Patras Kourtaki NV \$9 Rich, with flavors of chocolate, dark plum and dried cherry in a tawny Port style. Smoke and spice fill the finish. Drink now. 300,000 cases made.—K.M.

87 Pavlou-Kagas Xynomavro Macedonia Klima 2005 \$15 This has a Pinot-like elegance, with pretty spice, dried cherry and berry flavors. Structured and balanced, with notes of sandalwood on the finish. Drink now. 4,000 cases made.—K.M.

87 Skouras Saint George Nemea 2005 \$14 Focused red plum and currant flavors fill this balanced red. Shows herbal and tobacco leaf notes, with some smoky flavors. Drink now. 5,000 cases imported.—K.M.

86 Domaine Costa Lazaridi Drama Amethystos Cava 2002 \$30 Plum and dried berry flavors fill this medium-bodied red. Vanilla, cola and cherry flavors linger on the finish. Drink now. 5,000 cases made.—K.M.

86 Vatistas Kidonitsa Monemvasia 2005 \$39 Grapefruit, spice and orange peel flavors are flanked by plenty of notes of wet stone. The citrus-filled finish shows lots of smoky notes. Try with grilled fish. Drink now. 500 cases made.—K.M.

85 Kir-Yianni Vin de Pays d'Imathia 2004 \$26 A dense, inky red, with smoke and roasted plum flavors and some hints of Asian spice on the finish. Rustic but enjoyable. Drink now. 300 cases imported.—K.M.

85 Evangelos Tsantalis Mavrodaphne Patras Cellar Reserve NV \$14/500ml Intense brown sugar and maple flavors, with dark plum and cherry notes, dominate this sweet red. The finish is spicy. Drink now. 3,000 cases made.—K.M.

84 Emery Greece Efreli NV \$18/500ml —K.M.

84 D. Kourtakis Vin de Crete Kourtaki Red 2004 \$8 —K.M.

84 Alexandros Megapanos Savatiano Spata 2006 \$11 —K.M.

84 Semell Moschofilero-Roditis Vin de Pays de Péloponnèse Mountain Sun 2006 \$11 —K.M.

84 Evangelos Tsantalis Mavroudi Vin de Pays de Thraki Maronia Vineyard 2003 \$18 —K.M.

83 Biblia Chora Pangeon Areti Red 2004 \$27 —K.M.

83 Boutari Heraklion Fantaxometochos 2005 \$22 —K.M.

83 Karipidis Syrah Thessalikos 2004 \$35 —K.M.

83 D. Kourtakis Muscat Samos Kourtaki NV \$10 —K.M.

83 Palliou Agiorgitiko Corinth Rosé 2006 \$15 —K.M.

83 Vatistas Aghlorgitiko-Cabernet Sauvignon Péloponnèse 2003 \$19 —K.M.

82 A. & G. Papaioannou Agiorgitiko Nemea Ktima Mikroclima 2001 \$53 —K.M.

82 Evangelos Tsantalis Cabernet Sauvignon Haikidiki Organics 2001 \$29 —K.M.

82 Vatistas Asproudi-Assyrtiko Lakonia 2006 \$15 —K.M.

80 Domaine Gerovassillou Syrah Epanomi 2004 \$28 —K.M.

79 Achala Clauss Muscat de Patras NV \$27 —K.M.