

VASSALTIS POST

Quartely edition

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Yannis on Dan Really Likes Wine

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Debuting Kalupi Red Blend 2020

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Wine & Spirits TOP 100

Vassaltis Wine & Spirits Magazine Top 100!

Vassaltis is proud to announce that we were chosen as one of Wine & Spirits magazine's Top 100 wineries for 2022!

Only three Greek wineries were selected in 2022 Vassaltis is of them! Two of our wines, both scoring in the "superlative, rare finds" category, helped us achieve this honor: Plethora (97 pts) and Santorini 2020 (95 pts). This is an extraordinary accolade for our winery but what is more impressive is that it has been earned on only our 6th harvest!

Founded in 1982, Wine & Spirits magazine has garnered a readership of over 200,000 people including wine industry professionals and wine enthusiasts. The quarterly publication includes information on established and up-and-coming regions and producers, the art and science of viticulture, industry happenings, and food and wine pairing. Every year, this august publication selects 100 wineries from around the world to highlight as those it believes to be standouts from diverse regions throughout the world of wine. ●



From Stellenbosch to Santorini

This year, we trialed a potential cooperation with the Stellenbosch-based Cape Institute for Agricultural Training, Elsenburg Wine Cellar to host graduates for internships at our winery.

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For many wine lovers, a perfect food and wine pairing is the ultimate goal. That moment when the two come together perfectly and the heavens open.

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Meet the Stars of Santorini - Mandilariá

Without a doubt, Assyrtiko is one of the noblest of Greece's grape varieties, but that doesn't mean there are no other stars in Santorini's vineyards. Let's get to know a little better one of them: Mantilariá.

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Vassaltis 2022 Harvest Report

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Yannis on Dan Really Likes Wine



In early September, Yannis joined Dan Nicholl of Dan Really Likes Wine in the cellar at Athens's Oinoscent to talk about Greek wine today and its future in both Greece and abroad.

Dan Really Likes Wine is the leading wine show in South Africa. So, joining him and Yannis were three of South Africa's leading winemakers all of whom coincidentally are Greek wine fans: Chris Mullineux from Mullineux & Leeu Wines, Gary Jordan from Jordan Wines, and Ian Naudé of Naudé Wines. Together they discussed South Africa's early forays into Assyrtiko.

Getting South African Assyrtiko on the shelves has been a long and difficult struggle for winemakers like them. South Africa imposes an extensive quarantine on incoming agricultural products intended for propagation. That was not their only hurdle. The Department of Agriculture also had to get Parliament to add the grape to the official registry – which did not actually happen until 2021, a day before Jordan harvested its Assyrtiko! Furthermore, the wines had to be taste-tested and certified by the government to determine varietal authenticity. A real challenge since these were the first Assyrtiko wines produced in the country and many on the panel may have never had any experience with the grape at all.

And yet, for the two Assyrtikos now produced there, the reception has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating that South Africa is eager to embrace this Greek grape. In Swartland where Mullineux & Leeu Wines is located, bottling single varietal wines is a rare occurrence, this area basing the majority of its wines on blends. But its first vintage of Assyrtiko had such complexity and balance that they decided to bottle it on its own. A limited bottling, it sold out in less than a day. At his Stellenbosch-based winery, Gary has planted three hectares of Assyrtiko and launched his wine in a variety of restaurants in Johannesburg.

How do you take a grape so indelibly linked to a country and make it half a world away? According to Yannis, wine should express not only where it comes from but also the taste and philosophy of the person making it. Chris, Gary, and Ian (who imports Vassaltis to South Africa), echoed this feeling that their efforts with Assyrtiko should not imitate Greece, but to look for their own style and expression with the grape. While Jordan Winery has wind and proximity to the ocean (like Santorini), the inland Swartland is a completely different story, and they have to find their own style and expression of the grape.

Ian pointed out South Africa's great success with Chenin Blanc which could serve as a roadmap for how South Africa tackles Assyrtiko in years to come. With Chenin Blanc, South Africa has not tried to copy France but has made its own style, one that is appreciated and recognized around the world every bit as much as French Chenin. He fully believes that there is a place for Assyrtiko in South Africa and that now is the right time, the right place, and the right people to introduce it.

Check out the [full interview with Yannis on Dan's YouTube site at Dan Really Likes Wine!](#) ●

Debuting Kalupi Red Blend 2020

"If I tasted this wine blind, Greece would be among my last possible options indicating what a paradigm shifting, well honed quality Red this wine really is." Greg Sherwood MW on Kaloupi.

Joining the list of Vassaltis' red wines, which include the Mavrotragano and Vassanos, comes the ground-breaking Kaloupi. The first wine of its kind on Santorini, Kaloupi is a blend created from of 30% Mantilariá, 30% Mavrotragano, and 40% Assyrtiko. Before the three grapes come together to collectively finish fermenting, the Mantilariá grapes are partially dried under the sun, the Mavrotragano undergoes semi-carbonic fermentation to soften its often-harsh tannins, and the Assyrtiko ferment in whole bunches.

Each of the three grapes contributes something vital for the wine's balance. Mavrotragano gives it the aromatics, fruit, and structured tannins, the Mantilariá adds glycerol, alcohol, and acidity, and finally the Assyrtiko brings its elegance to bring together everything. The wine aged in stainless steel only in order to preserve the nature of the fruit.

Read Greg Sherwood MW tasting notes at <https://gregsherwoodmw.com/2022/08/26/vassaltis-vineyards-breaking-the-mould-with-their-experimental-reds-tasting-the-new-kalupi-2018-red-blend/>

Kaloupi is a limited bottling with only 300 bottles which are available in the UK. The 2022 vintage, which will yield approx. 1,500 bottles is already underway!



From Stellenbosch to Santorini



This year, we trialed a potential cooperation with the Stellenbosch-based Cape Institute for Agricultural Training, Elsenburg Wine Cellar to host graduates for internships at our winery. The Institute has a long history training winemakers in South Africa dating back to 1889 and has trained approximately 80% of South Africa's winemakers.

While we're hoping that this venture will result in future cooperation to give its graduates a taste of working on Santorini, we were thrilled to welcome two recent graduates to Vassaltis Vineyards this year for the trial-run: Lehandri Bothma and Gwen Marais.

Vassaltis Vineyards: How did your internship at Vassaltis differ from your work in South Africa?

Lehandri Bothma: First of all, you are making wine on an Island, that already - BIG DIFFERENCE. Apart from that I think we can start with the varieties. Although Assyrtiko is something starting to sound more familiar to some South Africans, other varieties such as Aidani, Athiri, Mavrotragano and Mandilaria are very unknown. So, from a viticulture and winemaking point there was a lot to learn. In the winery, yes the basic wine-making practices are very similar to what we do in South Africa, but working with Yiannis Papaconomou was such a great opportunity. He has so much knowledge to share and is such an innovative winemaker. I have

learned so much from him and the way he thinks about wine and the production of wine is inspiring! I have to add his ability to fix and build things is envious, but I mean if you need it now - you need to fix or build it yourself because you are on an island.

Gwendeli Marais: Every cellar is different and it's hard to compare. It was really refreshing to be somewhere where the winemaker and owner are so open and invested in sharing their knowledge. The mindset and drive force behind Vassaltis is a force to be reckoned with and it's definitely been an enriching and educational experience.

VV: Was there anything about viticulture or winemaking on Santorini that came as a surprise to you?

LB: If we can change the surprise to "new" then we can talk about the "Kouloura" pruning system that has been used in Santorini for decades because that was definitely something I was not familiar with. A very interesting way of protecting the grapes from the summertime sun and the wind.

GM: The whole Island is a surprise and the fact that grapes have flourished there for so long. The concept of vines growing in volcanic ash and pumice stone with no water retention is mind blowing. I think it's really cool that vines have survived on what I see as a rock in the Mediterranean without being af-

ected by viruses for so many years and still produce world class wines.

VV: Did you discover any new favorite grapes on the island?

LB: I came to Santorini for Assyrtiko and I was not disappointed. Learning and understanding everything about a variety in its origin, what a great opportunity. It is a variety that can be used to make so many different styles without changing or intervening too much. For me Assyrtiko is the variety in Santorini that really expresses the terroir the best.

GM: It's nearly impossible to pick a favorite over Assyrtiko! I really enjoyed the floral bouquet that Aidani has to offer and if Assyrtiko did not exist (thank goodness it does!) I would opt for it.

VV: What's your favorite wine of the (Vassaltis) range?

LB: Favorite wine - I would say Gramina. After being part of picking the grapes in the vineyard, seeing the quality of the grapes, tasting the berries and already you find so much complexity, you can almost immediately understand the goal of that vineyard. When you taste the wine it's special because it actually takes you to that site. But I have to say my first introduction to Vassaltis was the Santorini Assyrtiko and what a breath of fresh air that wine is!

GM: I think Gramina will rightfully blow anyone's hair back! However, I have to say the Santorini. For me it is a great expression of the island and Assyrtiko and it's the first thing that comes to mind when I think of Santorini. It is after all the wine that got me to Vassaltis in the first place!

VV: What did you discover about Santorini when you weren't working?

LB: We tried to not be too touristy, but come on, two South Africans in Santorini, we are tourists when we are not working. We tried to visit most of the beaches on the Island and went for a swim almost everyday because back home it is winter so no swimming for us usually this time of the year. We also made time to explore through the beautiful villages of the island and I was amazed by the amount of churches that Santorini has. We were invited to join 1 or 2 Panigiri, which was quite special, to experience some old Greek tradition. Apart from all the real touristy things

and being winemakers, food discovery was definitely high on the list as we tried as much Greek cuisine as possible.

GM: There are over 600 churches on Santorini. Many of the churches were built to support the community not only for religious purposes but they were supplied with water and electricity for free. Thus resulting in beautiful churches practically everywhere you go. Each church hosts "festivals" which are like cultural celebrations and you can pretty much find one taking place somewhere on the island at all times.

VV: What's your next trip or wine making region you'd like to visit?

LB: My next trip is Saint-Emilion, France. I am on my way to join them for the harvest 2022. I will be in France for the rest of the year learning and experiencing some more about wine. Other countries that I would like to visit are Italy, Spain, Chile and Argentina, whether it will be work or just a wine vacation, I am not sure yet.

GM: Portugal has always fascinated me. Specifically, Colares which is a coastal region where the vines grow in the sand much like they do in Santorini. I guess I have a type ;) But jokes aside I am fascinated by regions with similar climates to South-Africa that have a different way of doing things as there is much to learn.

VV: If you were a grape, which grape would you be and why?

LB: This is by far the most difficult question because I don't know. I think I might be a blend of some sort, but if I really had to choose and tie something to my personality, I would say Chenin Blanc. It is versatile and although it can be vinified into different styles it stays true to its characteristics.

GM: Thank goodness I am not a grape! I am going to take the easy way out and say Sauvignon Blanc, purely because I have consumed enough to be it.

Follow along with Leha (Instagram: @leha_wines) and Gwen (Instagram: @gwendeli) as they continue their winemaking adventures! ●

Restaurant Presentation - Aleria



For many wine lovers, a perfect food and wine pairing is the ultimate goal. That moment when the two come together perfectly and the heavens open. Nikiforos Kehayiedakis established Aleria in a neoclassical building with a lush, hidden garden, in Metaxourgeio in the heart of Athens to do exactly that. The atmosphere here combines the comforting feeling of home

with sophisticated dining, where guests can relax and enjoy a unique epicurean adventure.

Chef Gikas Xenakis uses classic Greek ingredients to create contemporary and delicious dishes; the core of which hold the memory of traditional Greek cuisine. Guests choose between two set menus: 'Earth & Sea' or

'Garden & Nature'. Both have the choice of five or six courses as well the option to pair wine from the restaurant's extensive wine list. Sommelier Argyris Christopoulos has built a cellar of stellar domestic and international wines, all of which promise to elevate guests' gastronomic experience.

Aleria is a great friend of Vassaltis Vineyards, so it is no surprise to find two of our wines on the list: Vassaltis Assyrtiko and Gramina.

Like the tasting menu itself, the wine pairing options at Aleria come with two options: the standard wine pairing and the premium. Those who choose the former enjoy the Vassaltis Assyrtiko with the Catch of the Day course. If you choose the premium option, you are treated to the obliteration of one of the oldest (and most tired) food and wine pairing rules: meat with white wine. At Aleria, Gikas and Christopoulos pair the Vassaltis Gramina Assyrtiko with Giouvarlaki tartare - beef tartare. The combination of delicate beef with an acidic, lemon avgolemono sauce with the elegantly structured white wine is perfection. ●



Meet the Stars of Santorini - Mandilariá

Chances are pretty good that, as a friend of Vassaltis Vineyards, you already know a good deal about Santorini's headlining grape, Assyrtiko. Without a doubt, Assyrtiko is one of the noblest of Greece's grape varieties, but that doesn't mean there are no other stars in Santorini's vineyards. Let's get to know a little better one of them: Mantilariá.

Originally a Cretan grape, Mantilariá, is cultivated in many of Greece's wine regions under various names including Mandilaria, Mandilari, Kountoura Mávri, and Amorgianó. It is, however, most widely known as Mandalari or Mandalaria, the name coming from the word mandila, which is a square piece of cloth used for head protection and to wrap snacks workers took with them to the fields, or even that was tied in a pouch to carry the grapes during harvest. On Santorini, Mantilariá covers about 17 per cent of total vineyard area making it Santorini's leading red grape variety.

Due to its thin skin, it can be prone to disease, especially in Santorini. Notable for its bluish-black berries, Mantilariá is one of Greece's deepest colored grape varieties. But it's a deceptive grape! While the skins appear almost black, Mantilariá wines tend to be rather light-bodied and bright, clear ruby in color. That pale color can catch you off-guard though as the tannins can be very aggressive.

Equally earthy and fruity, Mantilariá wines have flavors of red and black fruits, particularly cherries and plums, in addition to herbal and earthy notes like licorice. Wines tend to have a moderate amount of alcohol and pairs well with everything from lamb, steak, and keftedes (Greek meatballs) to grilled vegetables, cheese, and hearty fish. ●

Vassaltis 2022 Harvest Report

“ALMOST A UNICORN VINTAGE”



Winter this year brought more rainfall to Santorini than average - 294.5 milliliters vs. 220 ml which really helped the vines combat the island’s usually dry climate heading into the growing season. We had a longer than usual growing season thanks to lower summer temperatures and winds. Compared to last year, when the temperature met or exceeded 35 C every day in July, we had a very mild summer, reaching 35 C only twice. This was largely thanks to 50 straight days of meltemia.

Meltemia (plural) are northern winds caused by heat waves from Africa that displace huge pockets of air from the north. Their path usually follows the Aegean, putting Santorini right in its path. These constant winds kept vineyard temperatures cool and the vines healthy, generally pest-free, and overall less stressed creating a longer than usual growing season. It’s very unusual to have these winds for such an extended period of time and this meant for us is that our grapes were able to develop better phenolic maturation before reaching the sugar levels needed for harvest.

We began harvesting in staggered intervals as always, due to the different grape varieties’ characters. We began with Athiri on August 7th then on the 9th moved onto some early ripening Assyrtiko plots. We paused with Assyrtiko to allow the other plots to fully ripen but in the meantime, we spent two days picking our Mavrotragano. We resumed harvesting Assyrtiko on the 17th and continued until August 31st. After that, we had a small break in the vineyard until September 3 when the later ripening Aidani was ready. Our harvest officially ended on September 9 with our last Aidani grapes.

We very nearly had a “unicorn” perfect vintage. Unfortunately, a sudden rainstorm from 03:00 - 06:30 on August 24 dumped an unprecedented 25.5 ml of rain on the vineyards, swelling the grapes still on the vine at the time.

Overall, the grapes came to the winery with high levels of concentration with excellent acidity. In total, Vassaltis harvested a record 115 tons of white grapes and 4.5 tons of Mavrotragano, meaning that our winery is pro-

ducing at almost full capacity this year!

While the wines are only beginning to be shaped in the cellar, we can already make some predictions about what they will be like. This year’s almost perfect climatic conditions meant that the phenolics were ready before the grapes reached peak sugar levels giving wines with extraordinary primary fruit aromas which will add to the complexity of the wines. We’re especially excited about the Assyrtiko as we managed to pick grapes that are going to give full-bodied, well-balanced wines with high acidity, a salty character, and long finish. ●

Photo of The Month

