

WINE-TASTING ROOM

# best new greek wines

by ray isle

GREEK WINES MAY BE THE MOST UNDERRATED ON the planet. Why is a mystery, as the Greeks have been making wine since around 2000 BC. (Perhaps the oracle at Delphi might have an answer?) Certainly, the quality of Greek wines has improved dramatically since the 1980s, and more of them have been appearing in the United States. For fans of lively whites like Sauvignon Blanc and Albariño, Greek white wines offer astounding quality for a reasonable cost. While Greek reds are not as uniformly compelling, the best bottlings are terrific.

**SEVEN GREEK VARIETALS TO KNOW:**

**Agiorgitiko** (*ah-gee-or-gee-tee-ko*): This grape produces lush, velvety reds with black-cherry flavors.

**Assyrtiko** (*ah-sir-tee-ko*): A source of mineral, bone-dry, citrus-edged white wines.

**Athiri** (*ah-thee-ree*): Wines from this white variety often have a scent of stone fruits, like nectarines.

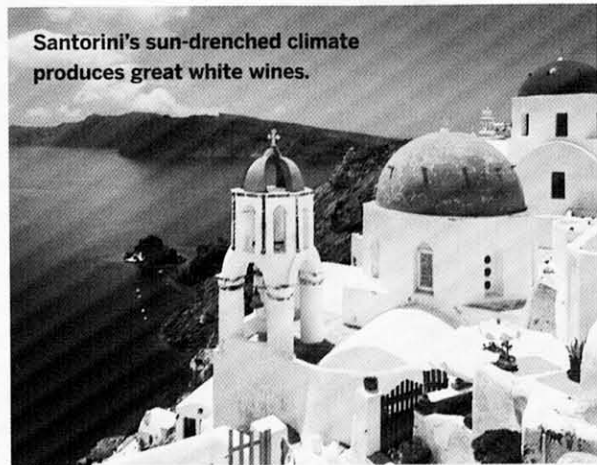
**Malagousia** (*mah-la-goo-see-ah*): This melony, jasmine-scented white was on the brink of extinction before winemaker Evangelos Gerovassiliou began growing it again.

**Moscofilero** (*mos-ko-fi-ler-oh*): A primarily Peloponnesian white, its wines have tangerine and blossom scents.

**Roditis** (*ro-dee-tis*): Elegant and light-bodied, this pink-skinned grape produces crisp whites and rosés.

**Xinomavro** (*zhee-no-mav-ro*): This red has floral and spice aromas, firm tannins, and vibrant fruit.

Wine grapes are grown, more or less, all over Greece. A few top regions are the Cyclades, especially Santorini, where Assyrtiko and other vines are tied into a basket shape to protect the fruit against the continuous wind; the Peloponnese peninsula, particularly Neméa, which produces full-bodied, juicy reds like Agiorgitiko; and Náoussa in Macedonia, the heart of Xinomavro.



White

**2007 Semeli Mountain Sun White (\$12)** A blend of the white grape varieties Moscofilero and Roditis, from an ambitious winery in Neméa, this savory bottling is all about elegant floral and spice notes, such as lemon blossoms, rose petals and sandalwood.

**2007 GAI'A Nótios White (\$14)** GAI'A, founded in 1994, focuses on native Greek grape varieties. Among the most appealing of its many wines

is this affordable blend of Roditis and Moscofilero, aged in stainless steel tanks; it offers mouthwatering acidity and crisp lemon-lime flavors.

**2007 Oenoforos Asproolithi (\$14)** Oenoforos was founded in 1990 by Angelos Rouvalis, a young, Greek-born, Bordeaux-trained winemaker. Winds off the Gulf of Corinth cool the winery's hillside vineyards, producing wines like this lemony, earthy white.

*star selection*



**2007 Domaine Sigalas Assyrtiko Athiri (\$16)** This zippy white, a fragrant blend of two Greek grapes from one of Santorini's top producers, has aromas of green apples and lemon blossoms. It finishes on a bright citrus-zest note.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JORG GREUEL/GETTY IMAGES (SANTORINI), GREGOR HALENDA (BOTTLE)

**2007 Emery Athiri Mountain Slopes (\$17)** Honeysuckle and mandarin-orange aromas characterize this white from the island of Rhodes. It's made from grapes grown in a group of small vineyards on the northwest slopes of Mount Atávros, high above the Aegean.

**2007 Argyros Atlantis White Santorini (\$18)** Founded in the early 1900s, Estate Argyros is one of the most significant wineries on Santorini. Its affordable Atlantis white is a great introduction to the strengths of the Assyrtiko grape—the lemon-honey aromas, mineral intensity and citrus-zest notes that distinguish it as a great seafood wine.

**2007 Hatzidakis Winery Santorini (\$18)** Winemaker Harry Hatzidakis blends small percentages of the Athiri and Aidini grapes with Assyrtiko for this lemony white. More full-bodied than most Santorini whites, its flavors last, ending on pepper and chalk notes.

**2007 Spyros Hatziyiannis Santorini (\$19)** Santorini's volcanic soils and windswept vineyards combine to create thrilling white wines like this one. It's marked by the scent of seashells and lemon zest, and despite its light body has a surprisingly silky texture.

**2007 Gerovassiliou Malagousia (\$25)** This aromatic white is the color of 12-karat gold and ought to be priced as such (thankfully, it isn't). Evangelos Gerovassiliou rescued the near-forgotten Malagousia grape, replanting it at his estate in northern Greece to make this complex, mouth-filling wine. It's an addictive mingling of melon, spice and minerals.

**2007 Vatistas Malagousia (\$35)** One of the new wave of Greek winemakers, Yiannis Vatistas produces a broad range of high-quality wines from his base near Monemvasia in the Peloponnese. This fragrant white is one of his best: creamy and dense with peach and lime fruit, ending on dry spice.

## star selection



**2007 Boutari Moscofilero (\$17)** Boutari is one of Greece's largest wine producers—and also one of its best. In 2007, its inviting Moscofilero bottling is characteristic of the variety: brisk and abundant with blossom and spice notes.

## Red

**2006 Pavlou Estate Klima (\$17)** The Pavlou Estate in the Amyndeon region focuses on Xinomavro, the great red grape of northern Greece. (The winery even creates an intriguing white blend from it by crushing the grapes, then immediately discarding the skins.) This 100-percent-Xinomavro bottling shows off the variety's distinctive dried-cherry flavors and streamlined tannic structure.

**2004 Katogi & Strofilia Agiorgitiko (\$20)** Dark cherry and espresso notes characterize this focused Agiorgitiko, which comes from a wine producer based in Macedonia. (One of its founders, Evangelos Averoff, was also the first winemaker in Greece to plant Cabernet Sauvignon, back in the '50s.)

**2007 Kir-Yianni Paranga (\$20)** Yiannis Boutaris founded Kir-Yianni in 1997 after leaving Boutari, the company his grandfather founded in 1879. Since then, Kir-Yianni has become one of Greece's top producers on the strength of wines such as this peppery Xinomavro blend, distinguished by its juicy cherry-berry flavors.

**2006 Pavlidis Thema Red (\$24)** Located in a narrow valley in the northern Greek region of Drama, the small, ambitious Pavlidis Estate creates a focused range of top-quality wines from hand-harvested grapes. This

violet-hued blend of Syrah and Agiorgitiko combines peppery, gamey aromas with rich black-fruit flavors.

**2005 Skouras Megalos Oenos (\$26)** George Skouras, this estate's owner and winemaker, was among the first in Greece to blend international and local grape varieties. This bottling, which is largely old-vine St. George (an alternate name for Agiorgitiko) with about 20 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, has bright berry fruit with a note of blackberry liqueur.

**2005 Tselepos Cabernet-Merlot (\$28)** Yiannis Tselepos, one of the central figures of the Greek wine renaissance, started his Peloponnesian winery in 1989 after studying enology in Dijon, France, and working for several years in Burgundy. Known for his graceful Moscofilero white, he also makes this smoky, elegant red, full of black-currant fruit.

**2004 Palivou Estate Terra Leone Ammos (\$45)** This voluptuous, rosemary-scented Agiorgitiko, lush with potent black-cherry fruit, comes from fourth-generation proprietor—as well as first-generation winemaker—George Palivos. For this high-end bottling, grapes from a single vineyard Palivos owns high in the Neméa valley receive lengthy aging in French oak. Somehow, though, the oak notes don't dominate the flavors of the wine.

## Avgolemono Chicken Soup with Rice

 TOTAL: 30 MIN  
4 SERVINGS

Avgolemono is a classic sauce of chicken broth, egg yolks and lemon juice; the addition of a bit more chicken broth, rice and shredded chicken turns it into a satisfying soup.

- 4 cups homemade chicken stock or low-sodium broth
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 cups cooked white rice, warmed
- 2 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 rotisserie chicken, meat pulled from the bones and coarsely shredded (1 pound)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh dill

In a large saucepan, season the stock with salt and pepper and bring to a simmer. Transfer 1 cup of the hot stock to a blender. Add ½ cup of the rice, the egg yolks and the lemon juice and puree until smooth. Stir the puree into the simmering stock along with the chicken and the remaining 1½ cups of rice and simmer until thickened slightly, 10 minutes. Stir in the dill and serve.

**WINE** Tart Greek white: 2008 Domaine Skouras White.

## Greek Baked Pasta

 ACTIVE: 25 MIN; TOTAL: 45 MIN  
6 SERVINGS

The moist and fragrant casserole pastitsio combines béchamel (a sauce of butter, flour and milk), pasta, ground lamb, tomato sauce, cheese, cinnamon and nutmeg. Instead of béchamel, Grace stirs a ricotta mixture into the pasta before baking it.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ pounds lean ground lamb
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crumbled
- ¾ teaspoon cinnamon
- Pinch of ground cloves
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 3 cups jarred marinara sauce
- 1 pound ziti or penne
- 3 cups fresh ricotta (1½ pounds)
- 4 large egg yolks
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil until shimmering. Add the lamb, onion, oregano, cinnamon, cloves and a generous pinch each of salt and pepper. Cook over high heat, stirring frequently, until the lamb is no longer pink and any liquid has evaporated, about 8 minutes. Add the marinara sauce and bring to a boil. Boil over high heat, stirring occasionally, until the sauce has reduced slightly, about 5 minutes.



GREEK BAKED PASTA  
*White baker from Crate & Barrel.*

2. Cook the pasta until barely al dente; drain and return to the pot. Meanwhile, in a blender, blend 2 cups of the ricotta with the yolks, nutmeg and ½ cup of the Parmigiano-Reggiano until smooth. Season with salt and pepper. Pulse in the remaining ricotta.
3. Add the lamb ragù to the pasta and toss. Transfer the pasta to a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Pour the ricotta mixture on top and sprinkle with the remaining ¼ cup of Parmigiano-Reggiano. Bake in the center of the oven for about 20 minutes, until heated through. Turn the broiler on and broil until the top is golden brown. Let stand for a few minutes before serving.

**MAKE AHEAD** The baked pasta can be covered and refrigerated for up to 2 days. Serve hot. ●

## perfect pairing



**2005 Domaine Mercouri Vin de Pays des Letrinon (\$20)** Made from the Italian grape Refosco and the Greek Mavrodaphne, this red combines berry fruit and peppery spice. It's fabulous with the Greek Baked Pasta above.