

Greek treats that'll make you forget retsina

Domaine Spiropoulos's 2004 Mantinia and Gai'a's 2003 Thalassitis are sprightly and sophisticated whites. Perfect for summer!

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The wines of Greece can be original and expressive — interesting departures from so many bottles of, well, you know the wines I'm talking about.

They remind me of summer. Many are light, refreshing and made advertisement for uncomplicated fish and shellfish dishes and warm-weather quaffing.

They also remind me of Greece itself, and of late lunches (typically no earlier than four o'clock) at a rustic taverna, say on the islands of Mykonos or Tinos, where the fish, such as sardines or octopus, have been caught the same day, coated with olive oil, sprinkled with salt and some herbs, then grilled. Simple and delicious, just like the wines that accompany them.

The number of Greek wines brought into this country has grown in recent years (anticipation of the Athens Olympics was the perfect vehicle for their promotion). But the wines don't need any special event or hook. Some, especially the whites, are good enough to hold their own when compared with comparably priced wines from California and Italy, for example.



This Week's Wine

Name:	2004 Domaine Spiropoulos Mantinia; 2003 Gai'a Thalassitis
Type:	Dry white
Country:	Greece
Region:	Peloponnese (Mantinia); Santorini (Gai'a)

Among a dozen or so Greek wines that I sampled recently, two whites stood out. The 2004 Mantinia from Domaine Spiropoulos is made from the moschofilero grape, one of my favorites among Greek varieties. The pink grape is the only one grown in the Mantinia area of Peloponnese on Greece's mainland. The wine shows the slightest blush, but not

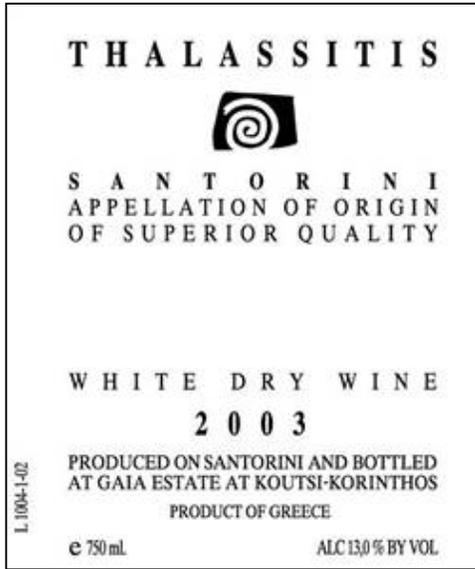


Grapes:	Moschofilero (Mantania); assyrtiko (Gai'a)
Price:	\$12 (Mantania); \$20 (Gai'a)
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enough color to be called a rosé. It has beautiful aromas of rose petals and tastes of apple, peach, citrus and strawberry. It's a refreshing picnic wine and will work well with grilled chicken and, of course, your favorite fresh fish. It's a bargain at \$12.

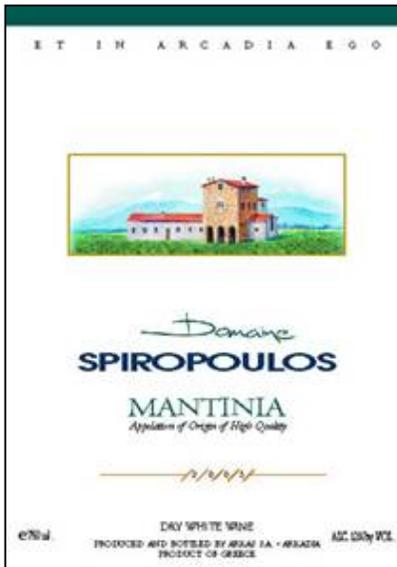
Domaine Spiropoulos, by the way, was one of the first Greek wineries to be certified as an organic grower.

Another white standout is the 2003 Thalassitis from the Gai'a Estate on the Aegean island of Santorini, which is well known for its white wines. The grape here is assyrtiko, another Greek variety, which in Gai'a's wine produces a crisply acidic, mineral-laden beauty with gorgeous fruit, mainly pear and pineapple. It, too, is a good value at \$20.



Athenee Importers

Although Gai'a is a fairly new winery, the grapes come from 30- to 100-year-old vines grown without irrigation in Santorini's volcanic soil, which accounts for much of the wine's character. The winery, by the way, is in an old tomato-canning factory on a beach.



Athenee Importers

With wines of this quality, I wondered, why aren't more people talking about Greek wines in general? Andrea Englishis, vice president of Athenee Importers, which brings the Gai'a and Spiropoulos wines to the United States, says it's about perception and marketing. "We've had the horrible stigma of retsina, which we're overcoming," she told me, referring to the resinous liquid that served as an unfortunate introduction to Greek wine for so many of us. "People are just trained to think that it's that horrible slop that they drank in the '70s and '80s."

Another issue, she says, is that Greece hasn't done a good job of promoting its wine industry beyond the European Union. "Unfortunately," she says, "the Greek government doesn't do a 'Brand

Greece' like the Australians and the Italians do."

These two superb whites are a big step in the right direction. They are available in 36 states.