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## Report #92 Crete's Wine Revolution



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## Introduction

In this, our third report on the wines of Greece, we focus on Crete where Greek winemaking began four millennia ago with the early Minoan settlements. Later, wines from Crete were exported around the Mediterranean, and during the Middle Ages found their way to the courts of Europe. Two centuries of Ottoman control and 20<sup>th</sup> century wars largely destroyed commercial winemaking in Crete, but just a few decades ago several wine pioneers like Ted Manousakis, Silva Daskalaki, and Yiannis Economou began a quality revolution. Some of them, like Nikos Douloufakis and the Lyrarakis family were also leaders in rediscovering the island's forgotten varieties like Vidiano and Plytó and raising the quality of indigenous varieties like Vilana, Kotsifali, Liatiko, and Mandilari. In this report, we identify Crete's wine pioneers and the promising indigenous varieties of the island.

While even just a decade ago, wine lovers saw Crete as a vinous backwater, today they see it as one of the most exciting wine regions of Greece. Crete's wine industry today looks very different even from what it was just two decades ago. It has 8 thousand hectares (ha) of wine grapes, 93 commercial wineries, and, most importantly, increasing numbers of young, professionally trained winemakers with experience making wine in other parts of Greece and Europe. Most wineries are relatively small with tiny marketing budgets, so their presence in foreign markets is still limited. But they are producing good quality wine from unique, indigenous grape varieties and selling it at remarkably low prices. Crete's quality wine pioneers have played a leading role in discovering several promising but long forgotten indigenous varieties and then replanting and making wine from them. In addition, Crete has a surprising number of very old, self-rooted, dry-farmed bush vines planted in remote locations not yet attacked by phylloxera.

It's not always easy to find wines from Crete in the local wine store. But Crete is wildly popular as a tourist destination, and the wines are an additional reason for the wine love to visit this lovely island. Fortunately, wine tourism is well developed, and the Wines of Crete has been proactive in encouraging wine tourism as well as organizing the participation of wineries in national and international trade shows.

The quality wine revolution of Crete is not well known by American consumers or the wine trade. We hope this report helps remedy this. In the final section of this report, we present profiles of each winery and winemakers we came to know in our tastings, and we give our evaluations of their wines.

*Acknowledgements.* First and foremost, we thank Wines of Crete, its President, Nicos Miliarakis, Board of Directors, and Dr. Elli Gkika, General Manager, for organizing and supporting our visit to Crete in April 2022. Second, we thank the many winemakers and wineries that received us and showed us their wines. Special thanks go to the wineries that hosted our multiple tastings: Haralabakis Winery and Domaine Gavalas. Thanks, too, to Bryan Smith and Gray Mosby for their help in obtaining samples. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the very helpful input from two Greek Masters of Wine: Konstantinos Lazarakis MW, author of *The Wines of Greece*, and Yiannis Karakasis MW, author of *The Wines of Crete*.

## History



*A Knossos Fresco*

Crete is an ancient wine-producing land where wine has always played an important role in the lives of Cretans. There's evidence of vines and winemaking going back to the Bronze Age, about 4 thousand years ago. Fragments of amphora found in early Minoan settlements reveal the presence of wine and resin, and tombs dated as early as 2500 BCE show images of grape presses. Over 40 Minoan presses have been excavated by archeologists in Crete, including in Knossos, the Minoan's most famous palace, which had underground wine cellars. Frescos and pottery at Knossos show wine as an important part of daily Minoan life. The oldest known (16<sup>th</sup> century BCE) Minoan wine press was found in Vathypetro in what is now the Archanes wine region in the Heraklion prefecture. There's also evidence that wine was exported, including murals in Egypt depicting Cretan wine amphorae being unloaded from ships.

Wine continued to play an important role in Crete during Roman rule and, especially, in the four-century reign of the Venetians. Venetian field presses are scattered around the island. However, this was followed by more than two centuries of Ottoman rule, beginning in 1669 and lasting until 1913 when Crete officially became part of Greece. Ottoman rule had a detrimental effect on viticulture and winemaking that it took half a century to recover from. While in earlier times Cretan wine was exported around the Mediterranean and to the courts of Europe, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century viticulture was focused on growing Sultana grapes for raisins, not wine grapes. World War II, the Nazi occupation, and the Greek civil war all took an additional toll on Crete. Wine cooperatives emphasized quantity over quality, and wine consumption focused on

village wines sold in bulk. The demand for Cretan wine increased with the 1960s surge in tourism, but tourists were more interested in inexpensive retsina than fine wines. The final blow was the invasion of phylloxera in 1972; this pest arrived late to Crete due to the island's inhospitable soils (e.g., low organic matter).

Crete's quality wine revolution began with Greece's entrance to the European Union in 1981. Slowly, new vineyards (often planted to French varieties) were planted using phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. Growers began making wine instead of selling to the co-ops, and their daughters and sons went off to Athens or Italy or Germany to learn how to make wine. Slowly, a quality wine culture began to take hold. A major impetus for commercial wine production was the tourist trade, but gradually the best producers began exporting wine, first to mainland Greece, and then other countries in Europe. They found growing interest abroad in Crete's indigenous varieties, leading to rediscoveries of forgotten varieties and replanting of vineyards.

## Rediscovering Indigenous Varieties



*Lyrarakis' Psarades Vineyard*

Indigenous varieties are generating much of the excitement in Crete's wine world these days. Some of these varieties are indigenous to Crete, while others are indigenous to Greece. Given the lack of historical records, it's often difficult to precisely determine the origin of many varieties.

Many growers and wineries have played a key role in discovering and developing indigenous varieties. None has played a more important role in this than the Lyrarakis family [see box below]. While the Lyrarakis

winery is located on the Alagni plateau in Peza in Heraklion, it sources grapes from several vineyards in Heraklion and Lasithi for its single site, single varietal wines. We tasted most of these wines on our visit to Lyrarakis, and our descriptions of the wines can be found in the tasting notes at the end of this report.

In addition to Lyrarakis, the Douloufakis winery has also played an important role in promoting indigenous grapes, especially Vidiano and Liatiko. Other winemakers have also worked to resuscitate old Crete grape varieties. Antoni Louloudis was already working with Liatiko, Kotsifali, and Takta in the 1920s in Dafnes, work that's now carried on by his grandson Antonis.

Iliana Malihin is working with growers of very old vines in the high-altitude vineyards of Rethymno, a task which has become more difficult after fires destroyed many old vineyards late this summer. Antonis Dourakis is working with Romeiko in Chania. Yiannis Economou is demonstrating the potential of Liatiko in Sitia in Lasithi. Nikos Gavalas is making single vineyard Kotsifali and Mandilari in Voria in Heraklion. Giannis and son Giorgio Kypriotakis are making Malvasia di Candia Aromatica in Archanes, also in Heraklion.



*Crete's Four Prefectures*

In addition, it's important to mention the important role enologist Iosiph Antoniou Miliarakis played in developing Crete's wine industry. In 1932 he created the first modern winery in Peza and the first (in 1952) to bottle and export wine. The Silva Daskalaki winery in Dafnes, the best known growing area of Heraklion, is another winery with roots dating to 1920; today enologist Eirini Daskalaki continues making improvements, introducing biodynamic viticulture and producing Muscat of Spina, sun-dried Liatiko, and other fine wines.



**Lyrarakis' Discoveries.** Bart and Giorgios Lyrarakis began bottling their family's own wine in 1992. Today, they and winemaker Myriam Ambouzer craft some of Crete's highest quality wines from indigenous varieties that they have discovered and developed on the island. They planted the ancient Dafní variety, dating from Minoan times, in their Psarades vineyard in the early 1990s; it makes highly sought-after wines scented of Bay Leaf. Plytó was found in the

family's old vineyards amongst the more common Vilana vines; it, too, was planted in the Psarades vineyard, and today several vigneron are experimenting with it. Melissa is another very rare variety discovered in the foothills of Mt Psiloritis and replanted by the Lyrarakis family. In addition to discovering these rare, indigenous varieties, the winery has also sought out old, self-rooted, dry-farmed bush vines of other varieties (e.g., the Aggelis Liatiko from ungrafted vines planted in Sitia in the 1930s) that make it into their single site, single varietal wines.

## Growth in Crete

Both vineyard plantings and the number of wineries have shown impressive growth in recent years in Crete. According to a recent survey by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, new plantings have averaged 618 ha per year since 2016 with 681 ha planted in the most recent year, 2021. The number of wineries has grown even more rapidly, from 61 in 2010 to 93 in 2021. However, most wineries are still small and family-run with production less than 10 thousand cases per year. No wineries produce more than 50 thousand cases. Growing tourism, especially wine tourism, in Crete undoubtedly allows small wineries to survive financially, but their small size constrains marketing budgets, especially for the export market.

## Geography and Climate



Crete is Greece's largest island, 260 km long and 12-60 km wide. With almost 8 thousand hectares (ha) under vine (about 4200 ha of wine grapes), it accounts for about 15 percent of Greece's total plantings. It has a warm Mediterranean climate with mostly northerly breezes and annual rainfall ranging from 250-900mm. Located midway between Africa and Europe, Crete is Europe's first line of defense against the dusty hot winds of the Sahara. Mountains shelter the northern side of the island from those winds. Most of Crete's vineyards are located on the northern side where not only are they sheltered from hot southern winds, but they benefit from the cooling effect of the *meltemi* winds coming from the north, especially during the summer months.

As shown earlier, Crete is comprised of four prefectures, from west to east: Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion and Lasithi. The mountainous nature of Crete means that vineyards have many different elevations, aspects, and soils within a single prefecture or even appellation (PDO). While Crete is the southernmost part of Greece, sea breezes and high altitudes can create cool growing conditions. Soils also vary greatly, but the predominant soil type is limestone and clay with varying amounts of slate and schist. The combination of relatively cool growing conditions, calcareous soils, and grape varieties that retain their acidity and mature slowly translates into excellent terroir for making wine.

## Chania

The westernmost part of Crete, Chania is dominated by the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) mountain range rising to 2453m at the highest peak (Pachnes). In general, the region is mountainous with vines planted on the plains and north facing slopes close to the Aegean at altitudes up to 900m. It's exposed to Mediterranean winds that generate humidity, making it the wettest part of Crete. Chania is home to the Romeiko grape variety, which was traditionally made into a high alcohol, sherry like wine called *marouvas*. Modern winemakers make wines from both indigenous and French varieties, including both dry and sweet Romeiko-based wines. About 80 percent of the Chania vineyard is planted to Romeiko.

## Rethymno

Named after the medieval town of Rethymno, this area is located between two north-south mountain ranges—Lefka Ori to the west and Mt Psiloritis to the east. It's drier than Chania with steeply sloped vineyards often located at high altitudes. Rethymno is also the home of the Vidiano variety, and 80-year-old, self-rooted vines still exist in Melabes and elsewhere planted on clay-loam-slate soils at up to 900m altitude. Recently, another indigenous variety, Melissaki, was discovered in Fourfouras on Psiloritis. More than 80% of the Melabes vineyard is planted with vines 30+ years of age.

## Heraklion

The largest of the four prefectures, Heraklion has five PDOs covering 2,159 ha that comprise two-thirds of its total plantings. On the map, Heraklion extends from the 2,456m high Mt Psiloritis on the west to Mt Dikti in the east with three peaks rising to 2,148m. The oldest vines are 30-40 years of age. Located on the northeastern slopes of Mt Psiloritis, Dafnes is the best known of Heraklion's wine growing regions. Vineyards are at 300-500m altitude with views of the sea, and they benefit from cooling sea breezes in the summer. The limestone rich soils are sandy to sandy-clay; a limestone-marl substrata lies about 60cm below the surface. Dafnes is home to the red variety Liatiko, which is grown on hillside slopes of calcareous soils. Located east of Dafnes, Peza has a wide range of terroir with vineyards of light, limestone soils at 300-600m altitude. Higher vineyards are sandier, while lower ones have heavier soils and higher yields. Vilana is the most widely planted white variety, and Kotsifali and Mandilari the most important red varieties. Archanes is an early ripening region with mostly homogenous, calcareous soils. Most vineyards are below 450m, and 90 percent of plantings are to red varieties, especially Kotsifali and Mandilari. Rainfall averages 600mm per year.

## Lasithi

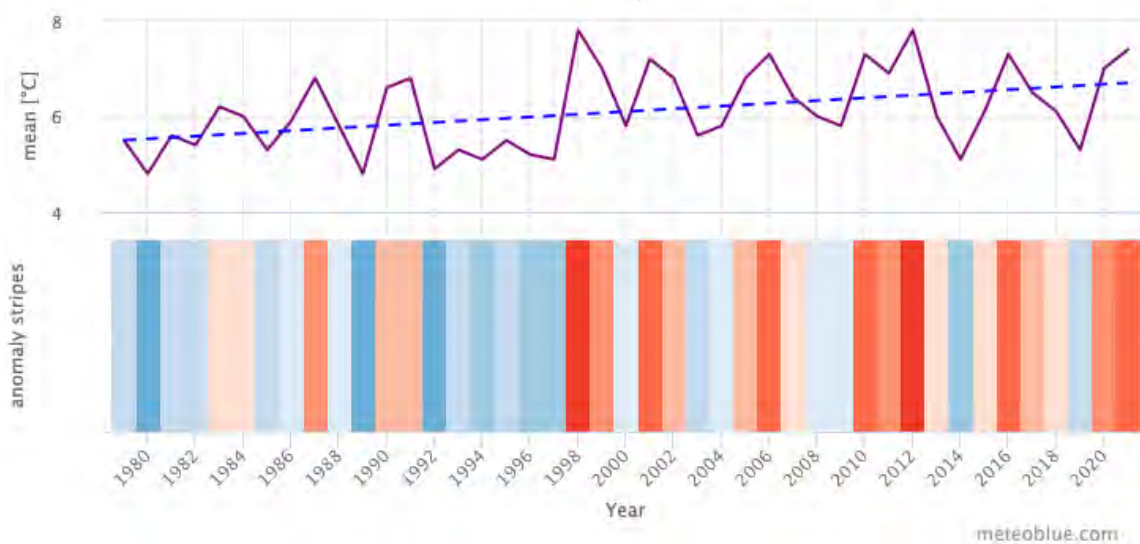
Located east of Mt Dikti, Lasithi is the driest, warmest part of the island. The semi-mountainous Sitia region is the most important vineyard area with predominantly old (60-80 years) plantings

at 300-700m altitude with highly diverse, mostly calcareous soils. The region benefits from cooling sea breezes, and annual rainfall is about 600mm from October to April. Popular white varieties include Assyrtiko, Vilana and Thrapsathiri, and the most important red variety is Liatiko, most of which is very old bush vines. Lasithi is also home to two PDOs, Sitia and Malvasia-Sitia. Both produce sweet as well as dry wines.

## Appellations

Established in 1989 and comprising Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion, and Lasithi, PGI Crete is the most commonly used appellation. It includes all categories of white, rosé, and red wines, both dry and sweet. In addition to PGI Crete, Crete is home to seven PDO level appellations: Peza, Archanes, Dafnes, Candia, Malvasia Candia, Sitia, and Malvasia Sitia. Seldom used on exported wines, these PDOs are further described in the Annex.

## Global Warming



As with the rest of the world, Crete is experiencing global warming as shown in the dotted blue trend line in the graph. Furthermore, the effects of warming are increasing, as shown in the colored bar graph. Each colored stripe represents the average temperature for the year, blue for cooler and red for warmer years. Crete is also very gradually becoming wetter.



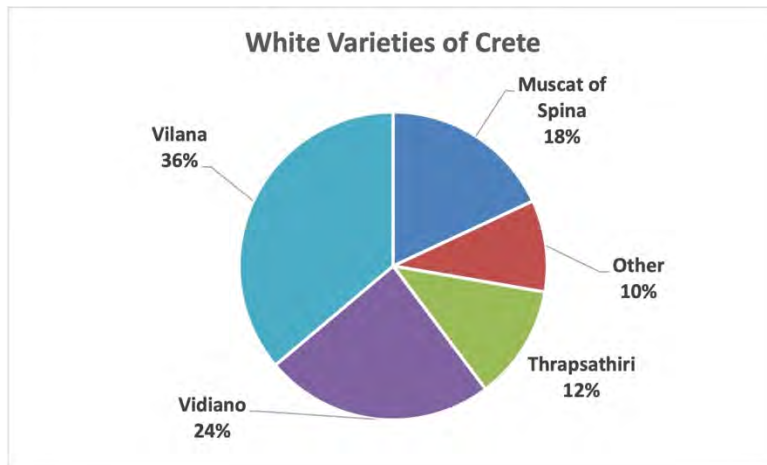
The overall effects of a warming, wetter climate on the quality of grapes and wines of Crete are difficult to determine. However, as in other regions, climate change is important not only for trending temperatures and precipitation but, also, for their variability. In July 2022, unusually dry weather caused forest fires in Melambes in Rethymno, resulting in the destruction of century old vineyards (see photo). Sadly, this is a phenomenon likely to be repeated in the decades ahead.

## The Indigenous Grapes of Crete

Crete grows both international and indigenous (both to Greece and Crete) varieties of wine grapes, including 30+ varieties native to Crete. Total plantings were 7,578 ha as of 2021. However, since there hasn't been a recent vineyard census, one can only make educated guesses as to plantings by variety<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the indigenous Greek varieties discussed here, Crete grows several international varieties, especially Syrah, Grenache, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc.

In March 2022, the Greek Ministry of Agriculture published a list of the officially registered grape varieties and their clones. The number of indigenous varieties listed is 210 for all of Greece.

### Indigenous White Varieties



Crete is home to a large number of white varieties including little known, indigenous (to Crete) ones. The principal varieties used to make commercially available wines are discussed below.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the planting information estimated in the Terroir Report, *The Wines of Crete*, by Yiannis Karakasis MW.

However, in addition, one can find Fokiano in Chania; Valaitis and Dermatas in Rethymno; Dafnato, Melissaki, Plytó and Tachtas in Heraklion; and Athiri in Lasithi.

**Assyrtiko.** Renown for the intense, saline and high acid wines of Santorini, Assyrtiko is now widely planted in Greece, including in Crete, especially Sitia where it has been grown for several decades. There are about 60 ha of this variety planted all around Crete, where the wines are more aromatic and fruitier than the intense minerality of Santorini's Assyrtiko. Assyrtiko develops more depth with time in bottle, especially if oak aged; it's often blended with Thraspathiri to boost acidity.

**Dafní.** An aromatic grape variety rescued from near oblivion by Lyrarakis in the 1990s. The name translates to "laurel" which reflects the distinctively herbal character of the wine. It often shows notes of bay laurel, rosemary, thyme and oregano, sometimes complemented by lemon citrus. Typically unoaked, it produces a light bodied, aromatic, crisp wine. A copper vessel of the last Minoan period has the name Dafnitis Oinos, so this variety may have been used to make wine thousands of years ago. Crete has only 8-10 ha of this variety, mostly in Heraklion. While not widely grown, this variety has excellent potential.

**Malvasia di Candia.** This low yielding grape and its sister Malvasia di Candia Aromatica produce aromatic white wines more closely related to Muscat than Malvasia. Perfumed with aromas of peach, pear and jasmine and softly textured, it makes both dry fermented and sweeter wines from sun dried grapes<sup>2</sup>. [Candia was the Latin name for Heraklion]

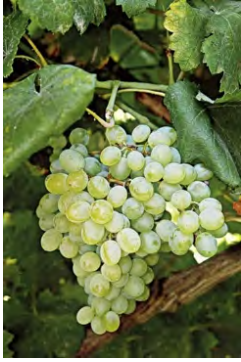
**Muscat of Spina.** This clone of Muscat Blanc a Petits Grains takes its name from the village of Spina in Chania. The wines tend to be very aromatic showing gardenia, jasmine, chamomile and stone fruit on the bouquet. Of moderate vigor and high acidity with small berries and thin golden skins, the vine grows throughout Crete. The grapes make excellent dry wines. About 150 ha, many 100+ years old, are planted on Crete, mostly the Chania region at 500-900m elevation<sup>3</sup>.

**Plytó.** A perfumed variety with an herbal, grassy and juicy citrus character. A productive variety with large bunches of medium sized berries that ripen in early September, it's drought resistant and retains its acidity, making it a good candidate for a warming climate. Single varietal wines are light bodied, so it's often blended with Vidiano. It's another variety discovered and recovered by the Lyrarakis family and planted in their Psarades vineyard at 480m in the early 1990s. Usually made in an unoaked style.

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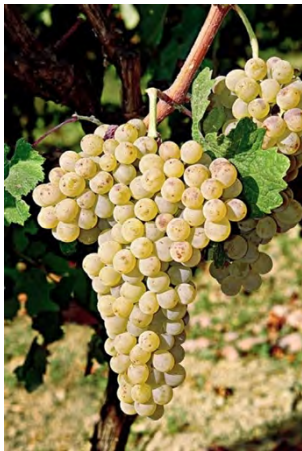
<sup>2</sup> See Konstantinos Lazarakis' YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DIGWmc8Yfc>

<sup>3</sup> See Gregory Michailos' YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDZBRd8x1N8>



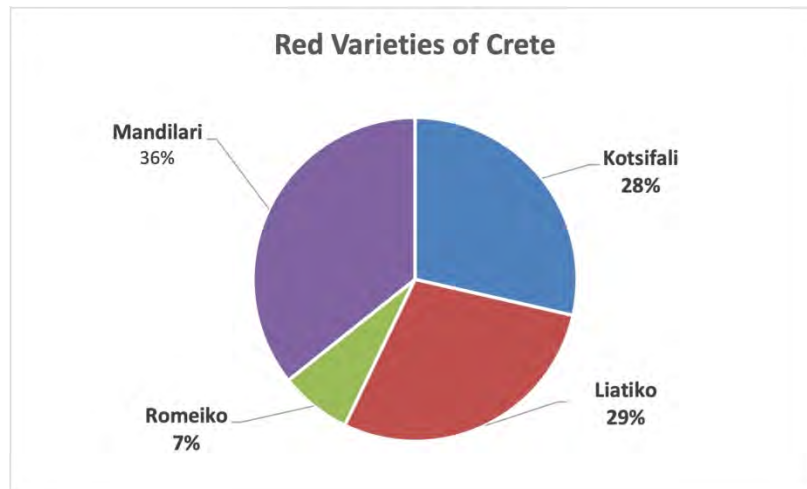
**Thrapsathiri.** Often compared to Albariño, this variety has a delicate floral, tropical citrus, and melon and peach character, producing full, fruity wines with moderate acidity. A high vigor variety, yields are constrained when grown in calcareous soils. It's mainly used in blends, although there are a few single-variety bottlings (e.g., Lyrarakis). It's drought resistant, late ripening and responds well to oak aging. Mainly grown in Heraklion and Sitia. A very promising variety.

**Vidiano.** Historically grown in Rethymno in small, self-rooted, head trained plantings totaling about 70 ha in the 1970s, Vidiano has quickly gained a reputation as perhaps Crete's best white variety. It combines stone fruit and herbal fragrances, sometimes with tropical notes in a well-balanced wine. It has a nicely textured full mouthfeel and supporting acidity that lends freshness and a sense of minerality to the wine; the acidity is present even in fully ripe fruit. It does best in limestone-rocky soils at 300-550m. The oldest vines (80+ years) are found in Rethymno. Vidiano is often produced unoaked, but when barrel fermented it gains an appealing creaminess, although excessive oaking strips the wine of its aromatics. It is also blended with other varieties like Vilana. Drought resistant, but the best wines come from cooler, high altitude vineyards. It ripens mid-August to early September. Mainly grown in the districts of Heraklion, plantings have grown to about 200 ha on the island. Nikos Douloufakis' acacia and oak-aged Vidiano was the catalyst for much wider planting of this variety in Crete and beyond. Vidiano also makes a good, skin fermented wine.



**Vilana.** The most important white variety of Crete with some 300 ha of plantings grown throughout the island, Vilana is fresh and aromatic, but it produces bland, generic white wines when cropped at high levels. It does best when grown on high altitude slopes up to 600m; aging in larger oak formats contributes to a fuller palate. Usually made in an unoaked style, showing light citrus and stone fruit aromas and flavors. Older vines are head-trained. Often made as a single varietal in the Peza region of Heraklion. Vilana is the core of three of Crete's PDOs: Peza (100% Vilana), Sitia (blended with 30% Thrapsathiri), and Chandakas-Candia (minimum 85% Vilana).

## Indigenous Red Varieties



In addition to the grapes described below, several other indigenous Greek red varieties are grown. These include Tsardana, which is related to Romeiko and mostly grown in Chania, and Voidomatis grown in Lasithi.



**Kotsifali.** A pale red, thin-skinned, softly textured variety mostly grown mainly in Heraklion with about 400 ha. A high yielding vine with tight bunches (see photo), low in tannins, medium in acidity, and fairly high in alcohol, it's typically blended with other varieties, especially Syrah and Mandilari, which contribute color and tannins. Very aromatic with red berry, cherry, plum and herbal aromas, it does best at low altitudes and light soils. It does especially well in the Archanes and Peza PDOs where it's blended with Mandilari. Also, it's often used to make rosé wine like Douloufakis' Enotria, a 60/40 blend of Kotsifali and Syrah.

**Liatiko.** A vigorous, early ripening variety, this thick, dark-skinned grape is among the most widely planted (400 ha) red varieties in Crete where it has a long history dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. A grape of significant clonal diversity, it typically shows strawberry, dried cherry, spice and herbal notes, moderate acidity, soft tannins and makes pale-colored red wines (reminiscent of Mt. Etna's Nerello Mascalese or Cinsault) and a particularly successful rosé. Very successful when vinified dry, it was historically blended with Kotsifali to produce Malvasia, a sweet red wine that was widely exported by the Venetians during the Middle Ages. It also blends well with Mandilari. Lyrarakis has been experimenting with Liatiko in diverse sites, from old vines in Sitia to high altitude vineyards near Rethymno. There's high clonal diversity in Liatiko with more than ten biotypes identified. Only a handful of Crete's producers make Liatiko-based wines including Lyrarakis, Diamantakis, Douloufakis and Economou. Perhaps Crete's most promising red variety.

**Mandilari(a).** Indigenous to Crete and known as the Xinomavro of the Aegean due to its deep, dark color, vibrant bouquet, high acidity and chewy tannins due to very thick skins. Mandilari's fruity aromas tend to cherries, figs and plums. An easy growing, productive and very late ripening vine, Mandilari is the most planted variety of Crete with about 500 ha. It grows well in hot, dry conditions and is also grown on Santorini where it is traditionally used for the red Vinsanto blend. It's often blended with softer varieties like Liatiko and Kotsifali and, increasingly, Syrah. Mandilari is very sensitive to yields with excessively high yields making thin, low alcohol, astringent wines. Rarely made as a monovarietal, it's traditionally blended with Kotsifali. Ripens in September. Mostly made in a dry style, it also makes a sun dried sweet red wine.

**Romeiko.** A traditional, drought resistant Cretan variety grown in the Chania area with large clonal diversity. Only about 100 ha exist today. It's late ripening and prefers calcareous clay soils. A pink skinned variety, when fermented dry and off the skins, it makes intensely aromatic, delicately textured white wines of lemon, pear and peach. The Dourakis Apus Romeiko is a good example. Romeiko is mostly associated with the traditional wines of Marouvas, a rustic oloroso sherry-like wine aged solera style for several years in oak barrels.



## Winemakers of Crete

A mere half century ago the number of quality-oriented winemakers on Crete was very small; most grapes were grown to make raisins or to sell to the cooperatives or the few large commercial wineries, and most winemaking was done in the home. There were, of course, a few pioneering wineries. As noted earlier, these include Daskalaki, Douloufakis, Louloudis, Lyrarakis, and Milliarakis.

Today the situation is far different. Young winemakers, both women and men, are professionally trained, many traveling to other European countries for education, internships and work experience. Some of them have already assumed lead winemaking and management positions in the wineries established by their parents. We describe below several of the winemakers who came to our attention during our recent trip to Crete.



**Lazaros Alexakis** (shown here) and his brother Apostolos manage Crete's largest winery. Lazaros received his enology training at the University of Florence, while Apostolos received his at Cal State Fresno. They have put increasing emphasis on their premium bottled wine over the past decade.

**Myriam Ambouzer** has been winemaker at Lyrarakis Winery since 2002. During the following two decades, Lyrarakis has gained an international reputation for its wines. Of Palestinian and Cretan descent, Myriam worked with Spain's Pepe Mendozain in Alicante before beginning at Lyrarakis.



**Eirini Daskalaki** of Silva Daskalaki is the enologist and viticulturist at the Silva Daskalaki Winery. She studied enology at the University of West Attica and earned a MSc in viticulture from the Agricultural University of Athens and has introduced biodynamic principles in her vineyards. Her sweet Liatiko made from sun dried grapes and matured in oak for 10 years is the best we've tasted.

**Nikos Douloufakis** is one of Crete's best known winemakers today. Nikos studied enology at the School of Enology in Alba in the Piedmont, finishing in 1992, and in 1996 he released his first bottled wine at the family winery. He is especially recognized for raising the quality and visibility of Vidiano with his oak and acacia fermented Aspros Lagos Vidiano. He has also helped raise the bar on Liatiko.





**Antonis Dourakis** is the second generation to manage this family wine estate. He studied viticulture and enology at RheinMain University in Wiesbaden, Germany. His recent focus has been on the traditional *marouvas* made with the Romeiko grape.

**Yiannis Economou** is one of Greece's preeminent winemakers. Yiannis studied enology at Alba and then did cellar work in Germany, the Piedmont and Chateau Margeaux in Bordeaux before returning to Crete to take over his family's winery. His wines are unique and sought after by connoisseurs.



**Stelios Klados**, studied at the University of Crete and then received his masters degree in enology from the University of Piacenza, Italy, and made wine in the Piedmont. Just 29 years of age, he has taken over the winemaking responsibilities at the Klados Winery in Rethymno.

**Iliana Malihin** did a postgraduate degree in enology in Athens and worked in Greek wineries before starting her own label before turning 30. She works with growers in the village of Melabes in Rethymno to source grapes from very old vines (90-140+ years) grown at high altitudes.



**Emmanouela Paterianakis** is the enologist at Domaine Paterianakis in Peza and her sister Niki is director of marketing and sales. After adopting biodynamic practices in the vineyard, in 2018 the winery began producing a range of natural wines without the addition of sulphites. Emmanouela studied enology at the University of Athens and joined the family winery in 2001.

**Maria Titaki** is lead winemaker at Titakis in Kounavi and also serves on the board of Wines of Crete. Titakis is one of Crete's largest wineries. She studied viticulture and enology at the University of West Attica.



## Wine Tourism

Crete is wildly popular as a tourist destination, and vineyards and wineries are spread out around the island, perfect grounds for successful wine tourism. And, as the experience of Provence and rosé wine has shown, familiarizing tourists with local wines can kick start exports. Wines of Crete, the best organized regional wine association in Greece, has played an important role in developing and promoting driving and walking wine tours as well as

organizing the participation of wineries in national and international trade shows like the London Wine Fair, the Athens Oinorama Fair, Prowein in Frankfurt, Wine Paris as well as the association's own wine fair OiNotika in Heraklion, Chania, Athens and Cyprus<sup>4</sup>. It also facilitates participation by Cretan wineries in the Thessaloniki International Wine and Spirits Competition and the Decanter World Wine Awards and organizes tours for professional organizations like the Masters of Wine and serious wine writers.

## Wine Routes

Wines of Crete has developed ten wine routes that wine tourists can follow to visit wineries and taste wines as well as appreciate the natural beauty and historical buildings and ancient ruins of the island. These routes cover all the wine regions with different themes like organic wineries, mountain wineries, ancient growing areas and ruins, etc. Wine tourism is well developed on Crete, and many wineries have modern tasting rooms and restaurants of different levels of sophistication. In addition, many growing regions sponsor annual wine festivals.

### Chania



Chania more than compensates for the relatively small number of wineries to visit with beautiful scenery. A Wines of Crete tour in this region that begins in the town of Chania (see photo of harbor) includes several wineries that offer tastings, including one of our favorites, Manousakis (Nostos). One of Crete's best village wine festivals is held in the picturesque town of Vouves, usually in mid-August.

### Rethymno

Like Crete's other prefectures, Rethymno offers the tourist everything from beautiful beach towns to the island's highest mountains. Several wineries offer tastings and cellar tours, including Dourakis (shown here), Klados, and Kourkoulou. Adventurous souls can drive inland on a winding mountainous road to the small village of Melambe and visit the exciting, new winery of Iliana Malihin. Wine visitors interested in Cretan music might want to visit the mountain village of Anogia for its annual culture and music festival Yakinthia in late July or early August.



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<sup>4</sup> Wines of Crete ([www.winesofcret.gr](http://www.winesofcret.gr)) was founded as a collaboration between the Heraklion Winemakers Network (founded in 2006), the Chania-Rethymnon Winemakers Network (founded in 2008) and the Prefecture of Lasithi. It includes as members 36 private and cooperative wineries accounting for 90 percent of the bottled production of Crete. Dr. Elli Gika is Director of Wines of Crete, and Nicos Miliarakis of the Minos-Miliarakis Winery is the current President.

## Heraklion



The Heraklion region is the center of Cretan wine with many wineries, vineyards, beautiful rural villages, winding mountain roads, and ancient ruins like Knossos. The Wines of Crete offers several wine routes in Heraklion focusing on different themes—rural villages, mountain vineyards, organic producers, and routes that include visits to old monasteries and Minoan temples (see photo of Knossos palace). One

village and growing region that should not be missed is Dafnes, which is home to many of Crete's best wineries including Douloufakis, Louloudis, and Silva Daskalaki. And in Peza one shouldn't miss the Lyrarakis winery, which offers a unique set of wines, the very modern Digenakis winery, and Domaine Paterianakis. And if one wants a particularly friendly wine tasting experience at a family winery, we suggest Domaine Gavalas in the village of Vorias. And don't miss the Dafnes wine festival, begun in 1976, which takes place the first half of July each year.

## Lasithi

Eastern Crete is one of most beautiful and touristic parts of Crete. The only very accessible winery is that of the Toplou Holy Monastery in Sitia, which dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. One of Crete's very best wineries, Domaine Economou, is also in this region; it requires an appointment for wine tasting. In addition to the monastery and wineries, this region has many attractive beach towns. While at the monastery, be sure to see the famous icon paintings by the artist Ioannis Kornaros, including Mega sei Kryrie (see photo).



## The Wineries and Wines of Crete

There are over 90 wineries in Crete, and an increasing number are exporting their wines to international markets, especially in Europe. The producers included in this report are principally those we met with and tasted during our April 2022 trip to Crete. When US importers are known, they are listed at the end of each winery profile. Suggested retail prices are also given when known. As usual, we also note the appellation of origin (PDO or PGI) of the grapes used for each wine. However, most wines are simply designated PGI Crete. The International Wine Review uses a 100 point scale in its evaluations.

### Recent Vintages in Crete<sup>5</sup>

The wines tasted and reviewed here mostly come from the 2016-2021 vintages. Both precipitation and temperatures can vary from year to year with 2021 showing especially sharp temperature fluctuations. The 2016 and 2019 vintages were particularly outstanding, according to Yiannis Karakasis.

Vintage	Description
2022	A good year in terms of weather with moderate temperatures and rainfall. However, heavy rain during the last 10 days of August affected late ripening varieties, and an infestation of the European grapevine moth ( <i>lobesia botrana</i> ) reduced yields.
2021	A difficult year weatherwise with yields about 20% lower than 2020. An early May heat spike was followed by some heavy summer rain and high temperatures. Skilled growers provided surprisingly high-quality fruit.
2020	A cold winter was followed by heavy rains and excellent weather during harvest. Above average yields and good acidity.
2019	A cold, wet winter was followed by a cool spring and normal summer. Very high-quality grapes, especially the reds. Karakasis calls it one of the best vintages of the decade.
2018	A relatively dry year with early harvests and 25% lower production than 2017.
2017	A wet winter and spring with late budburst and mild summer temperatures. Long slow ripening resulted in very good quality grapes, especially for the reds.
2016	Low rainfall in the winter and in general a hot, dry summer with optimal weather during harvest. Reduced yields, but Karakasis calls it one of the best vintages in past 20 years.

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<sup>5</sup> For the years 2016-2020 this table draws heavily on the vintage assessments of Yiannis Karakasis MW.



**Agelakis Winery.** Located in the village of Thrapsano Pediados, a village identified with the art of pottery since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Agelakis is a family owned and managed winery with 15 ha of vines planted in 1997 and 2012 at about 350-400m altitude. The winery was established in 2016. Evangelina Agelakis (shown here) sources clay from Thrapsano for the amphora the winery uses for making some of the wine. In addition to the two wines reviewed here, Agelakis makes an intriguing orange wine of Vidiano aged in amphora for 12 months.

**Agelakis 2017 Cornelia PGI Crete 92** Opaque red. An outstanding, Merlot-based red blend, Cornelia offers a vibrant nose of dark red fruit with hints of chocolate and toasted oak. It's soft, silky and full with a lovely mouth feel and packed with flavor. The finish is persistent with soft round tannins. 50% Merlot, 30% Syrah and 20% Liatiko fermented in stainless steel and matured 6 months in new French oak. **Agelakis 2019 Takimi Kotsifali PGI Crete 90+** 2019 is the first vintage of this Kotsifali based blend fermented and aged in amphora. Medium ruby purple hue showing dried red plum with savory accents on the nose. A mouth filling wine revealing flavors of dark red fruit with spice and earth notes. Long savory and fruity finish with firm round tannins. A blend of 70% Kotsifali and 30% Merlot aged 12 months in amphora.



**Alexakis (Dafnes)** Founded by Stelios Alexakis, this family owned and run winery is the largest on Crete. The estate owns 12 ha of vines but purchases 80% of its grapes from independent growers. His sons, Lazaros and Apostolos, are the enologists with degrees from the University of Florence and Cal State Fresno, respectively. Lazaros is in charge of viticulture, and they both make the wine. Primarily a bulk wine producer, the Alexakis brothers have put increasing emphasis on premium bottled wine over the past decade. The wines are exported to the US under the Alexakis brand, the winery's premium label. Annual production, both bottled

and in bulk, is about 14 million liters, making this Crete's largest winery. One of the few Cretan producers imported to the US, the wines offer good quality at reasonable prices. Importer: Diamond Importers, Skurnik

**Alexakis 2021 Assyrtiko PGI Crete (\$22) 91** Made from only free run juice, the pale colored Assyrtiko reveals light fruity aromas of mineral-inflected citrus. It's crisp and mineral-like on the palate with notes of perfumed fruit. Lazaros says this wine, crafted in stainless steel, develops a more honeyed character with age. A well made wine. pH 3.1 They produce 30 thousand bottles. **Alexakis 2016 Kotsifali Syrah PGI Crete (\$24) 90+** This 60/40 blend of Kotsifali and

Syrah offers aromas of dark red fruit with savory, earthy notes. It's a well-made wine, spending 12-16 months in all new oak, French oak barrels for the Kotsifali and American oak for the Syrah, after which the wine remains in bottle for one year prior to release. The oak is well integrated in the wine contributing to the suave, round mouth feel and firm tannins. 10 thousand bottles made. **Alexakis 2020 Vidiano Orange PGI Crete 90** Medium yellow gold. This is a consumer-friendly orange wine, pleasant to drink with good acidity despite 3 months on the skins. It reveals a savory nose of dried orange peel, which continues on the palate along with dried lemon and earth notes. Fermented in stainless steel. 12.5% alc.



**Amargiotakis Winery (Dafnes)** Established in 1965 by grandfather Amargiotakis, today Manolis Amargiotakis is the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation owner and winemaker. He undertook a major renovation and relocation of the winery in 2017 and released the new line of wines in 2019. The winery has 32 ha of estate vineyards and produces mostly single varietal wines from indigenous varieties. Harkoutsis Giannis is the enologist.

**Amargiotakis 2021 Kapetanissa PGI Crete 88** Blush pink. This off dry (16 g/L RS) rosé is made from Moschato of Spina and Liatiko grapes. The nose is perfumed and floral, while the palate is slightly sweet and easy drinking. Made for the younger generation. pH 3.31, 12.5% alc. **Amargiotakis 2020 Krotos Liatiko PGI Crete 89** Light brick tinged red hue. Shows a bouquet of strawberry, cherry, and toasted oak aromas. Soft on the attack and light on the palate, it offers nice ripe red fruit flavors with savory and oak notes, finishing with dry tannins. See 12 months in oak barriques. **Amargiotakis 2020 Thrapathiri PGI Crete 89** Pale straw. Shows a floral, herbal nose followed by a medium weight, balanced palate of citrus, apple and herbs. There's good acidity and freshness. pH 3.34, 13% alc. Will get still better with a bit of aging. Selected as one of the 50 Great Greek Wines.



**Boutari-Domaine Fantaxometocho** Located in the village of Skalani in the Archanes PDO, this modern (built in 2004) Heraklion winery is one of Boutari's six wineries in Greece. Its 7 ha vineyard located at 170-215m elevation was first planted in 1992 and included a research program focused on the indigenous varieties of Crete. In 2015, the vineyards were replanted, mostly with Cretan varieties. Boutari's wines made in Crete are sold under the Kretikos and

Scalarea brand names. US Importer: Dionysos Imports

**Boutari 2020 Kretikos White Crete (\$17) 89** Made from Crete's Vilana grape, the Kretikos offers a dusty, herbal nose. It's bright and fresh on a well-balanced palate with honeyed citrus and orchard fruit flavors and a clean, crisp finish. 11.5% alc. **Boutari Scalarea 2018 Kotsifali Syrah PGI Crete 91** The Scalarea Red is a 50/50 blend of Kotsifali and Syrah. Dark ruby in color,

it's very fragrant, offering peppery red plum and dark red berries. Full and full flavored on the palate with dark loam notes, it has a layered character and firm acidity. Finishes with accessible tannins. The two varieties are harvested and fermented separately and later blended. 13.5% alc. **Scalarea 2021 Phantom's Estate (Fantaxometochos) PGI Crete 90** The Phantom's Estate White is a blend of Assyrtiko and Chardonnay. Pale straw in color, it offers Chardonnay like flavors of melon and orchard fruit. The high acidity of Assyrtiko contributes a mineral like mouth feel and chalky finish. 13% alc. **Scalarea 2021 Vidiano Athiri PGI Heraklion 91** The Scalarea White is an elegant blend of Vidiano and Athiri. Light straw in color, it offers floral and honeyed scents along with notes of sun dried grapes. It's soft and silky on the attack with a juicy palate that's pure and fresh. Remarkable balance. Given extended skin contact (24-30 hours) and battonage after fermentation. 12.5% alc. At less than 15 Euros, it's an outstanding value.



**DAF Wines** Located in the Dafnes region of Crete, the Douloufakis family has been cultivating grapes for wine for 117 years. These wines were made by Douloufaki Fereniki (shown here) whose grandfather Evangelos Douloufaki produced bulk wine; he received distinction for his entry at the International Fair of Thessaloniki in 1952. The DAF winery was established in 2017, and the grapes are sourced from steeply sloped vineyards of limestone soils at 380m elevation.

**DAF Wines 2021 Mareta Vidiano Vilana PGI Crete 88** A suave, perfumed wine revealing scents of orchard fruit complemented by melon and white peach flavors on the palate. With medium acidity, it's an easy drinking white. 13% alc [€6] 13% alc. **DAF Wines 2021 White Earth White PGI Crete 89** A 50/50 blend of Muscat of Spina, a thin skinned clone of Muscat Blanc, and Vidiano. The wine is highly perfumed of flowers and stone fruit. It's mouth filling with good acidity and tropical and citrus notes. 13.5% alc. 89/90 [€11] **DAF Wines 2021 White Earth Rosé PGI Crete 89** Light copper salmon in color, this is a very dry, nicely balanced rosé that would pair well with a variety of vegetable and fish dishes. The palate has good weight and a chalky texture with blood orange and red berry nuances. An 80/20 blend of Muscat of Spina and Liatiko made saignée style. 13.5% alc. [€11] **DAF Wines 2019 White Earth Red PGI Crete 88** Light red in color, this 100% Liatiko is a delicate wine showing light floral and red berry aromas and flavors. It's an easy drinking wine that should be served with some chilling. [€12]



**Diamantakis Winery** Founded in 2007 by the Diamantakis family, this winery is located southwest of Heraklion near the village of Kato Assites and the historic Monastery of St. George Gorgolaini. It's at 450m elevation in the eastern foothills of Psiloritis with a 15 ha estate vineyard of Cretan and international varieties spread across 30 different parcels at 400-700m altitude. The three Diamantakis brothers manage the vineyard and winery, with Zacharias Diamantakis (shown here), a graduate of the Athens wine program, taking the lead on winemaking. Most of the production is sold in Crete with about 15-20% exported, principally to the UK. Prinos is the entry level line, while Diamantopetra is the quality leader brand. US Importer: YiaYia Imports

**Diamantakis 2021 Prinos White PGI Crete 89** Transparent, light straw hue. The entry level Primos White offers excellent value. A blend of 50% Malvasia di Candia Aromatica and 50% Chardonnay made in all stainless steel, it has a fruity, floral perfume. It's clean on the attack showing hints of jasmine and white citrus. Very drinkable! **Diamantakis 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 90** Pale straw color. Subtly aromatic of melon, pear and stone fruit, all mirrored on a bright, clean palate. Firm acidity with a long, chalky finish. Sourced from 3 distinct parcels with a northeast exposure in the Vorina Vineyard at 350-550m elevation and crafted in stainless steel with 3 months battonage. pH 3.29, RS 1.8 g/L, 13.3% alc. **Diamantakis 2021 Diamantopetra White PGI Crete 91** Pale straw. A bouquet that evokes wet stones and white flowers. Very clean, mineral-inflected, silky textured palate with subtle fruit notes. The winery's best seller and selected as one of the best white wines of 2020 by Decanter. A 50/50 blend of Vidiano and Assyrtiko oak fermented and aged for about 3 months in 20% new, 500L French oak. The fermentation is started in stainless steel and racked to oak before completion. **Diamantakis 2021 Prinos Rosé PGI Crete 90** Medium copper orange. This Syrah-Mandilaria blend reveals a nose of ripe strawberry with a blood orange accent. It's a fruity rosé with bright acidity, flavors of red berries and orange citrus, and bright acidity. 2 g/L RS. A blend of 70% Syrah and 30% Mandilaria made saignée style and fermented in stainless steel after about 3 hours on the skins.



**Digenakis Winery (Peza).** Established in 2017 in Kalloni, 20 km south of Heraklion, this is a new, very stylish winery located in the middle of PDO Peza, just 10 km from the Knossos Palace. About 40% of the grapes are sourced from estate vineyards and 60% from independent growers. The winemaker is Lefteris Digenakis. In addition to the wines reviewed here, Digenakis makes a

Vidiano (Vios Protos) with long skin contact and the single vineyard Livades Kotsifali. US Importer: Sierra Nevada Imports

**Digenakis 2021 Aeriko Sauvignon Blanc Dafni PGI Crete 89** This wine is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc (60%) and the rare, herbaceous Dafni (40%) grape variety. It offers an aromatic nose of herbs, citrus and flowers and is bright on the palate with herbal/earthy notes and a very dry finish. A gastronomic wine that requires the right food pairing to show well. pH 3.2, 13% alc.

**Digenakis 2021 Marisini Spinas Muscat PGI Crete 91**

The Marisini Spinas Muscat begins with pleasant floral aromas with hints of herbs and rose water. It's crisp on entry and squeaky clean, bright and fresh on the palate. Finishes with an emphatic sense of minerals. Very nicely made! pH 3.1, 12.5% alc.

**Digenakis 2019 Marisini**

**Syrah Mandilaria PGI Crete 90** Medium ruby red. This blend of 70% Syrah and 30% Mandilaria is fermented separately, then blended, and then matured 70% in used barrels for 8 months and 30% in stainless steel and, finally, blended again for bottling. It offers a vibrant nose of red plum, dark red cherry and hints of toasted oak. The palate is silky textured with nicely integrated oak and firm tannins on the finish. On tasting, it seemed reductive, although this may dissipate with time. pH 3.5



**Douloufakis Winery** Located in the village of Dafnes just south of Heraklion and east of the Psiloritis mountain range with vineyards at 350-400m, this is one of Crete's best producers. Nikos Douloufakis, the pioneer of Vidiano, now regarded as the best white variety of Crete, produces wines from about 30 ha of both indigenous and international varieties. His family has had vineyards since the 15th century. Nikos studied enology at the School of Enology in Alba in the Piedmont, finishing in 1992, and in 1996 he released his first bottled wine. One of his best-known vineyards is Aspros Lagos, the source of his White Aspros Lagos made from Vidiano fermented and aged in 15% new French oak and acacia. We tasted several of Nikos' wines (reviewed below) at his winery in Dafnes. The wines made from Crete's

indigenous grape varieties are outstanding and extremely good values. Annual production, about 25 thousand cases. Some of them are available now in the US market. US Importer: Skurnik

**Douloufakis NV Sparkling Brut Vidiano PGI Crete 91** Light yellow-green color. The sparkling wine made methode champenoise offers hints of dried lemon and brioche with leesy notes on the nose. It's creamy, full and savory in the mouth with tangy acidity and flavors of lemon curd and toast. From the 2018 vintage and disgorged July 2021 with 2+ years on the lees in bottle. Sourced from a high altitude (600m) vineyard where Vidiano has difficulty consistently reaching full ripeness. RS 4 g/L, pH 3.32, 12.4% alc.

**Douloufakis 2021 Alargo Assyrtiko PGI Crete (\$35) 91/2** Medium yellow straw. Yellow citrus with other savory and mineral notes on the nose. Mineral-like palate showing lemon peel, dried citrus and stone fruit. Perfectly balanced with nice firmness on the palate and good concentration of flavor. A serious expression of Assyrtiko more similar to Santorini than most mainland Assyrtiko. pH 2.97, 14.4% alc.

**Douloufakis 2021 Aspros Lagos PGI Crete (\$36) 92** Medium yellow straw. Complex bouquet of beeswax, melon and stone fruit. Creamy texture with well integrated wood and firmly structured. A serious wine

with good freshness and a long flavorful finish. 100% Vidiano sourced from vineyards with calcareous soils. Fermented and aged 5 months in 60% French and 40% acacia barrels, about 15% new. pH 3.30, 14.2% alc. **Douloufakis 2021 Enotria White PGI Crete 89** Pale straw green in color, the Enotria White is an exceptionally nice entry level white blend. It's bright and fragrant showing orchard fruit and ripe melon, and in the mouth it offers good balance and a nice acid backbone on a medium weight palate. A blend of 70% Vilana, 20% Sauvignon Blanc, and 10% Muscat of Spina that spend 4 months on the lees with battonage. pH 3.49, 13.4% alc. **Douloufakis 2021 Femina PGI Crete (\$18) 90** Pale yellow. Made of 100% unoaked Malvasia di Candia Aromatica, the Femina is a very aromatic wine showing jasmine, rose petals and citrus aromas. The palate is dry and crisp and similarly perfumed in character, like drinking a floral bouquet. RS 1.9 g/L, pH 3.49, 13.4% alc. **Douloufakis 2021 Dafnios White PGI Crete 90** 100% Vidiano, like the Aspros Lagos, but this version sees no wood. Medium yellow-green straw. Notes of herbs with hints of orchard fruit on the nose. On the palate, it shows vibrant acidity and good flavor depth. Very dry but well balanced with a bright finish. Sourced from the Dafnes area at 350m altitude and aged 4 months on the lees with battonage. pH 3.38, 13.5% alc. The 2018 vintage tasted at the same time showed how the wine develops additional depth and complexity with 2-3 years aging. **Douloufakis 2021 Enotria Rosé PGI Crete 89** Medium to light red color. Very floral on the nose with effusive notes of red cherry and strawberry. Shows a hint of sweetness on the palate. **Douloufakis 2019 Dafnios Red Liatiko PGI Crete 89** The Liatiko opens with effusive aromas of berry and plum that are mirrored on the medium plus weight palate with additional savory notes. A flavorful wine that's somewhat rustic in character but should be a good partner for country cuisine. A very early ripening variety, the Liatiko grapes were sourced from Dafne vineyards at 220-200m elevation and harvested Aug 25-Sept 5. 2 days cold maceration followed by fermentation at low temperatures in stainless steel. Matured 12 months in 60% new and 40% used French oak casks of 13 and 30 hl. pH 3.42, 13.6% alc. **Douloufakis 2008 Helios Sweet Red Liatiko PGI Crete 91** This is a sweet (RS 125 g/L) red wine made of Liatiko grapes sun dried for 7 days before pressing and aged 10 years in barrique. Mahogany in color, it offers a brightly aromatic nose that's sherry-like with tangy orange and caramel notes. It has a creamy mouthfeel and flavors that evoke toasted nuts, raisins and toffee. Enjoy on cool evenings with strong cheeses. pH 3.14, 14.4% alc.



production is about 20 thousand cases.

**Dourakis** (Chania) This family owned winery was established by Andreas Dourakis in 1988 after returning to Alikambos from Thessaloniki. Today, the second generation of the family manages the estate, including enologist son Antonis who studied viticulture and enology at RheinMain University in Wiesbaden, Germany. The focus of the winery is increasingly on indigenous varieties grown organically in the Alikambos area. It's one of the few wineries to make wines from the Romeiko grape, including Romeiko Liasto from sun dried grapes and the experimental solera style Romeiko reviewed here. Annual

**Dourakis 2020 Lihnos Vidiano PGI Crete 90** Starbright medium yellow. Showing a layered bouquet of straw and stone fruit, this Vidiano is full in the mouth, densely textured with subtle flavors. Excellent balance and acidity. Fermented in a mix of French oak barrels (35%) and stainless steel (65%). pH 3.63, 13% alc. **Dourakis 2021 Apus Romeiko PGI Chania 90** Pale yellow hue. Showing notes of honeycomb and stone fruit on the nose, the Apus Romeiko is pure, clean and bright on the palate with refreshing flavors of lemon zest, lemon curd and yellow apple. Finishes dry and crisp. pH 3.42, 12.3% alc. **Dourakis 2019 Romeiko (unlabeled) PGI Crete (not rated)** Bright copper orange with a complex, layered nose of dried orange, apricot and cherry. There's excellent concentration on the palate and a lanolin like texture with notable essence of orange. Finishes dry with rich extract. An experimental wine made from a solera begun in 2015 and fermented 6 months on the skins and then matured another year in old barrel.



**Domaine Economou** (Sitia) Yiannis Economou is one of Greece's preeminent winemakers. He combines deep knowledge of winemaking with a unique sense of artistry and produces original, beautifully crafted and refined wines. His domaine is located on Sitia in eastern Crete where he sources grapes from very low yielding, organically cultivated, self-rooted, old indigenous vines as well as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon that he planted in 1998 in his vineyard on the Ziros Plateau.

Drawing on his work at Chateau Margaux in the 90s, he released his first Bordeaux blend in 2012. Yiannis studied enology at Alba and then did cellar work in Germany, the Piedmont and Bordeaux before returning to Crete to take over his family's winery. He makes small quantities of several wines, including several made from Liatiko, most of which are exported and highly sought after by connoisseurs. His winemaking uses large old oak barrels, gentle extraction, and extended aging before wines are released. Konstantinos Lazarakis calls Economou "...the Greek equivalent of Lopez de Heredia." We tasted three of Economou's wines for this report. US Importer: DNS Wines

**Economou 2014 Assyrtiko PGI Crete (\$44) 94/5** Medium gold orange color. Assyrtiko's primary fruit aromas have evolved into a multidimensional bouquet of orange rind, stone fruit and dried aromatic *herbes de Crète*. Silky on the attack and broad in the mouth with dense, savory flavors of toasted hazelnut, dessicated orange, tea and spice. Excellent acidity with a very long, crisp finish. Sourced from 45 year old, ungrafted vines from the village of Armeni and its limestone/sandy soil. 13.5% alc. **Economou 2004 Antigone PDO Sitia (\$130) 96/7** Light garnet red with amber/orange hues. Amazing, multifaceted bouquet of dried red cherry, fig, flowers, and Cretan wild herbs. A complex, savory wine of exceptional depth and refinement showing myriad flavor elements including dried cherry compote, herbs, and spice. A blend of the two top crus of Domaine Economou, Vassilikes and Pentalofos, both of which are near the village of Ziros itself. On average the vines of Liatiko are 90 years old with a touch of old vine Mandilari as well. A unique wine; compare with Nerello Mascalese from Mt Etna or old vine Cinsault from the Swartland of the Western Cape. 13.5% alc. **Economou 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon - Merlot**

**PGI Crete (\$54) 94/5** Carmen red to the rim. Impressive aromatic depth of cassis, plum, and exotic spice. Silky, multidimensional palate of dark red fruit complemented by savory notes of loamy earth and herbs. Superb, bright acidity and round tannins. Despite being a decade old, it has the character of a youthful wine; it has a long life ahead of it. A Bordelaise style wine with 9 years of aging on it. 13.5% alc.



**Efosini Winery** (Kerasia, Heraklion) This is a small family winery established in 1999 that sells most of its production on the island of Crete. It has 3 ha of organically certified estate fruit and contracts about another 3 ha of vines. Total production is under 5 thousand cases. Antonis Kosmadakis (shown here) established the winery and is the winemaker.

**Efosini 2021 Mikri Evgeniki Vidiano PGI Crete 90+** Medium yellow straw. Showing aromas of pear and melon with floral note, this is a lovely, light and fresh Vidiano. There's good concentration of fruit on an especially pure and clean palate along with bright acidity and a firm mouth feel. A very good wine. 13% alc. **Efosini 2019 Sophia Chardonnay Vidiano PGI Crete 90** Yellow gold color. This is a 50/50 cofermented blend of Chardonnay and Vidiano, half aged 6 months in new French barriques and half aged in stainless steel. Notes of toasted oak and golden fruit on the nose. Toasted, honeyed oak also shows on the palate along with ripe mango like fruit. Nice firm mouth feel. Well made for the style. 13.5% alc. **Efosini 2017 Philoxenia Syrah Kotsifali PGI Crete 89** Dark ruby purple color. A richly concentrated 70/30 blend of Syrah and Kotsifali made from the organically cultivated and certified estate vineyard and matured 24 months in used oak barrels. Aromas and flavors of ripe, rich dark plum, earthy loam, and leather complemented by toasty, spicy sweet oak. 14.5% alc.



**Domaine Gavalas** (Heraklion) Emmanuel Gavalas planted the first vineyards in 1906 in the village of Vorias. After several generations of growing grapes, the vineyards were converted to organic in 2001; at present there are 30 ha of vines with focus on Vidiano, Vilana, Kotsifali, and Mandilaria. A new winery was set up in 2004 by winemaker Nikos Gavalas (shown here with his wife). The enologist is Giannis Chalkoutsis. The wines we tasted at the winery are all consistently high quality. US importer: Athenee

**Domaine Gavalas 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 91** One of the better, partly oak fermented and aged (30%) Vidianos of Crete. Pale yellow straw color. Lively bouquet of lime and apple. Excellent concentration on a mouth filling palate with a suave mouth feel, tangy acidity on the edges, and good concentration of stone fruit with bright acidity on the finish. 13% alc. Sourced from Kampos in Monofatsi at 350m altitude. **Domaine Gavalas 2021 Vilana PGI Crete 91** One of the best Vilana based wines we tasted in Crete. Pale yellow green hue. Aromas of orchard fruit and melon. Crisp attack of herbal tinged orchard and citrus fruit with good concentration,

balance and freshness. From a 30 year old vineyard. 12.5% alc. **Domaine Gavalas 2021 Efivos (Teenager) PGI Crete 91** Light copper tinged pink color. This rosé offers earthy aromas with light notes of rose petal. On the fresh-tasting palate, there are subtle flavors of cherry skin and red berries with bright acidity and nice firmness from the Mandalari. An original and delicious Cretan rosé. 12% alc. **Domaine Gavalas 2019 Kotsifali PGI Crete 89** Light violet red hue. This is a youthful, fruity Kotsifali offering bright red cherry and red apple on the nose. There's good concentration of fruit with hints of savory herbs, round tannins, and a long fruity finish. Made in stainless steel. 13% alc. **Domaine Gavalas 2018 Mandilari PGI Crete 92** Dark ruby purple color. Fragrant bouquet of dark cherry and plum. Fresh on the attack with good concentration of red fruit and a silky mouth feel. The palate is perfectly balanced and elegant with surprising complexity for a wine seeing no oak. Needs a bit of time for tannin integration.



**Greek Wine Cellars** Vassilis Kourtakis founded his eponymous wine company in 1895, and it became famous for its retsina from Attica in and 1960s and 70s. Since then it has expanded beyond retsina into a large number of varieties, growing regions and brands. Today, Greek Wine Cellars is Greece's largest producer of bottled wines and is a major player in foreign markets. We tasted two inexpensive wines from Crete that offer good value for money. US Importer: Nestor Imports

**Greek Wine Cellars Kourtaki NV Vin de Crete Dry White PGI Crete 88** This is a pleasant and easy drinking white wine. It offers floral and honeyed aromas and flavors and is nicely balanced with good acidity and freshness. Made from the Vilana grape. **Greek Wine Cellars Kourtaki NV Vin de Crete Dry Red PGI Crete 88** A blend of Kotsifali and Mandilaria, this is a good dry red wine showing red berries. It's fresh tasting and would pair well with a wide variety of dishes.



**Haralabakis Winery** In 2014 Yannis Haralabakis converted his family's winemaking tradition into a commercial enterprise. Investing in vineyards and a new winery, the first wines were released in 2018. Today the family owns almost 80 ha of vineyards as well as a modern winery with the latest winemaking technology. The vineyards are in the heart of Crete at 400-430m altitude. The winemaker is Manolis Dramitinios; he previously made wine for two decades at Mihalikis.

**Haralabakis 2021 Assyrtiko PGI Crete 89** Sourced from a vineyard planted with cuttings from Santorini's Argios estate, this Assyrtiko is fermented in stainless steel and spends 3 months on the lees. It reveals scents of citrus and wet stones and is soft on entry and round in the mouth

with medium plus acidity and citrus like flavors. Finishes dry and clean.

**Haralabakis 2019 Evnia Vidiano PGI Crete 89** Sourced from a single vineyard called Milos, this partly oaked Vidiano reveals light hints of chamomile and toast on the nose. Although only 20% of the wine was matured (4 months) in new American oak and 80% in stainless steel, the oak is present both in aroma and flavor. It also gives the wine a firm structure and a lingering sweet note on the finish. **Haralabakis 2021 Keras Vidiano PGI Crete 91** Fermented and aged only in stainless steel (with 4 months battonage), the Keras Vidiano is quite a contrast (and improvement) over the Evnia Vidiano. Medium yellow straw in color, it reveals chamomile, yellow apple and a hint of beeswax on the nose. It's full and well balanced on the palate with good concentration of flavor. Well made. pH 3.3, 13.5% alc. **Haralabakis 2021 Praxis III Rosé PGI Crete 91** Medium copper salmon color. Made saignée style from free run juice, this 50/50 Kostifali-Mandilari blend reveals a complex, earth and red berry bouquet. It's dry on the attack with some grip on the palate, a suave mouth feel and a clean, bright finish. Kostifali contributes acidity and Mandalaria gives color to this attractive, gastronomic rosé. 12.5% alc.



**Idaia Winery** (Dafnes) Established in 1998 by enologists Vasilis Laderos and wife-enologist Volitaki Kalliopi, Idaia is located in Venerato about 18 km from Heraklion at 305m elevation with calcareous soils in the Dafnes PDO. It mainly produces wines from indigenous varieties for the domestic market. Idaia is the ancient name of Crete. Annual production about 10 thousand cases.

**Idaia 2021 Ocean Thrapshathiri PGI Crete 90** An unusual, single varietal Thrapshathiri from high altitude (450-600m) vineyards in Dafnes. Attractive, light floral and white citrus scents. Fruity on the attack with good fullness, bright acidity and medium concentration of white stone fruit and citrus. An interesting, easy drinking wine. 13% alc. **Idaia 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 90** 100% Vidiano grown at 300-500m altitude in Dafnes. Perfumed bouquet of flowers, melon and sweet pear. The floral-fruity character carries over to a nicely concentrated palate with medium acidity and a crisp finish. 12.5% alc. **Idaia 2021 Vilana PGI Crete 89** Pale straw color. Steely citrus, pear and melon aromas. Good concentration of fruit and minerals on the palate with an appealing savory note. Bright acidity. Finishes with chalky minerals and pear skin. 13% alc.



**Klados Winery** (Rethymno) Founded in 1997 by Manolis Klados who began bottling his own wine in 2002, a new winery was created in Panormo, 25 km east of the city of Rethymno, in 2008. The winery is surrounded by a new organically cultivated vineyard of Vidiano. Fruit is sourced from 8-9 ha of vines owned by 5 growers and very gently pressed. Winemaker Stelios Klados (shown here) received his masters in Piedmont and worked there for two different producers before returning to Crete. Annual production about 6 thousand cases.

**Klados 2021 The Great Hawk Varietal Wine 89** This 40/60 blend of Vidiano and Muscat of Spinas is very aromatic, showing a floral nose of rose petals with a light fresh note of oregano. It's feminine in character, soft and silky with a perfumed, Muscat-dominated palate. Vidiano contributes weight and body. 13.4% alc. **Klados 2021 White Diva Vidiano PGI Rethymno 90+** Pale straw color. Opening with scents of white peach, pear and citrus zest, this beautifully crafted Vidiano is bright on the attack and nicely concentrated on a round, delicate palate of peach, pear and lemon. Finishes clean and long. Aged 4 months on the fine lees. pH 3.35, 13.3% alc. **Klados 2021 Pink Black Bird Rosé PGI Crete 90** Blush pink. Made from direct pressed Kotsifali that spends almost no time on the skins. It's a fresh tasting rosé with significant purity and depth of flavor, but at the same time it's delicate. An excellent rosé from a difficult, warm vintage that produced many low acid wines.



**Kourkoulou** (Rethymnon) Located in Rethymnon, the family vineyard was started about 30 years ago by Stratis Kourkoulou, but the winery was only established in 2015 with the first bottling in 2017. The estate's 13 ha of vines are small and scattered around the area of Patsos and focused on 4 grape varieties: Vilana, Vidiano, Moschato Spinas, and Liatiko. Katerina Karampatea is the enologist. Annual production is about 1500 cases.

**Kourkoulou 2021 Pentozali Varietal Wine 90** The Vilana based white blend is clean, fresh and mineral-like in character. Fermented in stainless steel, the wine is pale colored and lightly scented with a floral note. The dry but balanced palate shows juicy citrus and green apple fruit and tangy acidity. Finishes clean with a mineral edge. A blend of 50% Vilana, 25% Vidiano, and 25% Moschato Spina fermented separately and later blended.

**Kourkoulou 2021 Vidiano PGI Rethymno 90+** This is one of the better Vidiano wines we tasted in Crete. It has good freshness and impressive intensity of light apricot and melon flavors. Well balanced with good acidity and a clean, bright finish. Sourced from a 360m altitude vineyard. **Kourkoulou 2021 Mikro-Mikraki Rosé PGI Rethymno 91** Light copper rose color.

Made of 100% Liatiko grown at 510m elevation, this rosé offers light red berries and hints of stone fruit on the nose and a squeaky clean, delicate and very fresh palate. Finishes crisply with bright acidity. Made half saignée, half direct press with less than an hour's skin contact.



**Louloudis Winery (Dafnes)** Dating to 1920 when Antoni Louloudis began cultivating varieties like Liatiko, Takta and Kotsifali, the winery was taken over by his grandson Antonis in 1999 who planted new indigenous and international varieties. In 2012 the winery introduced stainless steel tank fermentation and oak barrel aging, and in 2016 wines made under the Louloudis Winery label were introduced and marketed. Winemaker Antonis [shown here with Dimitra] is an alternative board member of Wines of Crete.

**Louloudis 2021 Megalos Vasilius Muscat of Spinas PGI Crete 90** Pale platinum hue. Showing a refined floral and rose water nose, this is a refined wine with juicy acidity. The palate also has a floral and tropical fruit character with light notes of cherimoya. Delicate and delicious. pH 3.1

**Louloudis 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 89** Light yellow straw color. Aromas of flowers, citrus and a touch of melon. Nicely concentrated and balanced with tangy acidity, this is a well-made Vidiano. Finishes with lingering notes of citrus. pH 3.2

**Louloudis 2021 Dithiramvos Liatiko Rosé PGI Crete 91** Very pale coppery pink. Made from the Liatiko grape, this rosé offers floral and light red fruit aromas. It's very fresh, delicate, and refined on the palate with light cherry notes and medium acidity. Made saignée style from free run juice. Delicious. **Louloudis 2019 Dreamer Kotsifali PGI Crete 91** Light ruby red. Beginning with a pure nose of red cherry and berry, this is a wine of some delicacy with a soft stack and pliant, silky mouth feel. Red fruit is complemented by earth and leather notes on the palate with firm acidity. Fermented in stainless steel with ambient yeast and matured 6 months in barrel. pH 3.4.



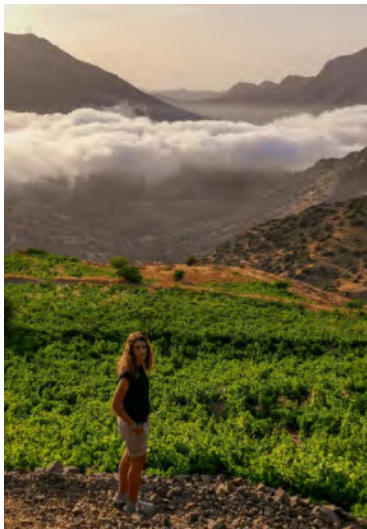
**Lyrarakis (Peza)** is a family winery on the Alagni plateau in Peza located south of Heraklion. It's known for rescuing indigenous varieties like Dafni, Plytó, and Melissaki. It also specializes in other Cretan grapes like Liatiko, Kotsifali and Mandilari. Brothers Sotiris and Manolis founded the vineyard in 1966. Beginning in 1992 their sons Bart and Giorgios began bottling wine under their own label. They source grapes from throughout the island to produce a range of "single area" wines made mostly from single varieties indigenous to Crete. The grapes from their own 15ha of vines are all farmed organically. Most of the parcels they work with are dry farmed and hand

harvested, and many are head pruned as well. Bart and Giorgios [shown here] manage the winery and make the wine with the assistance of enologist Myriam Ambouzer and viticulturist

Nikos Somarakis. Lyrarakis makes three categories of wines—entry level blends, varietal wines from multiple vineyards, and single vineyard, single variety wines. Most of the wines we tasted fall in the latter category. *Wine & Spirits* recently recognized Lyrarakis as one of the Top 100 Wineries of 2022. US Importers: Vintage 59, USA Wine WestGRE

**Lyrarakis 2021 Assyrtiko Vóila Village PGI Crete 92** Sourced from a windy, 700m high single vineyard with limestone soils planted with vines from Santorini in the early 1990s and located in the Vóila area in Sithia on the eastern end of Crete. This area was settled by Venetian occupiers in the 15th century and still has a ruined Venetian castle. The wine has a youthful but aromatic bouquet with notes of citrus, herbs and wet river stones. Bright and crisp with notable saline-like minerality and impressive phenolics on the palate. After a short cold soak on the skins, fermented and matured in stainless steel with 3 months on the lees with battonage. pH 3.2, 13.5% alc. **Lyrarakis 2021 Dafni Psarades Vineyard PGI Crete 92** The thick-skinned Dafni is another variety saved from extinction by Lyrarakis in 1992; today they are the only ones making a single varietal Dafni. Sourced from the Psarades Vineyard in the Alagni area of central Crete, dafni means "laurel" in Greek, and that's a good descriptor. The 2021 vintage Dafni reveals rosemary, fennel and other herbs along with wet stones on the nose. It's mineral like on the palate with muted herbal flavors along with pear and bright, juicy citrus-like acidity. Sourced from vineyards just 15km south of Knossos, the wine is a blend of both an early harvest, to ensure acidity, and a late September harvest for flavor. Given 8 hours skin contact before fermentation in stainless steel; the final blend is matured on the lees for 4-5 months. pH 3.16, 12.5% alc. Selected as one of the 50 Great Greek Wines in 2022. **Lyrarakis 2021 Plytó Psarades Vineyard PGI Crete 91** Discovered in a vineyard of Vilana in 1990, Lyrarakis saved the large-berried Plytó variety from extinction. The 2021 vintage reveals minerals and fennel on the nose. It's full in the mouth with exhilarating fresh citrus and quince fruit complemented by juicy acidity and a sense of minerality. Sourced from a 480m high vineyard located near the winery in Peza and harvested multiple times at different levels of ripeness. pH 3.39, 12.8% alc. **Lyrarakis 2020 Thrapsathiri Armi Vineyard PGI Crete 90** The single vineyard Thrapsathiri, sourced from the 500m high, northeast facing Armi vineyard with sandy clay soils in the Douli area of central Crete is a very fresh white wine revealing a bright bouquet and nicely concentrated palate of pear and quince, finishing with chalky minerals. Given 12 hours skin contact and then barrel fermented in used French and American oak and matured on the lees for 4 months. pH 3.11; 12.5% alc. **Lyrarakis 2021 Vidiano Ippodromos Vineyard PGI Crete 91** Platinum gold green. Expressive citrus, orange blossom, stone fruit and herbal aromas. Concentrated, ripe citrus and beautifully balanced on a well-defined palate with a persistent finish. Lovely phenolic ripeness. Sourced from the very low yielding, 610m high Ippodromos Vineyard with two pickings. Fermented and matured 3 months in a mix of new and old oak. **Lyrarakis 2021 Vilana Pirovolikes Vineyard PGI Crete 91** Usually farmed for high yields, this single vineyard Vilana from the Panorama area of central Crete shows the grape's potential when grown for quality instead of quantity. Sourced from 35-year-old, dry farmed, low yielding bush vines grown at 650m altitude. Shows melon with hints of stone fruit on the nose. The nicely concentrated, high acid palate is mineral like with quince and orchard fruit flavors. Given 16 hours skin contact and fermented in stainless steel; then matured 3 months in a mix of new and old Acacia and oak barrels. **Lyrarakis 2021 Liatiko Rosé Kendros Vineyard PGI Crete 93** Pale, pale pink in color,

this is one of Greece's most distinctive rosés. Made from 100+ year old, self rooted Liatiko bush vines growing at 800m elevation on sandy soils. The nose reveals nuances of herbs and pink grapefruit, while the mineral-laden palate is silky in texture with very light red fruit notes. Finishes with chalky minerals. A superbly fresh and unique rosé. **Lyrarakis 2021 Liatiko PGI Crete 90** Sourced from two different dry farmed vineyards in Rethymno and Sitia, the light brick ruby red Liatiko is a pretty, light red wine showing cherry and ripe raspberry aromas and flavors. It's very clean and fresh with bright acidity. Fermented and aged in stainless steel. pH 3.59, 13.3% alc. **Lyrarakis 2018 Mandilari Plakoura Vineyard PGI Crete 91** Medium carmen red. Showing a dark red fruited nose, this single vineyard Mandilari offers exuberant, fresh flavors of dark red berries and cherries on a richly flavored, firmly tannic palate along with bright acidity. A beautiful wine with excellent aging potential (at least 10 years); needs time for the tannins to soften. We also tasted the 2007 vintage and found it had retained its fruit with suave tannins. Sourced from a 350m high single vineyard in the Archanes areas. A small percentage of the grapes were dried in the sun for three days before pressing. Aged one year in a mix of French and American oak followed by a year in bottle. 14% alc. Lyrarakis was the first (2005) to make a single vineyard Mandilari. **Lyrarakis 2016 Kotsifali Karnari Vineyard PGI Crete 92** Made in the tradition of Cretan Marouvan oxidative wines, this sherry-like Kotsifali comes from the Kamari Vineyard in the Archanes area of central Crete. Pale red with an oxidized nose from 2.5 years aging in French oak barrels without topping up. Fresh and dry on the palate with sherry-like spice and toffee flavors. Firm acidity, round tannins, finishes dry. pH 3.35, 14.9% alc.



**Iliana Malihin** (Rethymno) This southern Crete winery established in 2019 by winemaker Iliana Malihin is located in the village of Melabes, but it sources fruit from old (90-140 years), high elevation, organically cultivated vineyards, many of which are self-rooted. Iliana did her postgraduate degree in enology and worked at Akra Chryssos in Santorini before returning to Crete. Her first year in Melabes she contracted fruit from 5 growers and specified only compost and worm castings for fertilizer, no more tilling of the soil, and only sulfur against fungus and mildew. She now has 37 growers providing fruit for her label. Unfortunately, a wildfire in July 2022 damaged over 80 percent of the pre-phylloxera old vines. US Importer: DNS

**Malihin-Chryssos 2020 Vidiano Young Vines Crete (\$50) 92** Medium yellow straw, unfiltered and slightly cloudy. A complex and singular expression of Crete's flagship variety, Vidiano. Showing hints of fresh and dried stone fruit with savory garrigue-like notes, full in the mouth and full-flavored, quite unlike any other Vidiano we've tasted. Sourced from young (<15 years old) vines grown at 650m on the slopes of Crete's highest mountain, Psiloritis. Given some time on the skins, then fermented with ambient yeast and aged 4 months on the lees. Tiny amounts of this wine are produced and even less exported to the US.



**Manousakis Winery/Nostos** (Chania) Founded by Theodore Manousakis in 1993 with the first wines made under the Nostos label in 1997. Born in Chania, Theodore had emigrated to America at age 11 and returned years later to give back to the island where he was born. He contracted some of Europe's top enologists and viticulturists (Laurence Feraud, Pascal Marchand, Lucie Morton) to help craft his wines. Today the winery in the village of Vatolakos on the slopes of the Lefka Ori is managed by his daughter Alexandra

and husband Afshin Molavi [shown here]. Konstantinos Galanis has been the winemaker since the beginning. The winery produces about 12 thousand cases of mostly organic wine annually from vineyards with calcareous clay soils. Among its white wines are Romeiko (a white wine made from red grapes), Assyrtiko, Muscat of Spina, and Vidiano. The red wines are mostly made from French varieties. Annual production about 12 thousand cases. The US Importer is Dionysos.

**Nostos 2020 Assyrtiko Crete (\$22) 90** Light yellow straw, very clear. Introduced by herbal notes followed by a tangy attack. Mouth filling with good acidity and depth of citrus and minerals, finishing long and rich again with herbal notes. Grown at 320m in soils of schist and sandy clay. Fermented in stainless and matured on the lees for four months. **Nostos 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 89** Light yellow straw. Scents of spice, ginger and stone fruit show on the nose. Clean on a round palate with light citrus and stone fruit flavors. Shows a bit of heat on the finish. Sourced from organic vineyards at 320m elevation; 10% of the wine is matured in barrels with 4 months on the lees. pH 3.60, 14.5% alc. **Nostos 2017 Nostos Alexandra's Crete (\$27) 92** The 2017 Nostos Alexandra is an attractive blend of 40% Syrah, 40% Grenache, and 20% Mourvedre. It reveals dark fruit aromas and spice on the nose and palate with a touch of violet. It is a well-made wine with youthful dark fruit flavors and a pleasant finish. 14% alc. **Nostos 2017 Red Blend PGI Crete (\$36) 89** Medium ruby. Red berry fruit and hints of toasted oak show on the nose. Softly textured palate with flavors of red fruit and a hint of leather. Firm tannins on the finish. A blend of 43% Mourvedre, 34% Syrah, 19% Grenache and 4% Roussanne. The Syrah and Mourvedre are matured 10 months in used oak barrels, 75% French, 25% American. pH 3.87, 14.5% alc.



**Domaine Menexes (Archanes)** The Kypriotakis family has grown and sold wine grapes for over 30 years, but their first wine was produced and bottled in 2009. Giannis is the owner of this boutique winery, while his son Giorgio (shown here) makes the wine. Located 20 km south of Heraklion in the Archanes region, the domaine has 10 ha of vines grown on sandy clay soils at about 350m elevation and produces about 2 thousand cases per year. Their wines are classified as PGI Crete, but the dry reds qualify as PDO Archanes. They began exporting this year to the UK.

**Domaine Menexes 2021 Malvasi di Candia Aromatica - Vilana PGI Crete 90** Light yellow straw. A blend of Vilana and Malvasia di Candia fermented in stainless steel. The Malvasia contributes a lifted floral perfume with a suggestion of honeycomb, while Vilana lends body and lemony acidity. The wine is softly textured, fresh and well balanced. **Domaine Menexes 2020 Orange Vilana PGI Crete 91** Medium gold color. This 100% Vilana organic wine is well made, revealing dried mango and orange along with savory herbs. The thickly textured palate is concentrated with moderate acidity. It sees 20 days of skin contact and is aged 6 months in amphora. While the alcohol is a bit high (15%), the wine is one of Crete's best natural wines. **Domaine Menexes 2019 Red Mandilari PGI Crete 90** Semi-opaque red. This is an expressive wine revealing aromas and flavors of dark red fruit complemented by savory spice and leather. It's full on the palate with good depth of flavor and firm tannins. Fermented in stainless steel and matured 6 months in French oak. 13% alc. **Domaine Menexes 2021 Chromata Kotsifali PGI Crete 89** This is an easy drinking rendition of Kotsifali. Fermented and aged in stainless steel, it has a red fruited bouquet reminiscent of fresh red plums and cherries. It's soft on entry with medium acidity, good flavor, and a clean finish. 13.5% alc.



**Minos-Miliarakis Winery** Located in Peza about 17km from Heraklion, Minos was the first modern winery in Crete founded by enologist Iosiph Antoniou Miliarakis. It was also the first to begin bottling (1952) and exporting wine. It's a large winery today with 3 ha of estate and 37 ha of contracted vineyards, and it's still run by the family. Miliarakis is their premium label. Total production is about 30 thousand cases, 15% of which is exported. The manager and winemaker is Nicolas Miliarakis (shown here).

**Minos Miliarakis 2021 Two Gorges White PGI Crete 89** A blend of Thrapsathiri (80%) and Spinus Muscat (20%), this is an easy drinking, light bodied wine showing pleasant, spicy muscat like aromas and clean flavors of citrus with a hint of rosewater. Thrapsathiri provides the acidity that gives this wine an attractive freshness. Sourced from the 300m altitude Livadakia Vineyard in the Peza area. **Minos Miliarakis 2021 Vidiano PGI Crete 88** Light straw color. Showing a perfumed bouquet of citrus with rosemary and other herbs, this easy drinking wine is full in the mouth with a flavorful palate of citrus with notes of stone fruit. Sourced from the Peza area and fermented in stainless steel with 2 months battonage in tank. 12.5% alc. **Minos Miliarakis 2020 Two Gorges Red PGI Crete 88** This fruit forward red blend is made in an easy drinking bistro style. It reveals aromas and flavors of red fruit complemented by notes of earth, leather, and wild herbs. A blend of 50% Kotsifali, 30% Syrah and 20% Mourvedre. **Minos Miliarakis 2021 Two Gorges Rosé PGI Crete 89** Medium pink color. This blend of 80% Mourvèdre and 20% Malvasia Aromatica grown at 300m reveals red berries, herbs and flowers on the nose. It's soft on the attack and juicy in the mouth with red cherry and strawberry fruit complemented by a light herbal edge. Finishes clean. 3 g/L RS.



**Domaine Paterianakis** Founded some 50 years ago by grandfather Manolis Paterianaki, this domaine was transformed in 1988 by his son Giorgos Paterianakis. The domaine is in Melesses in the Peza region. It's well known for its fragrant reds (Kotsifali and Mandilari) but also white blends from Vidiano and Muscat Spinus. Today, the winery is managed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of the family, Emmanouela and Niki. Emmanouela, who studied at the University of Athens, is the winemaker, and

her passion for indigenous authenticity and biodynamic practices has raised the profile of the winery and its wines.

**Paterianakis 2021 Vidiano Crete (\$22) 91** Pale yellow. Showing a crisp citrus-inflected nose and a mineral like palate that exudes freshness, this is the perfect oyster wine. It's balanced and refreshing and crystal clean. Paterianakis also makes a barrel fermented Vidiano that we didn't have the opportunity to taste. **Paterianakis 2019 Melissokipos Crete 91** This 50/50 blend of Kotsifali and Mandilari reveals an attractive intensity of dark berries with hints of roasted meat. There's good density and balance on the palate with a lingering finish. An excellent bistro style wine. The Mandilari is matured in French oak for 6 months; the Kotsifali is aged in stainless steel.



**Silva Daskalaki Winery (Dafnes)** A family vineyard and winery dating from 1920, the Silva Daskalaki Winery is located in Silva, Heraklion, at 500m altitude. The winery was renovated in 2007 with state-of-the-art equipment. The estate's 90 ha vineyard around the winery is in the process of conversion to biodynamic. Owner Eirini Daskalaki is the enologist and viticulturist; she studied

enology at the University of West Attica and earned an MSc in Viticulture from the Agricultural University of Athens. She produces white wines from Vidiano and Muscat of Spina and red wines from sun dried Liatiko and Kotsifali. Annual production is about 12 thousand cases. US Importer: Cava Spiliadis

**Silva Daskalaki 2019 Enstikto White PGI Crete 91** Light yellow straw. Vibrant, fresh scents of ripe stone fruit. Bright on the attack with a silky texture, firm backbone, good acidity and dry finish. A blend of 90% Vidiano and 10% Chardonnay from the family's vineyard at 580m altitude. The Vidiano is aged 12 months in new and used 225 and 500L French oak. The oak is nicely integrated. pH 3.19, 13.5% alc. **Silva Daskalaki 2010 Emilia PGI Crete 93** Tawny mahogany. Made from sun dried 100% Liatiko and matured in oak for 10 years. Effusive bouquet of figs, caramel, dried cherry and sweet oak. Viscous and creamy on the palate with rich, dense flavors and very good acidity to offset the 200 g/L sugar. Super long finish. A perfectly balanced, solera style wine, this one is mostly from the 2010 vintage. 12.5% alc. **Silva Daskalaki 2020 Enstikto Syrah Kostifali PGI Crete 91** Medium dark ruby. Aromas of red plum and toasted oak. Dry on the palate with nicely focused red fruit, a solid structure and good acidity. A sense of purity runs throughout the wine, finishing with light, firm tannins. A blend of 70% Syrah and 30% Kotsifali from a single vineyard at 600m; matured 12 months in French oak. 14% alc.



**Titakis (Peza)** Titos Titakis established this winery in 1952; the third generation of the Titakis family makes the wine today at the winery in the village of Kounavoi. The 10 ha family vineyard was planted in 1996 at about 200m altitude; grapes are also purchased. Its premium red Impetus (60% Kotsifali, 20% Merlot, 20% Syrah) and premium white Impetus are sourced from the estate vineyard. Another 4 ha vineyard "Amygdalia" in the area of Gagales is dedicated to indigenous white varieties like Vidiano, Moschato Spinias, and Malvazia Aromatica, and in 2016 a small parcel was planted to

Assyrtiko. Winemaker Maria Titakis (see photo) serves on the board of Wines of Crete. Annual production of about 33 thousand cases makes it one of Crete's largest wineries.

**Titakis 2019 Impetus White PGI Crete 90** Bright yellow straw. Shows ripe orchard fruit, beeswax, and toasty oak on the nose. Broad and firm on the palate with medium viscosity from partial aging in French oak. Mostly stone fruit flavors. A blend of 90% Vidiano and 10% Malvasia di Candia Aromatica. **Titakis 2020 Vidiano Moscato Varietal Wine 91** Bright medium yellow straw color. Shows a perfumed nose that evokes citrus and rose petals. Broad and full on the palate with good volume. The perfumed, floral character continues in the mouth along with hints of stone fruit and citrus-like acidity. A fresh, dry white wine that would pair well with lighter cuisine. A blend of 60% Vidiano and 40% Moscato Spina, all estate fruit from vines planted in 2011 at 260m altitude, fermented and aged in stainless steel. **Titakis 2019 Impetus Red PGI Crete 91** This is a delicious Cretan red blend of Kotsifali (60%), Mandilari (20%) and Syrah (20%). Ruby red in color, it offers a fragrant nose of red berries complemented by an accent of toasty oak. The palate shows very good concentration of red pomegranate and berry flavors with well integrated honeyed oak notes, and it finishes long and dry. Matured 12 months in 20% new French and American oak.

## Annex Appellations of Crete

Quality wines produced in Crete fall into two categories: [1] Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and [2] Protected Designation of Origin [PDO]. These categories follow the new EU wine laws adopted in 2010. PGI wines are further broken into PGI Regional Wines and PGI District Wines. Crete is one of Greece's eight PGI regional wines.



### PGI Crete

In 1989, Greek wine legislation introduced regional wine designations, including the island of Crete. When EU laws changed in 2010, Crete became a PGI. Today there are 41 wineries within the PGI Crete zone that use this appellation on their bottlings. EU rules require that 85% of the grapes used in making a wine have to come exclusively from the geographical area where the wine is actually made. Thus, like the American AVA, PGI essentially indicates where the grapes were grown.

Crete is also home to three PGI District Wines that correspond to the island's three prefectures: Heraklion, Chania, Rethymno and Lasithi. In general, PGI District Wines must use grapes from within the district boundaries and be vinified within those boundaries. Greece has 37 PGI District Wines, of which the four mentioned here are located in Crete. PGI District Wines have more stringent regulations governing the varietal compositions of wine than does PGI Crete. For that reason, and because consumers are not generally familiar with district names, most wines produced in Crete carry the PGI Crete appellation name.

## PDOs

In addition to the four District PGIs, Crete is home to seven PDOs. Five are located within the Heraklion prefecture, and two are located within Lasithi. Each PDO specifies the geographic origin of the grapes, the varieties of grapes permitted, the minimum altitude where the grapes are grown, viticultural practices, winemaking techniques, and alcohol levels. Only a small percentage of wines produced in Crete carry a PDO appellation name, and very few Cretan wines imported to the US do so.

### Heraklion

The **Dafnes PDO** wines must be made from the variety Liatiko in the Dafnes region. Established in 1972, it includes dry red wines, sweet fortified, and sweet red wines from sun-dried grapes.

The **PDO Peza** was established in 1971 for dry red wine and in 1982 for dry white wine. Grapes must be grown at 300m altitude or higher. White wines must be made of 100% Vilana, while red wines can be a blend of Kotsifali and Mandilari. All wines carrying this appellation must be fermented dry.

Created in 1917, the **PDO Archanes** lies in the north-central part of the Heraklion district. It lies in an area of historic significance near archeological sites of the Minoan civilization. The wines are dry reds made of Kotsifali and Mandilari.

**PDO Candia** (also, called Handakas-Candia) was established in 2011; it's the largest PDO of Heraklion and relatively high with altitudes reaching 700m. Dry whites must be at least 85% Vilana, while dry reds are a blend of Kotsifali (70%) and Mandilari (30%).

**PDO Malvasia Candia** (also called Malvasia Handakas Candia) was created in 2011, covering almost the entire district of Heraklion. It includes sweet white wines, both fortified and unfortified. It must be at least 85% Assyrtiko, Athiri, Vidiano, Thrapsathiri and Liatiko and a maximum of 15% White Muscat and Malvasia di Candia Aromatica.

### Lasithi

**PDO Sitia** is also located in Lasithi and was established for red wines in 1972 and for white wines in 1998. Dry white wines must be 70% Vilana and 30% Thrapsathiri, while dry red wines must be a minimum 80% Liatiko blended with Mandilari. Sweet wines must be 100% Liatiko.

The **PDO Malvasia Sitia** was established in 2011 in Lasithi; it covers vineyards at 300-700 meters altitude. The wines are sweet and white and made of sundried grapes, both fortified and unfortified, aged at least 24 months in oak barrels. At least 85% of the blend must be Assyrtiko, Athiri, Thrapsathiri and Liatiko and a maximum of 15% of Muscat of Spinass and Malvasia di Candia Aromatica.

