

Lyrarakis Crete



The Wines

- *Liatiko PGI*: Liatiko is an ancient Cretan grape and historically important in the island's wine production. Its skin ripens into a deep, dark color, but paradoxically this color rarely translates into the wine, which typically is lightly colored. Yet the tannin and spice of the skin clearly accent the fruit from the pulp in the resulting wine--it's a delightful bistro wine and immensely versatile. Lyrarakis' grapes come from small farmers in the eastern zone of the island around Sitia and from the central western zone around Rethymno. The vines are not irrigated and are harvested by hand, and the wine is raised entirely in steel. A small amount of whole clusters are used during fermentations, and the wine is bottled without fining or any cold stabilization.
- *Vidiano PGI*: This is a PGI (Protected Geographical Indication, or IGP in France) wine from several sites in central Crete, all certified organic with the 2022 vintage. Vidiano is known as the Chardonnay of Crete, probably due more to its widespread planting and its versatility than to its actual resemblance. These vines grow at 450 meters in central Crete and are not irrigated. The label is a Minoan queen image.
- *Assyrtiko Vóila*: In 1998 the local co-op in the far eastern side of Crete brought over a truckload of Assyrtiko cuttings from Santorini. On the high, windswept valley of Vóila, most were planted directly into the sandy soils, while others were grafted onto local rootstock. All are susceptible to phylloxera, but the sand so far has kept the aphid at bay. The soils are based on limestone and are somewhat richer than Santorini's meager volcanic ash soils, and the vine does well here, with its fruit ripening more slowly than on its native island thanks to Vóila's 600-meter altitude. These are head-pruned vines, not irrigated, and hand-harvested in the PDO (AOP in France) of Sitia, the name of the eastern providence, but not labeled as such because the grapes are made at the Lyrarakis winery outside of the appellation. It's a wine with abundant character, and it's pronounced *a-cer tee-ko*.
- *Dafni Psarades*: Like most of Lyrarakis' whites, this is a wine that can evolve nicely for years in a good cellar. Lyrarakis planted this block in its home vineyard of Psarades in the early 1990s and saved the variety from extinction. With the 2023 harvest, the vineyard was granted organic certification.

- *Liatiko Aggelis*: The Aggelis (*ah-gah-lease*) vineyard is in the Vóila Valley in the far eastern Crete appellation of Sitia and grows at 580 meters. The vines were planted in the 1930s on their own roots and are now farmed organically (certified with the '23 harvest), and give small, intense grapes and small yields. These grapes are fermented almost whole in an oak upright. Hand-harvested, spontaneous ferments, minimal filtration, and minimal SO₂ additions. Best served with a slight chill.
- *Liatiko Kedros Rosé*: The Kedros vineyard is at 850 meters on Mt Kedros in the Psiloritis mountain range. Some of its bush vines are nearly 100-years-old, and their grapes are pressed directly for this characterful, driven mountain rosé.
- *Plytó Psarades*: Psarades is Lyrarakis' most important vineyard, and its 3.7 acres of Plytó (*plee-toe*) is the largest planting of the varietal in the world. The vine is susceptible to powdery mildew and requires good viticulture but is super resistant to drought conditions. Psarades isn't irrigated, and unusually the Plytó was planted in the early 1990s in one block rather than inter-planted, thus going against the grain of what the island growers traditionally considered acceptable risk. The vineyard grows at 480 meters in central Crete and is farmed organically. With a nose reminiscent of Riesling with its piercing lift, this has a lemon purity and a salty twang.
- *Thrapsathiri Armi*: The Oxford Companion to Wine posits that Thrapsathiri may be the same as Begleri growing on Greece's Cyclades Islands. If so, Crete bequeathed the grape the more impressive name (*thrap-sa-thiri*), befitting what is one of its richer, more age-worthy white wines. Lyrarakis' rendition comes from the Armi Vineyard, a Cretan word for the top of a mountain, and this site grows on terraces in central Crete at an average of 500 meters above sea level. The soil is sandy clay, packed full of seashells, and the site is windswept. The grapes are hand-harvested, with a quarter undergoing fermentation in steel and the rest fermenting in barrel (the roughly 75% of the total stays in those barrels for a couple months).