

Assyrtiko

Santorini's indigenous white grape is a bone-dry, mineral-laden wonder, while on the Greek mainland it is something of a versatile chameleon, says Nico Manassis

ASSYRTIKO IS GREECE'S most striking white grape. It hails from the Cyclades island of Santorini and covers 65% of its vineyard area, where many vines are ungrafted and vary in age from 60 to 250 years. On this windswept volcanic isle, the roots of the Assyrtiko vine can reach up to 18m in the black, ash-rich soil, giving the resulting wines great minerality. The vines are uniquely trained in ground-hugging, basket-weaved fashion to minimise wind damage during flowering, as well as grape sunburn. Maritime humidity and fog contribute to an annual rainfall of just 350mm in this improbable winemaking location.

Different altitudes, latitudes and soils on this island result in varied styles. Wines classified as 'Santorini' are bone-dry, in-your-face, crisp, mineral-laden, high-acid wonders. Field blends of white grapes include the softer Athiri and the aromatic Aidani (it was only possible to produce a 100% Assyrtiko with the advent of sorting belts, where selection is done by hand).

Over the past 25 years, Assyrtiko has increasingly been planted on the Greek mainland, where it is trellised and yields are higher. Mainland wines are more aromatic, with an edgy character, and rounder with a more discreet minerality. Here, Assyrtiko has proved to be a real chameleon in a blend, able to partner a variety of grapes. Malagousia and Semillon are the best, giving the resulting wines a fascinating flavour profile. One overdone, albeit commercially successful, formula has been to pair Assyrtiko with Sauvignon Blanc, but there are now more interesting options in a country not short of colourful indigenous white grapes (estimated at 150 varieties).

With or without oak

There are equally opinionated camps for and against the use of oak. For wines classified as 'Nyktteri', grapes are picked at night to avoid hot temperatures. They can be vinified in steel or oak but must be aged in oak for a minimum of three months. The result is still a bone-dry wine with high acidity but is fuller-bodied. However, the majority of the island's producers still prefer unoaked Assyrtikos (mainly those under the Santorini classification) to preserve the grape's mineral, flinty characters.

In top vintages, wines from Santorini need two to three years to come round. In outstanding years, like 2009 and 2011 (see box, right), Assyrtikos can age well for a decade. Mainland examples seem to evolve a little faster, but vines are still relatively young there so comparisons are difficult.

Assyrtiko's qualities have not gone unnoticed even beyond its home frontiers. It has been planted in Australia and is being evaluated elsewhere, such as in Italy's Alto Adige – viticulturists sense that there is still much more to coax from this adaptable, charismatic grape.

Prized for its high acidity even in ripe years, Assyrtiko is consequently an excellent wine to pair with food, aided by its pronounced savoury profile, stony minerality and citrus freshness. This unique Greek grape is rising from relative obscurity, with an insider cult following, to achieve a resonant new voice in the wine world. Recent vintages to look out for are the charming 2012 and stellar 2011. Prices for these premium wines (£15–£20) are fair for their cosmopolitan personalities.



Assyrtiko: know your vintages

2012 Very good. Punchy bright fruit and tangy minerality. Approachable now.

2011 Outstanding vintage. Concentrated and ageworthy for next 10 years. Still closed now.

2010 Entry-level wines are dilute. Good old-vine labels.

2009 Classic vintage. Across-the-board textbook balance. Keep for up to 10 years.

2008 Very good. Riesling-like petrol notes on several wines.

2007 A hot year, giving powerful wines. Good Nyktteri styles but many need drinking up.

Assyrtiko: the facts

Plantings 2,000 hectares (mainland), 900ha (Santorini)
Vine age 5-15 years (mainland), 60-250 years (Santorini)
Yields 45-65hl/ha (mainland), 28hl/ha (Santorini)
Annual production 1.1m hectolitres (mainland), 252,000 hectolitres (Santorini)

Nico Manassis is DWWA Regional Chair for Greece ➤

The results

All but three of the wines rated Highly Recommended and above were from Santorini, but the tasters were enthusiastic about the mainland wines too, in this exciting and positive tasting. Amy Wislocki reports

THESE GREEK WINES enchanted our experts. 'They smell happy; of summer, salty sea and pinewood – Assyrtiko is pure Mediterranean, like a holiday!' enthused Igor Sotric at the end of the tasting.

Sarah Jane Evans MW said: 'My expectations were more than fulfilled. Assyrtiko is something wine lovers won't find anywhere else. Sometimes you want something punchy to pick you up after a tiring day, and New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc can be too over-the-top, too fruity. Assyrtiko is truly original, with fantastic acidity and minerality, and great value for money. Indeed, I'm amazed its not being planted more widely beyond Greece. It looks like a textbook variety to plant in an age of global warming, when warmer regions need varieties with naturally high acidity.'

The grape's island homeland of Santorini was undoubtedly the star, though Nico Manassis pointed out that it wasn't a level playing field: 'Assyrtiko on the mainland is only 20 years old, and producers are still learning how to farm it. In Santorini, the extreme conditions give extreme wines – the vines are older, and ungrafted, the yields are far lower, and the wines are more pronounced in their terroir and have more oomph. The roots of some of these

'Assyrtiko is pure Mediterranean, like a holiday!'

Igor Sotric

vines are 18m deep, giving incredible complexity, and you can't forget the impact of the pumice layer. In contrast, the mainland wines have less marked minerality, and are more gentle with more fruit. Certainly the Santorini wines are more expensive, but they are still cheap in terms of what they deliver.'

And yet examples from the Greek mainland also drew praise. 'I was pleased to see that Assyrtiko works in places other than Santorini,' observed Evans. 'There were outstanding examples from Drama and Pangeon – both elegant and polished,' agreed Manassis, 'and plantings on the mainland are increasing, so expect to see more.'

The panel also commented on the versatility of the grape, and how well it works in a blend. 'I find it fascinating how Assyrtiko will accept and accommodate anything, from Semillon to Asproudes,' said Manassis. 'Assyrtiko has

The scores

57 wines tasted

1

Outstanding

16

Highly recommended

36

Recommended

4

Fair

0

Poor

0

Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

Sarah Jane Evans MW



Evans became an MW in 2006 and is also a member of the Gran Orden de Caballeros de Vino for services to Spanish wine. She is currently deputy vice-chairman at the Institute of Masters of Wine

Evans' verdict

'Decanter's first-ever panel tasting for Assyrtiko, and the grape showed itself triumphantly to be a noble variety worthy of international recognition. Undoubtedly its home is Santorini, and that island gave

us vivid, citrus-driven whites with consistent penetrating acidity. Consumers and sommeliers trying out Italy's Verdicchios and Fianos should hop over to Greece for these more refreshing whites.

'With a few exceptions, I was less keen on the oaked wines; some of the oak definitely interfered with purity of the fruit. I was more attracted by Assyrtiko's potential in blends. When it was blended with local grape varieties it gave a brisk structure to more aromatic wines. With international varieties I was less sure: while the fatness of Viognier benefited from the blend, and Semillon gave a Bordeaux-like character, Sauvignon Blanc was too dominant.

'Overall I was impressed by the consistent quality. There was one Outstanding wine but there could easily have been two, possibly three. A minor grumble: only one wine in the whole tasting was closed by screwcap. With crisp whites, especially those not intended for ageing, I would prefer to see screwcap over cork.'

Nico Manassis



Manassis is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Greece. He is the author of The Greek Wine Guide and The Illustrated Greek Wine Book, and has created several maps of the country's vineyards. He is the publisher of www.greekwineworld.com and co-producer of a documentary film on the vineyard of the volcanic island of Santorini, Pelican's Watch.

Manassis' verdict

'Whenever one experiences a wide-reaching Assyrtiko tasting, it leaves a profound, lasting impression. This time was no exception. There were variations, with high notes from Santorini. From the mainland, there were mixed results and some poor showings. Encouragingly, there are new spots, shining bright, where the future looks exciting. There was a string of terrific vintages in diverse styles. The 2012s were generous and opening up, alongside a more austere 2011, and a classic 2009 with staying power.

'Santorini stood apart, with its love-it-or-leave-it, pronounced terroir. Assyrtiko comes into its own here, gaining in depth and concentration – qualities unmatched by any other Greek white wine currently produced. Elsewhere, the Assyrtiko varietal and blends are history in the making for their fruitier aroma and that ever-present hallmark of minerality.

'It is a tricky grape to vinify because of its high phenol content and tendency to oxidise. Hence, tannic bite crops up in tasting notes. It is this allure of a red-wine trait in a full-bodied bone-dry white that adds to its attraction. What this tasting confirmed is that, no matter where this grape is grown, Assyrtiko wines have an unmistakable presence.'

this amazing, chameleon-like quality that seems to elevate even lesser grapes such as Trebbiano.'

'There does seem to be a tendency towards higher alcohol [the wines classified as Nykteri – those picked at night and aged for up to three months in oak – range from 13.5% to 14.5%] and I found many of the blends more balanced than the varietal wines,' said Evans. 'When Sauvignon Blanc was used, it seemed to dominate, even at 20%. But I really liked some of the local varieties, such as Lagorghi.' Sotric also preferred the blends with local varieties – 'great food wines' – wishing only that these were easier to sell.

Manassis offered some advice on vintages: '2011 and 2009 were outstanding on Santorini, with 2012 close behind. On the mainland, 2011 and 2012 were super.' And don't be afraid to give the wines some age, he added. 'Santorini needs at least two years in bottle. In Greece they are realising that they're drinking their whites far too early.' He also advised, especially with the Santorini wines, to double-decant and leave them for 30 minutes in carafe: 'These wines need to oxygenate to come together.'

Lastly, all the tasters called for greater use of screwcaps, particularly on the unoaked wines. 'These are fresh, zesty wines and the screwcap would give more punchiness,' said Evans. 'At least three-quarters of the wines we tasted could have been under screwcap.'

Entry criteria:
Producers and UK agents were invited to submit dry Assyrtikos or Assyrtiko blends (minimum 25% Assyrtiko) of any vintage

Igor Sotric



Sotric is head sommelier and wine buyer at China Tang at The Dorchester in London. He acts as consultant to several restaurants, and since 2009 has made his own Chardonnay in Goriška Brda, Slovenia, with friend Marijan Simcic.

Sotric's verdict

'Assyrtiko's reputation as one of Greece's most versatile grapes definitely showed at this tasting. Its ability to adapt in more than one region

and to have high acidity even in ripe wines is a treat uncommon for most Mediterranean varieties, proving its nobility. Is there a place on restaurant wine lists for more than one Assyrtiko? I'm more than sure!

'Some of the Santorini wines were unique with real personality and a powerful character, with great structure and distinctive minerality. This island definitely outperformed the mainland – the wines were in a league of their own, although we did have great samples from Drama and Pangeon. Expression of the Santorini terroir with its sea breeze, volcanic soil and pinewood notes was wonderfully strong, and the only missing ingredients were hummus and pita bread!

'From this tasting it seemed apparent that Assyrtiko blends more successfully with local varieties such as Aidani, Athiri and Malagousia, but it can also perform with Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc when it is the more dominant grape.

'Out of 60 bottles tasted, we only had three corked wines, which is impressive, considering that most were under cork closure.'

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Haridimos Hatzidakis, Santorini 2012

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: Sarah Jane Evans MW 18.5 Nico Manassis 18.5 Igor Sotric 18.5

£9.95–£12 Le Caves de Pyrène, Theatre of Wine, Waitrose, The Wine Society Haridimos Hatzidakis laboured out of a pocket-sized winery for years, but has now moved into two spacious dug-out caves under a vineyard on Santorini. His 11 labels comprise intricate blends and single vineyards, focusing on southwest-facing slopes between Pyrgos and Megalochori. Most are made on 'natural' winemaking principles – an exception being this wine, in which grapes from four villages capture Santorini's unique terroir with lucent precision, using cultured yeast and low sulphur.

Sarah Jane Evans MW Bright golden wine. Honey, baked fruits, lime and grapefruit lift. Immediately lively and bold: mouthwatering freshness with tart lemon-curd ripeness, underlined by a clean and punchy minerality.

Nico Manassis Lemon curd on the nose. Broad and round. Spice on the full-throttle palate with a long aftertaste. Plenty of character.

Igor Sotric Huge intensity of tropical fruit, banana leaf, jasmine, flowers, pine and grapefruit. Apples and stone fruit to the fore on the harmonious palate, which is structured with great texture and balanced alcohol.

Drink 2013–2021 Alcohol 13.5%

Highly Recommended

17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Greek Wine Cellars, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012 18.25 (94)

SJE 18.5 NM 18.5 IS 17.5

N/A UK www.greek-wine-cellars.com

Youthful with fresh, stone-fruit notes followed by green, tropical notes such as mango and passion fruit. Palate reflects the same vanilla cream, with a supple, smooth texture, a jab of lime-pith acidity. Drink 2013–2020 Alc 12.5%



Biblia Chora, Areti Assyrtiko, Pangeon 2012 17.75 (92)

SJE 17 NM 17.5 IS 18.5

POA Hallgarten Druitt, Novum Wines

Mediterranean herbs, pinewood and salty minerals. Very rich and rounded palate, with a spicy undertone, but acidity comes punching through with a linking thread. Dynamic, modern, polished, elegant. Drink 2013–2022 Alc 13.5% >

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Canava Roussos, Nykteri, Santorini 2008 17.75 (92) SJE 18 NM 18 IS 17

N/A UK www.canavaroussos.gr

Persistent Assyrtiko acidity, now slightly tamed by age, and balanced with bitter lemon marmalade, melon and nectarine notes. Has a polished, almost Burgundian gloss; this is like Puligny on the Aegean. **Drink 2013–2018 Alc 14%**



Estate Argyros, Santorini Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012 17.75 (92)

SJE 18 NM 18.5 IS 16.5

N/A UK www.estate-argyros.com

Complex aromas: a blend of smoke and an oily aspect with a discreet citrus note. Pear, melon, a touch of the tropical on the palate, with passion fruit and mango, plus an undercoat of minerality. Harmonious and balanced, this has depth, presence and class. **Drink 2013–2020 Alc 13.2%**



Gaia Wines, Thalassitis, Santorini 2012 17.75 (92) SJE 18.5 NM 18 IS 16.5

£16.49–£18.49 Ake & Humphris, Hallgarten Druit, Novum Wines

Plenty of freshness with a wet-stone mineral character, bitter lemon, wax, roasted nuts and honeycomb on the nose. Crystalline fruit is concentrated and shows a mineral freshness, with the steely acidity softened by citrus fruit. Long, concentrated. **Drink 2013–2020 Alc 13%**



Sigalas, Assyrtiko-Athiri, Santorini 2012 17.75 (92) SJE 17 NM 18.5 IS 17.5

£10.80 Maltby & Greek

Smoky, citrusy aromas along with a whiff of a saline breeze. Palate is linear with chalky tannins, lifted grapefruit, pineapple and pear. Less acidic than 100% Assyrtiko and more rounded. Wet pebbles and a terroir-laden, smoky, long finish. **Drink 2013–2020 Alc 14%**

‘Assyrtiko is truly original, with fantastic acidity and minerality, and great value for money’

Sarah Jane Evans MW



Sigalas, Kavalieros, Santorini 2011 17.75 (92) SJE 17 NM 18 IS 18

£19.20 Maltby & Greek

Expressive minerality and crushed yellow and white fruits, plus smoke and green-tea aromas. Intense nose of basil leaf. Packed with citron and crisp, crunchy fruit. So much character and a complex, long and exotic finish. **Drink 2013–2022 Alc 14%**



Gaia Wines, Thalassitis Oak Fermented, Santorini 2011 17.5 (91)

SJE 18 NM 18 IS 16.5

£16.49 Great Wines Direct, Hailsham Wine Cellars, Hedonism, Strictly Wines

Expressive minerality, stone and yellow fruit on a rich, bold, oaky nose. Palate is typically bright and fresh with generous lemon-curd acidity. Fine oak gives texture but does not dominate and the finish is long. **Drink 2013–2022 Alc 13.5%**



Domaine Porto Carras, Melissanthi, Côtes de Meliton 2012 17.25 (90+) SJE 18 NM 17 IS 17

N/A UK www.portocarras.com

Herbal, fennel, leaf and citrus on the nose. Full-bodied and well-structured, this is an expressive, crowd-pleasing blend of stone and tropical fruit, with zesty acidity and chalky touches on the long, mineral finish.

Drink 2013–2016 Alc 13.5%



Gaia Wines, Assyrtiko Wild Ferment, Santorini 2012 17.25 (90+)

SJE 17 NM 18.5 IS 16

£16.99–£20 Ake & Humphris, Great Wines Direct, Noel Young, Selfridges, Strictly Wines

Intense, fresh, youthful, with citrus and stone fruit on the complex nose that shows attractive oak accents. Linear purity: lemon-juice acidity wrapped by buttery oak. Smoky-oak finish; a real fashionista. **Drink 2013–2019 Alc 13%**



Haridimos Hatzidakis, Cuvée 15, Santorini 2011 17.25 (90+)

SJE 18.5 NM 17.5 IS 15.5

£25 Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Highbury Vintners, New St WineShop

Intense and rich, ripe fruit with jasmine-tea aromas. Rounded palate, with a slight tannic grip and a hint of typical bitterness, softened by honeyed lime-curd richness. A lick of minerality on the long finish. **Drink 2013–2015 Alc 14.5%**



Kamara Winery, Kioutsouki Asirtiko, Thessaloniki 2012 17.25 (90+) SJE 17.5 NM 17.5 IS 16.5

N/A UK www.kamarawinery.com

Lively aromatics with banana, vanilla and white peach. Promise of aromatics follows through on palate, which is crisp and has intense, spicy, supple fruit with honey touches, white pepper, typical minerality and salinity on the very long finish. **Drink 2013–2018 Alc 12.5%**



Santo Wines, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012 17.25 (90+) SJE 18.5 NM 16.5 IS 17

£12.49 Ehrmanns

Aromatics reveal a creamy, honeyed richness, with a note of lemon preserve. In the mouth, peaches, apricot, and reflects the bitter sweetness of the lemon preserve. Refreshing with great length and structure, and a characteristic lift of bitterness at the very end. **Drink 2013–2020 Alc 13.5%**

Highly Recommended (continued) 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Santo Wines, Nykteri, Santorini 2012

17.25 (90+) SJE 18.5 NM 16.5 IS 17

£12.49 Ehrmanns

Gently aromatic – citrus, thyme, green herbs, smoke, yellow peaches. Otherwise brisk acidity of Assyrtiko tempered by the other varieties; a complex, powerful blend that shows how Assyrtiko can be a great blending grape.

Drink 2013-2020 Alc 14.5%



Gavalas Wines, Santorini 2012

17 (90) SJE 18 NM 17 IS 16

N/A UK www.gavalaswines.gr

Charming fresh aromatics: honey, cut flowers, orange blossom. Refreshing with a rounded palate showing a fragrant core of stone-fruit characters with orange and lemon peel enlivened by crunch of citrus acidity. Crystalline fruity finish. Drink 2013-2019 Alc 13%



Sigalas, Barrel Fermented Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012

17 (90) SJE 16.5 NM 18.5 IS 16

£16.80 Maltby & Greek

Vibrant nose of lime, herbs, cream and leesy aromatics with a lift of citrus. Layered with seamless oak adding a roasted-chestnut gloss, and sweet stone fruit on the palate.

Drink 2013-2020 Alc 14.5%

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	SJE	NM	IS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Avantis Estate, Santorini 2012	16.75 (89)	16	17.5	17	Closed nose with elements of white flowers, lemon balm, honey. Balanced and structured with volcanic tones, stone fruit, grapefruit and apricot. Needs time.	13%	2013-2019	N/A UK	www.avantiswines.gr
Biblia Chora, Ovilos, Pangeon 2012	16.75 (89)	16	18	16.5	Intense nose of green and stone fruit. Assyrtiko acidity develops in the mouth, surrounded by citrusy richness of the Semillon. Has ageing potential.	14%	2013-2020	£21.49	Ake & Humphris, Great Wines Direct, Haltham Wine Cellars, Selfridges, Wimbledon Wine Cellars
Boutari, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	17	Typically Assyrtiko with honeyed citrus aromatics and notes of fresh herbs. Has minerality, along with pear drops, grapefruit and elderflower flavours.	13.5%	2013-2022	POA	ABS Wine Agencies
Estate Argyros, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2011	16.75 (89)	16	18	16	Notes of smoke, mushroom, sweet spice and forest floor. Vanilla and crushed fruit with seaweed, edamame beans and green notes on the compact finish.	13.2%	2013-2018	N/A UK	www.estate-argyros.com
Koutsoyiannopoulos, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012	16.75 (89)	15.5	18	17	Zesty acidity, herbaceous and green characters with basil leaf, expressive fruit and minerality. Bold and ripe with citrus-jam flavours.	13%	2013-2022	N/A UK	www.wine-museum-koutsoyiannopoulos.gr
Dougos, Meth'imon Acacia, Thessaly 2011	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.5	Lime and acacia florality on the nose. The oak has reduced the sweetness and added a fine texture to the wine, so the Sauvignon doesn't dominate.	12.5%	2013-2015	N/A UK	www.dougos.gr
Santo Wines, Assyrtiko Reserve, Santorini 2010	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.5	Smoky cedar overlays honeysuckle aromas. Palate is richly textured, ripe and spicy, with grapefruit, elderflower and jasmine. Structure and alcohol.	15%	2013-2020	£15.49	Ehrmanns
Tsantali, Assyrtiko Organic, Halkidiki 2012	16.5 (88)	16.5	17	16	Hay and honey with roasted hazelnuts and banana. Bold, lively palate with citrus curd and pleasant salty notes of grapefruit, nectarines and orange peel.	13%	2013-2016	£10.99	Ehrmanns
A Koutsoglorgakis, Kamares, Evia 2012	16.25 (87)	17	16.5	15	Very salty and mineral. In the mouth, initially crisp, then red-fruit flavours such as rhubarb and raspberries develop.	13.5%	2013-2018	£12	Thea Gala
Biblia Chora, Pangeon 2012	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Pink grapefruit and pineapple on the nose. Palate shows zesty acidity, ripe tropical fruits; finish is almost salty. Seductively modern in style.	13.5%	2013-2016	£16.99	Great Wines Direct
Claudia Papayianni, CP Viognier-Assyrtiko, Chalkidiki 2012	16.25 (87)	16.5	15.5	16.5	Viognier apparent with apricot fruit. Floral, stone fruit, roses and elderflower. Palate fruity, full and rich, but relieved from weightiness by the Assyrtiko.	12.5%	2013-2015	N/A UK	www.cp-domaine.gr
Estate Argyros, French Oak-Fermented, Santorini 2011	16.25 (87)	14.5	16.5	17.5	Acacia and pinewood, green tones of apples and pears. Very much a food wine. Lacks the in-your-face minerality of the unoaked Santorinis.	13.5%	2013-2020	N/A UK	www.estate-argyros.com
Haridimos Hatzidakis, Vignes Centenaires, Pyrgos, Santorini 2010	16.25 (87)	18	15	16	Musky, herbal, minty, medicinal tones with fennel. Almost off-dry richness; pink-grapefruit, tangy lime-marmalade notes, salty purity. Long and complex.	15%	2013-2015	£36	Theatre of Wine
Lyrarakis, Assyrtiko, Crete 2012	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	Herbal and stony. Leafiness and Granny Smith apples, plus grapefruit. Sage on the elegant mid-palate with a mineral-toned, softer finish.	12.7%	2013-2019	N/A UK	www.lyrarakis.com
Sigalas, Santorini 2012	16.25 (87)	15	17.5	16.5	Honeysuckle and acacia aromas with notes of cream. Bright, fruity flavours. Pithy with tell-tale zestiness on the classy finish. Mineral and volcanic.	14.5%	2013-2020	£14.40	Maltby & Greek
Artemis Karamolegos, Santorini 2012	16 (86)	15	17.5	15.5	Still young and a little closed, aromatics of fresh-cut herbs, green tea, with citrus.	13.5%	2013-2019	N/A UK	www.mediterrawines.gr
Costa Lazaridis, Château Julia Assyrtiko, Drama 2012	16 (86)	15	16.5	16.5	Dusky floral aromas with a hint of forest floor. Grapefruit, nectarines, jasmine tea, stone minerality, high acidity and powerful length.	13%	2013-2016	N/A UK	www.cp-domaine.gr
Domaine Gerovassiliou, White, Epanomi 2012	16 (86)	15	17	16	Floral, Turkish Delight tones. Roses, stone fruit, tropical, and sweet, stoney mineral flavours, plus some cedar and lemon-sherbet flavours.	12.5%	2013-2016	£15.99	Great Wines Direct, Highbury Vintners, Spirited Wines, Wimbledon Wine Cellar
Domaine Hatzimichalis, Prima Terra Assyrtiko, Atalanti Valley 2012	16 (86)	14.5	17	16.5	Mediterranean pinewood minerality and aromas of bruised apple. Warmer with a generous, lemony hay richness and lip-smacking crispness.	13.5%	2013-2016	N/A UK	www.hatzimichalis.gr
Moraitis Winery, Sillogi Moraitis, Cyclades 2012	16 (86)	16	16	16	Malagousia apparent in the musky floral aromatics. Well-made, straightforward wine that's salty and mineral; dynamic with biting acidity.	12.5%	2013-2018	£10-£14	Theatre of Wine, The Wine Society
Wine Art Estate, Idisma Drios Assyrtiko, Drama 2011	16 (86)	15	17	16	Very aromatic, exotic notes of lychee, roses and delicate jasmine. The softer side of this gifted chameleon of a grape, showing apricot and red apples.	13.5%	2013-2018	£17	Theatre of Wine
Avantis Estate, Estate White, Evia 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	15	17	Gently aromatic, slightly herbal and smoky with a hint of stone fruits in syrup. Peach, melon and apricot in the mouth, with herbs and stoney minerality.	12.5%	2013-2016	N/A UK	www.avantiswines.gr

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	SJE	NM	IS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Boutari, Kallisti Reserve, Santorini 2010	15.75 (85+)	15.5	17	15	Smoky, oily aromatics with creamy undertones. Manuka honey on the nose and a white-tea-leaf bite. Finish is fairly long with a salty tang.	14%	2013–2018	POA	ABS Wine Agencies
Domaine Porto Carras, Assyrtiko, Haikidiki 2012	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16	Delicately aromatic with a suggestion of acacia, grapefruit and lime curd. Smoky mid-palate with a zippy, citrus finish and zingy minerality.	13%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.portocarras.com
Gavalas Wines, Nykteri, Santorini 2011	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16	16.5	Oily aromatics blended with cedar oak and punch of lime. Green fruit, pineapple, nectarines; full-bodied and masculine with generous alcohol.	14%	2013–2022	N/A UK	www.gavalaswines.gr
Haridimos Hatzidakis, Nykteri, Santorini 2009	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	Delicate aromatics of stone fruit and vanilla. Supple juicy fruits in the mouth; has weight and structure but no terroir expression.	15%	2013–2020	£20.60	Theatre of Wine
Ktima Mouson, 9 Muses, Thiva 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15	16.5	Yellow flowers and fruit, plus stoney minerality; pleasant. An interesting blend, a good, young summer wine, out of the ordinary for Greece.	12%	2013–2014	N/A UK	www.musesestate.com
Ktima Pavlidis, Emphasis Assyrtiko, Drama 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	17	15.5	Luxurious honeysuckle and acacia, tinged with bitter grapefruit. Lightly smoked, a bit of stone fruit on the palate, nectarines and orange peel.	14%	2013–2017	£13.50	Berry Bros & Rudd
Ktima Pavlidis, Thema, Drama 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15	17	Intense apples and gooseberries. Herbal and grassy, salty, dynamic and structured with a good finish, although the Sauvignon Blanc dominates.	13%	2013–2016	£10–£14.99	Lalthwaite's Wine, Waitrose
Sigalas, Nykteri, Santorini 2009	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16	Iodine aromatics and a Fino Sherry character. Expressive, intense, with stone- and tropical-fruit notes including mango and pineapple, plus ripe red apples.	15%	2013–2020	£31.20	Maltby & Greek
Estate Theodorakakos, Assyrtiko, Laconia 2012	15.5 (85)	17	14.5	15	Smoky aromas, with baked fruits. Palate has tropical fruit with a twist of lime and a clean mineral tang, with high acidity, zingy minerality and citrus fruit.	12%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.estatetheodorakakos.gr
Koutsoyiannopoulos, Nykteri Barrel Fermented, Santorini 2012	15.5 (85)	16	14.5	16	Quite richly oaked nose with honeyed fruit. More interesting palate with melons, nectarines and grapefruit. Well balanced but lacks real complexity.	13.5%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.wine-museum-koutsoyiannopoulos.gr
Claudia Papayianni, Ex' Arnon, SB-Assyrtiko, Chalkidiki 2012	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.5	14.5	Distinct lift of Sauvignon Blanc on the nose, with a leafy, citrus edge. Very floral and aromatic. More of an aperitif wine than one to have with food.	12.5%	2013	N/A UK	www.cp-domaine.gr
Domain Mega Spileo, Assyrtiko-Lagorathi, Achaia 2012	15.25 (84)	15.5	14.5	16	Light tropical tones on the palate – melons and peaches. Straightforward, youthful wine but lacks real intensity, yet a clever, elegant blend.	12.5%	2013–2018	N/A UK	www.cavino.gr
A&G Papaloannou, Assyrtiko, St Elias, Corinthia 2012	15 (83)	14.5	15.5	15	A youthful, fresh, summery wine with aromas of strawberries and red fruits. One for the terrace with spritz of acidity and a pinch of bitterness on finish.	13%	2013–2015	£7.50–£10	Eclectic Wines, Somerby Vineyards, Traditional Greek Food
Santo Wines, Assyrtiko Grande Reserve, Santorini 2010	15 (83)	14.5	15.5	15	Aromas of smoke, oil and toast. Spicy and salty; although oak is integrated, the island's character is hidden behind the sweet vanilla notes.	15%	2013–2016	£16.99	Ehrmanns

Fair 13–14.75pts (76–82pts)

■ Karamitros, Two Moons, Karditsis 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Ktima Vourvoukeli, Assyrtiko, Avdira 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Nico Lazaridis, Winery of Mykonos, Wind's Island, Table Wine 2008 14.75 (82)

■ Haridimos Hatzidakis, Assyrtiko de Mylos, Santorini 2011 13 (76)

For full UK stockist details, see p84

My top three

Sarah Jane Evans MW

■ **Haridimos Hatzidakis, Vignes Centenaires, Pyrgos, Santorini 2010** This super-complex, single-vineyard wine, with its skin contact, bottling without filtration and minimal sulphur, stands apart. Give it time in the glass to reveal its texture and minerality. **18/20pts (93/100pts)** Drink 2013–2015

■ **Domaine Porto Carras, Melissanthi, Côtes de Meliton 2012** Porto Carras has had its ups and downs, but it charmed me with this blend – Assyrtiko has a future beyond Santorini, and with other varieties. **18 (93)** Drink 2013–2016

■ **Gaia Wines, Thalassitis, Santorini 2012** Thrillingly intense and almost salty, with tingly acidity, this wine came very close to joining the Outstanding category. This is textbook: discover windswept Assyrtiko in its perfect volcanic terroir. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2013–2020

My top three

Nico Manassis

■ **Boutari, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012** Boutari was instrumental in ushering in changes by picking earlier and introducing modern winemaking. This is one of its most focused wines in years: understated and elegant with a refined mineral finish. **17/20pts (90/100pts)** Drink 2013–2022

■ **Koutsoyiannopoulos, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012** Not only is this a wonderful expression of a modern Assyrtiko, but grapes sourced from the estate at Exo Yiallos, east of Fira, reflect a different sub-regional identity, with texture and zesty acidity. **18 (93)** Drink 2013–2022

■ **Sigalas, Barrel Fermented Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012** Exemplary for its gentle use of oak. Layer upon layer of intense flavour, adding complexity to this cocktail of lemony, creamy yeastiness, with a flinty smokiness on the long finish. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2013–2020

My top three

Igor Sotric

■ **Biblia Chora, Areti, Assyrtiko, Pangeon 2012** Dynamic and elegant with Mediterranean herbs, pinewood, salty minerals, green apples, nectarines and citrus notes. This had a youthful character, great structure and minerality, with impressive length. Seductive. **18.5/20pts (95/100pts)** Drink 2013–2022

■ **Haridimos Hatzidakis, Assyrtiko, Santorini 2012** I loved the freshness and intensity here with tropical fruit, banana leaf, jasmine, pine, grapefruit, green and stone-fruit notes. Harmonious with balanced alcohol, structured with good texture, drinking now but will keep for another five years. Subtle. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2013–2021

■ **Canava Roussos, Nykteri, Santorini 2008** An aged Assyrtiko with a developing and pronounced expression of stone and tropical fruit characters, red apples, melon and nectarines. A smooth, rich and intense mouthful with hints of honey and vanilla. **17 (90)** Drink 2013–2018

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Nico Manassis

Santorini was the inevitable centre of attention, but the impressive wines from all over the mainland show that Assyrtiko is bound to provide pleasing surprises in the future



Nico Manassis is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Greece

FEW THINGS HELP focus the mind better than a crisis. The volatile political environment in Greece notwithstanding, and given the credentials of its Assyrtiko and blends, not all regions delivered in this tasting. While essentially free of flaws, our 36 Recommended wines were just not hitting the sweet spot. A closer look at vineyard management may be the key for more expressive wines, and for unlocking their full potential.

No surprise that Santorini was the star performer, and a high strike rate came from Sigalas – five Recommended or Highly Recommended wines topped by its Assyrtiko-Athiri, a softer, easier blend. 2012 was a cooler year when Athiri excelled in coming out of the shadow of its more illustrious cohort and contributed a great support act.

Estate Argyros's Santorini Assyrtiko, the only screw-capped entry, was noted for increased vibrancy – more producers should use this closure. Other blue-chip names like Gaia and Hatzidakis made strong showings, particularly the latter, claiming the only Outstanding prize. Most of their 2011s are still closed, especially the single-vineyard wines. Patient wine lovers will be rewarded.

Two Santorini wineries have considerably upped their game. Artisan Gavalas delivers yet another little-known snapshot of the island's complex vineyard puzzle, while

Santo Wines, its largest producer, confirmed with its straight 2012 Assyrtiko and 2012 Nykteri that it has been trying harder for some time now. These changes go beyond smart repackaging, and Nykteri wines need a few years to show how gracefully this traditional style develops.

Near the centre of mainland Greece, in the shadow of Mount Helicon, the potential emerged for a new quality source. Elsewhere, impressive results came from cooler-climate Macedonia, where the harvest takes place up to three weeks later than on the islands. Other emerging front-runners include Biblia Chora's Areti, whose modern sheen shows a gentle touch in this northern Aegean coastal location. I expected more from Chalkidiki, where some older vines should have come through. An eye-opener came from just outside Thessaloniki: Kamara's Kioutsouki 2012 was brimming with linear character, showing there are undiscovered places where Assyrtiko can shine. **D**

'Nykteri wines need a few years to show how gracefully they develop in bottle'



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