

Beyond Assyrtiko: Alternative Greek whites

Though Assyrtiko may be Greece's best-known grape, the country is a treasure trove of white varieties, in diverse styles. Yiannis Karakasis MW shares his pick of 'other' Greek dry whites.



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From hard-fisted growers of bad-reputation in terrible places in terms, to the somewhat modern-day (over)land of Southern Island, Greek wine has come a long way. This is particularly felt in the country's whites, which highlight freshness and structure, with moderate alcohol levels that rarely exceed 15%. There's also an unexpected common thread – a subtle aromatic, sometimes sweet, but a more so on the way, a handful of other exciting white varieties have come to the fore.

Savatiano and pink-skinned Roditis account for one-third of the 60,000 total Greek vineyard. These varieties, traditionally associated with rosés, are being increasingly produced in whites. Savatiano, which has its home in Attica, shows moderately intense aromas of apple, white peach and lemon. It ages well, developing a honed, waxy character, almost like a Hunter Valley Semillon, but formed all the time since its vigor, adding substance and layers of complexity. The rosé and often neutral Roditis, when planted in high-altitude sites such as Naxos in the Peloponnese, produces heady-tasting wines with intense minerality. Both varieties react well to skin contact, which is becoming more and more common.


Mainland Greece has long been an aromatic paradise. Malagouzia has received from extinction in the late athen and is today one of the most producers. It covers coastal and produces single-varietal wines or softens the edges of Assyrtiko blends. Armos include flowers and herbs in cooler sites, followed by a round palate with soft acidity. It delivers its best in mountainous areas.

Compared to Assyrtiko, it offers the more approachable side of Greek whites, however, the best examples are worth starting for up to five stars. Moschofilero, another pink-skinned variety planted mainly in Mani in the Peloponnese, could have been a big hit with its mix of Muscat aromas, high acidity and friendly price, but it's a victim of its own success – as producers increased yields to meet rising demand, so overall quality suffered.

Forasmuch, it's making a comeback with rose-white wines, some with less aging and more acidity. The Greek island of Crete has numerous varieties, both coasts – Crete, being elegant, medium-bodied wines with lemon, grapefruit and fennel aromas, plus fresh acidity. There are experiments with indigenous varieties and some single-clone plantings have been created. Vitis is the superior for Crete, delivering a dense core of apricot or rose-cream minerality. Whites are Dede and Vitsani, with a subtle texture – the Greek coastline, as it looks with its oak.

Other styles include orange and traditional-method sparkling wines. The list would not be complete without Aidani, a partner for Assyrtiko. It's increasingly used on Rhodes, delivering expressive wines with lemon, peach, kumquat and tropical fruit. It's made in two main styles – a rather Asian version and a more mineral one.

Yiannis Karakasis MW's top 18 alternative Greek whites



Nikos Douzoufakis, Sparkling Traditional Method Brut, Crete, 2018

Yellow-gold, cool's Vitis, with aromas of tart tatin, thyme honey and orange zest, plus light anise-like notes, refreshing and layered, with a fresh cream resonance on the palate and high acidity.

Points: 94



Gentilini, Bobola, Aegean Islands, Greece, 2019

A delicious introduction to Bobola (Saviano), with strong aromas and notes of apple, white peach and fennel. Vibrant palate, very elegant and precise.

Points: 91



Tetramestos, Natur Roditis, Peloponnese, Greece, 2019

From 20-year-old bush vines of from its island, using a natural approach. A stunning wine delivering hardiness, crystal-clear stone fruit and notes of apricot. Harmonious, with impressive depth.

Points: 89



Monemvasia, Kydonitsa, Lakonia, Peloponnese, Greece, 2018

Scented with apricot and perfume. Distinctive, vertical wine with mouth-watering acidity that leads to a long, lasting finish. Vibrant and delicate.


Points: 89



Petralopoulos, Thy mari Petras Bobola, Aegean Islands, 2019

Exotic and distinctive single-clone Bobola, just a few hundred bottles made. Complex green tea, mint and citrus notes on the nose. Vibrant, oily and balanced, combining richness and elegance.


Points: 87



Oenops, Vitianno, Crete, Greece, 2018

From mountainous vineyards in Crete, this is spontaneously fermented and matured on the lees for six months to emphasize the zest to bring to the style of vintner Nikos Karakasis: mineral and focused. Pure, fine.


Points: 87



Ktima Gerovassiliou, Malagouzia, Epimoni, Macedonia, 2019

The archetypal expression of Malagouzia, this is a top vintage and is partly matured in oak. Vibrant nose, with herbal notes and a core of citrus. Ais heh.


Points: 86



Troupis, Tonal Maniada, Peloponnese, Greece, 2019

Intensely floral and fruity with lime, white peach and rose. Mineral and crisp, a strong vein of acidity on the long finish, another delightful Moschofilero from one of our favorite Troupis vintners.


Points: 86



Tselepos, Maniada, Peloponnese, Greece, 2019

A benchmark Maniada with freshness, generous fill and a long finish. High-bodied with evenly acidity and high energy. This is a textbook, high-quality Moschofilero, delicious and better with age.


Points: 86



Moropoulos, Maniada, Peloponnese, Greece, 2019

New kid on the block Moropoulos offers one of the most promising Moschofilero, delivering floral and citrus scents, with hints of minerality. Strikingly balanced and structured, an unexpected salty finish.


Points: 86



Aton, Savatiano, Central Greece, Greece, 2017

An Asian take on Savatiano, bold and powerful, with a nutty nose and lots of freshness. For all the expression on the palate, there is also energy and high energy, with a vein of fine acidity and a super-long finish.

Points: 86



Mylenas, Naked Truth Savatiano, Aegean Islands, Greece, 2018

Not your ordinary Savatiano, this has seen skin contact for 12 days and is bottled with minimal oxygen. Floral and wild rose, with lemon notes. Lightly tannic, with freshness and a persistent finish.

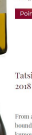
Points: 86



Argyros, Aidani, Santorini, Aegean Islands, Greece, 2018

A different, more mineral style compared to the Nipelas, with white flowers, honeyuckle, peach and mineral. Vibrant and textural, complex yeasty notes. Abundant tropical fruit and fresh acidity.


Points: 85



Domaine Siglas, Aidani, Santorini, Aegean Islands, 2018

Golden-colored, with yellow fruits, tropical hints, honey, orange zest and nuttiness. Texturally oxidative and full-bodied. This is layered with garrigue and Mediterranean herb notes, a powerful and rich.

Points: 85



Chatzivaritis Estate, Ni Malagouzia-Roditis, Macedonia, 2018

Impassive, with the 100% Malagouzia within the line. A vibrant cream, candied fruit, orange peel, an exciting orange-ripe grape aroma and intense fruit.

Points: 84



Talis, Malagouzia Orange, Macedonia, Greece, 2018

From a historic producer in Giannitico, this Malagouzia produces homeliness. Skin contact wine, extremely aromatic, with orange zest, lemon and citrus notes. Fresh, floral and delicious palate.

Points: 84



Dyo Ipsi, Malagouzia, Peloponnese, Greece, 2019

A vibrant blend of Kithiaki and Assyrtiko in equal proportions, displaying notes, thyme and peach. Fruit purity on the palate, plus intense minerality on the long finish. Textural and focused.

Points: 84



Oreolios Gaia, San Gerassimo Bobola, Aegean Islands, 2018

Consistently one of the best Bobolas of the island, this speaks of high-altitude character, demonstrating all the virtues of the variety – aroma, freshness and structure – in excellent balance.

Points: 84