

RENAISSANCE IN GREEK WINEMAKING **WIDENS PRODUCTION OF CLASSIC AND NEW WINES**

Until recent years, the most common references to Greek wine were historical and mythological: gift to mankind from Dionysus, Greek god of wine...product of the world's first cultivated vineyards...the first wines labeled according to place of origin...the first to be prized and traded internationally.

But today, discussions and writings on the wine of Greece are far more likely to focus on the present. Wine enthusiasts, experts and journalists are spreading word of an industry renaissance that is bringing Greek wines of exceptional character, quality and consistency to the marketplace.

The wines are winning awards at such major international trade shows as VineExpo and Wine America; earning high ratings from wine and spirits publications; and have penetrated the wine lists of renowned restaurants across the U.S. which are responding to consumers' Chardonnay and Cabernet-weary palates. These accomplishments are adding a new and exciting chapter to the country's already formidable viticultural history.

Competition, tourism, Greece's 10-year participation in the European Community, and a new generation of penologists trained abroad have all helped to hasten this revival. But while the changes are widespread-- involving a great many of nation's nearly 300 commercial wine producers-- vintners are proceeding along two divergent paths. Some are committed to using only native grapes, of which there are some 300 varieties. Others are planting foreign grape varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, to produce new wines that remain inherently Greek in style.

There is, however, a common denominator among these vintners: the newfound emphasis on modern technology and scientific techniques. New bottling lines, stainless steel tanks, filtration systems and French oak barrels are fast becoming the industry norms, resulting in enhanced purity, freshness, and higher and consistent quality.

In addition to hundreds of indigenous grape varieties, Greece is blessed with three geographical attributes that greatly benefit the production of wine: ideal climatic conditions for the growing of vines; low-yield soils favorable to the production of quality wines; and a variety of regional micro-climates, which results in a range of wines with great individuality.

Greek wines fall into two basic categories: those carrying a government- approved "appellation of origin" (identified by a label across the bottle's cork: blue for sweet wines: red for dry and sparkling), and table wines, which may be blended and called "cava" when barrel-aged for two to three years.

There are 28 recognized wine-producing regions in Greece, which produce 64 varieties of wine with an appellation of origin. Better known grape varieties include xynomavro (used to make dry, full-bodied reds in the regions of Naoussa, Amynteon and

Goumenissa in Macedonia); agiorgitiko or St. George, (used in red wines mostly from Nemea in the Peloponnese); and mavrodaphne (used to make the sweet red dessert wines of Patras).

Retsina, a resinated wine known for its distinctive pine flavor, carries a special designation of “traditional appellation,” and may only be produced in Greece.

In total, Greece produces approximately 132 million gallons of wine annually, about 32 million of which is bottled (the remainder is sold in bulk). Roughly 15 percent of this bottled wine is exported, about two percent to the U.S. While export figures are modest at present, current advances in Greece’s wine-making industry are expected to have a favorable impact on these figures in the years ahead.