

DOMAINE SIGALAS, SANTORINI

Santorini is a unique island which is part of the Greek Cyclades group. It was formed by a catastrophic volcanic explosion in 1646 BC, and the soils and, in places, desolate terrain, still bear witness to the tumult and fury of the ancient past.



Santorini vine training

Santorini's environment has a profound impact on its wines. I'll concentrate on the white grape assyrtiko which is the dominant variety on the island. The volcanic pumice soil lacks organic content, and the vines are exposed to the elements, demanding inventive viticulture. The canes are wound into "baskets" so that the grapes grow in the middle, protected from the sun and wind. This allows ripening and acid retention without sunburn or shrivelling.

The production of high quality white wine in this part of the world challenges conventional thinking, but Santorini is unique, and its native grape assyrtiko is part of that uniqueness.

Most assyrtiko wine is stainless steel-fermented and dry. Lees contact in tank for up to 18 months can impart a subtle complexity. In aroma and flavour terms, the closest comparison I can make is with Hunter Valley semillon, but some high quality examples of assyrtiko carry a hint of riesling-like fragrance when young as well as sea air "salty" aromatics.

The Assyrtikos of Domaine Sigalas

2016 Santorini Finesse Vibrant and delicate, with a faintly "salty" nose. The palate offers generous flavour backed up fresh acidity. Short-term lees contact has contributed a textural element. ★★★★★

2016 7 Villages (Imerovigli) Fresh powerful citrus peel aromatics lead to a concentrated palate with a lively acid finish. The texture features talc-like phenolics which add considerably to enjoyment. ★★★★★

2016 7 Villages (Oia) Fuller, richer and more rounded, showing grapefruit characteristics. It lacks the length and acid line of the Imerovigli, and the palate is more phenolic. ★★★★★

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2016 7 Villages (Megalochori) It doesn't have the precision of the other village wines, showing wet straw aromas together with obvious sulphur dioxide. The finish is quite firm. ★★☆☆

2016 7 Villages (Pyrgos) Delicate and "salty", with faint lemon zest overtones. It's the lean and racy member of the family. A good oyster wine. ★★★★★

2016 7 Villages (Vourvoulos) Quite ripe, edging into tropical fruit territory. It makes a substantial flavour impact but lacks finesse. ★★★

2016 7 Villages (Fira) Very fresh, and offering a touch of saltiness. A complete wine of intensity, fineness and acid-freshness. The balanced grip on the palate completes the picture. ★★★★★☆

2016 7 Villages (Akrotiri) A delicate lemony style with plenty of fresh flavour and lively acid back-up. ★★★★★



2015 Kavalieros Without doubt, this is a "first growth" of Santorini. Made from 60 year old vines grown on a single site at Imerovigli, and rested for 18 months on lees in tank, this is a subtly complex, textural delight. The lemon aromas are enhanced by a breath of sea air, and the long palate is creamy and perfectly balanced. ★★★★★

2014 Kavalieros Although the colour is light gold and some honey and toast show on the nose, this wine is still full of life. It's richly flavoured, long on the finish and acid-fresh. Excellent drinking. (\$56.50) ★★★★★☆
<https://www.redwhiteandbubbles.com.au/shop/domaine-sigalas-kavalieros>

2016 Santorini Barrel The varietal aroma is fresh but subdued, pushed under slightly by oak, even though only 10% new barrels are utilised. Fruit returns to the fore on a lively, satisfying palate, but the oak seems more like a condiment than an integrated enhancement. ★★★★★

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2014 Nychteri This assyrtiko was made from late-picked grapes. Fermentation was in old oak barrels in which the wine remained for three years without topping-up. It's light gold in colour and decidedly honeyed, a curious mix of crystallised fruits and oxidative complexity. The finish is quite firm. ★★★



Bare terrain opposite Domaine Sigalas winery

The assyrtikos of Santorini are largely undiscovered internationally, but producers like Domaine Sigalas know their value, and consequently prices are relatively high. The pricing is undoubtedly supported by the hordes of tourists who descend on Santorini in the warmer months, but the quality certainly warrants it.

Some of the wines of Domaine Sigalas are available in Australia through <https://www.redwhiteandbubbles.com.au/shop/?brand=Domaine%20Sigalas&>

I suggest you try them, not just for the great pleasure they deliver, but to experience the uniqueness of Santorini.

Note: Jim Barry Wines at Clare has created considerable interest with their Assyrtiko which is the first to be produced in Australia. Winemaker Peter Barry imported the cuttings from Santorini.

Although it's very early days, the wine shows great promise. It shares some characteristics with some of the wines of Domaine Sigalas, and a comparative tasting would be fascinating.

<https://www.jimbarry.com/products/16927-assyrtiko/>

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