



**Written by**

Guest contributor

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## Cyprus's vineyard treasure trove



*Co-author of Wine Grapes Dr José Vouillamoz reports on recent discoveries in the renascent vineyards of Cyprus. See also [The Cyprus wine revolution](#).*

A recent short trip to [Cyprus](#) allowed me to take the pulse of this underrated wine-producing island, on which phylloxera is miraculously still unknown, making it one of the only wine regions in Europe, along with Santorini in Greece, where all the vines are planted ungrafted.

In *Wine Grapes*, published in 2012, we mentioned five indigenous grape varieties that were then used to make commercially available Cypriot wines. The two most widespread are the red-berried Mavro and white-berried Xynisteri, both used for the production of the historical sweet fortified wine *Commandaria*. The dark-berried Maratheftiko has gained momentum in recent decades, and the two rare varieties Ofthalmo (light red) and Spourtiko (white) have been rescued only recently.

Yet there are more varieties responsible for wines on the market today, with some more pending. After we finished writing *Wine Grapes* in September 2011, the Vouni Panayia winery in the Paphos district of western Cyprus began to produce varietal wines from the light-skinned Promara and dark-skinned Yiannoudi - a good enough excuse to pay them a visit. With 25 ha (62 acres) between 800 and 1150 m (2,625-3,770 ft), Vouni Panayia (*vouni* means 'small mountain' and Panayia is the name of the village) winery is run by Andreas Kyriakides and his sons Petros, Pavlos and Yiannis, the last trained in oenology and viticulture at the University of Florence.

A former researcher at the Department of Viticulture and Oenology at the Ministry of Agriculture, Andreas is proud to have established the first private 'boutique' winery on Cyprus in 1987 to produce high-quality Mavro and Xynisteri, at a time when four large co-operative companies (Keo, Loel, Etko and Sodap) dominated wine production on the island. In 2000, they were among the first to revive the production of Maratheftiko (initiated with Keo's Heritage), an old variety with female flowers that requires the propinquity of another variety in order to be

pollinated and to set fruit. They were also among the first (after Fikardos winery) to make wine with Spourtiko in 2007, with Promara in 2011, and with Yiannoudi in 2014, the last one having female flowers just like Maratheftiko.

Most of these forgotten varieties were recuperated by the late Akis Zambartas, whom I had a chance to meet briefly as we are both members of the *Académie Internationale du Vin*. While he was an oenologist at Keo, Zambartas tirelessly examined the old vineyards of Cyprus. He was able to rediscover an impressive total of 12 native varieties.

One of these old vineyards, planted about 70 years ago, belongs to the Vouni Panayia winery. Akis Zambartas and Pierre Galet, the most famous ampelographer alive, visited the vineyard in the 1980s. Alongside the traditional Mavro, Xynisteri, Maratheftiko, Ofthalmo and Spourtiko, they were able to rediscover Yiannoudi and Promara, which are commercially cultivated today, as well as four obscure 'new-old' varieties that are still under study: Bastartiko, Maroucho, Michalias and Omoio. Below, Yiannis Kyriakides (Vouni Panayia) stands next to the enigmatic Maroucho vine (with white labels on the shoots) in his 70-year-old vineyard in Panayia, planted with nine different native grape varieties, 1100 m above sea level.



This brings the total number of (supposedly) indigenous Cypriot varieties to 15:

Variety	Colour	Etymology	Note
Bastartiko	White	'bastard'	Possibly a clone of Promara. No longer cultivated.
Canella	White	'cinnamon', for unknown reasons	Or Kanella. Related to Morocanella? Rare, used in blends.
Flouriko	Black	?	Or Vfouriko. Rare, used in blends.
Maratheftiko	Red	?	Or Vamvakada. Promising, plantings recently increased; female flowers.
Maroucho	Red	Marouchos vineyard in Panayia	No longer cultivated.

Mavro	Black	'black'	The most widespread red wine grape, also called Kypreiko Mavro, the 'black from Cyprus'.
Michalias	White	Named after the owner of the vineyard in Panayia	No longer cultivated.
Morocanella	White	'little cinnamon', for unknown reasons	Or Morokanella. Female flowers. Widespread under Ottoman occupation, rare today (eg at Aes Ambelis, Gerolemo, Vasilikon).
Ofthalmo	Black	'bull's eye', after the berries' shape	Used in blends.
Omoio	Red	'similar', because it looks like Maratheftiko	No longer cultivated.
Promara	White	'early ripening'	Thick-skinned. Glykopromo is most likely a clone.
Sideritis	Black	'iron'	Different from its Greek homonym, unclear origin, probably not Cypriot. No longer cultivated.
Spourtiko	White	'bursting', the thin-skinned berries tend to split easily	Recently rediscovered and cultivated.
Xynisteri	White	'low in acidity'	The most widespread white wine grape.
Yiannoudi	Black	found in the garden of a certain Yiannis	Female flowers. Recently rediscovered and cultivated.

NB Contrary to Galet's hypotheses, and as extensively detailed in *Wine Grapes*, DNA profiling has definitively shown that Altesse from Savoie in France (recently planted and vinified on Cyprus by Keo winery) and Furmint from Tokaj in Hungary do not originate from Cyprus. In addition, a preliminary DNA study by Hvarleva and colleagues showed in 2005 that the variety called Moscato on Cyprus is identical to Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (or Moscato Bianco), that Malaga is identical to Muscat of Alexandria, and that Lefkada is a synonym of the Greek variety Vertzami, grown on the island of Lefkada.

Following in the footsteps of his late father Akis, Marcos Zambartas, trained in oenology and viticulture in Adelaide, has taken over the winery with his wife Marleen, and has recently purchased a vineyard planted in 1921. Marcos invited me to visit this historical vineyard in which he has found at least three additional old and potentially unknown varieties. Could Marcos's vineyard contain some of the varieties that I found in the literature and for which I have no information: Daktylidi, Hemoniatiko, Kliniotiko, Mardangura, Nezerkotiko,

Tsakromoutiko? Since many old or unknown varieties have never been genetically studied, a follow-up and an extension of Hvarleva's 2005 research should become a priority for the Cyprus wine industry. Not only must the identity of these varieties be established, but the family trees of all 15 Cypriot varieties should also be reconstructed, providing Cyprus with a strong scientific background for its ampelographic heritage.

As Marcos informed me, all the vineyards of Cyprus are apparently registered with their date of plantation. Therefore, priority should be given to the oldest ones, since they are at most risk of being uprooted at any time. Indeed, this is a pernicious consequence of inheritance laws and of the use of EU subsidies to replace old vineyards with more 'suitable' varieties. I suggested to Marcos that the creation of 'old vine' cuvées might be a way to save them from uprooting, obviously by selling the wines at higher prices. In order to strengthen this value creation, the estimation of the age of the oldest vines by dendrochronology should also be carried out. Contrary to some opinions, it is quite possible to estimate the age of a vine, just like we do for a tree. I am currently learning this technique with a retired professor from Switzerland, who successfully estimated the age of several old vines. Below is one of the many old bush-vine plantations at risk of being uprooted in the near future on Cyprus.



I'm definitely convinced that the salvation of Cyprus viticulture will be via safeguarding the study, and the planting, of indigenous grape varieties.

### **RESTAURANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

I did not have many opportunities to cover the restaurant scene during my short stay, but I want to highlight two places:

#### **The Winery** wine bar and restaurant in Nicosia

Good food in a lively atmosphere where I had my first ever Morocanella by Aes Ambelis, an aromatic wine with nectarine notes. Crisp, pleasant but a bit short.

#### **Fat Fish** seashore restaurant in Limassol

Watch out, there's a wine geek in the saddle here! Thanks to co-owner and sommelier Georgios Hadjistylianou, who is extremely knowledgeable about wines from Cyprus and far beyond, I was able to enjoy the tasty and delicate cuisine of the Fat Fish along with some amazing wines: Xynisteri 2016 by Ezousa, fresh and lively; Petritis 2011 by Kyperounda, from the highest vineyards on Cyprus (1400-1600 m), complex and dense, arguably one of the best Xynisteri on the island, already praised by Jancis; Maratheftiko 2009 by Ezousa, impressive nose of pencil shavings, dark fruits, incense, ripe and smooth tannins, very persistent in spices and fruits, admirably illustrating the qualitative potential of this variety after some ageing in the bottle. The

cellar here contains a carefully chosen range of wines from all over the world, and Georgios Hadjistylianou even made his own, and first-ever orange wine from Cyprus, a 2009 Xynisteri vinified with Tsiakkas winery with six days of skin contact and four months fermentation in new oak, at first declared 'dead', but now showing beautiful notes of orange, saffron, with incredible drinkability. Not for sale, but maybe an alternative direction to follow?

## **WINES TASTED**

### **Vouni Panayia, Panayia, Paphos district**

#### **Whites**

##### **Alina 2016**

*100% Xynisteri, maceration 6 hours at 8 °C, selected yeasts, bâtonnage in stainless-steel tanks. Named after a location.*

Chamomile, mirabelles, with Riesling-like petrol notes. A bit dull in the mouth, lacking structure, light wine with too much acidity (added tartaric acid?). Simple. (JV) 12.0%

15 Drink 2017-2018

##### **Spourtiko 2016**

*100% Spourtiko, maceration 7 hours at 8 °C, selected yeasts, bâtonnage in stainless-steel tanks.*

Yeasty, grapey, with aromas of peach flowers. A nice texture with good body and balanced acidity. Water-melon flavours, finishes on bitter orange, quite enjoyable. (JV) 12.5%

16 Drink 2017-2020

##### **Promara 2016**

*100% Promara, maceration 8 hours at 8°C, selected yeasts, 3 months in French and American oak (not new) with bâtonnage. Single vineyard, 2,000 bottles.*

Smoky, cold ashes, smooth texture, rich and rounded mouthfeel, well-balanced acidity, a little heavy on the finish. Needs some time to calm down, very promising. (JV) 12.5%

15.5+ Drink 2019-2023

##### **Promara 2015**

*100% Promara, maceration 8 hours at 8 °C, selected yeasts, 3 months in French and American oak (not new) with bâtonnage. Single vineyard, 2,000 bottles.*

Not smoky at all (unlike the 2016), complex nose of ripe apples, bitter orange, petrol, green beans. Soft mouth with pleasant acidity, very fruity on the finish. (JV) 12.5%

16.5 Drink 2017-2022

##### **Promara 2014**

*100% Promara, maceration 8 hours at 8 °C, selected yeasts, 3 months in French and American oak (not new) with bâtonnage. Single vineyard, 2,000 bottles.*

Not smoky at all (unlike the 2016), complex, almost heady nose of acacia flowers, smooth texture, with brandy-like flavours, although the alcohol and the acidity are balanced, more powerful and persistent than the 2016 and the 2015. (JV) 12.5%

17 Drink 2017-2024

#### **Rosé**

##### **Pampela 2016**

*75% Maratheftiko, 25% Mavro, maceration at 8 °C, selected yeasts, bâtonnage in stainless-steel tanks. Named after a location.*

Smoky, wild cherries, soft in the mouth, finishes on acidity and bitterness, simple, enjoyable rosé. (JV) 12.5%  
15.5 Drink 2017-2019

## Reds

### **Plakota 2016**

*Blend of Maratheftiko, Mavro and Othhalmo, 3-4 days of fermentation in stainless-steel tanks. Smoke, blackberries, gooseberries, light structure, very few tannins, unbalanced finish, too acidic and bitter. (JV) 13.0%*  
15 Drink 2017-2019

### **Yiannoudi 2016**

*100% Yiannoudi, 2-3 weeks of maceration, 12 months in oak (70% new). Mocha, plums, alcohol too heady, medicinal in the mouth, harsh tannins and bitter finish. Needs time? (JV) 13%*  
15 Drink 2020-2024

### **Barba Yiannis 2015**

*100% Maratheftiko, 2-3 weeks of maceration, 12 months in French oak (70% new). Dark cherries, cigar, vanilla, some volatile acidity, soft mouth with rounded tannins, the acidity increases in crescendo on the finish, slightly bitter. Needs time. (JV) 13.0%*  
15.5 Drink 2018-2022

### **Barba Yiannis 2013**

*100% Maratheftiko, 2-3 weeks of maceration, 12 months in French oak (70% new). Peony, strawberries, fresh structure with somewhat rustic tannins, pleasant bitter finish on cherry stones. (JV) 13%*  
16.5 Drink 2018-2022

## **Zambartas, Limassol**

(NB all wines with DIAM closures)

## Whites

### **Xynisteri 2016**

*100% Xynisteri from old vines at 850 m in the Krasochoria region, north of Limassol. Fermented in stainless steel. Straw colour, fresh lemon juice, apple flowers, crisp mouthfeel, sharp finish, unusual acidity for this grape (added tartaric acid?), impressive freshness for a Mediterranean wine, quite quaffable. (JV) 13.0%*  
16.5 Drink 2018-2020

### **Single Vineyard Xynisteri 2015**

*100% Xynisteri from a 28-year-old vineyard in Mandria in the Troodos mountains at 900 m. Fermented in stainless steel, followed by 4 months of barrel ageing and 1-2 years of bottle ageing. Straw colour, intense and complex nose with hints of hay, chamomile, peach, pineapple, clean and straight mouth with a smooth texture, balanced acidity, finishes on kumquat. (JV) 13%*  
17.5 Drink 2018-2025

## Reds

**Maratheftiko 2015**

*100% Maratheftiko. French oak.*

Ruby colour, rose petals and violets, freshly crushed blackberries, some vanilla, rounded mouth with fine tannins, very juicy and pure, well-integrated wood, very persistent on cherry stones and roses, crushed almonds, one of the nicest interpretations of this variety. (JV) 14.5%

17.5 Drink 2018-2025

**Lefkada/Shiraz 2013**

*Blend of Lefkada (originating from the eponymous Greek island in the Ionian Sea) and the French Syrah. French oak for 12 months.*

Blood colour, smoke and spices, marzipan, mocha, dark chocolate, quite serious red, dense structure, fine tannins, wood still perceptible, bitter chocolate on the finish, a bit drying, could be mistaken for a Valpolicella Ripasso in a blind tasting. (JV) 15%

16.5 Drink 2018-2023