Gerovassiliou's 2007 Greek whites

3 Mar 2008 by Julia Harding MW

Find the Malgousia
Find the Estate White

Greek winemaker Evangelos Gerovassiliou practically rescued the delicate, aromatic Malagousia vine variety from extinction, and has certainly shown what it is capable of today. He trained in Bordeaux under oenologist Émile Peynaud and on Peynaud's recommendation went to work at the then-pioneering Château Carras in Halkidiki. Since 1981, Gerovassiliou has been building up his own estate at Epanomi, just south of Salonica, in central Macedonia. The 45-hectare single-vineyard estate (pictured below), looks down to the Aegean Sea and across to Mount Olympus and has a Mediterranean climate, with sea breezes to keep the temperatures down in summer. Soils are mainly sandy but there are also underlying strata of calcareous marine fossils.

Gerovassiliou has been particularly influential in his efforts to exploit modern winemaking techniques in order to make top-quality wines from indigenous as well as international varieties (notably Chardonnay and Syrah), both red and white, and he was one of the first to see the potential of the rare Malagousia, native to central Greece.

2007 was a much hotter summer than usual and particularly difficult to manage in the vineyard because of three short periods of extreme heat (up to 40 degrees C). The last of these spikes was around the beginning of the harvest and careful use of drip irrigation was needed to protect the wines from heat stress without diluting the flavours. As a result of this heat, the harvest began six days earlier than in 2006 and all the white grapes were picked in early August with yields around 10% below average.

The grapes for **Gerovassiliou Malagousia 2007** spent a night saking up flavour from the skins, at a cool 10-12 deg C, and were then fermented at 18-20 degrees C in stainless steel tanks, followed by a few months in contact with the lees, which were occasionally stirred - nothing too complicated but very deliberate. (Skin contact has to be very carefully done to avoid any hint of phenolic bitterness.)

There's an initial fresh fragrance of spring blossom but it's more complex than that first impression, with mineral and just slightly smoky citrus and apricot notes on the palate, even the tiniest hint of spice and pepper. After such refined perfume, the restrained power on the palate might come as a bit of a surprise – there's noticeable weight and density and length, even though it's just 12.5%, especially if you don't over-chill it. Here's a wine with lovely multidimensional purity which is terrific with or without food.

Gerovassiliou Estate White 2007, which may not be as widely available as the varietal Malagousia, is a 50/50 blend of Malagousia and the mineral-laden Assyrtiko (best known on the island of Santorini). These two varieties make up about two-thirds of the estate's vineyard. It's made in the same way as the varietal Malagousia and the two varieties are blended after the alcoholic fermentation because the Malagousia is picked about a week earlier than the Assyrtiko. It shares the aromatic qualities of the Malagousia but seems to show the warmth of the vintage more - a little bit richer, riper, creamier and more rounded, even though the technical analysis of sugar, acidity and alcohol are very similar. It's dry (not bone dry but pretty close at 3.2 g/l residual sugar) and the alcohol a mere 12.5%. Gerovassiliou has clearly handled the challenges of the hot summer brilliantly, since both wines retain freshness and their wonderfully distinctive varietal characteristics.

Some retailers will probably still be selling the 2006 vintage of these wines as the 2007s have only just been shipped. But I don't think you will be disappointed by either.

Gerovassiliou wines are available in the UK, Germany, Belgium and Sweden as well as in the US and Montreal. In the US, the following are listed on winesearcher.com as having offered the 2006s and so may well stock the 2007s: Schneiders of Capitol Hill (Washington DC), Vestry Wines (NY), Beltramo's Wines (Menlo Park, CA), DrinkUpNY.com, K&L Wine Merchants (Redwood City, CA), Liquid Partyworks (Chatsworth, CA), Woodland Hills Wine Company (Woodland Hills, CA), Du Vin Fine Wines (Alameda, CA).

In the UK, the 2006 vintages were available from the stockists listed below. For information on where to buy the 2007s,

contact specialist importer Vickbar Wines, www.vickbarwines.co.uk.

Gerovassiliou Estate White: Cooden Cellars (Eastbourne), Region Wines (online only, Chester), Theatre of Wine (SE London), and Green & Blue (S London). It is also available in many member states of the European Union especially Germany, France, Belgium, Sweden.

Gerovassiliou Malagousia: Swig (W London), Theatre of Wine (SE London), The Vine (Ware, Herts).

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