

Moscophilero from Mantinia

5 Apr 2010 by Julia Harding MW

From €7.60, £11.99 and US\$11.84 for the Gaia Notios white, US\$10.95, for the Spiropoulos Moscophilero and €9.95, US\$16.98 for the Tselepos Moscophilero.

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When Steve Daniel, then buyer at UK independent specialist Oddbins, had a rush of Greek blood to the head in the mid 1990s, I remember being enchanted by a bottle of Tselepos Moscophilero from Mantinia, the high plateau in the middle of the Peloponnese where this variety is truly at home and dominates white-wine production.

So I was delighted to be reunited with the current vintage of the Tselepos Moscophilero on my recent visit to this part of Greece (more detailed reports to follow) but disappointed to find how few of the wines I tasted in Mantinia and the neighbouring regions are available on export markets, though the US is far better served than the UK, for reasons discussed briefly in [Greeks not resting on their laurels](#).

In view of this lack of availability, I'm recommending five different versions of Moscophilero – four varietals and one blend. I could have added a couple of sparkling versions to show the variety's versatility but I thought seven wines was pushing it a bit for wine of the week.

Moscophilero – pronounced with the stress on the third syllable and sometimes transliterated with an F in the middle (???????????? in the Greek alphabet) – is typically light-bodied, with alcohol around 12% in a good vintage, delicately but unmistakably aromatic, mostly floral and/or grapey, both charming and refreshing. It is generally unoaked, though there are a few honourable exceptions (see below).

Yiannis Tselepos (right), Cyprus-born and Dijon-trained, is based near the town of Rizes, south-east of Tripoli in the prefecture of Arkadia, though he has vineyards further north too, in Ancient Mantinia. He produces a 'classic' unoaked wine, **Tselepos 2009 Mantinia**, which is light and fragrant on the nose and then tight and crisp in the mouth with a long mineral finish and a finely chalky aftertaste. Just 12% alcohol. The vineyards are at around 650 metres and you feel the coolness in this wine. He skilfully avoids the pitfall of making a wine that is all initial aroma and no structure or length or freshness. It was even better than my rosy memory of that bottle from the mid 1990s. (Many retailers may still be selling the 2008.)

His oaked version, **Tselepos, Blanc de Gris 2008 Mantinia** (rather discreetly distinguished by a red flash on the label saying 'barrel fermented'), is only partly barrel fermented and aged on lees for four months, so it retains the variety's hallmark aroma but is richer and fuller, and – surprisingly – intensely aromatic on the mid palate. It's very long and rounded and yet still fresh and finely textured, perhaps more silky than the unoaked version, with just a touch of spice on the finish. The alcohol is slightly higher at 13%.

Apostolos Spiropoulos (left) was thrust into the role of chief winemaker in the family business as soon as he graduated from UC Davis. His first vintage was 2006 and already he is making refined and elegant wines. The winery is in Artemisio, north of Tripoli, and the vineyards are, like those of Tselepos, at around 650 metres. **Spiropoulos 2009 Mantinia** has a pink tinge because the skins of this variety range from pale pink to quite dark, depending on the clone. Many if not most winemakers try to avoid getting any colour in their wines but Spiropoulos says his ambition is to make the pinkest wine in Mantinia, if other interested parties will give him free rein ... It has the typical lightly floral (peach blossom?) and grapey aroma then more lemon and grapefruit on the palate; a lovely restrained, fresh style.

Spiropoulos, Astala 2008 Mantinia is a single-vineyard wine (not necessarily the same vineyard every year), made from lower-yielding vines and allowed more time in contact with the skins. A small proportion (15-20%) is finished in new oak.

Here added weight and depth and a slightly more creamy texture are well balanced by the crisp acidity. It's even more aromatic than the straight Moscofilero – grapefruit, orange zest and spice but all in homeopathic doses. Both the Spiropoulos wines are just 12% alcohol.

In honour of Steve Daniel and his relentless commitment to the best Greek wines, here's one wine available in the UK from his company Novum Wines: **Gaia, Notios white 2009 Regional Wine of Peloponnese**. It's an elegant and refreshing blend of Moscofilero from Mantinia with Roditis from Corinth, which adds a lemony flavour and structure. It is less overtly aromatic than the varietal Moscofileros described above but manages to combine a delicate fragrance with a lovely mineral intensity and amazing persistence for the price. The mid palate is more scented than you might expect from the initial aroma and there's a fine roundness from some less contact (but no oak). Excellent value for money. According to the producer's website, Notios means 'from the south', a name chosen to prove that times have changed in the southern Mediterranean when it comes to fresh white wines.

Spiropoulos wines are available in the US (Athenee Importers, NY), Canada (Rubaiyat, Toronto), Cyprus and Germany (Mikroulis, Hannover).

Tselepos wines are available in the US (VOS Selections), Australia (Douglas Lamb Wines), Cyprus (Argosy Trading Company), Germany (Atlas Grosshandel GmbH and Weinhandlung Cava), Belgium (Pasqualinno Bvba), France (La Table de la Mediterranée) and Sweden (Oenoforos AB / Carovin AB).

Gaia wines are more widely available than those of many Greek producers and Notios can be found in the UK at [Novum Wines](#). Google also led me to Oddbins and [Yamas Wines](#). Though beware: because Greek wines tend not to fly off the shelves, some retailers may be offering older vintages. Novum definitely has the 2009, which, I am told and can well believe, is the best vintage yet!

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