



Written by

Guest contributor

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Greeks praise Australian Assyrtiko



Brand new MW Yiannis Karakasis (right) and Grigoris Michailos (left), aka the Wine Commanders, are founders of the independent wine blog winecommanders.com. Both are Diploma holders and WSET educators. Since 2013 Yiannis and Grigoris have joined hands to communicate their passion for Greek wines. They regularly organise themed and regional wine tastings, promote Greek wines abroad and write about wine. Here they describe the triumphant debut of Clare Valley Assyrtiko.

Three years ago renowned Australian producer Jim Barry planted half a hectare of Assyrtiko vines in Clare Valley, with the planting material sourced from Argyros Estate on Santorini. Despite the laborious process of importation and quarantine procedures, Jim Barry's son Peter (seen here picking Assyrtiko) was not discouraged from trying something so innovative in Australia.



Production started with just 42 half bottles in the maiden 2014 vintage (we are proud to have one in our cellar) and climbed to 2,000 litres in 2015, potentially giving around 2,600 bottles. The grapes were picked by hand on 5 March, the result of two passes through the vineyard. They were then whole-bunch pressed to yield a wine with pH 2.98, TA 6.6 g/l and 13.8% alcohol. The retail price is not yet determined but could be somewhere between 25 and 30 Australian dollars a bottle.

Assyrtiko vines are now planted on a total of three hectares in the Clare Valley and the yields are close to 35 hl/ha. More plantings are scheduled.

During a promotional Greek wine tour in Australia we were thrilled to show Greek wines in Adelaide and meet Jim Barry's winemakers Derrick Quinton and Sarah Adamson. Quinton offered us a bottle of Jim Barry's Assyrtiko 2015 to open and taste with a group of wine influencers. Among them there were Phil Reedman MW and Bird in Hand's Kym Milne MW together with various importers and media.

It was a joy with real emotional momentum to show the wine next to an Assyrtiko from the Argyros Estate that provided Jim Barry with the eight dormant cuttings from a single Santorini vine.

Yiannis, who presented the Clare Valley Assyrtiko, commented on the restrained aromatic character of the wine and the firm, structured personality on the palate with freshness and minerality highlighted. Stylistically one could argue that the wine was more mineral than fruity.

On the other hand Quinton talked about the Argyros Estate wine from the 2012 vintage that showed an evolved Riesling-like character with honeyed richness and high extract. He believes that there will be more Assyrtiko plantings in Australia during the next few years as the variety shows good adaptability in the Clare Valley and the variety can offer the unique combination of high alcohol and high natural acidity together with the intense mineral notes. The photo below shows an experimental planting of bushvine Assyrtiko.



In all, this is an amazing first effort, bringing out the best of Assyrtiko outside Greece. Well done Jim Barry and thank you for spreading the word on this one-of-a-kind variety!

Both the Jim Barry and Argyros wines proved exquisite with the kingfish sashimi, smoked mussels and spanner crab dishes (pictured) served later in Africola restaurant.

