

Palate-cleansing hedonism at its best

19 May 2014

2013 Artemis Karamolengos Aidani

On Santorini, the three As mature in the following order: Athiri, Assyrtiko, Aidani. Visually the vigour of Aidani is the more impressive. Yet, appearances can be deceiving. If there is a problem, it lies in its small acreage, as well as market forces. It is mostly found in the field mix and in few more-recently planted vines notably by the beautifully restored Argyros's Episkopi vineyards, or Hatzidakis's Pyrgos organic plots. Aidani is gifted with a more aromatic, though lower in acid, profile than king Assyrtiko. The revisited, much in demand Aidani is needed on two fronts, resulting in some serious price hikes. Sun-dried Vinsanto's backbone tannic bite and acidity remains Assyrtiko. It is the smokey, floral aromatic qualities needed for Vinsanto that set the wineries reaching deep into their pockets. During harvest the Aidani word has become almost a battle cry. With chilling chambers now being the norm, this once overlooked grape has become something of a prima donna. Price continues to rise as demand far outstrips supply – especially as the dry varietal emerged over the last decade. This softer introduction to the bone-dry Assyrtiko has become the new darling of the fooderati. Nature's wisdom is such that in a given year not all three As mature in the same time window. Athiri likes cooler climatic conditions, such as the 2009 and 2011. Aidani ripens slowly and in some areas it struggles to reach the full aroma spectrum and expressive flavour levels. The outstanding 2013 seems to be kind to most Aidanis. Consulting oenologist Athina Tsoli has left few stones unturned in improving quality and individuality at Karamolengos. Fully aware of the value of terroir-driven place names, she has grouped them in styles to structure their shape for each label from the vineyard up. This may be a logistical nightmare but much needed discipline. Fact remains: one has to go with these building blocks or happy-go-lucky end up in messy mediocrity. Even for the softer, aromatic Aidani, this terroir has such a strong imprint that it needs a proactive stance after the harvest futile attempts in blending. The acidity in this, much improved, varietal is impressive. It is sourced at the highest and cooler Pyrgos sites, arguably the highest and slower-ripening vineyards on this one-of-a-kind island vineyard. Interestingly, as Pyrgos village reaches 340m and the vineyards 300m, the locals refer to the microclimate as 'Siberia'. According to Artemis Karamolengos, he sourced from the east-facing Exo Gonia and the south-western upper-Megalochori slopes. The look on his face after asking him how many hours of extra labour to harvest Aidani involves, was, well, priceless.

Platinum. Pale yellow tints. Lime scented, wet pebbles. Fat, vibrant freshness. Sweet blossom, smokey, mineral, long aftertaste. Food was made for such wines. My Portobello-mushroom risotto, spiked with six-month-old Cretan umami-rich graviera cheese, was quite a match. I urge you to stock up of this, yet another surprise from this world-class improbable vineyard. Palate-cleansing hedonism at its best.



Artemis Karamolengos Aidani

Area: Aegean Islands

Type: White

Variety: Aidani Visit: n/a