

Tasting notes

Manousakis Mourverdre Vertical, 29/8/2020

Elias Kiritsis

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1 Introduction

On August 29th, 2020, we have assisted in a vertical tasting at Manousakis Winery, of one of their flagship varieties, Mourverdre. The winery is located in the village of Vatolakos, southwest of Chania, in Crete. The winery itself and the surroundings are very beautiful and worthy a visit.

The vineyards of the winery were planted in 1993, with a second wave taking place in 2007. Today the winery vinifies many varieties, both French and Cretan. They became known for their Rhone varieties, Syrah, Grenache, Mourverdre and Roussanne but they later also focused on local varieties like Vidiano, Romeiko, Muscat of Spina and Asyrtico.

The focus of the tasting were the Mourverdre wines of the domaine. We started however with two other bottles from my cellar, a Roussanne 2012 paired with a similar bottle from the Winery's cellar, as well as a red Mazi wine from 2012 from my cellar.

The bottles of the tasting came from my cellar² as well as from the Winery's cellar³.

The wines were tasted open (not blind), in flights of two wines at a time (mostly)

Below I present my tasting notes marking the origin of each bottle, interlaced with a few comments.

²Where they were kept at 11.5 °C and 80% humidity. All bottles from my cellar started their life in pristine condition as they were given to me as samples by the talented winemaker of the Winery, Kostis Galanis.

³The winery's cellar has regulated temperatures that are around 16 °C. Since the effect of the cellar temperature is expressed exponentially on the evolution of wines, one can expect substantial differences for older wines.

2 Preliminaries

We started tasting two wines unrelated to Mourverdre. The first round contained a Roussanne 2012 from my cellar served together with a Roussanne 2012 from the Winery’s cellar. The reason I picked this wine is that I tasted it recently and I was impressed by the result.

The second wine that was tasted was a red Mazi wine, from 2012, from my cellar⁴. Mazi means “together” in Greek and is a collection of two wines made by Manoussakis winery together with another distinguished winery from the Heraklion area, the Lyrarakis winery. For the red Mazi blend, two very interesting local varietals were used at 50% each. The Romeiko grape, indigenous to the Chania region, which was resurrected, studied and vinified (as a red wine)⁵ by Galanis at the Manousakis winery. And the Mandilaria grape, indigenous to Crete and eastern Aegean islands, from the Plakura vineyard, vinified by the Lyrarakis winery⁶

- **Roussanne 2012** (from my cellar): Brilliant yellow color. A first nose is subtly aromatic with a palette of papaya, loquat and peach aromas, ending with a hint of safran. Upon coaxing and having the temperature slightly up⁷ the nose evolves, becomes stronger and more focused, with a similar palette of aromas that also give notes of Helichrysum flowers (Helichrysum

⁴The wine bears no millesime on the bottle as it was forbidden by the existing legislation. I know the millesime from Galanis’ info.

⁵Romeiko is a rather unique variety as such. It is highly aromatic, but very easily oxidized. The aromas lie mostly in the pulp of the grape, while the skin does not carry a strong color component. Galanis experimented for over a decade with various types of vinifications. Now the winery produces a pure white version that is highly aromatic and attractive young, but whose evolution in time has not yet been studied. The winery also produces a pink version with partial contact with the skins that shares the aromatic profile of the white version.

⁶When I arrived on the island of Crete in the late 90’s, Mandilaria was used as a coloring component in local red wines based on the Kotsifali grape. It was harvested completely immature in the second part of August together with the Kotsifali grapes, giving wines with high astringency and acidity. I had tried to persuade a few producers then that the Mandilaria must be harvested much later, fully ripe. Lyrarakis, was the first producer to do things right with Mandilaria. He “discovered” Plakura vineyard with old Mandilaria vines and he harvested in October. His single varietal Mandilaria wine, made since 2007, is a very interesting wine that continues to evolve higher. I have detailed this in my tasting notes on Lyrarakis’ winery wines.

⁷My numerous controlled experiments with the service of Roussanne wines indicate, that they show best at temperatures high compared to other full bodied white wines. The optimum temperature is around 15-16°, but as usual, service must also take into account external temperature gradients as well as the quantities served in the glass.

stoechas is a common mediterranean flower whose flowers are dried but smell throughout, Αμάραντος in Greek). In the mouth, it has a smooth attack, with a rich mouthfeel, the aromas of the nose resort in the midpalate, with papaya dominating and a nice lively acidity well-balanced with the rest. It has a long finish, where some of the original wood notes of the wine resurface.

Remark: This wine is drinking superbly at the moment. It is not so easy to predict its long term future but I would bet on consuming it in the next three or so years although it may last longer.

I should also take the opportunity to reiterate my opinion, that wood does not go very well with Roussane. It masks the very enticing primary and secondary aromas of young Roussane and it may, if substantial, also show up when the wine is older. As first shown by the talented Andrien Berlioz of Chignin in Savoie, what can enhance the wine, without much deforming its aromas, is lies' contact and batonage.

• **Roussanne 2012** (from the winery's cellar). Brilliant yellow/dark-yellow color. The nose is funky suggesting a possible start of corking. However the wine remained for half an hour in contact with air, but the nose did not evolve. It is a mystery. In the mouth however, the wine behaves differently. It has a smooth attack, a good balance and some fruit reminding mostly herbs and safran. It has a long finish on pleasant herbal notes.

• **Mazi red, 2012** (from my cellar, 50% Romeiko, 50% Mandilar): Brilliant ruby-red color. A first nose with elegant aromas of leather, red fruits, tar and other phenolic tails while developing blackberries in the sequel. A second nose after some coaxing, gives a more focused palette of aromas, with some extra alcohol-macerated cherry flavors. In the mouth, it has a smooth attack, with hints of tannin adding some structure, a lot of fruit with aromas mirroring the nose, excellent balance and medium to full body. It has a long finish with lingering aromas of cherries and kirsch.

Remark: This wine shows its best at a service temperature of 18° C unlike

most other red wines (with the exception of Bordeaux reds). It is pleasant to drink now and in my opinion it will evolve nicely for the next ten or so years.

3 Mourverdre

Remarks: The Mourverdre tasted here is a single varietal wine. Until 2011, all Mourverdre in the winery was blended in the Nostos and other blends. Galanis would bottle a few bottles of it before blending and he gave me one per year for a few years. Since 2012, there is a minuscule 100% percent Mourverdre cuvée produced at the estate (around 1000 bottles) produced from selected barrels of Mourverdre.

There are three vineyards producing the Mourverdre for the winery. The two were planted in the beginning, while the third was planted in 2007. The Mourverdre from these vineyards is vinified separately. After maturation in barrels, the three or so best barrels are selected for the Mourverdre wine. The yields range between 45-60 hectoliters per hectare (or 600-800 Kgr of fruit per 1000 m² of vineyard).

The wines were served directly from the bottles without carafing. In retrospect, several of the wines needed a 1-2 hours carafing. The service temperatures were not always optimal (see my comments at the end).

- **Mourverdre 2006** (from my cellar): Color limpid dark-red turning brick from the center to the rim. The first nose is expressive with aromas of cherry, kirsch and cherry marmelade. In the mouth it has a rather lively attack, with sustained acidity, a lot of fruit, nice balance, imperceptible tannins but good structure, medium to full body and a long fruity finish.

After half an hour, the wine was retasted and had evolved substantially. New aromas of cinnamon and liquorice appeared in the nose and also in the midpalate and finish. The wine was substantially more complex now.

- **Mourverdre 2007** (from my cellar): Limpid ruby color with brick hues near the rim. The fist nose is reserved with subtle aromas of red fruits, kirsch and leather. A second nose after substantial coaxing evolved somewhat, but remains reserved. It has a lively attack in the mouth with zesty acidity, imperceptible tannin, a good fruit and a long finish.

- **Mourverdre 2008** (from my cellar): Limpid red color with a bit of brick at the rim. The first nose gives aromas of reds fruits and kirsch while, with coaxing, a blackcurrant component becomes obvious. After 10-15 minutes, the nose improves substantially becoming more complex and focused, with extra tones of cherries and blackberries. In the mouth, it has a lively attack, with a solid acidity that is well integrated with the fruit present, imperceptible tannin, full body in the midpalate, and a long finish with cherry and blackberry aromas.
- **Mourvedre 2008** (from the winery's cellar): Limpid red color with a bit of brick at the rim. The first nose gives aromas of reds fruits and kirsch and remains constant after coaxing. It has a unusual fleeting end where the aromas merge and somehow disappear. In the mouth, it starts with a lively attack, dominated by acidity, well integrated and full bodied midpalate and a long finish. This and the previous wine started life being the same, but this one is a bit less complex than the previous one. The reason must be different storage conditions.
- **Mourverdre 2009** (from my cellar): Limpid dark red color with a touch of brick at the rim. The nose is intense with nice red fruits, kirsch and alcohol-macerated cherry flavors. It has some volatile aldehydes that are nicely incorporated in the nose and sharpen the rest of the aromas. In the mouth, it has a smooth attack with a lot of fruit unfolding, well balanced and integrated acidity and tannins, full-bodied midpalate and a long fruity finish.

Remark: The density of the wine is increasing as the years go by. By now, it is a dense wine and the subsequent millesimes will see the density increasing further. They are broad-shouldered wines with an alcohol content of around 14.5 °C, which however is very well-integrated and hidden, provided the wine is served at the appropriate temperature (around 16° C).

- **Mourverdre 2012**⁸ (from the winery's cellar): Deep dark-red color. The first nose starts with aromas of cherries and kirsch. Upon coaxing it becomes more sustained and focused. In the mouth, it has a lively attack, a present but well integrated acidity, a lot of fruit in the midpalate, smooth tannin, full body, excellent balance and perceptible aldehyde that ties well with the fruit. The finish is long. This wine can be drunk now, but it may better in 3-5 years and will probably last till 2032.
- **Mourverdre 2013** (from the winery's cellar): Dark-red color. First nose with hints of cherry, blackcurrants and kirsch, rather reserved. It remains so, after 10-15 minutes coaxing. In the mouth, it has a lively attack, a lot of fruit in the midpalate, smooth tannin, full body, perceptible aldehyde that ties well with the fruit and a long finish. This wine can be drunk in 5 years and will last 20 or so years, maybe more.
- **Mourverdre 2014** (from the winery's cellar): Dark-red color. The first nose is reserved with hints of fruit, blackcurrant and kirsch. After 10 minutes of coaxing it remains reserved. In the mouth, it has a smooth attack, with good fruit developing in the midpalate, smooth tannin, full body and a long finish with kirsch notes. The wine can be drank in 5-7 years and will last 20-25 years.
- **Mourverdre 2015** (from my cellar): Dark-red limpid color. The first nose is reserved with hints of fruit and kirsch. After 10 minutes of coaxing it becomes more expressive and focused along the same aromatic palette. In the mouth it has a smooth, silky attack, with good fruit developing in the midpalate, smooth tannin, lively but integrated presence of aldehyde, full body and a long finish with kirsch notes. The wine can be drank in 5-7 years and will last 20 years.
- **Mourverdre 2015** (from the winery's cellar): There is essentially no per-

⁸From now on, these wines were released officially under the Winery's mark.

ceptible difference from the sample before.

- **Mourverdre 2016** (from the winery's cellar, out of stock): Intense black color. First nose soaring from the glass with an expressive palette of red fruits, blackcurrants, cherries and kirsch. After a ten minute evolution in the glass it becomes more complex and is now also showing an intense floral component of viola (violette) and paeonia (pivoine) flowers. This is a very impressive nose for a young red wine. In the mouth, the wine has a rather lively attack, solid tannins that are well integrated, good acidity, loads of fruit, full body, excellent balance and an extra long fruity finish. This is undeniably the best of the young Mourvedre vintages of the winery. The wine can be drank even now, but it will be much better in 5-10 years and will last 20-30 years.
- **Mourverdre 2017** (from the winery's cellar, not yet released): Intense black color. The first nose is dominated by smoke aromas and cinnamon coming from the barrel, slowly giving place to shy aromas of red fruits. Substantial coaxing does not provide a lot of differences in the nose. In the mouth, it has a smooth attack, with fruity and spicy aromas especially cinnamon, full body and substantial tannin. It has a longue finish. This wine needs 7 years to mature and can last 20+ years.
- **Mourverdre 2018** (from the winery's cellar, not yet released): Intense black color. The first nose is shy and after substantial coaxing aromas of red fruits, cherry and kirsch emerge. In the mouth, it has a smooth sweet attack, with fruity aromas interlacing the substantial tannin, full body and very good balance. Its finish is long and fruity. This wine needs 7-8 years to mature and can last 20+ years.

Final comments on the service of Mourverdre: Young wines starting with 2012, should be served at no higher than 16°C to curb the preponderance of alcohol. Older wines may be served at a bit higher temperatures, 17-18°C.