

Miliarakis Tasting, 1/7/2021

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1 Introduction

On July 1st, 2021, we have assisted in a vertical tasting at Miliarakis Winery, of several of their wines. The winery is located in the village of Peza, south of Heraklion, in Crete.

The winery was one of the pioneers of bottling wine in Greece and in Crete. Today, they have two labels, “Miliarakis Estate” that carries the best wines, and the Minos brand that specializes in inexpensive local wines.

The tasting focused on three wines, that were chosen because of their interest in aging and the availability of appropriate bottles.

The first wine is Turtle Vineyard White, a wine that contains 50% Roussanne sourced at the Turtle vineyard, west of Yuhtas mountain, south of Heraklion. The vineyard is located at 450 m altitude and is facing north. This wine, from 2012 (its first millesime) until 2016 contained another 50% Sauvignon Blanc from Petropoulos’ vineyard in the Filisia village. From 2017, Roussane was blended with another 50% of the Vidiano grape sourced from the Estate’s vineyards. The wine is vinified in stainless steel vats and then passed into cuves, without contact with wood.

The second wine tasted is made from 100% Vidiano that is sourced in the Estate’s vineyards. The wine is vinified in stainless steel vats and then passed into cuves, without contact with wood.

Finally the third wine is the “Domaine Miliarakis red”, a wine made from 80% Kotsifali grapes and 20% Mandilari grapes, both emblematic Cretan red varieties. The grapes are sourced in one of the Estate’s vineyards that was planted in 1998, with the first wine bottled in 2001. The wine is vinified in stainless steel vats and then passed into french oak barrels (average age about 3 years) for 10 months until bottled.

The bottles of the tasting came from three sources. One was my cellar² while a second was the Winery’s cellar³.

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 bought just after bottling directly from the winery.

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.

Finally, one bottle, Domaine Miliarakis' Red 2014, was bought in Chalki-adakis Supermarket in February 2021. It is clear that it has remained there from mid-2015 till February 2021, in a temperature that varied between 15-24 degrees throughout the year, as well as in contact with light. Its case seemed bleak, but the tasting revealed otherwise.

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

The detailed program of the tasting was as follows, in order of service:

Flight 1: Turtle Vineyard White 2019, 2020

Flight 2: Turtle Vineyard White 2014, 2014 (unfiltered)

Flight 3: Turtle Vineyard White 2013, 2012 Cuvee I, 2012 Cuvee II.

Flight 4: Vidiano 2016, 2014.

Flight 5: Vidiano 2013, 2010.

Flight 6: Domaine Miliarakis Red, 2003, 2007.

Flight 7: Domaine Miliarakis Red, 2009, 2010, 2014.

Flight 8: Vermouth Milirakis, 1965.

The high heat during the tasting created serious problems that had to be addressed. The white wines were kept at 12° C and were served directly from bottle so that they arrive at about 13-15°C in the glass during the actual tasting, a temperature that for both whites was ideal. The reds were kept at 15° C and were served also directly from bottle so that they arrive at 16-18°C during the tasting.

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

The tasting ended with a glass of Vermouth Miliarakis 1965. It was a hybrid between an Italian amaro and a Vermouth that was superb. It had a remarkable balance between sweet, bitter and spicy and a seamless texture, helped by its 57 years of age!

2 Turtle Vineyard White (Λευκή Χελώνα)

- **Turtle Vineyard White 2019** (from the winery's cellar): The color is bright and brilliant straw-yellow. The nose is open and starts with a full palette of mineral flavors accompanied with a beautiful honeysuckle (chevrefeuille, αιγόκλημα) and pineapple aromas. In the mouth it has a lively attack, punctuated by acidity. The mid-palate is aromatic and both mineral and floral/fruity components appear, the acidity is present and the overall balance is very good. The finish is long and fruity.

comments: 2019 was a very unusual year for Cretan wines. The winter and spring were unusually harsh and long, and vines started flowering very late. The rest of the season was cooler, and harvests were late (but not late enough, so the vegetative cycle was shorter than other years). Moreover, the whites tasted in early 2020, were very difficult to taste, dominated by high acidity and closed noses. Later on, some whites that never had mineral flavors before, did develop mineral flavors. This wine was tasted in early February 2020 and was completely closed with a pronounced high acidity. What a difference, one and a half year later! Although this wine can be drunk now, it is best to wait another 7-8 years and drink for the subsequent ten.

- **Turtle Vineyard White 2020** (from the winery's cellar): The color is bright and brilliant straw-yellow to yellow. The nose is impressively complex, with a prominent aroma of wild strawberry, honeysuckle, pineapple and grapefruit aromas. In the mouth it has a lively attack driven by zesty acidity and fruit. The mid-palate is very aromatic, with the full palette of the nose present as well as a mineral component. The acidity is present but seamlessly integrated and the body is substantial. The overall feeling is that of balance and aromatic strength. The finish is very long with powerful aromatics. This is a very complex and balanced young white.

comments: 2020 was a very good and balanced year for Cretan Whites. The tell-tale wild-strawberry aroma of young Turtle Vineyard White is a mark of the terroir of the Turtle vineyard on the Roussanne grape, and is almost certainly not due to yeasts. It usually lasts not long in the young wine, unless bottled and properly cellared early. But in 2020, it has been much more persistent. See also below, when we discuss the 2014 unfiltered cuvée. This wine drinks well now on its primary aromas but is expected to

age well.

- **Turtle Vineyard White 2014, Regular cuvée** (from my cellar): The color is a brilliant yellow. The nose is quite complex and is dominated with typical aromas of old Roussanne: papaya, safron, pineapple and helichrysum flowers. In the mouth it has a lively attack driven by zesty acidity. The mid-palate is dominated by the fruity and empyreumatic aromas of the nose, the acidity is substantial but is well-integrated, and there is an overall balance. The finish is long, lively and perfumed.

This wine is at its plateau of maturity.

comments: This cuvée remained in the cuve roughly 6-7 months before being bottled. The wine has evolved faster than it should, given the conditions of cellaring, as it had a cheap plastic cork, that has become rigid fast and allowed too much oxygen to pass through. I have recently recorked my bottles of 2014. For a tasting after recorking look at the end of this section. This wine drinks well now and will probably last for the next 2-4 years.

- **Turtle Vineyard White 2014, unfiltered cuvée** (from my cellar): The color is lighter than the previous wine, being a straw-yellow to yellow, and it is not perfectly limpid, being bottled unfiltered. The nose starts more reserved than the previous wine and the aromas are clearly less evolved. There are hints of the original wild-strawberry aroma, honeysuckle, pineapple and touches of safron and quince. In the mouth it has a sweet attack that is seconded by a zesty acidity. In the mid-palate, the wine has a lot of fruit, a sweetness as well as acidity, but the blend is not fully harmonious and the two do not seem to complement one another. The finish is medium and ends on a bitter note that does not detract.

comments: While the wine was in the cuve, six bottles were bottled unfiltered on the third month, to track whether one can preserve the exotic wild-strawberry flavor. These bottles were preserved in my cellar. This was the last of them. The bottle has also developed large crystals of trygic acid that precipitated over the years. The aromatic profile of the wine was backward, as expected compared to the regular cuvée. The structure of the acidity was different, giving a sweetness to wine and making it appear flabby in the mid-palate.

- **Turtle Vineyard White 2013** (from my cellar): The color is brilliant

pale straw, like in a young wine. The nose start timid but slowly opens to give aromas atypical of the wine: jasmin, citrus fruits, green apple, and honeysuckle. In the mouth it has a lively attack dominated by the acidity. The mid-palate is light, with low fruit expression, but well integrated acidity. The finish is medium to long and ends in citrus notes.

comments: The color is very unusual for a 8 year-old white. The nose aromas are tell-tale signs of sauvignon, and it is the only wine in the series where the aromatic profile of sauvignon dominates that of Roussanne. Moreover, it is unusual that these aromas are preserved mostly unchanged after 8 years. This wine needs to wait another 5 years, and then be drank in the subsequent 10.

• **Turtle Vineyard White 2012, Cuvée I** (from my cellar): The color is brilliant and limpid pale-straw to yellow, still youngish for this wine. The nose is very expressive and is typical of old Roussanne: papaya, safron, pineapple and helichrysum flowers. On a second effort, notes of honeysuckle also appear. In the mouth it has a vivid attack with lively acidity and finely dispersed CO₂ that gives a slightly peppery feeling. The mid-palate is dominated by the fruit, the acidity is balanced, the CO₂ is present, and the wine is full-bodied. Despite the CO₂, there is an overall balance. The finish is extra long, with fruity and peppery notes and a slight bitterness in the end that does not detract.

comments: This was the first vintage of Turtle Vineyard White made. The only difference of cuvée I from cuvée II is that Cuvée I was bottled earlier, at 4 months after vinification. Moreover, the must was left for about 6 hours with the skins of Roussanne, which are the color of iron rust. Therefore, this wine was a pale rose color when young. The color dissipated after about a year in bottle.

There were signs of refermentation in bottle since 4 years ago, as the cork of one of the bottles popped midway out. 3 bottles were tasted in the last 3 years and all have shown CO₂ compatible with refermentation (almost certainly due to malolactic fermentation that is always blocked in Greece) This wine will be best in 3 years from now (so that the gas dissipates) and will then drink well for another 5-6 years.

• **Turtle Vineyard White 2012, Cuvée II** (from my cellar): The color is

brilliant and limpid pale-straw to yellow. The nose is very expressive and is typical of old Roussanne: papaya, saffron, pineapple and helichrysum flowers. The aromas are a bit more prominent than the previous bottle. In the mouth it has a vivid attack with lively acidity and finely dispersed CO₂ that gives a slightly peppery feeling. The mid-palate is dominated by the fruit, the acidity is balanced, the CO₂ is present, and the wine is full bodied. There is an overall sweetness that contrasts with the acidity and CO₂. Despite the CO₂ and the sweet feeling there is an overall balance to the wine. The finish is extra long, with fruity, peppery and sweet notes and a slight bitterness in the end that does not detract.

comments: Cuvée II was bottled 6-7 months after vinification and therefore remained in the cuve an extra 2-3 months compared to cuvée I. When bottled, the original pale rose color had already disappeared.

Here again it seems that refermentation took place in the bottle. This wine drinks well now and will continue to do so for another 6-10 years.

Addendum

The following bottle was tasted in April 2021.

• **Turtle Vineyard White 2014** (from my cellar): Color brilliant and bright deep yellow. The nose is expressive on tertiary notes of papaya, helichrysum flowers and resin notes, evolving towards smyrna. In the mouth it has a lively attack with a full mid-palate, solid acidity, resin aromas and a long finish expanding on smyrna notes.

comments: This bottle comes from my cellar, and has been recorked 1 month ago (March 2021). The original bottle had a lowest quality plastic cork, that lost elasticity early and is responsible for the accelerated evolution of this wine.

The bottles of 2014 that were tasted during the tasting above, had the original

plastic cork.

3 Vidiano (Βιδιανό)

General Remarks:

Vidiano is by now a popular grape with Cretan winemakers. Moreover, its aging profile and its organoleptic characteristics were slowly understood, thanks to several recent tastings of aged Vidianos.

Miliarakis' 100% Vidiano is sourced at an estate vineyard in Saba, that was planted in 2000. In several intermediate years additional grapes were added from Petropoulos vineyard in Filisia. The wine is raised in a cuve, without contact with wood.

- **Vidiano 2016** (from my cellar): Bright light-yellow color. The nose is expressive with fruit aromas dominated by apricots and quince as well as a palette of mineral flavors: wet stone to flint. In the mouth the attack is smooth and rich. The mid-palate is loaded with fruit, the acidity is lively and balanced and the mineral flavors dominate towards the end. The wine has a substantial body. The finish is long and lingering with mineral and herbal notes.

Comments: 2016 was an excellent year for Cretan wines. This wine is typical of the millesime as well as the varietal. It is placed in between primary and secondary flavors on one hand (fruit) and tertiary flavors (mineral and herbal notes) on the other. This wine needs another 3-4 years and it will then drink well for another 10.

- **Vidiano 2014** (from my cellar): Bright light-yellow color. The nose is impressive and complex. Fruit aromas are dominated by apricots, citrus and quince. Then there are mineral/herbal flavors, wet stone, flint and laurel. And finally empyreumatic flavors like smyrna and cedar. In the mouth the attack is lively and rich. The mid-palate is dominated by the complex aromatic profile of the nose and the acidity is important but balanced by the full body. There is an overall equilibrium. The finish is long and lingering with

both fruity, mineral and resinous notes.

Comments: The quality of this wine is well above the reputation of the millesime. This is the best Vidiano I tasted from Milirakis, and one of the three best I tasted in Crete. This wine is drinking superbly now and will remain in this plateau for another 10 years if cellared properly.

- **Vidiano 2013** (from my cellar): Bright yellow color. The first nose is funky, dominated by herbal/green notes reminiscent of tomato stems. Upon further coaxing, more flavors arise on the mineral side. In the mouth, the attack is very lively with acidity playing a dominant role. The mid-palate is dominated by the important acidity of the wine, the fruit is taking a back seat, and the body is light. The finish is medium.

Comments: This is not a balanced wine, but with an appropriate pairing with food can balance the acidity. This wine might be better to drink in 4-6 years from now.

- **Vidiano 2010** (from my cellar): Bright and intense yellow color. The first nose is dominated by overripe fruit and is not very pleasant. Further aeration mitigates the fruity aromas turning them into more fresh notes of citrus. Novel mineral aromas appear as well as aromatic resin and smyrna. In the mouth it has a smooth attack plenty of aromatics. The mid-palate is dominated by the fruit while the acidity is good and well integrated. The body is medium and the wine is balanced. The finish is medium long with mineral and resin notes.

Comments: After some aeration this wine can be drunk now and is expected to remain in this plateau for about 2-5 years.

4 **Domaine Miliarakis Red** (Κτήμα Μηλιαράκη)

- **Domaine Miliarakis Red 2003** (from the winery's cellar): The color is light brick. The nose is pleasant with evolutive aromas of sour cherries in alcohol, red fruit marmelade, allspice, cinnamon and black pepper. The first attack is dominated by important acidity. The mid-palate is light, fruit is less dominant and the acidity has the upper hand. No tannin is discernible. The wine is somewhat off balance, although the aromatics are very nice. The finish is long, but ends on an acid note.

Comments: This is not a bad showing from very young vines and important yields. The wine should be drank now and can be balanced by matching it with a powerful dish like roasted lamb, Cretan style.

- **Domaine Miliarakis Red 2007** (from the winery's cellar): Intense brick color. The nose is beautiful with evolutive aromas of sour cherries in alcohol, red fruit marmelade, leather and black pepper. The first attack is dominated by acidity. The mid-palate is light, the fruit is present but faint and the acidity is angular. No tannin is discernible. The wine is also somewhat off balance, although the aromatics are very nice. The finish is medium.

Comments: The wine should be drank now and can be balanced by matching it with a powerful dish like roasted lamb, Cretan style.

- **Domaine Miliarakis Red 2009** (from my cellar): Bright red color with brick at the rim. Beautiful and complex nose with evolutive aromas of cassis, sour cherries in alcohol, red fruit marmelade, leather and black pepper. The first attack is smooth and seamless. The mid-palate is rich and fruity, with good structure, integrated acidity and an excellent balance. The finish is medium.

Comments: This is a very good wine that can be drunk now and in the next ten years. When young, it had a compelling nose reminiscent of a Burgundian pinot noir.

- **Domaine Miliarakis Red 2010** (from my cellar): Bright red color with brick at the rim. Beautiful and complex nose with evolutive aromas of cassis, sour cherries in alcohol, allspice, cinnamon and black pepper. The first attack is lively. The mid-palate has loads of fruit, the aromatics are similar to the nose, the acidity is low, the tannins are important and the body substantial. The overall balance is excellent. The finish is long and dominated by the aromas of the nose.

Comments: This is a very good wine that can be drunk now and in the next 10 years.

- **Domaine Miliarakis Red 2014** (bought from Chalkiadakis Supermarket in early 2021): Bright and intense red color. Beautiful and complex nose with evolutive aromas of cassis, sour cherries in alcohol, red fruit marmelade, leather, allspice, cinnamon and black pepper. The first attack is lively supported by the acidity. The mid-palate has loads of fruit, the aromatics are similar to the nose, the acidity is important but well-integrated, the tannins are few and elegant and the body substantial. The overall balance is excellent. The finish is long and fruity.

Comments: This is an excellent wine, the best of the series. It can be drunk now but it will be best in 3-5 years and will last another 10-15 years.

4.1 Final comments on the Kotsifali-Madilari blend.

It is clear that Kotsifali, supported by some Mandilari, can make a compelling and complex wine when aged 10+ years. For me, this is an eye opener as I have always found young wines with this blend, not particularly interesting.

It is fair to say that from all Kotsifali-Mandilari blends that I tasted in their youth so far , the Miliarakis' one, was on the average the most compelling.