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This issue's report mainly focuses on the output of Ted Diamantis's Diamond Importers; although, as always, I do not stick too closely to themes, and there are other things here in the interest of timeliness.

Founded in 1992, Diamond Importers was a smaller operation the first time I met with Ted Diamantis about a decade ago. Diamantis is Greek for diamond, but Ted says it is also about representing the jewels of Greece. He had a relatively small portfolio, but it was a very high-quality one, with some of the top producers in their regions like Alpha Estate (from 2002), Sigalas (from 2005) and Skouras (from 1992), plus the Naoussa boutique Karydas (in 2007). Gradually, the portfolio expanded. His first Cretan winery, Douloufakis, was added to the portfolio in 2011 and is now one of my favorites on the island. He scored a coup with Kir-Yianni (from 2014) and then Santo Wines that year as well. Both have received some 95-point scores. Some recent acquisitions, like Mylonas in 2014 and Vassaltis in 2016, are not at that level yet, but they have considerable potential. I could make a good argument that Diamond has the best producers in Amyndeon (Alpha), Naoussa (Kir-Yianni) and Santorini (Sigalas), granting that such arguments will go on for a long time in any bar. Nemea/Mantinia (Skouras) and Crete (Douloufakis) are even closer calls, but they are certainly going to be in any conversation. So, that looks like a pretty good portfolio, doesn't it? We won't even mention the olive oil.



The “7 Villages” project from Sigalas

There are, to be sure, some key competitors, perhaps most prominently and historically, Athenee. The recent expansion of Diamond, coupled with the recent loss by Athenee of four very well-known producers (Pavlidis, Estate Argyros, Gai'a and Papagiannakos), certainly tilts the balance, though.

For his part, Diamantis thoughtfully told me that Athenee was "one of the pioneers of Greek wines," and that he regrets the losses. They will recover, though, and they still have plenty of fine producers, including Thymiopoulos, Semeli, Gentilini (the last two in April's issue). Recent acquisitions like Tsiakkas, Oenops and Tsililis (some in April's issue and some in this issue) have proven to be savvy finds.

Needless to say, that's not the whole story, either. There are other fine producers scattered about with different representation as well. Dionysos Imports carries top producers in Naoussa, namely Dalamara and Foundi (check out April's issue for some super performances in Xinomavro from both of them), Gavalas on Santorini and Wine Art. They've made a push and put themselves in the conversation. Craft + Estate (the Winebow affiliate) took over Estate Argyros and Gai'a, among others, while DNS has Hatzidakis and others. Cava Spiliadis handles some big names, such as Biblia Chora, Gerovassiliou and Tselepos. Apologies to those left out, but this is a short article, not a book.

If I had to pick just one at the moment for King of the Hill, though, it would be Diamond. The breadth and quality of the portfolio is exceptional. It also doesn't hurt that Ted Diamantis is smart and knowledgeable about wine, not just a run-of-the-mill salesman. Going back to his foundations, it's no coincidence that his portfolio includes Skouras, because George Skouras got him into wine. Like many of us (some of us used to even be lawyers!), Diamantis had a first career (risk management) and became disenchanted, quitting at 26. As a first-generation Greek living in the USA, he saw the EU-related changes occurring on the continent (it was a big spur for the development of Douro table wines too) and visited Greece for the first time in 14 years. He bumped into Skouras, at the time making wine in his father's basement. He had just released his first vintage, the 1986 Megas Oenos. Skouras indoctrinated him into wine, "an avocation that could become a vocation." Then, Diamantis became Skouras's importer (the first vintage imported being the 1988).

It wasn't a full-time job at first. Diamantis repped for other wine distributors and also held down other jobs while learning the import business, not always a happy process. His first container was unluckily inspected (he says just 1% of wines undergo inspection) and challenged due to label issues, and he had to re-label 300 cases. It seems funny now, but to a young guy with his first shipment and his financial life flashing in front of his eyes, it probably wasn't.

Those days are long gone. Diamantis is one of the most knowledgeable about Greece at this point, spending about three months of the year in the country. He has well-considered opinions, not all of which we have time for here, given space constraints. The old wisdom on Greece was "whites better than reds." Personally, I think that's still true, even though I especially love the small region of Naoussa for Xinomavro, but it is changing. On the other hand, Nemea (with its signature grape, Agiorgitiko) underachieves. "I'm optimistic about the reds catching up to the whites," Diamantis said. "I really believe in the reds emerging out of Greece. The winemakers are much more understanding of their ecosystems, backing off oak."

Of course, to me personally, the great unknown is how Agiorgitiko progresses in the large and inconsistent region of Nemea. Agiorgitiko is easy to like, thanks to its bold flavors and enticing aromatics, but producers can't seem to decide between fruity, Gamay-styled wines and overly powerful monsters that seem to distort the grape and destroy its charm. The grape generally seems to have a Pinot Noir feel, but Nemea is fairly warm, so a lot of the wines show very ripe. Nemea is "misunderstood," Diamantis said, "and not really explained as an appellation." Eventually, there will come village sub-appellations, and "Agiorgitiko will become more of a standard-bearer. Better cultivation, farming, lower yields will see a lot more exciting stuff in Nemea."

Then, there's the battle for the soul of Greece. Cabernet or Xinomavro? Assyrtiko or Chardonnay? Too many wines just wind up being the same old international grapes. It's often shocking for

someone just getting into Greek wine to see how many of the wineries are better known for international grapes, but that's not where the action and excitement really is these days. The Greeks may seem to have had disdain for their own indigenous grapes in the past, leaning more to French ones, but those days seem to be drawing to a close. Diamantis explained that Greek millennials "really are embracing the indigenous varieties." So are foreigners. More Liatiko, Vidiano, Moschofilero, Malagousia, Assyrtiko, Xinomavro and others, please (so MANY others—Greece has hundreds of indigenous grapes).

Some upcoming highlights of his portfolio to look for in the future: Sigalas will continue the "7 Villages" exploration (see the tasting notes) and will also do an exploration on soil types. Skouras's Megas Oenos bottling will celebrate its 30th anniversary with the 2015 vintage. Diamond's pickup of Vassaltis on Santorini, "the first new winery built on the island in decades," he said, is in contrast to "transient winemakers." That property should continue to evolve. Next, Naoussa-based Kir-Yianni, which also has some vines in nearby Amyndeon, will do a Goumenissa under a new label. That's a year or two away. (Goumenissa and Rapsani are the two appellations where Xinomavro is a major component in wine blends and has appellation status as a blending grape but not as a monovarietal. As a monovarietal, it appears with appellation status in Amyndeon and Naoussa—sometimes spelled Amyndeo or Naoussa, respectively, Greek transliteration issues never being consistent.)

The wines in this issue comprise the usual assortment of seasonal items, nice values and other good stuff from places like Mylonas, Douloufakis (both from Diamond), Wine Art, Thymiopoulos, Tsillilis and many more. In particular, however, Sigalas, Kir-Yianni, Skouras and Alpha Estate are out in force this issue (all from Diamond), and Argyros (Craft + Estate) provides mini-verticals of their brilliant Vinsantos, dessert wines that, between this issue and last, have received my highest Greek scores.



You may also notice that this full online report includes many more wines/reviews than the shortened version that appeared in the print edition of this issue (due to the ever-present space limitations of print). Karomolegis, which was not in the print edition, provides some pretty impressive Santorini, thanks to its special Pyritis bottling. Once upon a time, I did not consider this estate a leader in Santorini. Some recent efforts in back-to-back issues may be changing my mind. Speaking of Santorini, it seems to me that Gai'a's well-known Thalassitis brand may have hit a high this issue. It

will be interesting to see where it goes, but it seems a bit different this year—and potentially stunning. No guts, no glory, right? I'm leaning up on it. Also on tap: an old favorite from Mercouri (Kallisto), mostly seasonal offerings from Moraitis on Paros Island, some nice pink from La Tour Melas, some nice prices from Papargyriou for things like The Black Daphne and a tasty Nemea for modest money from Palivou.

The highlight of this issue to me, however, was Sigalas's 7 Villages experiment, each wine using grapes only from a specific village on the island. Each village gets its own bottling. They will only be sold as a set (a bit under \$500 for the seven-pack set), often to restaurants but not exclusively. Some of them received the highest scores yet for table wines.

The labeling is a little obscure. The back indicates the village, but the front focuses on the entire series and has only coded clues to the village. For example, the Vourvoulo Village bottling has two vertical dots on the front, while the Imerovigli Village bottling has two vertical lines. Likewise, Ia (a.k.a. Oia) Village has a dot, and Fira Village has a half circle, and so on. It's a little too cute and too obscure, not to mention that one of the back labels was misprinted (see the tasting notes on the Fira and Pyrgos). The wines, however, are pretty special. They are all 100% Assyrtiko.

Helpful tip: If you don't know Sigalas and/or great Assyrtiko, it's fair to say that they will not show all they can be if you open them now, especially if you just pop 'n' pour. There is a reason I give these such high scores, even when I don't always see that excitement on the first taste and pour. When young and new, they generally do better with a couple of days in the refrigerator. Some of the best looked far more interesting after being open for four to five days.

When the cork is first pulled, they rarely seem daunting, which can be misleading on a quick taste. When I taste brand new vintages, I often decant them or taste them over several days, because there are many hidden layers (this would be worthwhile even with these 2016s, although 2017s are already rolling out). A couple of years in the cellar or a couple days in the fridge will let them reveal those layers. Generally, they tend to blossom around four to six years from vintage date. Few are fully expressive today at the upper level. Assyrtiko is a great grape. Sigalas is a great producer. The 2016 vintage was terrific. Draw your own conclusions.