

BY THE GLASS

Food-friendly wines from Crete exported despite crisis

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ELLEN BHANG FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Ellen Bhang

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Winemakers on the Greek island of Crete are eager to introduce you to grapes like vidiano and kotsifali. Family winegrowers are crafting herbal-and-floral scented pours from these food-friendly local varietals. And even with the Greek economic crisis, these bottles are easy to get.

Crete, the largest Greek island and the fifth largest in the Mediterranean, is about 160 miles long, punctuated by mountain ranges that traverse east to west. Known for its millennia-old wine culture, the island is where Europe's oldest known wine press — 3,500 years old — was discovered. A new generation of winemakers is building on tradition, crafting some truly distinctive wines.

Nikos Karavitakis, 30, works with his father, Manolis, at the family winery in the region of Chania. After studying enology in Athens, the son returned to Karavitakis Winery looking for ways to innovate. The father-son team decided to package some of their wines in kegs for the export market. Today, theirs are the only estate-made pours from Crete available in kegs in the United States.

Two of these are served at Daddy Jones, a Somerville cocktail bar and restaurant. There, the

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ana, and a red blend of

kotsifali and mandilaria — are on tap.

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Daddy Jones' owner Dimitra Tsourianis, whose parents are from Greece, points out that the two Cretan wines are the only ones offered by the glass on the menu. Customers were initially unfamiliar with them, but were won over. "I wish I could find more of these," Tsourianis says of Greek wines on tap. The keg format keeps wine fresh, and at \$9 a pour, it's an easy sell at this neighborhood spot. She also has a larger aim. "I like the idea of helping my country."

Tsourianis says she hasn't experienced any difficulty getting the wines. The New York-based importer agrees. Andrea Englisis, vice president of Athenee Importers & Distributors, notes that the Greek economic crisis has not hindered exports of her producers' wines to the United States. When the crisis hit, the 2014 vintage had already been bottled, and the producers in her company's portfolio reported no difficulty procuring needed materials like barrels or bottles. It might have been a different picture had the crisis hit during harvest, she says, or for producers who might have a weaker financial standing. But Karavitakis Winery is moving forward. More bottles and kegs from Crete are headed our way.

"Exports are thriving," Englisis says. We'll drink to that.

Karavitakis Winery "The Little Prince" White 2014 Vidiano, known for its acidity, and vilana, regarded for its aromatic freshness, are the grapes in this lively white. Green herbaceous notes and apple, with peachiness on the finish; \$9 a glass. Enjoy with the feta cheese plate. At Daddy Jones, 525 Medford St., Somerville, 617-690-9095, www.daddyjonesbar.com.

Domaine Douloufakis "Dafnios" Vidiano 2014 Vidiano, the grape in this appealing white, offers scents of peach and citrus spritz. Yellow apple, bitter lime zest, and a hit of saline come through in this smoothly textured wine. Pair with dishes made from the bounty of the farmers' market, like a succotash of corn, tomato, and shell beans. Around \$16. At Curtis Liquors, Weymouth, 781-331-2345; Ball Square Fine Wines, Somerville, 617-623-9500.

J. Boutari & Son Wineries "Kretikos" 2013 This red blend of kotsifali and mandilaria (or m. It's smooth and ripe,

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with black cherry and a dollop of fine-grained tannins. Versatile with poultry, pork, or sweet-and-sour eggplant. Around \$14. At Wegmans Burlington, 781-418-0780; Athena International Foods, Brockton, 508-941-0030.

Alexakis Winery Kotsifali Syrah 2011 A robust red, blending kotsifali and syrah, expresses assertive aromatics like crushed green herbs, red fruit, and black pepper, leading to a palate of cherry, bitter herbs, and drying tannins. Decant first. Terrific with lamb burgers. Around \$16. At Ball Square Fine Wines; University Wine Shop, Cambridge, 617-547-4258.

Domaine Douloufakis “Dafnios” Liatiko 2012 This brick-hued pour is an elegant single varietal made from thin-skinned liatiko grapes, offering violets, soil, red plum skin, and appetizing umami notes on the nose. Bright cherry on the palate, with some drying tannins, and a smoky, ferrous quality that makes you crave anything grilled, especially herb-rubbed meats or red peppers with char. Around \$16. At Curtis Liquors; Needham Center Fine Wines, 781-400-1769.

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