

The Cyprus Wine Guide

By ELLEN PONTIKIS

YIANNOS Constantinou, author of *The Cyprus Wine Guide*, calls himself a realist. He cannot, he says, make the assertion that Cyprus wines are among the best in the world or use words like "excellent" or "terrific" to describe them collectively.

This does not mean, however, that they are not to be celebrated, promoted or - most importantly - enjoyed.

And it does not mean that he cannot use words like "exciting" when writing about the changes in the local wine industry over the last ten years.

Constantinou is a respected wine critic and writer. He writes regular articles on wine for "Politis" newspaper, "Man" magazine and publications abroad. He published a wine guide last year "Oenikos Odigos" which assessed almost all the wines - both local and imported - on the Cyprus market. The guide was an instant best-seller.

Now Constantinou presents *The Cyprus Wine Guide* which includes glorious photographs and identifies the best Cyprus wines that have been tasted, assessed and rated. It also gives background information on Cyprus winemakers and wineries.

Cyprus wine, he says, is not what it was 10 or 15 years ago.

"It has changed for the better, shedding the old beliefs that had

kept it nailed to bulk production intended for Russian and other eastern bloc countries.

"Cyprus wine is now treading a road, a narrow tortuous and difficult road, on a journey to a noble and inevitable goal from which there is no return. It is this road that will lead to its complete reorientation towards quality."

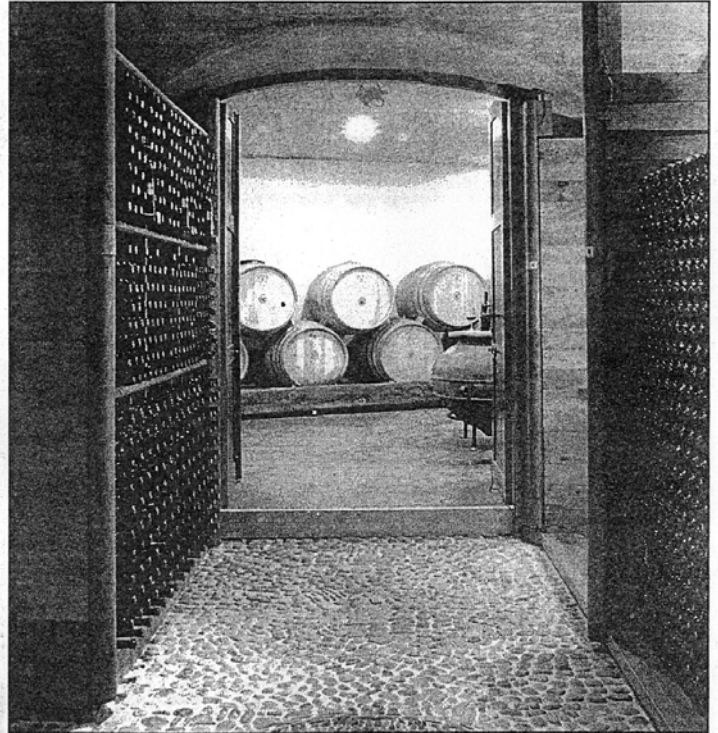
Thousands of acres of vineyards have been uprooted for new grape varieties, dozens of small wineries have been established and new wine labels have timidly taken their first steps into the Cyprus market.

Consumers are no longer dismissive of local wines and they now stop and linger when making selections and wonder what the new wines from indigenous varieties, such as Xynisteri and Maratheftiko, taste like.

The Cyprus Wine Guide presents these wines and, equally as important, profiles the Cyprus wine makers. Constantinou ranks the wines from acceptable (one star) to outstanding (five stars).

The guide is a good introduction to the wines of Cyprus as it gives a comprehensive outline of the indigenous varieties of the Cypriot vineyard as well as the imported varieties. There is also a section on Commandaria and Zivania. The guide is unique, however, in that it gives extensive profiles on the wineries and the personal philosophy of the wine makers.

There are currently some 50 wineries in Cyprus and Constantinou has



INVITING: The cellar at the Vasa Winery in Vasa Kilanias. Its owner constructed a model winery from local stone in a local style. It is claimed to be the 'best' winery in Cyprus - and also makes some of the finest wines.

selected what he ranks as the top 20 to profile in his book. The selection, he says, was made based on the quality of the wines and also the infrastructure of the wineries and their potential.

The book is a glorious, visual journey into the wines of Cyprus; a perfect gift book but also an important reference book for every wine lover.

The fact that the author profiles the wine makers makes you want to take a drive to wine country and shake their hands... after, of course, trying their wines.

The Cyprus Wine Guide (£6.30) is available at Moufflon bookshop and all leading bookshops and kiosks around the island.

A look at two wineries...

Domaine Vlassides

YIANNOS Constantinou ranks the Domaine Vlassides winery in Kilani as one of the top wineries in Cyprus. It does not, he says, follow the typical story of "I loved wine and decided to build a winery" -- though love and passion for wine is undoubtedly part of the tale.

What makes the story different is that owner Sophocles Vlassides studied oenology at one of the world's leading universities in the field, UC Davis in California, and is the only qualified oenologist in Cyprus who took the plunge and set up his own winery.

His involvement in Cypriot wine-making has, writes Constantinou, given a fresh impetus to the island's, till recently, stagnated industry. Vlassides has



"I am not in the business of wine-making for the purpose of making money"

Sophocles Vlassides

introduced new trends such as the use of oak casks to age red wines and has very clear ideas about wine making. His orientation is towards reds and the winery is known for its full bodied reds -- especially the

Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Vlassides winery has initiated a new style of wine that has similarities to those of the New World, where emphasis is on intensity of colour, compact aromas and a full tannin and closely structured taste with a slight prominence of acidity - characteristic of all Cyprus red wines.

Constantinou ranks Vlassides' Cabernet Sauvignon as its best wine:

"Deep red. Concentrated nose that needs time to bring out its array of aromas - red fleshy fruits, liquorice, clove, grass, oak and vanilla. Full, stout mouth with strong tannins, substantial structure and tone acidity. The top Cyprus wine of this variety - together with the corresponding Cabernet from the Kyperounda winery."

The Yiaskouris winery

THE Yiaskouris brothers, Christos and Doros, are the mainstay of this winery in Pafos that bears their family name.

Christos is a US graduate in Electrical Engineering, Doros is a US graduate in Business Management and Christos' wife has a postgraduate degree in Chemistry.

Together they make a dynamic trio which run one of the island's best-equipped wineries which boasts a vacuum press, stainless steel vats and underground cellars.

The Yiaskouris brothers have one of the largest vineyards owned by small regional wineries and this gives them a significant advantage.

They are among the few who from the start realised that unless a winery had its own



"Modern technology must ally with local tradition to produce quality wine"

Christos Yiaskouris

vineyard, it would be impossible to produce high quality wine that would not vary - significantly - from year to year.

The Yiaskouris brothers and Sophocles Vlassides (see left) are

the first Cypriot wine-makers that gave serious attention to Shiraz, making the variety known to the wider public and revealing the immense potential of this multi-dynamic grape which has adapted beautifully to the xerothermic climate of the island.

Moreover, Constantinou ranks the Yiaskouris Shiraz as their best wine:

"Dark red colour. Dense, really fruity nose with red fruits blending with violet and ink aromas.

"One of the few Cyprus wines that combine density of colour with soft, round, mild tannins, and balanced acidity.

"A thoroughbred Shiraz expressing clearly and unaffectedly the authentic character of this great grape variety."