



Written by
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Balkan wines - united by diversity



It is hard to think of a name that resounds with greater political and historical intrigue and conflict than the Balkans. Happily there was no such conflict – other than healthy debate and re-tasting – among the judges for the Fourth Balkans International Wine Competition in May in Bulgaria's capital Sofia.

My picture, taken in the National Archaeological Museum in the city during an hour's respite from the tasting room, shows one of the most stunning objects I have ever seen - a gold tripartite vessel found in the 1920s in Pleven by brothers working in their vineyard (part of a haul of 12.5 kg of gold known as the [Valchitran treasure](#)) and likely to have been crafted in the Late Bronze Age, around 1300 BC. It is thought to have been used in religious ceremonies to blend three different liquids, probably wine, honey and milk. The art of blending has a noble history, though I am not sure I would have liked that particular mix.

The Balkans, short-hand for the Balkan Peninsula in south-eastern Europe, is named after the Balkan Mountains in the east of the region, known as Stara Planina in Bulgaria. This wine competition welcomes entries from any wine region but the focus is on producers from the Balkan Peninsula, Central and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region. It is the brainchild of Galina Niforou, with Greek Master of Wine Konstantinos Lazarakis as chair of the judges. On her [Vino Zona](#) website, Niforou explains why she thinks there is a place for 'Balkan wine' based on an existing shared culture and a need for the creation and marketing of a wine identity that is bigger than any one country or region, stressing that Balkan wines are 'on an upswing'. She adds, 'From a global perspective this is the region with the richest treasury of local varieties and this must be shown to the rest of the world. Not the least, competing on the market with the other winemaking giants, the Balkans - if taken united - occupies the fifth place.'

I admire this enthusiasm and the desire to lead journalists and consumers on a Balkan wine adventure but I am not sure it will be any more successful than the promotion of a single region or country. In fact, given the incredible diversity within the Balkans - in terms of natural environment and grape varieties, to name but two factors - I think it is actually very difficult for anyone to get a handle on 'Balkan wines'.

My own experience as a judge in the impeccably organised competition was rather partial in that there were three judging panels so my panel tasted only one third of the wines submitted, plus those that were in the running for trophies. As it turned out, during the competition I tasted almost no Romanian, Macedonian or Croatian wines, and I could not say that I found any sort of identity across the wines - unless it was their diversity. And since we were tasting blind (we were told the range of countries and varieties within any particular flight, and the vintages) and did not find out the identity of those wines until some days later, it was very hard to draw any conclusions. Philosophy professor and part-time wine writer in Bulgaria Iliyan Zahariev came to my aid and summed up his country's wines very neatly for me: 'Looking for identity'.

Diversity is for me one of the key aspects of wine pleasure, one of the reasons for my unquenchable thirst to try new wines, but I cannot see how it is a marketing advantage for a massive region such as the Balkans in competition with the rest of the wine world. Perhaps marketing theories are as diverse and apparently contradictory as economic ones. However, if the competition and the wine fair that was held in Sofia over the weekend after the competition gives wine writers and consumers a chance to taste more widely, and they enjoy what they taste, then the initiative is a success in my book.

It would seem that wines made from international varieties are better represented among the medal winners than those made from indigenous ones but I put this down to the fact that the re-evaluation, on export as well as domestic markets, of local varieties is a relatively recent phenomenon, and research, plus years of trial and error, are needed to identify the best clones and site-variety combinations. One obvious exception to this generalisation is Greece, where indigenous varieties did particularly well, thanks to what I observe as a longer-standing appreciation of Greek varieties and less inclination among producers to go overboard on international ones. See, for example, [Greece backs indigenous varieties](#). (As an aside, I'd say the same is true of Portugal.)

The 141 wine reviews below are from four sources: the competition itself (these are the wines where an approximate local retail price is given at the end of the note), the consumer tasting in Sofia immediately after the competition, a tasting of Bulgarian wines in London earlier this year, and a selection of the best wines tasted during a visit to Macedonia last year. Wines are listed by country and colour and then alphabetically by producer (sur)name, with fizz and rosé first

and sweet and strong last.

The writing up process for the competition wines was particularly laborious (boring enough not to explain) so I have included mostly those wines that scored 16.5 or higher, except for a few lower-scoring wines that I thought were interesting enough to include.

The scores for the wines in the competition are my own and not the agreed score of my panel, nor do they reflect the *final results*. I confess that they may be on the slightly generous side compared with my usual scoring because I was collaborating with the other three tasters on my panel and we were asked to judge with medal categories in mind: Bronze 15.5-16.5, Silver 17-18, Gold 18.5+.

Serbian wine writer, editor of *Vino & Fino* magazine, and excellent taster Igor Luković was delighted by the trophy results: the wines that won the best red wine trophy – **Matalj, Kremen Kamen Cabernet Sauvignon 2012** – and the best white – **Podrum Janko, Vrtog Sauvignon Blanc 2013** – were both Serbian and, not-so-coincidentally, made by the same super-talented winemaker Mladen Dragojlović.

When I asked Igor to sum up Serbian wines for me, he replied in a way that contrasted with what Iassen had said about Bulgaria: 'Serbian wines are on their way to finding their identity and raising their quality fast in the last few years, whether they are made of local or international grape varieties. After a period of revival of small wineries in the past two decades and planting new vineyards, when mostly pretentious, over-oaked and over-extracted wines were made, now they're more elegant, less robust and with smart oak, portraying the terroir from which they come, as well as using more indigenous grape varieties.' Well done, Serbia!

FIZZ

- Logodaj, Nobile Rosé Shiroka Melnishka Brut 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands Struma Valley. Pretty pale orange pink with delicate red-fruit aroma. Dry tasting and nicely fresh, pure and a touch chalky, adding interest to the texture. Straightforward yet elegant. Fine mousse. (JH) 12.5% Drink 2015-2016

16.5

- Edoardo Miroglio, Brut 2008 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Traditional method. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay. Disgorged (on demand) April 2015, so this particular batch has had 6 years on lees.*

Creamy citrus with a hint of orange zest. A lovely wine with a creamy texture, a very slight grip and bright zesty fruit. Not as marked by the lees ageing as I would have expected but has real finesse and length. Tastes fresh as a daisy. Just a slight hint of yeastiness. Very good indeed. Pretty dry but not bone dry. (JH) Drink 2015-2018

17

ROSÉ

- Dragomir, Sarva Rosé 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Mavrud/Rubin, unoaked. Very pale rose pink. Subtle peachy aroma, Victoria plums. Mouthwateringly dry and fresh, longer than it is deep but the texture is appealing. (JH) 12.5% Drink 2015-2016

16

- Logodaj, Nobile Rosé Shiroka Melnishka 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Same pretty colour as the

fizz. More intense fruits on the nose – wild strawberry and orange plum. Rather too soft on the palate, fruity but docile. (JH)12% Drink 2015-2016

15.5

- Edoardo Miroglio, Bio Rosé Mavrud/Bouquet 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands First vintage. Pale Provençal pink. Red-fruited and tangy aroma. Clean, crisp and dry, with a definite grip. Bouquet (Pinot x Mavrud) seems to be quite a tannic variety. Food rather than aperitif wine. Crisp finish. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016
16
- Monemvasia Winery, Rosé Fileri 2014 PGI Peloponnese 90% Fileri - a dark-berried clone of Moschofilero - and 10% Agiorgitiko. More pale red than dark pink. Aroma of sour red cherry. Lots of red fruit. Similar on the palate, lots of fruit flavour. Clean and juicy and finishes dry-tasting. (JH)12.7% Drink 2015-2016
€5 16.5
- Orbelus, Paril Rosé 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Struma Valley in the south west of the country. Syrah, Merlot, Marselan and Melnik 55 (aka Early Melnik). Deepish Provençal pink. Delicate red-fruits nose. Dry and a similar chalky texture to the Orelek Chardonnay/Viognier blend. Sophisticated and restrained. Really well made. Long too. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2016
16.5
- Rossidi, Rosé Pinot Noir 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Deep orangey pink thanks to 8 hours' maceration with the stems. Dry, finely tannic and a real food wine. Pretty dry but a viscous richness and depth. Very persistent. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2016
16.5
- Tikveš Winery, Alexandria Rosé 2014 Republic of Macedonia 60% Pinot Noir, 30% Merlot, 10% Vranec. Provençal pink. Delicate and fresh but with a touch of SO2 at the moment. Clean, nicely dry and refined. Not massively fruity but harmonious. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016
€3.30 16.5
- Troupis, Fteri Rosé 2014 PGI Peloponnese 70% Agiorgitiko, 30% Moschofilero. Deep rose pink. Spicy but gentle red fruit. Peppery. Dry, finely textured, refreshing and elegant. Persistent. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2016
€6.70 16.5
- Zelasos, Rosé 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Cabernet Franc. Pretty Provençal pink. Delicate red fruits on the nose, dry, relatively dense and not bad length. Bone dry, or at least it tastes that way. (JH) Drink 2015-2016
16.5

BULGARIA WHITES

- Better Half, Wizard Sauvignon Blanc 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands Ripe green fig and sugar-snap aroma – one of the more aromatic so far in this line-up of Bulgarian Sauvignons. The flavour matches the aroma but it's a bit watery. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2016
€7 16.5
- Borovitz, Canyon Park The Guardians MRV 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier. Definite almond aroma. Dry and textured. Could be from the Rhône. Plenty of fruit but in a restrained style. Pear and almonds on the palate with pear-grain texture. Very good - and surprisingly youthful. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2017
16.5

- **Borovitza, Orange Garden Chardonnay 2012 PGI Danubian Plain***From Vidin in the far north west of the Plain, where it is cooler than the rest of the country. Skin contact is quite short but the grape skins from one vineyard were deep yellow/orange. Ambient ferment in 3,000-litre oak.*
Pale orangey gold. Subtle aroma with hints of apricot and hay but the sample is cold so the aroma may be suppressed. Only lightly tannic, a rather timid orange wine. Fresh and cool without a great deal of concentration but all in harmony. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2018
16.5
- **Bratanov, Single Vineyard Tamianka 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***In the south east near the Greek border. Tamianka = Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. The producer's grandfather had owned the biggest vineyard in the village - 1 ha. His father inherited it and wanted to build a bigger estate - it took him 5 years to buy 24 ha because the land was so fragmented post Communism. Tank fermented, 10% in barrel. First time they have made a varietal.*
Delicately grapey and floral. Lifted and fresh. Pretty dry but has nice weight and a silky texture. Quite vinous. Finely balanced - better than most southern French examples. Scented without any bitterness or loss of freshness. Extremely well made, not bone dry. (JH)14.5% Drink 2015
16.5
- **Dragomir, Sarva Chardonnay/Dimiat 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Dimyat is known as Smederevka in Macedonia and Croatia. Unoaked. Very pale. Scented with citrus and green apple (and whatever perfume that women walking past is wearing - always more difficult to avoid intrusive aromas in a big consumer tasting). Smells attractively leesy/creamy too. Delicate and dry on the palate, not a huge amount of flavour but a nice chalky texture and good length. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016*
16
- **Karabunar, Heritage Misket 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Very pale, fresh citrus and grapey aromas. Bright and lively, just a touch grassy but mouthwatering and long. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016*
€4.50 16.5
- **Karabunar, Heritage Dimiat 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***RS 2.8 g/l. Very pale. Slightly smoky/oily/mineral, and herbal. There seems to be a touch of oak here. Very good acidity and structure. Long vinous finish, more winey than fruity. (JH)12.6% Drink 2015-2018*
€4.50 17
- **Midalidare, Premium Selection Sauvignon Blanc 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Watery white. SO2 still in evidence on the nose. Lightly grassy, clean and bright citrus on the palate with a nice slight tannic grip adding length. Good concentration without being OTT. (JH)12% Drink 2015-2016*
€8 16.5
- **Orbelus, Orelek Chardonnay/Viognier 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Struma Valley in the far south west of the country. Unoaked.*
Aromatic with a peachy Viognier impression and fresh citrus, just a touch floral. Delicately scented, becoming more intense with air. A fine, dry, firm texture with a certain leesy depth that marries well with the fruit purity. Attractive chalky texture but perhaps tails away a little on the finish. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2016
16.5
- **Rossidi Gewurztraminer 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Part in tank and part in steel barrels to get more lees contact.*
Lovely classic Gewurz aroma. Delicate with classic gentle floral notes and a hint of bitter grapefruit to give lovely freshness. On the lighter side but sensitively made. (JH)12.9% Drink 2014-2015

16.5

- **Rossidi, Unison Chardonnay/Gewurztraminer 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Entry-level blend produced for their Belgian importer.*
Delicate Gewurz aroma. A little more substance on the palate than the straight Gewurz. Cool and fresh and very professionally made – for balance, freshness and still with a strong aromatic character. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016
16
- **Rossidi, Unison Chardonnay/Gewurztraminer 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Near Sliven, small producer. Naturally low yields 45 hl/ha. No malo and no oak, fermented in concrete egg.*
Melon and a touch of spice and green apple but a little bit sweet and soft. Very clean and fruity. RS 5 g/l. Aromatic. Finishes clean but just a little soft overall. Slight saltiness on the finish. (JH)Drink 2014-2016
16
- **Ivo Varbanov, La Belle Excentrique Viognier/Tamianka 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Tamianka is the Bulgarian name of Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains.*
Fresh, dry and scented. For me the best of his wines. Shows the aromatics of both varieties. Full flavoured, good weight but nice freshness too. (JH)13.4% Drink 2014-2015
16
- **Ivo Varbanov, Claire de Lune Chardonnay 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Oak fermented.* Plenty of oak spice on the nose and palate. Really marked by the oak but the fruit is clean and fresh. Finishes fresh and dry. Smart and nicely balanced in this oaked style. I'd like just a tad more acidity. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2017
16
- **Villa Yustina, 4 Seasons Summer Traminer 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Smells aromatic enough to be Gewürz. Classic rose petals and lychees. Juicy and fresh for a Gewurz, with less body than is typical. Unusual. Not bone dry perhaps but successful combination of both fresh acidity and and fragrance.* (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2016
16
- **Zelanos Pinot Gris 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Uncommon variety in Bulgaria. Clean, bright, lightly spiced pear aroma. Somewhere between Alsace and Italy. Good depth while remaining fragrant.* (JH)Drink 2015-2017
16
- **Zelanos Misket 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Misket Cherven is an old pink-skinned Bulgarian variety.*
Aromatic and peachy. Creamy, fresh and very drinkable. Delicate but with freshness and tension on the finish. (JH)Drink 2015-2016
16

BULGARIA REDS

- **Angelus Estate 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands***60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 10% Syrah, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon.*
Black core, deep rim. Fragrant cassis and black plum. Lively, dry and elegant. Everything held nicely in check but not lacking flavour or length. (JH)14.5% Drink 2015-2022
€8.70 17
- **Angelus Estate, Gold Stallion 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands***80% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Petit Verdot.*
Ripe, sweet black fruit but not overripe. Intense and pretty oaky but in balance for an oaky wine. Firm and dry and quite muscular. Slightly spicity on the nose. Very firm tannins but not

aggressive. Expensive and trying a bit too hard to impress. Less might have been more.

(JH)14.5% Drink 2016-2022

€53 16.5

- **Black Sea Gold, Salty Hills 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands**50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Syrah.
Very dark crimson. SO2 on the nose. Better on the palate – firm grip, dry tasting. Long and moreish and chewy. The level of SO2 worries me though, hence the minus. But I am giving it the benefit of the doubt. (JH)13.9% Drink 2015-2018
€7.60 16.5-
- **Borovitza, Great Terroirs Granny Gamza 2012 PGI Danubian Plain**So named because the 9-ha vineyard is owned by a lady in her 80s. From the cool north near the Serbian border. Gamza is the Bulgarian synonym for Kadarka.
Mid cherry red. Cherries and almond paste on the nose. Bakewell tart without the sweetness apart from fruit sweetness. Delicate, scented and pure. Supple like the Italian variety Schioppettino. Long. (JH)Drink 2014-2017
16.5
- **Borovitza, Great Terroirs Bouquet 2012 PGI Danubian Plain**Also spelt Buket. A Bulgarian cross of Pinot Noir and Mavrud.
Much more mature colour than the Gamza. Lifted and more complex nose, still has cherry fruit but also something richer like cherry liqueur and prune but without the overripeness. Firm, dry, marked tannins and freshness more like mature Xinomavro. Tastes a good deal older than it is, or perhaps that is in the nature of Bouquet. More rustic in texture than the Gamza but plenty of character and flavour. (JH) 12.5% Drink 2014-2018
16.5
- **Borovitza, Maxima Reserve 2012 PGI Danubian Plain**100% Mavrud. Deep garnet. Lifted almond aroma and ripe cherries. Orange flavours on the palate, very unusual – like Terry's chocolate orange but not sweet. Dry, chewy and very moreish. (JH) 17 15-2213% Drink 2015-2022
17
- **Borovitza, Dux 2008 PGI Danubian Plain**Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot from the Vidin region.
Deep crimson – young looking. Inviting, gently meaty dark-red fruit with just a hint of age – fragrant. Refined tannins and excellent freshness. Perhaps just a little spicity on the nose. (JH)14% Drink 2014-2020
16.5
- **Borovitza, Great Terroirs Evmolpia/Cabernet Franc 2012 PGI Danubian Plain**Evmolpia is a Mavrud x Merlot cross. 'The Cabernet Franc holds it in shape', I am told.
Mid smudgy cherry red. Smells of sweet spicy warm red fruit. Lively and fresh but without much substance - though I think that may be the intention - some freshness on the finish. (JH)13.5% Drink 2014-2016
15.5
- **Borovitza, Great Terroirs Granny Gamza 2013 PGI Danubian Plain**Bulgarian name for Kadarka. From the cool north near the Serbian border. Disease-prone variety and does not do well if overcropped. Not very deeply coloured. Needs gentle handling – more like Pinot. The winery is in the middle of a national park.
Mid garnet. Complex aroma with some undergrowth and red fruit, a little meaty. Firm tannins but with juicy red fruit too. Lots of fresh acidity and mouthwatering finish. Fine tannins but still has some grip. A bit Pinot-like but more rustic. Juicy finish. (JH)Drink 2014-2017
16.5
- **Bratanov, Single Vineyard Mavrud 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands**In the South Sakar Hills, towards the Greek border. This variety has good potential for Bulgaria, though it has a long growing season and does better in the south. Some of the wine was aged in 500-litre old oak.

Attractive pure cherry fruit on the nose and the palate. Peppery with lots of energy. Like the Tamianka, this has clarity and varietal directness. Some spice on the finish. Easy, sweet fruited but fresh and lively, rounded out by the restrained oak influence. (JH)13% Drink 2014-2016
16.5

- **Ch Burgozone, Iris 2011 PGI Danubian Plain***This producer is, unusually, right up near the Danube in the north of Bulgaria. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Marselan (Cabernet Sauvignon x Grenache) and Egiodola (Fer x Arboriou). All vineyards planted 2002. The producer is named after a Roman fortress - nothing to do with Burgundy.*
Has that new-cross sweetness of Marselan even though I guess the Cabernet is dominant. Well made but with such a mix of varieties it seems to lack definition/sense of origin. Easy to drink. (JH)14% Drink 2014-2016
16
- **Damianitza, Uniqato Rubin 2010 PGI Thracian Lowlands***From the Struma Valley. A Nebbiolo x Syrah cross.*
Deep smudgy garnet with browning rim. Smells pretty alcoholic. Warm and earthy. Has that great acidity of Rubin and the tannins are still pretty grippy. Sour cherry, earthy and rocky. Warm and lots of spice. Tastes older than it is. Some sun-dried tomato. Powerful and long. (JH)14.5% Drink 2014-2017
16
- **Dragomir, Sarva Mavrud/Merlot 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Mavrud is the Cypriot variety Mavro. Deep garnet. Gently herbaceous dark fruit. Subtle, lightly peppery. Quite leafy on the palate too. Fine dry tannins. A restrained style. Persistent and fresh. (JH)13.3% Drink 2015-2017*
16.5
- **Dragomir, Reserva Rubin 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***'Limited edition' - 1,000 bottles produced. Nebbiolo x Syrah cross obtained in Bulgaria in 1944. Not widely planted. New French oak for 18 months.*
Maturing garnet, blackish core and some brick at the rim. Complex and sweet-fruited with some orange notes, spice, just a hint of sweet maturity and some of that lovely savoury roasted potato-skin aroma. Big, bold, firm tannins but has a terrific dry, chalky texture. Lots of complex flavours but still needs longer in bottle for the tannins to resolve. Long, chewy finish. A strong and striking identity that has not been overwhelmed by the oak. (JH)14.5% Drink 2016-2021
17+
- **Dragomir, Pitos 2010 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Rubin - about 25% Rubin. 13 months in French oak.*
Deep garnet with brownish rim. Savoury, spiced and sweet undergrowth aroma. Surprisingly mature in flavour though the tannins are still on the firm side. Complex, savoury maturity. Firm, dry and savoury to the end. The opposite of fruity but not lacking in fruit depth. (JH)14.1% Drink 2016-2020
16.5+
- **Dragomir, Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***18 months in French oak, 60% new.*
Deep mature garnet. Complex, mature aroma that still shows dark fruit, some dark cherry, but with aromas of spice, some herbs, maybe tar, really hard to describe. Firm but extremely fine texture, big tannic structure yet still fresh. There's sweet oak spice but it does not dominate. Juicy finish even with all that tannin. Not ready yet. (JH)Drink 2017-2024
17.5
- **Logodaj Melnik 55 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Same as Ranna Melnishka Loza or Early Melnik. 12 months in used French oak.*

Deep greyish crimson. Sweet lifted cherry fruit and small dark berries. Gentle, lively, supple. Just slightly smoky. Lovely freshness, relatively simple. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2017
16.5

- Logodaj, Nobile Melnik 55 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Struma Valley. 18 months in French oak, half new.*

Seems to have an initial green note despite the high alcohol. There's lots of spicy oak but it obscures the variety a little. Fresh but a little bit hard. I prefer their more straightforward Melnik 55. (JH)15% Drink 2015-2018

16

- Logodaj, Nobile Rubin 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Struma Valley. 12 months in French oak.* Deep smudgy garnet. Lively but a bit spicity on the nose. Oak obscures the variety, making it more red wine than Rubin. Fresh finish. A bit boring. (JH)15% Drink 2014-2016

15.5

- Logodaj, Primus Shiroka Melnishka 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *The name points to the fact that this is, apparently, the first Bulgarian wine to be made without added sulfites. 12 months in French oak.*

Ripe fruited and spicy. A bit overripe. Dry, fine tannins. Alcohol shows on the nose. Lots of spice, freshness but no soul. I should probably applaud this attempt to make a very-lo-sulphur wine since so many of the young wines tasted during the same period were spoiled by over-zealous use SO₂ – but you need more than just low sulphur to make a great wine, of course. (JH)15% Drink 2015-2017

15.5

- Marvin, Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon/Syrah 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Black core, cherry rim. Lively black cherry aroma with some oak sweetness and vanilla but also a dusty/herbal note. Supple, dry and fine texture. In balance though not terribly generous in the middle. Finishes long and dry.* (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

€9 16.5

- Edoardo Miroglio, Elenovo Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands *RS 3 g/l. Dark greyish crimson. Slightly herbaceous and a hint of graphite. Nicely balanced, not overdone. Leafy style. Supple tannins. Better with food.* (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2021

€16 16.5

- Edoardo Miroglio, Elenovo Mavrud 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Elenovo is their top range, 18 months in French oak. Aka Mavro from Cyprus.*

Deep garnet. First impression is oak spice rather than Mavrud character but it opens out to lively, spicy hedgerow fruit. On the palate the fruit shines. Plenty of tannic grip on the finish. (JH)14% Drink 2016-2019

16+

- Edoardo Miroglio, Pinot Noir Reserve 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands *18-24 months in oak, 2nd-use French.*

Mid ruby. Sweet Pinot nose, just slightly stewed fruit. Fresher on the palate and the oak is subtle. Dry and fresh but starting to dry out a little on the finish. I am told (by a Bulgarian fellow taster) that the 2006 is still very good. (JH)13% Drink 2014-2017

16

- Edoardo Miroglio, Bio Mavrud/Rubin 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Organic grapes and wine in this Bio range. 24ha of their vineyards were certified in 2013. Rubin is the Nebbiolo x Syrah cross.*

Deepish crimson. Lively aroma of small wild berries. Honest, dry and lively. Some spice but mostly freshness, the tannins are fine and in balance. Zesty and very drinkable. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2017

16

- Neragora, Ares Merlot/Mavrud 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands Organic wine. Very dark. Dusty but fresh black fruit, slightly herbaceous. Deep, firm and rounded. Lively and refined. Long. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2018
17
- Orbelus Melnik 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Melnik 55 with 10% Grenache and 5% Petit Verdot; a little oak (not new). All the Orbelus wines are organic.* Deep crimson. Bright, sweet cherry and plum. Gentle, dry chalky texture - finesse as well as juicy fruit. Long, dry, mineral texture to the finish. (JH)14.8% Drink 2015-2019
17
- Orbelus 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Organic wine from the Struma Valley. A blend of Syrah, Melnik 55, Mourvèdre, Marselan.* Deep cherry red. Spicy, dark-red fruit with a sweet, ripe note but not raisined. Upright, dry and fine-grained. Plenty of fruit but a subtle restraint (tastes unoaked). Firm, lightly chewy finish. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2018
16.5
- Orbelus, Getika 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Organic wine from the Struma Valley. Blend of Melnik 55, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah. 6 months in French oak.* Deep cherry red. Lots of spice and cherry fruit, lifted and scented. Firm, chewy tannins but they are supple and in harmony with the lively fruit. Oak nicely in the background. Long and juicy and satisfying. Serious without any excess. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2019
17
- Orbelus, Prima 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Organic wine from the Struma Valley. Melnik 55, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot; 8-9 months in French oak, some new.* Lovely spicy aroma and sweet cherry. Again that fine chalky texture, excellent restraint but still long. Dry chalky finish. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2019
17
- Rossidi Pinot Noir 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *20% new oak but all hogsheads. All French.* Delicately scented, real restraint here. Delicate, cool and avoids over-sweetness. Dry but light tannins on the finish. (JH)13.5% Drink 2014-2017
16.5
- Rossidi Syrah 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *20% new oak but all hogsheads. Some Bulgarian oak as an experiment but it tends to give some greenness even if seasoned for 36 months, I am told.* Blackish crimson. Interesting aroma - spicy but also a hint of tomato leaf - maybe that is the Bulgarian oak. There's some char there too, which slightly corrupts the fruit, which is nice and fresh underneath and would be more Rhône-like without that oak affect. (JH)13.5% Drink 2014-2016
16
- Rossidi, Nikolaevo Vineyard Rubin 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Local variety - cross created in Bulgaria between Syrah and Nebbiolo. Usually very dark and herbal and spicy. 27-year-old vines. 50% in Bulgarian and 50% in French oak (300 l).* Oak on the nose, lively and with some wild fruit notes. Sweet vanilla contrasts with spice and god acidity. Pretty firm grip on the finish. Oak covers the varietal character, lots of chocolate sweetness on the finish. Too much oak for my taste, or perhaps it is the Bulgarian oak that is intrusive? (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2020
16
- Saedinenie, F2F 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands *Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Regent.* Black core. Sweet ripe back plums and blackcurrant. Sweet and supple on the palate. Lively, juicy and persistent. Fine tannins. Lots of pleasure and harmony. (JH)13.5% Drink 2014-2018
17

- **Santa Sarah Rubin 2012 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Nebbiolo x Syrah cross obtained in Bulgaria in 1944. Aged in French oak, some new.*
Mature garnet colour. Spicy dark fruit, slightly minty. Highly structured though the tannins are fine grained. Still pretty unyielding and not really ready. Firm grip on the finish but nice dark fruit in the middle. (JH)14% Drink 2017-2020
16.5+
- **Santa Sarah Cabernet Franc 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Aged in French oak, some new.*
Deep smudgy garnet. Herbaceous nose and lots of leafiness on the palate. Tight, firmly structured and definitely Cab Franc. Texture is dry and grippy but not aggressive. Still needs more time. (JH)14.5% Drink 2016-2020
16.5
- **Sintika, Explosion Melnik 2008 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Located in the Struma Valley, in the south west of the country. One year in French oak. This is Ranna Melnishka Loza (aka Early Melnik) rather than Melnik 82 or Shiroka Melnishka (aka Broad-Leaved Melnik).*
Ripe and very obviously fruity aroma. Quite a bit of oak on the palate. Fresh and red fruited on the palate, juicy, moderate, chalky tannins. Youthful still. (JH)Drink 2015-2018
16
- **Villa Melnik, AplauZ Melnik 55 Reserve 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***From the Struma Valley in the south west of the Thracian Lowlands. Aged in French oak, some new. Melnik 55 is a synonym for Ranna Melnishka Loza (aka Early Melnik).*
Deeper colour than the Broad-Leaved Melnik and very marked by the spicy French oak. The oak-sweet spice dominates the fruit so you lose some of the varietal identity. (JH) 14.5% Drink 2015-2017
15.5
- **Villa Melnik, Bergulé Melnik 55 Reserve 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Aged in Bulgarian oak. Mid garnet, herbal red fruits. Light, rather dry tannins. (JH)14% Drink 2014-2016*
15.5
- **Villa Melnik, Bergulé Ruen Reserve 2013 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Ruen is a Shiroka Melnishka x Cabernet cross obtained in Bulgaria that was neglected during the Communist era and now quite rare.*
Mid garnet. Slightly reductive nose, dark cherry fruit, touch of herbal cherry. More herbal on the palate too. Moderate tannins, nice freshness. A little on the lean side. Spicy aftertaste. (JH)Drink 2014-2016
15.5
- **Villa Melnik, AplauZ Melnik 55 Reserve 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Melnik 55 (aka Ranna Melnishka Loza or Early Melnik) grown in the Struma Valley - warmest and sunniest region with low rainfall. Broad-Leaved Melnik (Shiroka Melnishka) - a parent of Melnik 55 along with Valdiguié from the Rhône - is more widely grown but quite difficult to make good wine from. 15 months in Bulgarian oak.*
Very deeply coloured. Rich dark ripe fruit. Charry, savoury, roasted vegetable. Dark chocolate. Very firm grip but generous in fruit and really chewy tannins. A big mouthful of savoury richness and a sweet vanilla cast. Full of character and pretty powerful. Better than the 2013 tasted in Sofia. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2018
16.5
- **Villa Yustina, Monogram Mavrud/Rubin 2011 PGI Thracian Lowlands***Deep garnet. Small-berried dark fruit with a slight green note and just a touch spicity. Firm and dry on the palate, pretty tannic for a 4-year-old wine. Will it soften? A bit tough. (JH)14% Drink 2016-2018*
15.5
- **Zelanos Syrah 2014 PGI Thracian Lowlands***A new producer - first vintage 2014. Only 10% sees any oak.*

Bright cherry red. Juicy and peppery, very fresh. Straightforward Syrah without any make-up – refreshing after some over-oaked wines tasted today. (JH) Drink 2015-2017

16

CROATIA WHITES

- **Belje Graševina 2013 Baranja** RS 2.3 g/l. Smells a little oxidative and honeyed. Rich, just fresh enough. Deep and very slightly honeyed on the palate. Full bodied but balanced. (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2019
€3.40 17
- **Carić, Cesarica 2014 Hvar** 33% *Bogdanuša*, 33% *Pošip*, 33% *Maraština*.
Much darker than the other wines in this flight of indigenous dry white blends. Fascinating aroma that includes acacia honey and beeswax. Lovely fresh acidity, distinctive, with the tang of grapefruit pith on the palate. Long and good ageing potential even though it has some mature aromas already. (JH) 11.7% Drink 2016-2020
€4.70 17.5

GREEK WHITES

- **Anatolikos, λ2 2014 PGI Thrace** 90% *Assyrtiko*, 10% *Malagousia*, *organically grown*. *The name stands for '2 whites' (λευκος), ie 2 white varieties.*
Smoky/oaky aroma although it appears to be fermented in steel - perhaps some oak ageing or is it some other influence? Then lots of citrus fruit and creamy texture, very good freshness. (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2018
€12 17
- **Avantis Malagousia 2014 PGI Evia** Pale gold. An unusual combination of peachy and mineral aromas, spicy too. Dry but rich in the mouth. Refined and long, not lacking freshness. (JH) 12.5% Drink 2015-2017
€8 17
- **Avantis, Dolphins Assyrtiko 2014 Santorini** Peppery and mineral, with some residual SO₂ slightly getting in the way at the moment. On the leaner side but direct and persistent. (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2017
€14 17
- **Costa Lazaridi Assyrtiko 2014 PGI Drama** Attractively dusty nose. Very Assyrtiko - long, dry and elegant. (JH) 13% Drink 2015-2018
€10.20 17.5
- **Costa Lazaridi, Château Julia Chardonnay 2014 PGI Drama** Slight fermentation aroma of pear drops but better on the palate. Lemon freshness and good length. (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2016
€10.60 16.5
- **Messenicolas, Two Moons Assyrtiko 2014 PGI Karditsa** Intense, spicy, mineral aroma, with a light citrus note. Power and length. (JH) 13% Drink 2015-2017
€5.25 16.5
- **Monemvasia Winery, 300 2014 PGI Lakonia** *Kidonitsa and Assyrtiko in equal parts*. RS 2.3 g/l. Not yet revealing much on the nose but there is definite concentration on the palate. A powerful, mineral/oily quality with a lightly bitter note adding freshness at the end. A bold wine. (JH) 13.1% Drink 2015-2019
€6 16.5
- **Monemvasia Winery, Metropolis 2014 PGI Peloponnesos** *In some markets this is labelled Akra*

Minoa. Monemvasia (25%), Kidonitsa (25%), Assyrtiko (25%), Asproudi (25%).

Aromas of cool fermentation - pear and citrus mostly. Refreshing and relatively straightforward despite the complex blend. I think it will get more interesting with a little longer in bottle.

(JH)13% Drink 2016-2018

€5 16.5

- *Monemvasia Winery, Maleatis 2014 PGI Lakonia Assyrtiko (40%), Kidonitsa (30%), Monemvasia (30%).*
Touch of spice and grapefruit on the palate. Fresh and lively, moreish on the finish. Not especially fruity so I think it would go rather well with delicate fish dishes. Persistent.
(JH)12.8% Drink 2015-2017
€3.50 16.5
- *Monemvasia Winery Assyrtiko 2014 PGI Lakonia RS 3.5 g/l.* Much more lemony than the Avantis just tasted. Smoky, steely too. Fine and dry-tasting with an attractive grip but perhaps just slightly hard on the finish. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2018
€5 16.5
- *Mylonas Malagousia 2014 PGI Attiki RS 2.8 g/l.* Light almond aroma, and thyme and orange on the palate. Has depth and weight and just enough freshness. Unusual. (JH)12% Drink 2015-2016
€7.30 16.5
- *Oinampelos 2014 PGI Cyclades Equal parts Athiri and Assyrtiko.*
Herbal nose, slightly floral and grapey, perhaps a very slight spritz but also mineral and long. Both stony and fruity on the palate. Tight, zesty and persistent. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2016
€7.50 17
- *Pavlidis, Emphasis Assyrtiko 2014 PGI Drama* Stony/dusty aroma. Dry and stony on the palate, perhaps just a little watery on the palate for a higher score but it does have good varietal character, showing that Assyrtiko can do well beyond Santorini. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2017
€10 16.5
- *Samartzis, Klepsidra Malagousia 2014 PGI Central Greece* Pale straw. Spicy nose but less aromatic and a little less intense than the Avantis just tasted. Peppery, mineral and long. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2017
€7.20 16.5
- *Sigalas, Barrel Fermented Assyrtiko 2014 Santorini* RS 3.5 g/l. Slightly honeyed nose and restrained but definite signs of oak, even a hint of coconut. Powerful, excellent fruit depth without losing the variety and region's distinctive mineral quality. (JH)14.5% Drink 2016-2021
€16.40 18
- *Sigalas Assyrtiko 2014 Santorini* RS 2.5 g/l. A little sulphury on the nose at the moment but real intensity on the palate. Surprisingly ripe citrus fruit on the palate after that more subdued nose. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2018
€12.70 17

GREEK REDS

- *Avantis, Plagies 2011 PGI Evia* 80% *Mavrokoundoura (aka Mandilaria)*, 20% *Syrah*.
Deep garnet. Sweet blueberry aroma and a touch of vanilla sweetness. Thick, firm texture. Dark fruited. Honest and heartfelt. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2019
€18 17.5
- *Kir-Yianni, Dyo Elies 2011 PGI Imathia* 60% *Syrah*, 30% *Merlot*, 10% *Xinomavro*. RS 3.4 g/l.
Black core, cherry rim. Not very open on the nose. The very fine tannins currently making a tight corset round the dark fruit. So much still to be revealed. (JH)14.5% Drink 2017-2022

€16 17.5

- Costa Lazaridi, Château Julia Merlot 2011 PGI Drama Very dark core. Aromas of dark plums and spice. A slight biscuity note (to do with the oak?). Savoury - like roasted potato skins. Fine tannins, nicely structured. Still has a pretty firm grip but the tannins are becoming supple. Long and serious. (JH)14.5% Drink 2016-2021

€16 18

- Messenicolas, Melisma 2010 PGI Karditsa 60% Limniona, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. Deep garnet, sweet fruit, perhaps a very slight touch of brett adding a meaty character. Fine tannins and cleaner on the palate. Satisfying. (JH)13% Drink 2014-2017

€7.80 16.5

- Monemvasia Winery, 300 2006 Regional Wine of Lakonia 70% Agiorgitiko, 30% Mavroudi. RS 3.1 g/l. Delicate aroma - mostly undergrowth, mushroom, definitely mature. Old but not past it! Complex, still with a certain grip. Leathery and long and lots of lovely mature flavours. (JH)13% Drink 2012-2017

€20 18

- Monemvasia Winery, 300 2007 Regional Wine of Lakonia 70% Agiorgitiko, 30% Mavroudi. Mid garnet, quiet nose. Subtle on the palate too. Some undergrowth but still with some dark hedgerow fruit. Fine texture, just a little earthy but ageing well and still some firmness in the tannins. (JH)13% Drink 2012-2017

€20 17

- Monemvasia Winery, Monemvasios 2007 Regional Wine of Monemvasia 90% Agiorgitiko, 10% Mavroudi.

Hints of coffee and undergrowth - very much in the tertiary aroma spectrum - much still with some spicy fruit and herbs. Dry, very fine tannins. (JH)13% Drink 2014-2017

€8 17

- Pavlidis, Thema 2012 PGI Drama 60% Syrah, 40% Agiorgitiko. RS 3 g/l. Black core, crimson rim. Lovely restrained dark fruit aroma - a little wild, like elderberries. Savoury and smoky on the palate. Firm, dry and moreish. Long and very well balanced. Still very youthful. (JH)14% Drink 2016-2022

€11 18

MACEDONIA WHITES

- Ezimit, Barrique Chardonnay 2013 Ovče Pole Light acidification. Not yet bottled. Barrel aged 4 months in US oak (not new).

Very pale. Hint of pear drops. Delicate lemon and hint of green apple and melon, creamy rather than buttery. Fresh, not overoaked, a little warm on the finish but still manages to be fresh and tangy. Clean and correct without excess. (JH)13.7% Drink 2014-2016

16.5

- Ch Kamnik, Single Vineyard Pinot Grigio 2013 Skopje Delicate pear notes. Lovely depth of Pinot Gris (rather than typically more neutral Pinot Grigio) but with lots of freshness. Alcohol not too evident. Very nice slight grip. (JH)14.5% Drink 2014-2015

16.5

- Ch Kamnik, Premium Temjanika 2013 Vardar River Valley pH 3.17. Very finely aromatic and lightly grapey and orange blossom. Delicate and refined and very pretty but long too and not just aromatic. Dry but no bitterness. Sustained. (JH)14.2% Drink 2013-2014

17

- Ch Kamnik, Barrel Fermented Chardonnay 2013 Skopje Barrel sample at the time of

tasting. Slightly cloudy. Creamy, mealy and an attractive sour/leesy freshness. Depth and interest, and great freshness even though the alcohol is on the high side. 14.2% Drink 2015-2018

16.5+

- **Popov, Smolnik Chardonnay 2013 Tikveš** Unoaked. Smolnik is the subregion and the vineyards round the winery. Fresh melon fruit. Stone fruit and freshness, finely textured. Fresh and subtle. Chablis-like but with more green apple and lots of tension. (JH) 14% Drink 2014-2015
16.5
- **Popov Pinot Gris 2013 Tikveš** *From Vrsnik. Planted 2011 and this is the first harvest. First bottle corked - 'partner industry that kills the wine industry', says Popov. Yield 4 t/ha and they will only go up to 6 t/ha.*
Second bottle: spicy and chalky on the nose. Firm and spicy and mouth-filling. Sour freshness and mealiness even though it is unoaked. (JH) 14.1% Drink 2014-2015
16.5
- **Skovin Temjanika 2012 Tikveš** Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains. Not very aromatic on the nose but more so on the palate. Spicy and green on the nose and not as grapey as in the mouth. (Yellow mutation less aromatic, apparently). Fresh and delicate. Gold-medal winner in Muscats du Monde. (JH) Drink 2013-2014
16.5
- **Stobi Graševina 2014 Tikveš** Smells rich, smoky and lightly spiced. Firm, dense and characterful. Very Central European - somehow fiery - but still has excellent freshness. Full bodied, just a touch of heat on the finish. (JH) 12% Drink 2015-2018
€3.60 16.5
- **Stobi, Cuvée 2013 Tikveš** 50% *Rkatsiteli*, 35% *Zupljanka*, 15% *Zilavka*.
Spicy, concentrated, really satisfying but still fresh. Long and characterful. Complex for the price (€4-5 in Macedonia) and long, spicy finish. Touch of heat at the very end. (JH) Drink 2014-2016
16.5
- **Tikveš Winery, Barovo 2011 Tikveš** Grenache Blanc and Chardonnay. More smoky and mineral than the 2010. Mealy citrus, crisp and clean and doesn't show its high alcohol except at the very end. Tight, crisp and elegant. (JH) 15% Drink 2012-2015
16.5
- **Tikveš Winery, Barovo 2013 Tikveš** Grenache Blanc and Chardonnay. In tank at the time of tasting. Creamy citrus. More mineral than the 2012 and 2011. Very dry, lovely tension and freshness and notable persistence. (JH) 14.6% Drink 2014-2016
17

MACEDONIA REDS

- **Bovin Petit Verdot 2013 Tikveš** While I found most of the Bovin reds rather tired and a bit old fashioned, this stood out for its much better liveliness. Very dark. Alcohol shows on the nose but it has fine dark pure fruit and classic floral character. Great freshness and intense fruit purity. Firm but rounded. Needs time. (JH) 15% Drink 2015-2018
16.5
- **Ezimit, Terra Macedonika Vranec 2012 Ovče Pole** *Barrel sample at the time of tasting. 60% Vranec, 40% Syrah. NB this may be just a component in top wine, Terra Macedonika, rather than final product. US oak for 14 months.*
Lovely peppery Syrah nose. Deep, fresh, chewy and savoury but the texture is refined and there's a nice dry finish. Persistent, tight. Really expressive. (JH) 13.5% Drink 2015-2018

17

- Ch Kamnik, Signature Grand Reserva Merlot 2012 Skopje Black core, deep ruby rim. Very ripe fruit (dried on the vine, I think) - dried fruit and a little porty. Massive and very ripe style is not my favourite but it does have some freshness and a sort of Amarone sweet/sour intensity. But I wouldn't pay this price for it. RS is apparently 11.4 g/l, even with this level of alcohol - can it really be that high? This style seems better suited to Vranec than to Merlot. (JH)17.4% Drink 2015-2019

€48 16.5

- Ch Kamnik, Terroir Grand Reserva Vranec 2011 Veles *Even with 17.3% alcohol, this still has 7.1 g/l residual sugar. Vines at 550 m, dried on the vine, 20 months in US oak.* Black as black. Peppery, spicy, rich, dark and savoury but then sweet and tannic on the palate. Terrific density and freshness. A bit like an Amarone in the sweet/sour blend. A little spicity (not really surprising at 17.3%). Very fresh (adjusted, I am sure, to TA 7.7 g/l and pH 3.21), lively and gripping. Not for the lily-livered. (JH)17.3% Drink 2015-2021

17

- Ch Kamnik Carmenère 2013 Skopje Not bottled at the time of tasting. Deep but bright crimson. Intense green and red pepper on the nose. Delicious tomato-leaf juicy freshness. Deep and rich and intense and so fresh. (JH) Drink 2014-2016

16.5

- Ch Kamnik Syrah 2013 Skopje *Barrel sample at the time of tasting. Aged in French and US oak.* Inky black. Bags of spice and pepper but also fabulous dark fruit. Both char and oak sweetness but refined and full of the future with a savoury meaty classic Syrah profile. Black olive. Delicious. (JH)14.7% Drink 2015-2018

17

- Ch Kamnik, Terroir Grand Reserva Vranec 2012 Veles *Barrel sample at the time of tasting. Fruit partly dried on the vine. Finely dark aromatic fruit, deeply tannic and concentrated. Full of dark fruit and intensity. A wow wine for very slow sipping. Extreme but still balanced. Fresh, huge grip but bags of fruit that holds the alcohol.* (JH)16.5% Drink 2016-2022

18

- Lozar, Excellence Merlot 2013 Republic of Macedonia Mid crimson. Not particularly aromatic. Juicy, softish tannins but has the structure for food if not for long ageing. Straightforward. Nice bright fruit. (JH)12% Drink 2015-2017

€7.50 16.5

- Popov, Cuvée Prestige 2011 Tikveš *Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Vranec and a touch of Cabernet Franc. One third aged in oak.*

Spice and a touch of mocha but leafy too. Elegant, leafy, fresh and very drinkable. Still quite youthful. (JH)14% Drink 2014-2016

16.5

- Skovin, Markov Manastir Vranec 2011 Skopje *New oak. Vranec from 40-year-old vines.* Intense ripe, deep cherry and forest fruits darkness. Oak well integrated. Rich and firm, fine grained, sweet fruited but nicely dry on the finish. Long and satisfying. (JH)14.2% Drink 2014-2017

16.5

- Stobi, Cuvée Prestige Petit Verdot 2013 Tikveš *Barrel sample at the time of tasting. French oak.* Black with purple rim. Much more of Petit Verdot perfume than the earlier vintages tasted. Rounded and generous and long. Full of beautiful fresh fruit. Vibrant. (JH)13.8% Drink 2015-2018

16.5

- Stobi, Veritas Vranec 2011 Tikveš *RS 3.8 g/l. Their top-level wine. Older vines - 40 years old. Yield 6 t/ha. All new oak - French and mostly Slavonian, barriques and casks.*

Black as tar. Spicy, sweet dark fruit yet the tannins are on the elegant side. Intense and dark and voluptuous. Fine grained. Vibrant dark wild berries. (JH)14.8% Drink 2015-2020

17

- Tikveš Winery, Special Selection Vranec 2013 Tikveš Black like elderberry juice. Both red and dark fruit. Lovely varietal expression with dry, firm tannins and fresh acidity, alcohol tastes moderate. Dry finish and not overly tamed – shows Vranec in a sophisticated and true style. Chewy and genuine but not rustic. Great stuff. (JH)14.1% Drink 2014-2017

16.5

- Tikveš Winery, Bela Voda 2012 Veles 50/50 Plavec and Vranec. 15 months in barrique for the Vranec and the Plavec in steel. Plavec better in steel, apparently – more aromatic and softer tannins and less colour.

Black core. From tank/barrel. Slight stemmy freshness on the nose even though there are no stems. But has that lovely ripe Vranec fruit character. Rich, dry, chocolatey. Getting more refined but needs time in bottle. Dark fruit and spice. Fine tannic texture. Promises much. Looks like it will be **GV**. (JH)14% Drink 2015-2020

17

- Tikveš Winery, Barovo 2011 Vardar River Valley 70% Kratosije and 30% Vranec, very low yields. 12 months in oak barriques, some new. Philippe Cambie of the Rhône is the consultant. Intense colour, black core. Intense, very ripe dark fruit. Mocha. Dark and savoury and sophisticated. Intense and long, almost a sourness on the finish from the concentration. The minus is for the slight bitterness on the finish. Would be around €15 in Macedonia. (JH)14.5% Drink 2015-2020

17-

ROMANIA WHITES

See the end of the article for a glorious, and gloriously mature, sweet Grasă de Cotnari. And see the introduction for why there are so few Romanian wines reviewed in this article. I will be going to Romania in November so hope to make up the deficit then.

ROMANIA REDS

- Ch Lazarus, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 Romania Very youthful colour – dark black cherry and wild dark fruit. Dusty but fresh cassis fruit aroma. Fine, dry texture. So young and still vibrant. Fine-grained and really remarkably youthful. (JH)13.5% Drink 2013-2018

16.5

SERBIA WHITES

- Pusula Chardonnay 2014 Serbia Fresh fruit, both citrus and melon. Clean, zesty, pure and tightly fresh. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2016

€5.50 16.5

TURKEY WHITES

- Arcadia, Odrysia Narince 2013 Turkey From Kırklareli in north-east Thrace. First vintage. 3 months sur lie and 8 months in bottle. The name Odrysia comes from the Odrisian Kingdom. Definite leesy note, almost like champagne but with the orange aroma of the variety. Leesy flavour too and a slight grip. Creamy, gentle but fresh. No fining. Lots of stony texture.

(JH)13% Drink 2015-2016

16.5

- **Arcadia, Odrysia Gris 2013 Turkey** From Kirklareli in north-east Thrace. 80% Sauvignon Gris (very rare in Turkey), 20% Pinot Gris. Whole cluster pressing, 3.5 months on lees, no oak. 'Lots of champagne techniques', apparently (their consultant is Dr Michel Salgues, former director of Roederer California).

Interesting aroma of peppery citrus and pear. A little smoky. Slight grip, fresh green fruits, lots of texture. Bone dry, chalky and fresh. Very good. Moreish. (JH)14.5% Drink 2015-2017

17

- **Chamlija Narince 2014 Turkey** From Kirklareli, Thrace. Grown on decomposed granite close to the Black Sea at 400 m asl. Unoaked.

Lovely orange and pear aroma. Fine delicate citrus and a hint of orange blossom. Crisp and with a light cedary freshness and a slight grip in the texture. More aromatic than intense but persistent and scented on the palate. (JH)12.8% Drink 2015-2016

16.5

- **Chamlija Riesling 2014 Turkey** From Kirklareli, Thrace. According to the producer, 'the driest Riesling in Turkey'.

Delicate appley citrus, mineral too. Crisp and dry, not very intense on the mid palate but with an attractive stony, almost chalky texture. Fine terroir-driven texture. Persistent and pure - impressive. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

16.5

TURKEY REDS

- **Arcadia, A Cabernet Franc 2011 Turkey** Kirklareli in north-east Thrace. A = their top range. Cold maceration and long cool ferment. 12 months in oak, 50% new. Gravity fed and hand punch downs.

Classic slightly leafy Cab Franc nose. Pure and zesty. Tannins are relatively soft, the oak nicely in the background. Fresh, softly textured but not flabby. Seems to show the varietal character more than the terroir - not as place-specific as the whites? But there are clear signs of careful restraint here. (JH)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

16

- **Chamlija Papazkarasi 2014 Turkey** Papazkarasi plus 15% Cab Franc. Turkish variety grown only in Thrace and often used to make an aromatised drink, mixed with mustard seeds. Generally low alcohol. 15% fermented in open-top vessels and whole-bunch but no oak. pH 3.4.

Lightish cherry red. Wonderful aroma of bright and peppery red cherry. Juicy, full of energy, red fruited on the palate and a very fine structure from acid/tannin balance. Tannins are fine and lightish but in proportion. Lovely long finish - such pure fruit but not simple. (JH)12.5% Drink 2015-2018

17

- **Galî 2010 Turkey** From Gallipolli, Thrace. 85% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc.

Deep garnet. Lively, fresh, dark fruit. Lots of integrity and not too much make up. Peppery, spicy. Chewy and honest. (JH)13.6% Drink 2016-2020

16.5

- **Galî, Pure Merlot 2011 Turkey** Very deep ruby with inky core. Mature dark brick rim. Peppery and complex with savoury roasted notes (but not overripe fruit). Much more terroir than Merlot. Firm dry and chewy and definitely shows the chalky texture I often associate indirectly with limestone soils. Chewy but fine. Needs more time. (JH)14.5% Drink 2017-2021

17+

- **Ch Nuzun 2011 Turkey** *From Tekirdağ in eastern Thrace. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Pinot Noir.*
Deep crimson. Balsamic, black olives and dark fruit. Juicy, taut and still rich. Finely balanced between freshness and richness. Big but not heavy. Firm, chewy, long. (JH)14.3% Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- **Ch Nuzun Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Turkey** *From Tekirdağ in eastern Thrace. Certified organic in 2010. 12 months in French oak, some new.*
There's a slight leafy note initially and a hint of menthol. Tight and a little lean but there's freshness despite the alcohol. A bit austere. (JH)15% Drink 2016-2019
15.5
- **Ch Nuzun Syrah 2011 Turkey** *From Tekirdağ in eastern Thrace. Certified organic in 2010. 15 months in French oak, some new.*
Inky crimson. Restrained aroma, dark and a touch peppery but not giving much away. Like the Cabernet, a bit too austere, needs more flesh in the middle. Fresh but hard. (JH)
13% Drink 2016-2020
15.5

STRONG AND SWEET

- **Avantis, Black Syrah 2013 PGI Evia** RS 120 g/l. Inky black core. Fabulously intense aroma of ripe black fruit, fruit cake. Rich and figgy. Sweet, juicy and lovely harmony, the tannins are subtle but help balance the sweetness. Juicy and long. Reminds me of Recioto della Valpolicella. (JH)13% Drink 2015-2020
€18 17
- **Cotnari Grasă 1984 Cotnari** RS 64 g/l. Deep gold. Gentle honeyed aroma, barley sugar, hint of pine resin and quince. Similar on the palate, really flavourful and fresh and still elegant. Fabulous freshness. (JH)12.1% Drink 1995-2020
€35 18.5
- **Kiš, Bermet NV Serbia** *Bermet is a traditional Serbian aromatised and fortified wine - this one fortified to 17% with RS 100 g/l.*
Quite subtle rosemary and pine aroma and gingerbread. Intense ginger flavour on the palate. Fresh and lingering. In its style, very good. **GV** (JH)9% Drink now
€6.50 17.5
- **Rossidi, G Gewurztraminer 2012 Cotnari** *Late harvested. All in steel barrels.*
Classic Gewurz nose, here with a touch of honey added to the rose petal and quince. Light and stony on the palate, gently sweet and surprisingly refreshing. Attractive bitter grapefruit pith freshness on the finish. (JH)12.5% Drink 2014-2016
16.5
- **Sigalas, Vinsanto 2005 Santorini** 75% Assyrtiko, 25% Aidani. RS 280 g/l.
Deep burnt umber. Caramelised orange and apricot. Thick and viscous but with a very attractive slight grip and plenty of freshness. Stunning concentration and overwhelmingly delicious as well as complex. This won my vote for the sweet wine trophy, though in the end I was outvoted and the Cotnari won. (JH)9% Drink 2012-2025
€26.10 19