

Grand Wine and Liquor: A Family-Owned Astoria Institution

By Christodoulos Athanasatos

ASTORIA – Grand Wine and Liquor, 30-05 31st Street in Astoria, is a staple of the neighborhood, celebrating 84 years offering an impressive variety of wines and other alcoholic beverages for even the most demanding customer, including a wide range of Greek wines, and more.

The company was founded in 1937, by Robert Battipaglia, in the period after the repeal of Prohibition. For Battipaglia, it was a side business, as his main concern was to establish himself in the local political scene. He may not have imagined at that time that the next generation would make Grand Wine and Liquor the standard for the entire area.

"The truth is that, after the first 20 years, my grandfather thought the store was not doing well enough and wanted to sell it. But when my father reached adulthood, he decided to run it himself. Not only did he run it, but he expanded it, investing heavily in Greek wines, as well as others from Eastern Europe. This helped him build the business' reputation. So he expanded the space and bought this building," Bob Battipaglia, the grandson of the founder, who has taken over the man-



agement of the company, told The National Herald.

As the third generation in this family-run business, Bob literally 'grew up' inside the store. He worked part-time and helped his father during his student years, work in wine sales, and in 2017, he was called on to take over and continue the family business. He was, in fact, ready for a long time.

Regarding the evolution of the

business and the significant changes in the profile of the customers themselves, Battipaglia noted that the flexibility in the selection and distribution of products was immediate, towards a very demanding audience.

"Demographics have changed, a lot of the older residents have left for the suburbs and new people have come to the area who work in Manhattan. So the profile has changed,

and now we have wines from all over the world, mainly of medium price, while our big goal is to take advantage of e-commerce. We have a modern website and we emphasize online orders. E-commerce is growing at a rate of ... 20 percent each year and the pandemic – something that can be seen from the launch of Amazon – has made many people accustomed to ordering from home,"



PHOTOS: TNH/ZAPEIRIS HAITIDIS
Robert J. Battipaglia is the third generation running the family-owned Grand Wine and Liquor in Astoria.

he said, noting that the surge in sales during the lockdown was almost unexpected.

"A lot of people thought we would close and they came here buying wine and liquor to have for the long run. Eventually, the wine shops and liquor stores were considered essential services and remained open during the pandemic. From March to May, we had an increase in sales, but from the summer when people left for Long Island the traffic went back to normal. From our side, of course, we had additional expenses, be-

cause we had to adapt the store in order for both the customers and the staff to be safe," said Battipaglia.

Finally, the owner of the store, via TNH, thanked the Greek-American community for its timeless support, expressing his happiness for the fact that the company is based in an area like Queens with so much diversity.

More information about Grand Wine and Liquor, 30-05 31st Street in Astoria, is available by phone: 718-728-2520 and online: grandliquors.com.

HACC Presented Event on Amphora Wines

By Eleni Sakellis

NEW YORK – The Hellenic-American Chamber of Commerce (HACC) presented The Amphora: Two Sides of Wine on April 24 via Zoom. The event included a presentation on the history of wine with Museum of Cycladic Art archaeologist Metaxia Routsis and a tasting of excellent amphora wines available today. Moderator for the event Athenae Imports and Distributors Vice President Andrea Englis was joined by Sommelier Michael Madrigale for the tasting and discussion with winemakers Nikos Karatzas of Oenops and Sakis Nikolaidis of Anatolikos Vineyards.

Amphorae have been used to ferment and age wine for thousands of years. For thousands of years, they also served the wine community well. Part of HACC's wine tasting series, the event transported attendees back to the roots of winemaking to explore wines made in amphorae.

Amphora wines are unique and represent an emerging category of wines that offer a distinctive experience. In this class, participants ventured to Greece's northernmost wine regions of Drama and Thrace. Rich in wine history, these regions offer unique interpretations of amphora winemaking. Attendees had

the opportunity to taste and learn about the different grape varieties available. A list of the wines for the tasting was emailed before the event. The wines could be purchased at Grand Wines & Liquors 30-05 31st Street, Astoria, NY.

In her presentation, Museum of Cycladic Art archaeologist Metaxia Routsis explored the history of wine from prehistoric times to the 2nd millennium BC to the luxurious gatherings of classical antiquity. The wine, as god Dionysus' gift, established the famous symposiums and led to high quality works of art to serve the process of common drinking. The presentation highlighted a different perspective on ancient Greek history as it traced the routes of viticulture during the millennia and showcased the importance of wine from ritual activities to the greatest medium of socialization.

The tasting began with Oenops wines, RAWDitis (\$30.99) and XinomavRAW (\$30.99), introduced by winemaker Nikos Karatzas. The tasting continued with Anatolikos Vineyards' Natural Red (\$54.99), Natural Orange (\$54.99), and Pollios Oinos (\$59.99) introduced by winemaker Sakis Nikolaidis. Englis and Madrigale offered their insights into the wines and answered questions from the participants of the class throughout the event.

Four Ancient Greek Varieties Featured in Wine Enthusiast Magazine

TNH Staff

NEW YORK – Ancient Greek grape varieties and the impressive modern wines made from them were featured in Wine Enthusiast Magazine (WEM) which noted that "in Greece, wine is deeply woven into the fabric of everyday society and is a central component of cultural history."

WEM reported that "references to consumption and cultivation appear in literature and historical texts as early as the 17th century BC" and "indigenous wine varieties once favored by Hesiod and Aristotle are still produced today."

"Social and political upheaval of subsequent Roman ... [and] Turkish occupations impeded and sometimes suspended commercial production of Greece's legendary ancient varieties," WEM reported, adding "yet, local production and demand for the one-of-a-kind wines endured throughout the ages."

The ancient varieties are becoming increasingly popular today worldwide, "thanks to passionate sommeliers and wine historians, and an increasing number of progressive Greek vintners committed to protecting and perfecting these liquid relics," WEM reported, noting that "among Greece's more than 300 indigenous grapes, several are millennia old," and "Assyrtiko, Limnio, Robola, and Liatiko are four that draw particular attention for their world-class quality, with traditional and modern styles that align with 21st-century palates."

Assyrtiko is "the smoky, salty and cellar-worthy white wine born of Santorini's moonscape-like volcanic vineyards that dates back more than 3,500 years," WEM reported, adding "the island boasts some of the few self-rooted vines left in Europe."

"This flinty, full-bodied expression of Santorini may be the closest in style to its ancient expression, but the grape has also proven successful elsewhere," WEM reported.

Vagelis Gavalas, the fifth-generation winemaker of Santorini's Gavalas Winery told WEM "we think it can be the flagship for the white wines of Greece."

WEM noted that "elsewhere on the island, producers like Sigalas, Gai'a, Argyros, Vassaltis and Hatzidakis have contributed to the grape's global success," and "micro-terroir bottlings, experiments in underwater aging, and library tastings reveal its potential as one of the world's great ageable white wines."

Assyrtiko is also used "in sparkling wines by producers like Santorini's Santo Wines, and in a lively retsina made by Kechris Winery in Thessaloniki," WEM reported.

"The global wine market is now very open to unique, rare wines," Gavalas told WEM. Spinthiropoulou told WEM that she agrees, saying "Assyrtiko seems to be our passport to the international market."

Among the "bottles to try," WEM suggests Greek Wine Cellars 2019 Flowers Assyrtiko (Santorini), \$27; Skouras 2019 Wild Ferment Assyrtiko (Peloponnese), \$18; Wine Art Estate 2019 Plano Assyrtiko (Drama), \$25; Alexakis 2019 Assyrtiko (Crete), \$17; Do-

maine Papagiannakos 2019 Assyrtiko (Attica), \$22; and Gavalas 2019 Dry Assyrtiko (Santorini), \$34.

Limnio, the red wine mentioned in Homer's Odyssey is "one of Greece's oldest on record," WEM reported, noting that it hails from the Aegean island of Lemnos, and "was a major player in the sweet wine craze that dominated ancient Greece."

Today, Limnio is "produced both in elegant, dry, single-variety bottlings and blends, mainly in the northern Greek regions of Macedonia and Thrace," WEM reported, adding that "Limnio is typified by moderate, silky tannins, good acidity, a pronounced mineral nose and flavors of crushed herbs and bright red berries."

"Its full-bodied yet focused character has 'more than a little in common with Barolo,'" George Salpindigis, viticultural director at Tsantali Vineyards & Wineries, told WEM.

"Though relatively rare, varietal bottlings by producers like

"The global wine market is now very open to unique, rare wines..."

Vourvoukeli Estate in Thrace and Garalis (on Lemnos) highlight Limnio's naturally vibrant palate and high acidity," WEM reported, noting that "both stainless steel- and oak-aged expressions offer an intriguing alternative for fans of deep-flavored reds."

Salpindigis told WEM that Limnio is "an extremely fine variety with fabulous potential to make great, age-worthy wines."

WEM suggests Tsantali 2014 Agiorgitiko Abaton Gold Selection (Mount Athos), \$35, noting its "aromas of ripe red berries, cherry and spice are followed by rich flavors of cherry, currant, and vanilla in this blend of 50% Xinomavro, 30% Grenache and 20% Limnio."

Robola is a white grape, "fresh, citrusy, and lightly aromatic," which "originates from the Ionian island of Cephalonia and is believed to date to at least the 12th century," WEM reported.

"Gentilini Winery is the island's premier Robola producer," WEM reported. Gentilini 2019 Wild Paths Robola (Cephalonia), \$43, and Sclavos 2019 Di Sasso (Cephalonia), \$28, are among the bottles recommended by WEM.

The section on the Liatiko variety highlights Crete's "ancient wine world," WEM reported, noting that, "Liatiko's connection to Crete dates to the 2nd or 3rd century BC" and adding that "the variety is mentioned throughout the island's history, including in 13th-century texts (referencing the famous sun-dried Malvasia sweet wine of the time, in which Liatiko was included) and in 16th-century vineyard purchase documents."

"The timing is right to showcase the variety's strengths," Bart Lyrarakis, owner of Lyrarakis, told WEM, adding that "he strives for a lighter, more delicate expression of Liatiko."

Lyrarakis 2018 Aggelis Liatiko (Crete), \$24, and Doulofakis 2018 Dafnias (Dafnes), \$17, are two of the bottles of the variety recommended by WEM.



Officer Anastasios Tsakos

AHEPA MOURNS DEATH OF GREEK-AMERICAN POLICE OFFICER

Police Officer Anastasios Tsakos, a fourteen year NYPD veteran, immigrated from Greece to America for a better life. Throughout his life he wanted to become a police officer to Protect and to Serve his community. While on duty, he responded to an accident on the Long Island Expressway at 2AM on Tuesday morning. While Officer Tsakos was diverting traffic away from the fatal accident and towards safety he was fatally struck by a driver who was allegedly under the influence. Officer Tsakos is survived by his wife and two young children. He was a member of the St. Paul's Society (whose members are composed of Hellenic American & Eastern Orthodox Law Enforcement officers from federal, state and local police agencies) and has marched proudly in the NYC Greek Independence Day Parade.

The Order of AHEPA has and always will support our Law Enforcement and sends their deepest sympathies to Anastasios' fellow officers and the entire Tsakos family. May his memory be eternal.

Supreme Governor, Tom Dushas



District-6 Governor, Lou Katsos