

Kydonitsa Reborn

Inside the family bringing Greece's forgotten white grape to the world. *By Theodora Tsevas*

From left: Elli, Marialena, Artemis, Anastasia, and George Tsimbidis



At the southern edge of Greece, near the medieval town of Monemvasia, in the region of Laconia, a pale-skinned grape called Kydonitsa is rewriting the story of Greek wine. Once on the brink of extinction, it is now appearing on wine lists in Athens, New York, and Boston. The architect of this revival is Monemvasia Winery, a family-run estate established in 1997 with a mission to bring back the wines that once made this region famous.

"Our parents, Giorgos and Elli Tsimbidis, dreamed of reviving a historic wine for Monemvasia known as Monemvasia-Malvasia,"

says Marialena Tsimbidis, part of the second generation running Monemvasia Winery. Malvasia was celebrated across Europe as early as the 12th century, but with the fall of Byzantium and later Ottoman rule, its production faded. "By our time, it had practically disappeared," she explains. "We knew it was a wine of very high quality and taste value, made from local grape varieties."

During the search for the lost Malvasia, the family rediscovered native grapes that had survived around Laconia. "Kydonitsa, Monemvasia, and Asproudia are the DNA of our region," says Tsimbidis. The winery

also cultivates Assyrtiko, Agiorgitiko, Mavroudia, and Limniona. "Our goal is to produce unique wines that express the terroir of Monemvasia from indigenous varieties."

Among all these grapes, Kydonitsa stood apart, a rare white variety that would later become the centerpiece of the winery's revival. "In the experimental vinifications, it was the first batch to show a distinctive taste character among the dry whites we produced," Tsimbidis recalls. "During those first trials, we were convinced that there was real treasure hidden in the rare local varieties." The winery went on to plant

about 80 acres of Kydonitsa, effectively reviving its cultivation and paving the way for other growers.

The Tsimbidis family farms organically and practices minimalist winemaking to showcase the grape's character. There are two different labels of this wine, the classic Kydonitsa and the Kydonitsa Mature. For their classic Kydonitsa, they use a standard white vinification with temperature-controlled fermentation and selected yeasts, followed by five to six months on the lees with bâtonnage. "We prefer stainless steel tanks for their neutrality," says Tsimbidis. "They let the grape express itself." For

the Kydonitsa Mature, they add extended pre-fermentation skin contact to draw more from the tannic skins, followed by nine months on the lees and nearly three years of aging before release. This process brings out the richer, more layered side of Kydonitsa.

In its home region of Laconia, Kydonitsa reveals its true majesty. “Its thick and tannic skins protect delicate aromas of quince, herbs like pelargonium, and citrus from the high summer temperatures,” Tsimbidis explains, “while also retaining a refreshing acidity.” On the palate, the wine shows fruity flavors over a lightly phenolic backbone with hints of minerality, thanks to the area’s clay-loam soils and low-yielding vineyards. Young Kydonitsa displays bright, crisp fruit, while older examples develop a richer, more mature character.

Kydonitsa is a modern wine with perfect balance in many food pairings. That versatility has helped it win over sommeliers both in Greece and abroad, positioning it as a natural companion to popular Greek whites like Assyrtiko. “Kydonitsa pairs beautifully with aromatic spinach pies, dolmadakia avgolemono, goat cheese, and seafood,” says Tsimbidis. According to Tsimbidis, the wine combines measured aromatic intensity with refreshing acidity and deliciousness. “It has a great balance of elements, so everyone can find something different in it.”

Monemvasia Winery now exports Kydonitsa to Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, Maryland, and California, with distribution



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expanding to other states. It is particularly popular in Massachusetts and Virginia, especially the label Kydonitsa Mature (2019).

With Kydonitsa firmly established in their vineyards, the Tsimbidis family now carries the founding vision forward together. “Because of our size, the whole family contributes to different areas,” Tsimbidis says. All three sisters, Marialena, Anasta-

sia, and Artemis, take part in winemaking decisions and tastings before bottling each vintage. Anastasia now manages marketing and image, Marialena handles exports, and the youngest, Artemis, is completing her university studies with plans to join the winery full-time. “Our wines are the result of the hard work of our entire team, and the dream of two generations of the Tsimbidis family,” she says.

Today, they farm nearly 300 acres of certified organic vineyards.

Looking ahead, Tsimbidis sees Kydonitsa and other indigenous varieties as Greece’s strongest card on the world stage. “Greek varieties, mainly whites for now, seem to be gathering the most interest internationally,” she says. “Turning to native grapes isn’t just a trend; it’s the way to build a unique wine profile in the global market.” This focus places Greece alongside other wine countries that have reclaimed their own heritage grapes—Spain with Mencia, Portugal with its field blends—creating wines impossible to duplicate elsewhere.

At its core, the revival of Kydonitsa is about identity. Each bottle tells the story of a region, a family, and a nearly lost tradition reborn. Standing among the rows of organically farmed vines, Tsimbidis sees more than fruit. “We want to produce wines that express the terroir of Monemvasia from indigenous grapes. That is our sole philosophy and purpose,” she says. And with each harvest, the family hopes to safeguard a piece of Greek heritage and to offer to the world a fresh expression of what Greece’s future wines can be.

Today, Kydonitsa carries a whole story in each glass, of clay soils and sea breezes, of a family who refused to let a grape die, and of Greece finding its own voice in the world of wine. What began on the hillsides of Laconia now pours into glasses thousands of miles away, showing how an ancient grape can find a new life in the modern world.