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Tradition and innovation in Douloufakis winery in Crete

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People who have tasted the wines produced by Nikos Douloufakis in Crete and had also the chance to meet him in person always tell me the same exact thing. That Douloufakis is an absolute gentleman producing fantastic wines. A day spent with him, that concluded in a tasting of some very old bottles of his brilliant Vidianos and Cabernet Sauvignon make it easy to understand why.



A lot of passion revolves around Douloufakis' work yet there is plenty of labour involved as well. As we drive through the narrow streets of Dafnes village where his **modern winery** [1] is located he says that until recently he used to prune all the vines himself. Eventually, he had to move forward getting some extra hands as more hectares were added to its property.

Dafnes is a beautiful landscape and an intriguing terroir for vine growing as it combines altitudes of 350 to 400 metres, lots of limestone on the soil (associated with high quality wine because of encouraging light water stress) and hillside vineyards. There, Douloufakis controls about 30 hectares producing approximately 300.000 bottles per year.



Dafnes in Crete near the city of Irakleion

One of his most celebrated vineyards is Aspros Lagos (pictured below) where he sources grapes both for the white Aspros Lagos version of his 100% Vidiano and red made from Cabernet Sauvignon. The White Aspros Lagos ferments and matures in 15% new French oak and acacia adding more spicy layers, while the Red is full of elegance leaning more to the Old World in style Cabs that combine bell pepper aromatics with ripe cassis fruit and taut structure. Both can age remarkably well as it will be described below.



Aspros Lagos vineyard

Back in the winery, Nikos Douloufakis talks about adopting some new ideas in his winemaking like maturing his red Liatiko in large three tonnes oak casks (pictured below) for better oak integration and less toasty flavours, thus taking advantage of all the micro-oxygenation without the vanillin effect. He is also heading in reducing the acacia percentage for the white Aspros Lagos in favour of French oak.



The best however is saved for last. Someone commented on a photo I shared in social media that "the good producers always have something behind the scenes" and this is exactly what happened when I explored a secret cellar where the producer experiments with *amphoras* or *pitharia* as they are called there.

"These are Cretan pitharia crafted in the village of Thrapsano with long tradition in ceramics, wood fired in ovens. I am experimenting with both Vidiano and Liatiko trying to see what those varieties are capable of producing. I am very excited for this project where the wine is already with the skins for three months. All is very natural with some SO₂ only added at crushing" Douloufakis explains. "If this goes to production it will be about 1000 bottles for each label" he continues.



We taste together with wine enthusiasts and professionals three different labels of Vidiano where he is the undisputed pioneer of the variety and the Cab Sauv Aspros Lagos. All these wines show the elegance, the fruit purity, often the precision of his style and above all the respect to the raw material. Add to this the excellent *value for money - paramount* these wines offer and you have the Douloufakis equation.

The Wines:

[Vidiano Sparkling Methode Traditionnelle 2013 \[2\]](#)

Dafnios (Vidiano) 2012, 2013, 2014

Top: 2013 Wonderfully evolved, elegant with underlying minerality. Easy to see that it will improve over the next 3 years.

Aspros Lagos White (Vidiano) 2009, 2010, 2011

Top: 2009 Well it seems Vidiano can age really well and the 2009 Aspros Lagos is solid evidence as at almost 8 years old shows a layered ripe buttery character retaining finesse. Multi - layered with integrated oak and long finish. A star and wine of the night.

Aspros Lagos Red Cab Sauv: 2004, 2005, 2006

Top: 2005 Bordeaux like nose with cedar, cassis, pyrazines and an earthy dimension. Velvety, elegant with vegetal nuances and a long persistent finish. Excellent balance of alcohol. Precise.

You can find Douloufakis wines [here \[3\]](#).

