



**PLUMPJACK**  
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

## July 2007

Having an open mind and a welcoming palate are critical requirements in the pursuit of organoleptic bliss. Memories of wines past, jaded opinions of obstinate wine drinkers, influential journalism, and critics' scores can easily lead one astray. There are many myths that we need to overcome in order to rejoice in what the world of wine offers today. For example, many think all Greek wines are made in the style of Retsina - a white or rosé that has pine resin added. Similarly, some think all Côtes du Rhône are light in color, simple in flavors, grapey, and uninspiring. Our two wines this month dispel the

absurdity of these beliefs. Thanks to the insight and Herculean efforts of these two producers, their wines showcase the unique characteristics of their regions. Both wineries are considered to be among the best in their area, and their wines, while not living up to the aforementioned myths, are indeed legendary!



*2004 Canava Argyros  
"Atlantis"  
Santorini, Greece*



*2004 Domaine de Mourchon  
Côtes du Rhône Villages-Séguret  
Grande Réserve  
Séguret, France*

The history of wine in Greece originates as early as the 7th century BC. The expansion of viticulture to the rest of the Mediterranean is credited to the Greeks. In Greece, wine formed the culture's identity and was worshiped in the form of the god Dionysus, later known as Bacchus by the Romans. The Greeks had many uses for wine besides as a beverage. Numerous medical uses, religious ceremonies, and social occasions like the symposium (regular community events celebrating social and family successes) made wine an integral part of life. Despite its noble wine history, the growth of modern Greek viticulture was stunted well into the 1900's by centuries of Ottoman rule. It wasn't until after the Second World War and Greece's bitter civil war that the wine industry began to emerge from the dark ages. Investment in technology in the 1960s and the widespread move to bottle sales, versus bulk, ushered in a new era. Experts disagree on the exact number of indigenous grape varieties that exist in Greece. Some claim that there are more than 350, but a more realistic figure would be somewhere around 250. Of all Greek varieties, perhaps 50 are used on a substantial scale, with less than thirty being well known. Our wine this month is produced by Yiannis Argyros (ahr-yeer-ohs), from his estate on Santorini, which is part of the Aegean Islands. The Aegean Islands constitute one of the oldest winemaking regions of the world. Due to their proximity to the Phoenician and Egyptian cultures they became the first station in the migration of viticulture westward across the Mediterranean during ancient times. The climate in the Aegean Islands is among the warmest of any grape-growing region in the world. A number of Aegean Islands have distinct climatic and geological features such as elevation and favorable microclimates created by ocean winds or mountain valleys. Recent experience has shown that a number of well-adapted grape varieties need only the benefit of modern vinification techniques to reveal their great potential. Santorini, the archetypal white-washed Greek island, has a claim to fame as the homeland of Assyrtico, a local grape which expresses itself best in its native volcanic soils. Yiannis Argyros is a bridge between the past and future of winemaking in Santorini. His grandfather established the family winery in 1903, and the firm specialized in bulk wine sales, following the fortunes of the Santorini wine market wherever they led. Yiannis took over the operation

in 1974, beginning a steady program of improvement in farming and technology. The wines, in keeping with Santoriniote tradition, are mainly appellation whites, consisting of Asyrtiko, Athiri, Aidani Aspro and traces of lesser local varieties. His first bottling was in 1987, and by the early nineties, his wine showed a marked improvement in quality. Yields, already naturally restricted on the island, were lowered further by selective pruning. During the past five years Argyros has joined the list of Greece's elite winemakers. The pressure to perform on an island whose tourist economy is often at odds with winemaking is intense. Wineries such as his must compete for labor with the bustling and more profitable tourist industry. The 2004 "Atlantis" is a blend of Assyritko, Athiri, and Aidani. All fermentation took place in stainless-steel, and only 1,000 cases were produced. This wine has an aromatic and citrus nose. Intense flavors of golden apples and mandarin oranges are combined with a bright dash of lime and mineral notes. It is elegant with lingering fruit flavors and an earthy, mineral finish. This wine pairs beautifully with all seafood and salads. My mouth waters when I think of drinking a glass of "Atlantis" with a salad of grilled octopus, sliced potatoes, and celery, topped with extra-virgin olive oil.

**The 2004 Canava Argyros "Atlantis" is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.**



As the Rhône River flows south, it fans out into a great agricultural plain north of Avignon, and this is where the southern Côtes du Rhône wines are grown. The best area is the right bank or eastern side where the vineyards go for miles. The most famous wines come from the rocky soil around Chateauneuf du Pape and sell at prices ranging from \$35 to over \$100. Next in reputation are the designated Côtes du Rhône Villages, coming from towns that are clustered around the eastern side of the valley. The east has a monopoly on the best Côtes du Rhône Villages. These are the ones that are allowed to append their names to the Côtes du Rhône Villages label designation, i.e. Côtes du Rhône Villages-Séguret. These designated villages make up only about 15% of the area production and come from the quaint old wine-growing towns like Cairanne, Rasteau, Beames de Venise and Séguret. The *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* has several quality requirements like limited yields (42 hl/h) and minimum alcohol content (12.5%). Domaine de Mourchon is one of 11 private producers making wine under the Côtes du Rhône Villages-Séguret appellation. The Domaine is set in the hills behind Séguret to the east of the Dentelles de Montmirail and to the west of Mont Ventoux. The first vintage produced at the Domaine's newly-built winery was in 1998. Until then, the land was owned by a large family concern and the grapes were blended with those from 3 other local vineyards. Scotsman Walter McKinlay, who sold his IT business at retirement age to live the wine dream, has emerged as the leading producer in this small Southern Rhône village. After re-plantings, and construction including the transformation of an ancient pigeonier into the quintessential Provençal chateau, Walter has created a domaine that is a thing of beauty in an architectural sense, as well as in a state-of-the-art winemaking sense. From the sorting table on one level where the inferior grapes are removed, to the temperature-controlled Italian-made tanks where the first fermentation takes place, to the chais where the wine ages in barriques, all is designed to let gravity do the work. In the vineyard, Walter takes great care to harvest manually and he takes up to three weeks to get the crop in, picking individual parcels only when they are ready. The vines have an average age of 35 years and the vineyards are situated on steep and stony hillsides at an altitude of approximately 3,800 feet above sea level. The soil is a mixture of clay, limestone and grey sandstone. Domaine de Mourchon's vineyards are planted primarily to Grenache and Syrah, with a smaller percentage of Cinsault and Carignan. The 2004 Grande Réserve is a blend of 35% Syrah and 65% Grenache, aged in barriques for 12 months and bottled with very minimal filtration. The wine offers aromas of herbs, ripe blackberry and currant, lifted by a violet perfume. It is very intense, fleshy and ripe on the palate. It is full-bodied, wonderfully lush with concentrated fruit and a long finish. All your favorite summertime grilled meats will compliment this wine, as well a variety of cheeses such as aged cheddar, Gruyere or Camargue – a cheese made from fresh sheep's milk rolled in thyme and other fragrant herbs.

**The 2004 Domaine de Mourchon Grande Réserve is \$20.99/bottle, \$226.70/case.**