

Marcos Zambartas

An Interview



©Zambartas Marcos Zambartas and his father Akis

French people are used to say sons are exactly like their fathers. So is it in the Zambartas family. After having studied in Montpellier, Akis, the father, has been chief cellarer for 25 years, then managing director for eight years at the very famous [KEO](#) winery. Today, Akis and his son Marcos lead their own 3ha small winery located in [Ayios Ambrosios](#), 27kms far from Limassol. The winery [Zambartas](#) produces two red wines, a rosé and two white wines.

Vinifera-Mundi already documented the vintage 2008 for the red ones in the [August 2010](#) newsletter. The Maratheftiko 2008 as well as the Lefkada-Shiraz 2008 surprised us quite positively and reached very high scores. If we already knew the Maratheftiko grape before (as we organized a Cyprus dedicated wine tasting in January 2010) we also recommend the second one without restriction.

The facebook group [ΟΜΑΔΑ ΤΩΝ ΦΙΛΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΟΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΟΥ ΚΡΑΣΙΟΥ](#), Association of the Greek-Cypriote wine friends, organized an event with [Paphos-Wein](#), the Cypriote wine select boutique, and Marcos Zambartas on the 15th October 2010 at the Hilton Hotel, Zurich Airport. Vinifera-Mundi was invited and could interview Marcos Zambartas.



Vinifera-Mundi: Nice to meet you Marcos. Is it the first time you are in Switzerland?

Marcos Zambartas: Nice to meet you Jean François & Urs. Actually I am for the second time in Switzerland. The very first time I was here before starting making wine. At that time I still was a student, studied French and spent three weeks here.

Vinifera-Mundi: Do you like Switzerland?

Marcos Zambartas: Yes, I do. I find it very beautiful and well-organized. For someone coming from the Mediterranean region it looks very different and I like it.

Vinifera-Mundi: My very first experience with your wines was when I wrote the report about them in the Vinifera-Mundi newsletter. It was an

impressive experience. When Urs [Senn, associate member of Vinifera-Mundi, editor's comment] came nine days later, the Maratheftiko bottle had remained open for nine days. Yet, the wine remained excellent and we could hardly imagine the volume and the balance had remained at that very high level.

Marcos Zambartas: Yes, the Maratheftiko can be kept indeed on a longer term. With the Shiraz-Lefkada, they are our best wines and possess such a character.

Vinifera-Mundi: Altogether you produce five wines, two white ones, a rosé and two red ones. Five wines are not really a wide range... Is there any specific reason for this limitation?

Marcos Zambartas: I think five dry wines are fair enough. Maybe, we will also start in the future producing a sparkling and a Commandaria,

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which is the dessert wine and the most famous Cyprus mark. We are studying the opportunity to produce a premium wine in a very limited edition in the future. We would produce maximum two barrels of extremely good wine. You know the type of product you can open markets up with.



The Shiraz-Lefkada 2008 and the Maratheftiko 2008

Vinifera-Mundi: On your winery you are focused on autochthon varieties.

Marcos Zambartas: We believe you can produce better wine with the autochthon varieties because they comply with the general local set-up [weather, soil, terroir, ed.]. Nonetheless, the local and the international varieties can also complement each other very well. We consider the varieties as if they would constitute the various pieces of a building block. When you control the blending, you can get very good results. For instance, the Maratheftiko you mentioned before is blended with 15% Shiraz. There is even more Shiraz in the Lefkada.



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Vinifera-Mundi: How do you consider the potential abroad for Cyprus wines? Concerning these wines, another issue putting me off, is the fact, the

Cyprus authorities don't promote the Cypriot wines. When a wine consumer is not actively interested in these wines he has no real chance to discover them. Undoubtedly, Commandaria, to mention the most blatant case, belongs to the greatest sweet wines worldwide. But it still remains unknown...

Marcos Zambartas: You have to look at history of wine making in Cyprus. Twenty years ago the focus was on quantity and bulk wine export. Actually they did a very good job on that sector. But they failed because they did not understand what was coming and weren't pro-active either. Then they just tried to switch from quantity to quality. In the last ten years a number of boutique wineries appeared. The vintners have studied in France, Australia, and California... In term of marketing, there is a change as well. This cannot happen overnight. Let's start with the country authorities: They haven't yet experience with wineries. But it's ongoing, Things are changing effectively. In practice things are changing right now.

Vinifera-Mundi: Personally, what do you expect from Switzerland in this context?

Marcos Zambartas: First of all, I would like people to know us. On the other side, I don't expect all people to like Cyprus wine. It all is a personal appreciation. Therefore people should taste the wines [at the event 10 various wines could be tasted, editor's comment], taste other varieties, meant autochthon varieties, and finally other blendings. Obviously if they like the wines and either purchase or promote them, that's even better. Be open-minded, try the wines first and make your opinion.

Vinifera-Mundi: Is today's event a personal collaboration between Mr. Bernhard Furler and you, Marcos Zambartas, or is there any support in the background, for instance from the European Union?

Marcos Zambartas: There is no support; it is a private initiative...

Vinifera-Mundi: On last Monday [the 11th October 2010, ed.] I attended to a very interesting Greek wine presentation [organized by [Mettler&Vaterlaus](#), ed.]. An official Greek representative reported that the European Union supports appellations to develop wine marketing abroad and especially outside of the E.U. Therefore this offers European wine makers a very good and competitive instrument to gain market shares.

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Marcos Zambartas: Currently, Cyprus is mainly focused on the United States of America and on the United Kingdom. I don't really agree with this approach and prefer to come to people, exactly as I am doing today in Switzerland. Swiss people are more open. On account of my previous experience, I think Swiss people are also interested in tasting something they don't yet know. Switzerland also is near from Cyprus in comparison to the United States. We also have a very experienced partner in Switzerland and that's determinant. If I am comparing with economy, I can imagine Swiss people are also interested in niche products. The Swiss economy is full of very efficient niche players and Swiss companies, e.g. in the pharmaceutical industry, do it very well. So maybe the niche approach can be generalized.



Marcos Zambartas and Jean François Guyard

Vinifera-Mundi: Before working for your father's winery you have travelled a lot abroad. During these travels you were active at various wineries...

Marcos Zambartas: Yes that's true. I worked as a cellar hand at [Domaine de la Bégude](#) in the Provence, in the Bandol appellation, then in New-Zealand as well. Afterwards I decided to go to Australia for 1.5 year. Since my previous study was in chemistry [Marcos Zambartas is Master of Chemistry, ed.], my oenology study in Australia was a very good thing. In the meanwhile I worked at a winery over there. That experience was very positive too. It was a boutique winery where I could apply my winemaking knowledge and learn more. I could adapt and apply these concepts to our Cypriote reality without too many modifications. Moreover I did some work for the University. For two years now I have been living back in Cyprus.

Vinifera-Mundi: What was your main motivation for all these trips?

Marcos Zambartas: First of all and as a person I like to gain cultural experience. I don't think there is any country anywhere in which people know everything. Then as a wine maker, these countries I have travelled to belong to the wine elite. Especially at the initial stage, you can gain valuable experience. Then you really absorb everything as a sponge would do. Obviously you have to make concessions; you don't earn money and so on but you just have to pay for your accommodation, your food and dispose on some cash.

Vinifera-Mundi: How would you distinguish wine making in New-Zealand and in Cyprus?

Marcos Zambartas: It tends to be different. Already temperatures are not the same ones. New-Zealand is used to benefit from a cool climate while Cyprus is very warm. Then we have very different vine varieties. For instance Sauvignon Blanc in Cyprus is not very expressive and Pinot Noir does not exist in Cyprus. Similarly Shiraz and cabernet sauvignon are comparable in Cyprus to the ones made in South Australia. In this specific case, our Cypriote wines have nothing to do with New-Zealand ones. The viticulture can neither be compared with the New-Zealand model. This led to the decision to go to Australia rather than to Bordeaux where I had a place where to go. I went to Adelaide instead.

Vinifera-Mundi: What about the way they work in New-Zealand and South Australia in comparison to Cyprus?

Marcos Zambartas: Indisputably, it is much more mechanized. In Cyprus, the harvest is still done manually; the quantities also are much smaller. The wine making techniques also differ between both countries. Here again I see a parallel between Cyprus and South Australia. For instance our wines also have much alcohol or our red wines are much jammier than in New-Zealand.

Vinifera-Mundi: Let's speak about this white wine we are drinking right now. It is a xynisteri, a vine I always forget the complete name...

Marcos Zambartas: Non-Greek speakers just say Xyn. It probably is the most popular white autochthon vine of Cyprus. It also is one of both varieties used for the Commandaria blending. It is a very versatile vine because it can produce white dry wines and Commandaria or consume it as a table grape as well. I wouldn't say it is the best table grape but many people like it. Its versatility

makes it very popular in the islands as well. It is planted everywhere.

Vinifera-Mundi: I can also imagine it perfectly fits with your climatic conditions in Cyprus.

Marcos Zambartas: Yes exactly. For instance there still are people harvesting it right now, in November. We finished harvesting our Xynisteri last week.

Concerning international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, they were harvested in August. When they are fully ripe they have to be harvested. Many wine makers really struggle in Cyprus because their vineyards are not irrigated and there is very little rain. It seems the Cypriote vine varieties are more robust because they endure the same conditions and support them better. They get exactly the same amount of water.

Vinifera-Mundi: You also are very famous for your very low yields.

Marcos Zambartas: Actually, our low yields result from missing water. The further reason is related to the vine training. Maybe 90% of our vines are trained as bush vines [meant is [gobelet](#) but Australian rather use the English wording, ed.]. The gobelet training reduces the yields naturally and protects the grapes against the sun. If your training technique is vertical “hanging” [meant is [Cordon](#) but Australian rather use the English wording, ed.], then the sun is direct. This technique is inappropriate in Cyprus; this would be problematic at any time.

Vinifera-Mundi: In this case, it means you don't do any green harvest and don't take up branches, do you?

Marcos Zambartas: Take up branches, pick up branches, yes sometimes we do!

[Afterwards, we spoke off the record about marketing techniques for Switzerland and market statistics, ed.]

Vinifera-Mundi: What is your marketing strategy in Cyprus?

Marcos Zambartas: We are definitely interested in small shops because we finally produce boutique wines. We are not interested in mainstream or in supermarket wines. I don't think either we could keep up with our quality goals. We, Zambartas, only sell to specialized shops. We also are well-represented at hotels and restaurants.

Vinifera-Mundi: Actually that's very interesting when you produce a good product. In Switzerland you can go to a wine bar and taste or drink a glass instead of having to buy a full bottle. Obviously you get it for a good price and you comply with the traffic regulation...

Marcos Zambartas: Yes exactly.



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Vinifera-Mundi: Let's come back to your experience in the Provence. Can you tell us a little bit more?

Marcos Zambartas: Yes, sure. The Domaine de la Bégude, where I have two months to learn some specific viticulture techniques such as the pruning or barrel treatment and so on, is located, as said, in the Bandol appellation. But it actually belongs to a family from Bordeaux [the family Tari, ed.]. The family has bought two domains in the Provence.

Vinifera-Mundi: What is your position about oak?

Marcos Zambartas: Well, if it is wisely used, it can be a good parameter providing some more complexity. If you integrate it very well, it certainly is a plus. If consumers don't know what they drink because there is too much oak, well... If you just smell oak, it surely is a waste of wine and a waste of oak as well.

Our Maratheftiko has a little bit oak; the wine spends six months in two years old oak. For the Lefkada-Shiraz we use new oak. Nonetheless we also investigate. We use one year oak, two years oak and analyze the results. We did it with the 2008 vintage. At the end, we were convinced two years oak is much better integrated. The floral aromas of the grape are better respected. Since then we know it is our style.

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Vinifera-Mundi: What do you think about so-called modern techniques such as micro-oxygenation?

Marcos Zambartas: “Macro-ox” is nothing for me!

Vinifera-Mundi: And now the very last question before attending to the tonight’s event: What are your dreams for next years?

Marcos Zambartas: First of all, to still make better wines! And, maybe, to launch a Commandaria. And I will never sacrifice quality in favour of quantity! Commandaria wines are fascinating, you love the word terroir and a great Commandaria always reply to the terroir. It assembles the soil, the grape variety, the drying process of the grape,... The whole process makes a great Commandaria.



Both Zambartas’ white wines:
the Semillon 2009 and the Xynisteri 2009

Thank you very much Marcos for this interview.

Interviewers: Jean François Guyard and Urs Senn

The interview was run on the 15th October 2010 at the Hilton International, Zurich Airport.

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