

Ouzo family

THE BARBAYANNIS family, this year celebrating 150 years of ouzo production, should be rightfully given the honorific of Masters of Ouzo. Upholding a proud tradition for five generations, the family of Efstathios Barbayannis has not only kept the brand name alive but has made Barbayannis synonymous with ouzo. The famous "blue label" Ouzo Barbayanni, unaltered for one and a half centuries, is produced today from the original recipe of 100 percent distillate made with aniseed from the family's own production and Plomari's natural spring water.

It was in 1860 when Efstathios arrived in the bustling port of Plomari on Lesvos from Odessa, where he had learnt the secrets of distillation. During the mid-19th century, Plomari was a hub of activity with small factories producing soap, oils and distillates from the plethora of herbs and spices native to the island and other necessary goods.

The entrepreneurial spirit of Efstathios allowed for a modernised approach to distilling ouzo: he created the blue label and branded it AA63, a reference to the quality of ouzo produced in an amphora with a capacity of 63 okades (a 19th-century Greek measurement equivalent to around 50kg) that can be seen today in the ouzo museum. The Barbayannis distillery expanded its production, with barrels of ouzo being sent to the major ports of Greece and as far as Alexandria and Beirut.

Single-minded

Under the guidance of fourth-generation Yiannis, the business was booming from the Second World War until the mid-1960s, especially with new markets opening in the United States and Australia. However, in the 1970s, the popularity of ouzo in Greece started dropping when foreign alcoholic drinks threatened to replace the distinctive drink's place in everyday life.

Yiannis noticed that the quality of ouzo production in Greece dropped to accommodate a misconceived competitiveness, resulting in the notoriously rough ouzo that many people experienced during that period. However, the Barbayannis ouzo recipe did not waver. The quality was a founding principle, although government legislation stipulated that ouzo requires only a 20 percent distillate in order to be classified as ouzo. Answering the ques-

tion of what constitutes the remaining 80 percent, Vagia Barbayanni (photo L) succinctly answers: "Alcohol with flavouring."

The fifth generation - Sathis and Manolis Barbayannis and sister Vagia - took the reins of the family business after the passing of their father in 1987. For Vagia, the decision to continue the ouzo legacy was an obvious one. "I was always next to my father in his endeavours," she explains. "My father showed me that our work is a one-way street". This single-minded approach to the business is the force founded by great-great-grandfather Efstathios.

Aniseed aromas

In a family business, there is no demarcation between family life and work life. Vagia reminisces that in her childhood the first things she remembers "are the aromas of the aniseed



from the distillate, the stills that were under our house but are now resting in the museum, the people working alongside my father, and especially the girls who would put the labels on the bottles. We worked together and played together."

Since the 1990s, the business has been enjoying a steady increase, with production at 400,000-500,000 litres a year. In the past two decades, new products were launched, such as the "green label" ouzo, now grabbing a share of the market with its soft flavour and lower alcohol content (42 percent compared to the 48 percent of the blue label).

One of the most significant developments for the latest generation of the Barbayannis family is the Ouzo Museum, a tribute to both their family and the production of ouzo that has such an important role in Greek culture.

Visitors can see production equip-

ment and the first alembic (distillation cauldron) used by the factory and made in Istanbul in 1858.

The museum is next to the distilleries and includes a visitors' centre and gift shop.

Barbayanni Ouzo Museum

First km Plomari-Mytilini Road, towards Agios Isidoros

Summer hours: 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Entrance is free

The cardinal rules of drinking ouzo

- Ouzo is an ideal drink for a *parea* (company).
- Ouzo is an aperitif and enjoyed before dining, never drunk with a complete meal
- Ouzo is served in a tall slim glass (a small version of a highball) straight up, with a small jug of cold water and clean icecubes for guests to dilute their drink according to preference.
- The water should always be added before the ice to ensure the ouzo turns cloudy and crystallisation is prevented. The ice is added to bring the drink to the right temperature.
- The *mezedes* served with ouzo are just samples, an *amuse bouche*, eaten to stimulate the palate instead of filling the stomach. They can be anything from olives and small pieces of *kefalograviera* cheese to prawns, courgette fritters, marinated anchovies and the like, limited only by your imagination and the contents of your fridge. Remember that the *mezedes* are just a taste, so only serve one piece per person.

Article from Athens News
by Helen Varvaritis



Bread

the precious

Three elements of nature aid in the preparation of bread: earth, water and fire

Bread is considered an archetypal symbol of food; countless age-old legends and the labor intensive process of its preparation have ensured it would be so. It is not only a staple of our daily table but also somehow linked to every significant festival in the year and to key moments of our lives:

"Christopsoma" (Christmas bread), "Lambropsoma" (Easter bread), Shewbread, Altar-bread, bread of christenings, engagements, brides, grooms and mothers-in-law, but also for funerals, bread for memorial services, "perpatopita" (bread to celebrate a child's first steps)... "Embroidered" bread, decorated bread, celebration bread, ceremonial bread "anevato" bread (raised) or "lipanavato" bread (flat)... bread seems to be present in each moment of a person's life.

Rye was never popular in Greece as opposed to Northern Europe where the weather did not favor crops, so the people learned to favor rye and barley bread.

Sweden and Germany have a great bread-making tradition and a great variety of, mainly rye and barley, bread to choose from: dark and heavy types of bread, but full of flavor and