

In love with the wine and olives of Thassos

THE owner of a new business is hoping to raise people's awareness of the quality of food on offer in Greece and to change the perception of the country's wine.

Sarah Vergopoulos, *pictured right*, started her company called Verlina this year selling olives, olive oil, honey and wine.

Her husband, Vassilis, is Greek and every summer for the last 16 years they have visited Thassos – a small island opposite the mainland which he visited as a child.

It was here she fell in love with the

island's food.

Sarah, who lives in Windsor, said: "I love the seafood fresh from the local fisherman.

"Everything is made quite simply and grilled – with olive oil drizzled over it and a squeeze of lemon.

"It is all completely fresh."

She loved how the residents all had their own fruit and vegetable plots and it was here she realised for the first time that she liked cucumber, as she said it tasted completely different to what she had tried at home.

And it was on the island that she was introduced to the products she now sells – the Throumba olive, a black, wrinkly olive, which has been allowed to dry naturally on the tree.

These produce an extra-virgin olive oil, which has an extremely low acidity. This year's production was as low as 0.28.

The abundance of pine trees on the island also results in a velvety, naturally sweet honey – meaning she currently sells a pine honey and a pine, wildflowers and thyme honey.

Sarah said: "For years I have been complimenting



Picture: WY80062-p14 ANITA ROSS MARSHALL packaged and labelled at a bottling plant on the island. Everything then gets brought to the UK on pallets."

Sarah and Vassilis met in Germany 16 years ago. They lived in the States for five years and it was while she was here that she set up a wine import company.

She said: "During this time of researching wineries all over Europe, I discovered the wonderful wines from the Simeonidis Winery opposite the island of Thassos. Verlina is proud to be the exclusive distributor of Simeonidis' award-winning, boutique wines in the UK."

The products can be bought individually or enjoyed in a gift box. Go to www.verlina.co.uk



the food from the island. I have always brought things back and my friends and family have loved them.

"I had the idea to do a gift box on the web."

Her website finally became ready to go live this year.

She named the company Verlina – Ver from their surname and Lina is their daughter's name. She designed labels for the products with a designer on the island.

Sarah, originally from Pontypridd in Wales, said: "I feel I am helping the Thassian farmers by importing their products and giving them the recognition they deserve in the UK. In so doing, I hope I am doing my bit to help the Greek economy. I buy the products in bulk and have them bottled,

Deriaz Slater

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