

Greece does not spring to mind when you talk about quality wine. But the owner of a new business is hoping to change that, writes *Rebecca Cain*.

Sarah Vergopoulos is hoping to prove to customers that Greek wine goes a lot further than the 'Retsina' found at touristy taverns with her own selection of wines. She is also selling Greek olives, olive oil and honey under the company name, Verlina, which she started last year.

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 per cent. 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 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.

"I started thinking about it about two years ago."

Then this year her website finally became ready to go live.

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, who is 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."

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.

"Greek wines have not always had a great reputation here in the UK as people assume it is all like the 'Retsina' available at the touristy tavernas. However, I have held several wine tastings and potential customers get to sample my wines when I rent a stall at local fairs and the feedback has been excellent. I hope to change the public's perception."

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



Food from the **island**