



## Sparklers that hit the Marques

(or no-one honest can be a champagne salesman)

Rick Staff  
with a remit to sniff, taste,  
and spit his way around Nanjing  
and disseminate the drinkable.

POINT SYSTEM	
0-10	A WARNING
11-14	A Feasible Party Prop
15-17	Heartily Recommended
17-19	Exceptionally Good
20	The Apoogee Of WINE EXPRESSION

■ **W**hen it comes to sparkling wine you really do have to take your hat off to the French, and not because within Champagne's sacred boundaries their artisans produce a drink of such unique finesse and quality unreachable by anyone else. No, it's their salesmen to whom you should kowtow. For it is meticulously controlled marketing that is mainly responsible for the beverage maintaining its iconic profile; universally synonymous with excellence and occasion.

These marketing wizards started work back in the late 19th century when the champagne houses' advertisements boasted their regal credentials with kings, nobles, knights, and military officers cited as enthusiastic imbibers. However, they were also keen to portray the drink as an attainable luxury that can be enjoyed by anyone. This assault on aspiration worked. By the turn of the 20th century the majority of champagne drinkers were middle class, bringing us to the current day 'Grand Marque' ('big brand' is a good enough reading) penetration – from football managers with year round tans, City types, F1 testosterone charged victory sprays and big occasions, through to ladies' days and the 'Season', all targeted with carefully orchestrated brand associations.

China and its huge appetite for luxury superbrands seems to be the newest target. In fact, the Moët part of LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët and Hennessy) is now busy planting 163 acres of vines in Ningxia in a bid to produce China's own first real 'champagne'. This should keep the price reasonable for China's consumers, unless of course the words Moët & Chandon are put on the label. Champagne brands are the wine world's 'bling'.

At its best, champagne is the best sparkling wine in the world but, at its worst, it's just hogwash. Acidic hogwash. I would wager that in a blind tasting, a good and less expensive sparkler would nearly always beat 'cheap' champagne. Have a go with these:

The Santero Moscato (¥260 Bar Neuf, 1912 District) hails from the Piedmont region of Italy and is a gorgeous, quietly honeyed, chewily satisfying, softly sparkling treat. Its light touch makes it perfect workday lunch material especially at just 6.5% abv. A tad expensive, but delicious (15 points).

Spanish cava has its own fans and the Segura Viudas, Aria, Cava (¥220 Eminence cellar, Wutaishan sports complex), is very light and clean, making for a more precise and pure aperitif than the Moscato. Light lime and mineral flavours mingle in the mouth with apple and a trace of mango; a typically crisp mix of the Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel-lo cava grapes (15.5 points).

Obikwa Cuvée Brut from SA is dry, yes, sparkling, yes, and not overly complex it has to be said, but certainly refreshingly quaffable – prepare a light salad, imagine sunsets and then think about it costing you just ¥98 at Carrefour and you will feel even better (14 points).

Prosecco is the name for both the grape and DOC region within Veneto, north east Italy, which is now enjoying a huge surge in popularity. And led by its fine and bright bubbles this Prosecco Zonin (¥129 Everwines, 302 Zhongyang Lu) has a precise attack on the taste buds. Crisp, clean, very appley and very refreshing but also managing satisfying yeasty biscuity flavours underneath the sparkle. Great stuff (17.5 points). **WU**

