



The Germans are Coming!

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 Apogee Of WINE EXPRESSION



The land that gave us Beethoven and Bach has for a good chunk of wine drinkers, particularly the British, become synonymous with the unremittingly sweet, unrefined, and cheap, assault from the flabby Liebfraumilchs and Piesporters beloved of blue rinsers and bridge club types, wines seemingly completely incongruous with the precise civility of their homeland. However, these infamous wines were, and remain, chiefly intended for export. The elegant, sonorous and multifaceted wines produced by the Germans are mainly being drunk very happily by the natives. While in terms of export to China German wines still lie somewhere in the barely perceptible sliver of the pie marked “others”, the signs are there that wine exports are becoming more important to Germany with a growing focus on Asia, and, most exciting, China, which looks set to overtake Japan as a German wine stomping ground.

However, a major hurdle for a non-German wine drinker (and there are a lot of those) is how to negotiate the intimidating wine label to hazard a guess at its style, and then of course how to pronounce it to order one. In addition to the producer, region, town, vineyard, vintage and, sometimes, the grape name you may also see the word Prädikatswein which is the highest and most highly regulated quality level and Qualitätswein bestimmter Anbaugebiet (QbA), which comprises all the basic blends including Liebfraumilch and some other creditable contenders. Prädikatswein has six broad levels of sweetness, and price, which usually ascend in the following order; Kabinett, Spätlese (late harvest, bone dry to medium dry), Auslese (selected late harvest, fully ripe and medium sweet), Beerenauslese (very sweet and quite pricey), Eiswein (sumptuously sweet and very pricey), Trockenbeerenauslese (unctuously sweet and über pricey).

In Nanjing, Western leaning Ivy Stores deserve a look in occasionally for wine, their ruddy-red fascia seemingly adorns most streets of the city, and amongst the disconcerting abundance of Blue Nuns in the German section of the wine quarter, the Fritz Windisch Oppenheimer Krötenbrunnen Riesling Auslese is certainly worth the candle at ¥140. Find within a quiet scent of apricots and lemon and a typical Auslese sweetness to balance the acidity, honeying over time and leaving an overhang of faint citrus at the finish (17 points).

Now German reds may not be the first things to appear on your bucket list of must dos, but I can assure you that, partly through climate change as well as better winemaking, highly commendable Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder when in Germany) is being produced with Germany now the world's third biggest producer of the grape. The light, graceful style of German Pinot is a perfect foil for anything from luscious Peking duck to soy sauce imbued dishes, in fact anything rich and salty is a good pairing where a fine old French Burgundy (usually cited as Pinot Noir's spiritual home) would be too dense and an inexpensive one too thin, and a Californian just too punchy and fruitily competitive. If you are still reeling from the very mention of a German red how about one that has the words “medium sweet” adorning the label? Still your fears and you will find that the Niersteiner 2012 Medium Sweet Pinot Noir from the Rheinhessen region (¥138, Metro) delivers a delicious whack of strawberry fruit which keeps an adroit distance from the frivolous sweet nothing territory, maintaining a dignified poise through firm structure and a balancing trace of tannic austerity. Its an obvious choice for desserts, though I found the wine's best pairing when pitched against Xinjiang style slow cooked rice and lamb; the mannered sweetness cutting through the gamey black pepper flavours and providing a wholly satisfying contrast, certainly not just for ice creams this; it collects 16.5 points. 