



French value?

■ **W**ith care there are some very good French wines to be found in China, even amongst the aristocracy of Bordeaux and Burgundy (being the most coveted and imitated), though it is rare to find great value. The somewhat blind faith in France's iconic wine shrines is largely shared by the rest of the world along with the accompanying price leverage, but there is a fallout in China by which all French wine bears similar elevation. Still, some of the less vocal and more self-effacing French wines, with more appropriately modest pricing, can be tracked down.

*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



Cahors is a region which sits in the south east of the mighty Bordeaux, and once upon a time (the heyday being the early 13th century) was a vital adjunct to its wine supply. The area is now its own slightly abstruse wine appellation and an interesting French bastion of the Malbec grape. A Cahors wine must comprise at least 70% Malbec to carry the region's name (the remainder being Merlot or Tannat, or a combination of the two; Tannat a little rustic, Merlot more supple). Malbec is now a far more famous name than Cahors thanks to being more reliably produced with a more populist smooth opulence in the sunnier and drier climes of Argentina, having made its way there from France in the 18th century, and a transition so successful that Cahors wines have been humbled to market themselves as "the French Malbec". Nonetheless, a handful of artisan vigneronns have found ways of cultivating an inky dark charisma from Malbec on French soil. This French Malbec can also be a little rough, to be blunt, but the best are deep, dense, rich and very intense; Rigal's Cahors 2009 (¥105, BHG) is all this with delicious hints of licorice around the boundaries that keep a polished coherence overall despite a robust physique. A powerful velvet textured liquid at a keen China price for the horsepower (16.5 points).

The Rhone Valley in the south east (follow the Rhone River from Lyon to the Med) has a strong north-south divide. The north of the region, concentrating on Syrah for the red wines but also with notable whites made from Viognier, Rousanne and Marsanne, is more on the wine map as it houses Rhone's most prestigious names (Hermitage and Cote Rotie inter alia). The southern Rhones are generally dominated by Grenache and are thus lighter, juicier, and simpler, and typically comprise a mix of Grenache, Shiraz and Mouvedre, in that order of dominance. The appellation Ventoux, at the foot of the iconic Mont Ventoux in the far south east of the valley can yield great finds and Armand Dartois Ventoux 2011 is one such. Therein a suggestion of the wild, in an attractive artistically unkempt way; it is savoury and satisfying with a chocolaty lift on the finish while light enough to stand a little chilling on a hot day. Must be the most wallet-friendly wine in town right now at a deliciously low ¥45 from Metro (16 points).

Further to the south, and then a little to the west, is Vin de Pays de l'Herault, a region which lies within Languedoc-Rousillon, the epicenter of Vin de Pays wines. The Apollonia de l'Herault 2008 (a precise ¥68.99 from Metro) is, on first tasting, a slightly pretentiously delivered Cabernet, a popular grape for the local reds (i.e. aping and not really achieving a Bordeaux Cab style), then over time the wine turns warmer and softer, more in line with its southerly heritage, and delicious hints of burnt jam emerge to keep your interest piqued (14.5 points). ■