



CORNER

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



The reign of terroir

Ripping through the tapestry of the holy vinelands of France by motorbike some years back I was never been more curious about the tricky concept of “terroir”. Translated as “a sense of place”, it can be defined conceptually as the special combination of weather, geography, geology and soil but some say it could be more accurately defined as a contrived mystery by way of the vigneron (the French in particular), thus preserving precious market positioning and real estate values. The differences are really in the process; the application of “fei hua” (flying speak) in many cases.

Indeed Burgundy, perhaps the world’s most terroir-conscious region, is a place onto whose sacred turf I lurched, having tasted my way, inter alia, through the nearly as confusing wine maze of Bordeaux, where I remained very much part of the terroir-cynique entourage. That was until I experienced a red burgundy so mesmerising and light on its feet I felt I myself had taken flight.

Like similarly stricken winos it has been a mostly elusive and expensive chase amongst the shadows for something akin to that sensation ever since. If this was anything other than a pursuit of expensive red wine we would be given help. Burgundy is an infuriating region; price is certainly not a reliable indicator of quality and post-epiphany I have made many insipid (little more than rouge-stained water) and costly mistakes.

Among the Burgundians, it is a sacrosanct notion that a specific vineyard or region will bear a given classification and that exact place is seen to impart the essential character of the wine. The main levels in the Burgundy classifications, in descending order of quality, are Grand Crus, Premier Crus, village appellations, and finally regional appellations. The Grand Crus are highly prized. Romanée-Conti’s four acres of vineyard is possibly the most valuable piece of agricultural dirt in the world entitled to a complete official Appellation Controlée in its own right. The celebrated 2005 vintage reached £15,000 a bottle at auction in Hong Kong just last month.

Buying red burgundy needs a man who has nobly fallen on his wallet before you; Bar Neuf in the 1912 district contains a good range of the celebrated names but also has an affordable collection from producer Charles Audoin at around the ¥320 mark. My nod is to go a little higher and at ¥400 (believe me, that is entry level red burgundy, representing good value, when it’s decent) the 2009 Marsannay “Clos de Jeu” has dramatically intense aromas and deliciously ripe flavours of red berries on stone, all embraced by bright acidity and balanced tannins. Sophisticated but still approachable and friendly, especially after 30 minutes decanting (18.5 points).

This wine will turn you on if the propensity for appreciating red burgundy is there at all, and, here’s the Christmas message, will be superbly correct with turkey if this is your festive fare. For the same bundle you can collect close on a triplet of Casillero del Diablo’s Pinots (widely available but most recently seen in Aqua City for ¥138), they are not nearly as grand but are supple, smooth, affable and very Christmas bird friendly. As American journalist and relentless bon vivant A.J. Liebling put it, “Burgundy is a wonderful thing, if you can get someone to buy it for you”. A tactical nudge may be in order; ‘tis the season after all. **N**