



The Cape Crusaders

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



In the face of the complexities of a globalising planet, the world of wine keeps it very simple; there's old and there's new. When winos use the term 'old world' they look through the prism of European discovery of the Americas and Australasia, being vague about Eurasia (included in the classic historic definition of old world). The classification is about as much use as a chocolate teapot in defining wine style with the contemporary diaspora of both vine and man ("flying winemakers" increasingly catering to the homogenised wine palate). Much vaunted "terroir" (place) has a claim in shaping wine style, though location certainly does not cleave neatly into old and new, with some parts of "old" Spain hotter than the hottest wine growing valleys of "new" Chile. Climate ranges is surely a more nuanced and useful classification (and on that basis we could even disregard the grape names; a buxom Argentine Malbec bears little resemblance to France's sinewy versions of the grape).

The so-called new world wines of South Africa sit somewhere in the middle of the weather spectrum; the country warm, sunny and Mediterranean-ish, with hints of the Rhone valley. Since emerging from the dark shadow of apartheid and trade embargos in the mid-nineties, it seems best suited to knock out sun-bathed bouncy reds and whites, competing at the value level. Not necessarily so, as the cooler areas of the Cape are where the young crusaders, ironically working with older vines (SA hauled its first grape harvest over 350 years ago), aspire to rival Napa, Bordeaux and Burgundy, and are already reaping rewards with "edgy" and elegant Chenin Blancs (the country's most planted grape), making fellow new worlders Chile and Argentina look like platitudinous crowd pleasers.

South Africa's elite are still readying at the banks of the Rubicon for a favourable crossing to China, but there are worthy contenders from the lower ranks to be found here. Anyone who has lived in China more than a fortnight should know that the Obikwa range make for reliably genial company, and, if you don't, then they are currently residing in Carrefour, Auchan and BHG supermarkets, circling the ¥80 mark (the Chenin being my pick of the bunch on a recent tasting; a pleasing whack of pineapples and sunshine, 15.5 points).

Pinotage, which is the result of a home-made crossing of Pinot Noir and Cinsault, is really the country's signature grape. By and large a little rustic in feel, it veers from heavy to light-bodied styles with a beguiling smoky earthiness at best, though redolence of burnt rubber is not an unjust complaint of some concoctions; unfairly stigmatising the good ones. Here it intriguingly meets one of its parents in the Green Cape Cinsault/Pinotage 2011, showing damsons on the surface and sufficient bark and bite underneath to make it an interesting steak pairing (15.5 points); watch out for the price, low enough to trip over at ¥59 from Metro. For fans of the fuller body, the 2010 Saxenburg Guinea Fowl entertains the more worldly Merlot, Cabernet and Shiraz berries (¥98, Metro), where the Merlot drapes silk and satin over the firmer charms of the blackcurrant and pizzazz from the Cabernet and Shiraz; as mellifluous as Stephen Fry with the insouciance of Keith Richards and the spicy opulence of Sophie Marceau (16.5 points). **NJ**