



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 WINEEXPRESSION



Scotch on the rocks?

Whisky has been synonymous with Scotland for over 500 years, and in particular the single malts (which all must be malted from barley yeast and water, and nothing else, from a single distillery) are proffered as uniquely descriptive of their birthplace. The marketing men are certainly in no doubt; taking the high road or the low road, the whole milieu reeks of Scottishness, with all those handy photogenic locations and regional declarations of local terroir. Those Islay malts from the West Coast do provide an evocative liquid metaphor for the wind and rain lashed inner Hebrides; visceral with wafts of iodine, peat smoke and seaweed, curiously redolent of Lapsang Souchong tea in the case of the legendary Lagavulin. Work inland and you can find less of the sea brace, though no less muscle, with the Highlanders. “The Original” Glenmorangie Ten Years Old (¥385, Metro) is one such which is fruity, toffee-ish, and as round and smooth as a snooker ball; a crowd pleaser with its accessibly thick flavours of vanilla, edged chocolate and slight citrus spice on the nose (17 points). By contrast the north east of the country where the most industrious malters, the Speysiders, reside, tends to produce lighter, sweeter, sherrier fare. The Balvenie “Double Wood” is aged 12 years first in bourbon and then finished in sherry casks, which impart a vanilla sweetness counterbalancing a big peat bass line playing out beneath the high notes. A beautifully nuanced number, though it is asking a rather stiff ¥458 at Metro (18 points). Something of a bargain though is the Glen Moray “Classic” Speyside which has hints of dried grass and a touch of oak, among some light slivers of lemon and spicy fruitcake; a gentle contender overall and certainly a prettier price from the same shop, a very plausible ¥198 (16.5 points).

However, the Scottish claim to terroir in whisky terms is being increasingly challenged. Many miles away from the region, the Japanese, completely without assistance from foul weather and midges, have had their Yamazaki Sherry Cask 2013 recently declared as the “best whisky in the world” (with a couple of Americans as runners up to add insult to injury). The Malt Whisky Bible 2015 handed out the accolade. Though any publication which calls itself a Bible is considered by some as largely a work of fiction, it has given a timely kick under the kilt regarding Scot-

tish complacency over the national dram, praising the made in Japan malt as “near indescribable genius”. It sounds exciting, but only 18,000 bottles were made and, if you can get your hands on one at all, will set you back circa a hundred English pounds. You can have something of a vicarious experience though via its less-expensively aged sibling (no pricey Andalusian casks used here); the Yamazaki Aged 12 Years. Find it in Metro for ¥498 or take a seat in 1912 district’s Zuo Bar, as I did, where you can expect to be impeccably served just about any malt under the rising sun (and beyond), and experience all the beguiling gentle complexity of a softly spoken rum-laced malt with an overarching floral zest jostling alongside traces of nut and cinnamon, which could, I would wager, be reproduced anywhere else in the world with those very casks, pipes and expertise (18.5 points). **NJ**