



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

Chile

maybe a New World country in wine lexicon,
but wine has been made there since the Spanish conquistadors
arrived in the 16th century.

The 1990's, though, is really when Chile really found international recognition in terms of quality, with new-found democracy and a revitalized commercial spirit along with substantial external investment. Concha Y Toro is a beneficiary of these changes and now one of Chile's winemaking giants. They might be big but this has not prevented them from consistently getting it right in my opinion and this take on Merlot, the Casillero Del Diablo Merlot 2010 (¥113, Auchan) did not disappoint. The wine has a deep ruby complexion with violet hues at the rim and a supple, but firm, feel on the palate, where it delivers a hit of black cherries with some slight cassis inclined sweetness, and a hint of vanilla-edged toffee from some six months American oak ageing.

Use with grilled steak, most obviously, but could also do well alongside all but the very strongest of cheeses (16.5 points).

The Santa Rita 120 Merlot 2009 (¥69, Auchan) Affable and easy going with a mouthful of dark plummy fruits, svelte tannins, wood smoke, and just a trace of oak, make it much more than a sweet nothing. Versatile and good company for just about anything other than the very rich and spicy; an excellent pasta wine or would be a good solo performer (16 points).

Onto a typically sterner grape, Cabernet Sauvignon, courtesy of the Quasar Cabernet 2009 (¥118, JiuYJiu, Zhongshan Dong Lu), the celestial reference in the name leading to a description of the wine itself as "luminous..." but also cryptically, "magnetic".

Well, this wine felt strangely subdued, especially in comparison to its compatriots; duller in colour, and mellow in fruit. But the feel is subtle, integrated and pleasant making a gentle companion for mild cheeses and more simple pasta fare. Ready to drink now. Magnetic? I felt compelled to finish it which must make it a 15 pointer.

Lastly, turning to one of Chile's curious expats. Carménère was one of the most widely cultivated grape varieties in Bordeaux during the early 19th century. Prior to the phylloxera louse that devastated the vineyards of the Old World cuttings had fortunately previously been taken to phylloxera free Chile, which is now almost exclusively home to Carménère. Origen Reserva Carménère 2008 (¥108, BHG market, Aqua City) is from the del Pedregal Family, one of the smaller, boutique producers in the southerly Maule region of the Valle Central, where a lot of very ordinary wine is made but this is one of the exceptions. With a crimson colour when first poured that turns deep red over time, this offers a big smoky bouquet of prunes, plums and cherries. Could partner most pizzas and pastas but should hold its own with heftier, more complex dishes; mine went well with a medium-spiced, tomato and onion drenched lamb bhuna. Wins by a nose (17 points). **N**