



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



Flagging down a Cab

■ Cabernet Sauvignon through adaptability, reliability and sheer fame has arguably the most reliable ROI in the world, and has been accused of being something of a coloniser. Now it is official; the world's most famous grape is the world's most widely planted. A recently published study by the University of Adelaide puts Cabernet on pole usurping former front-runners Merlot and, further back, the mighty white Airén (Spain's vastly planted and still dominant work horse varietal), now increasingly uprooted for Tempranillo, which the study suggests is symptomatic of a global trend of whites giving way to reds.

With roots, long and deep, in the soils of Bordeaux's storied Medoc, Cabernet Sauvignon finds there its most sought after expression making up the emblematic and much plagiarised Bordeaux Blend partnering the plumper Merlot and more fragrant Cabernet Franc grapes. Versatile and robust, however, Cabernet Sauvignon thrives in a variety of climates and soil, with the defining inky cassis and blackcurrant still prevailing. Together with clearer varietal labeling in recent years, consumers have embraced the grape as much as the winemakers, looking for the famous name outside of the gilded realm of its origin, where it is collecting increasingly crazy prices.

Which leads us to Chile. The émigré Carménère remains Chile's signature grape; the Cabernet cuttings that found their way from France 150 years ago have also adapted very successfully to their new home, making for a softer, fruitier and readier experience in the main (a Chile Cab can generally be drunk within a year or two of bottling), more affable than the stricter versions from the old country. If you can fight your way through the forest of flailing hands brandishing bottles in front of your eyes - ironically in the name of increasing sales - then you can find a good example in the Trewa Gran Reserva 2006 amongst BHG's Chilean offering. In sharp contrast to the uncouth sentinels of the wine hall this is a very well-tailored wine, and just at the point of its temporal apogee with a suave and complete glide across the palate delivering olive laced blackcurrant with a sliver of milk chocolate. You will need to be fleet of foot though, and single-minded, to grab it at the bargain sale price of ¥74 - and be similarly quick on the draw with your corkscrew, as it is drinking perfectly now (17 points).

Then dust yourself off for an encounter with the Valle Alto Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva 2011 (¥149, also at BHG). This seems to be a merely competent liquid at first taste - professional to a point of exposing no real character and working to a glassily smooth blackcurrant formula - though time exposes spicy aromas with the simple exterior yielding to something more nuanced and satisfying (15 points at the finish). Finally, turning to dear old, neglected, super behemoth Wal Mart: the starkly labeled Chile Cabernet Sauvignon Central Valle 2011 - now that is straight talk - is as simple as the label suggests, with not a discussion point in sight on the liquid per se, although it is perhaps a scandal at ¥38 - so if you can still your fears over the price tag, this makes for useful inoffensive knock-it-back party stash (14 points). And for your real friends you should also be able to spy the Alto Los Romeros Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 at the same venue; a suggestion of dark cherries with a hint of spice on the long finish, the wine displays an integrated warmth throughout, punching well above its weight at ¥58 (16.5 points). **NV**