



## Spain's Gains

**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



Spain now produces more wine than anyone else. It has for a long time been the country with the most land under vine but was always firmly in third place as a producer due to low yields from sparse rainfall. Legal changes since the 1990's have led to something like 34 percent of Spain's current vineyards being subject to water irrigation and the effects of this are that production now pips that of wine giants France and Italy. This rise in production has been mirrored by a dramatic decline in domestic consumption. Thus, the Spanish winemakers and marketers are very keen to slake China's increasing thirst. And slake they have as China's imports of Spanish wine have tripled just over the last three years, overtaking Italy and Chile to take third place behind France and Australia. This success is owed in part to offering a real alternative with softer and more yielding styles along with saner prices (particularly compared to the French on both counts), and also through a drive to shake off the cheap and cheerful stigmas of old and claim real kudos in a steadily maturing market. Suits me, señor.

Viña Pomerol 2006 is a deeply red 100% Tempranillo Rioja Reserva and one which should be decanted over an hour or two to really allow the silken supple integration of chocolate and cassis-edged fruit to sit serenely over the tongue. This must collect 18 points, now that's value even at ¥168 from Metro supermarkets.

There is, of course, the ever-dependable, full-blooded Catalanian Sangre de Toro comprising a blend of Garnacha and Cariñena and is widely available but is most keenly priced at ¥98 from Newold Wine World (on the bottom floor of New City Mall); savoury and tangy at the edges with a hint of sweetness. Very versatile and food friendly, it's surely a social crime to not have some on standby (17 points).

Though for roughly the same price consider the Camino de Castilla Crianza 2011 (¥99, Metro), which hails from the Ribera del Duero, a region which now jostles with Rioja for head honcho designation, and has poise, punch and a silken touch shaped from a Tempranillo driven base of cherry and blackberry flavours, and shows hints of olive, liquorice and black pepper alongside. Gorgeous, petal (17 points).

Rioja itself can still turn out an inexpensive bargain or two from the very same grape and the Solar de Carrion Crianza 2011 (¥63, Auchan) with a hint of vanilla sweetness hovering above a well orchestrated gamut of black fruit flavours is certainly one (16 points).

"Passion for wine", the tacky moniker on the label of the Don Vinico 2011 from Spain's Cariñena region initially created a frisson of cynicism when eyed on the shelf, though happily, I overcame this through sheer curiosity to reveal an old vine Garnacha as satisfying as David Ginola dethroning Slapper Blatter from the FIFA presidency; fat chance, but the glow imbued by the wine; joyously darkly fruity with a whiff of smoke and cedar on the nose, is as warm as the thought, made more radiant by only having to part with ¥62 at Auchan for the experience (16.5 points). 