

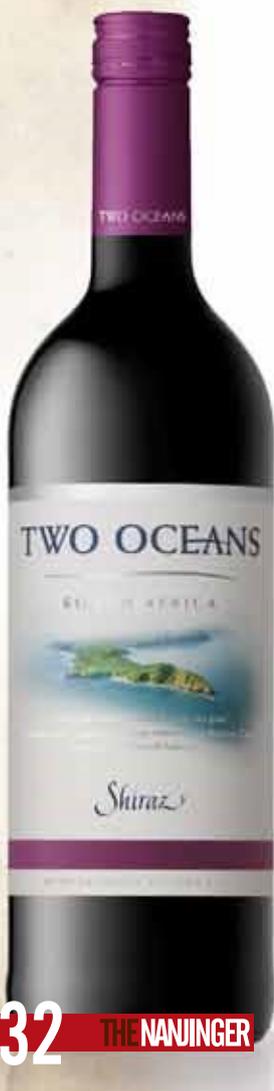


**“What is man, when you come to think upon him,  
but a minutely set, ingenious machine  
for turning, with infinite artfulness,  
the red wine of Shiraz into urine?”**

■ You may not share Danish writer Isak Dikensen’s beautifully exact explanation of the human condition, but it is an interesting grape, Shiraz.

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 Apoogee Of  
WINEEXPRESSION



How many people know that the fine peppery Syrah reds from the Rhone region of France are made from the very same grape as the big sturdy Shirazes from Australia? The origins of the grape have been much discussed, with some saying the vine made its way out of the ancient Persian (modern day Iran) city of Shiraz via French crusaders in the 13th Century, and, with a heavy French accent, “Syrah” then came to France. However, DNA testing in the late 1990’s seems to have spoiled a good story, determining the grape to most likely to have been the result of a varietal cross originating from the Rhone valley in France.

Syrah might be French but the word Shiraz has almost become ‘Australian’ for red wine (some suggest this to be a “strinisation” of Syrah), it being the most dominant red grape by far since the mid-1980’s. The Australian Shiraz vines might be identical to the Rhone valley’s Syrah, but the wines certainly are not. The best of the Rhone’s single varietal Syrah wines come from the north of the Rhone valley, the two jewels of the area being Cote Rotie and Hermitage. These wines can be as long lived and as sagacious, and pretty much as pricey, as Bordeaux’s celebrated first growths. And if these Rhone wines can be typified by having an elegant black pepperiness, with earthy notes of leather and truffles in later age, then the Australians’ Shirazes can be described as powerful and chocolaty with much bolder fruit flavours. Some Australian winemakers have tempered these bolder styles, tending toward the elegance of the northern Rhone although they sometimes come with unpalatable price tags.

The ‘Aussie Shiraz fruit bomb’ has plenty of followers, but Shiraz is now stamped on many of the world’s wine labels. The **Two Oceans Shiraz 2010 (¥88, Auchan)** from South Africa has a deep ruby complexion and a gorgeous rich, velvety texture. The wine is full and supple and proved a very satisfying ‘hot’ Shiraz. An “easy drinker”, yes, but not without some inky mystery. Versatile enough to partner simple pasta fare through to heavily peppered rare steaks (16.5 points).

And what of the French? Well, to find that fine black peppery style from the northern Rhone in Nanjing at a reasonable price proved elusive, so far. The **French Paradox Reserve Syrah 2010 (¥85, Carrefour)** is a more southern and less regulated Vin de Pays d’Oc and delivers a pleasing hit of cherry and raspberry with an earthy peppery grip, and has a lovely round sweetish finish. Quaff alongside a mature cheddar (15.5 points).

But I return to the Western Cape for the pick of the bunch - the **Obikwa Shiraz 2009 (¥75, Auchan, Carrefour)** is rich, with a jammy, milk chocolaty, sleek feel in the mouth. No mere smoothy, it has a svelte finesse which would hold its own at any dinner party especially if spicily smoked ham were also on offer (17 points). **NJ**