



## Icons and Inspiration

**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 WINE EXPRESSION



**T**ransfixed by the sight of the towering cone-shaped singularity of Mont Ventoux some summers back I felt compelled to make an unscheduled extended stay in the area. This inadvertently led to life lessons in painting and poetic insouciance, courtesy of a garrulous local artiste philosophe, and, more lastingly, an abiding interest in the aromatic and intriguing wines from this lesser known appellation.

The fabled “Giant of Provence” lies in the far Southeast of France and looks down upon the vineyards of the Rhône valley to the west and those of Provence to the south and east. The Ventoux appellation resides on its western slopes producing the classic Côtes du Rhône varietals, Messrs. Grenache and Syrah in the main, with touches of Mourvèdre, Carignan and Cinsault from the vineyards of an area measuring roughly 48 km north to south comprising 51 communes. The style of these wines is shaped by their exact *encépagement* (how the grapes are combined), with the soft red fruit flavours of Grenache tending to dominate. Overall, they are generally lighter, fresher and more fruit-driven than the rest of the southern Rhône, influenced by the increased altitude’s slightly cooler climate moderating the intense and plentiful southern French sunshine. This enables an extended “hang time” where the grapes are left on the vine to reach an optimum balance of fruit character with acidity. Indeed, grapes grow so well in these climes that the premium table grape Muscat Noir has established its own AOC du Ventoux appellation.

Escaping the flashy cachet of France’s more fabled wine shrines, the Ventoux is also fertile ground for a bargain. Pierre Chanau is a name you may have seen doing inexpensive rounds in Auchan supermarkets’ wine aisles, it being their in-house label, covering a wide range of French wine territory. Quick-witted shoppers will have correctly gauged Chanau to be an anagram of Auchan, one that is proving to be a fairly reliable stamp of drinkability. One such carrying the imprimatur is the Pierre Chanau Ventoux 2013. Brightly berried and very firm, this is possibly a little too unyielding and remote for some palates as a solo proposition, though certainly on the right side of austerity when pitched against a ripe cheese, thus nudging 16 point territory, and a snip of a sip at just ¥61. The Gonnet La Jeannette Ventoux 2012 (Jaysonwines, 1912 district) is a far fruitier affair; powerful on the frontline with a whiff of gun smoke before the charge of strawberries alongside a smack of liquorice drawing to a peppery finish; there is a lot going on in the glass for the ¥80 asking price (17 points). For a more typical interpretation of the Grenache grape within the Ventoux appellation try the Armand Dartois Ventoux 2012, which is light-bodied, yet savoury and satisfying with a touch of spice and a dash of chocolate emerging over time. This all makes for a moreish quaffer demanding a Friday night and a big juicy burger. Last seen at a ludicrously low ¥45 at Metro; cheap at twice the price (16 points). 