



On A Lighter Note

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



My first direct experience of France's Beaujolais region was with the village of Fleurie. Parched and famished, I spied a flower-festooned restaurant along a picture post-card little street, my mere entrance rousing an urgent uncorking of a bottle of the area's eponymous wine, Fleurie, by a memorably welcoming propriétaire. It was a perfect salve for the heat and dust of a long two-wheeled drive, the soothingly soft local berry working magically alongside côtelette d'agneau, recommended with a doctor's authority by the chef who later rustled up a very convivial large post-prandial cheroot; I could feel the envy of Dionysus himself. Sometimes, you just have to hand it to the French.

Nostalgia may temper my taste buds on Beaujolais but the region does offer much more than the 'Nouveau' which it is indelibly linked to. Representing a third of all wine production and still jovially shifted in large quantities on the third Thursday of November each year the wine is released just a few weeks after the harvest. Not all of Beaujolais Nouveau is a pointlessly pallid concoction; to be drunk rather than savoured, it can make for a strawberry strewn easygoing invigorator in the right hands and the right year. All Beaujolais wines are made from Gamay, a cousin of the celebrated Pinot Noir, grown just a little further north in the notoriously difficult to navigate Burgundy region, though various hues are wrought from the grape. Beaujolais wines are generally lighter, juicier and more cherryish on the tongue than the Burgundy reds and never structured for long ageing, though the Beaujolais Villages (wines from one of the 39 named villages) are a little thicker. The "crus", which can be broadly styled into three groups; light and aromatic (Chiroubles and Saint Amour), middle-weight (Côte de Brouilly, Brouilly, Fleurie, Chénas and Régnié) and chubby (Juliéas, Morgon and Moulin à Vent), can resemble a good Pinot after a few years, taking on earthier aromas and flavours.

Fleurie is one that at its best gloves bright berries with silk and velvety textures, which coalesce with heady blasts of floral scents. One such is the André Vonnier Fleurie 2011 (¥78, Metro). This wine benefits from decanting an hour or so in order to reveal the silk and a light touch of cherry within the drape of soft textured darker fruits; one for praline chocolates (15.5 points). Same producer, same shop; the simply monikered Beaujolais Villages 2011 (another Vonnier production, ¥69) really nails what a rude and ruddy Beaujolais quaffer should be about; a lovely, light cherry chomper, though not overly frivolous, it makes a serious breakfast contender, nothing fried, just toast lightly buttered with some fresh strawberries and a long summer's day stretching out in front. Light on its feet with charming poise this should head for the chiller before imbibing on the hot days (17.5 points). Getting a little richer, in every respect, the so-called 'King of Beaujolais', Monsieur Georges Dubœuf (the affectionate nickname reward for his heroic effort over many years in building Beaujolais' reputation and commercial success) has a 2009 Moulin-à-Vent, which the King himself declared 'the best vintage of my lifetime', residing at BHG Xinjekou. No juicy "tooty fruity" this wine, although lighter than some Moulins (I would drink it before 2015 is out), it has an earthy tannic grip taming the concentrated baked cherries and ripe blackberry, which jostle along energetically to a satisfying near-bitter finish; the unfolding flavours have a serious quality but the price, alas, is no laughing matter either at ¥245 (17.5 points).