



CORNER

How Low Can You Go?

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
WINEEXPRESSION



■ A great frustration for any wine lover in China is price. There are clearly costs, which are peculiar to China; for one it's a very big country and the distributors' networks therefore traverse expensively long distances. Then the collective taxes in China for imported wine add up to close on 50 percent with further financial idiosyncrasies at customs. But there still appears to be plenty of opportunistic bouncing going on between the distributor (often also the importer) and retailer to reach a price, with which consumers are finally confronted. The signs are there though that China is losing its taste for wine enhanced with such practices, which a status-driven market had previously swallowed in great gulps. Figurative gulps in the main for the so-called 'fine wine' buyer as much of the wine purchased was really just for show and China's austerity and anti-corruption drive has seriously affected the ticket sales. Wine investment too, with returns yet to materialise from fever pitch forays into the controversial Bordeaux en primeur market (where wines are bought on spec from the barrel before bottling), has also taken a knock on the pricey end of things. There is also increasing diversity in the finer wine category, namely Burgundy for France along with the rise of the new world wines, which is beginning to temper the market with some sanity.

The more prescient long-term players though are hastily paring the numbers down for the country's rapidly increasing middle class real wine drinker. We can increasingly have a good time with wine for less than a ¥100 here these days but what's currently in store for less than half of that watershed, less than a British fiver? If you haven't cottoned on to Wal Mart's Chile Valle Central Cabernet Sauvignon then you really should; it's simple, but inoffensive, and I did distinguish more than a mere sliver of Cab Sauv's trademark blackcurrant on the taste buds, which has to put a smile on your face when you have only shelled out ¥38; it collects 14 points. But we can do better than that. Auchan supermarkets have recently retaliated with a series of cheap shots, which appear to have been procured for a price that would indicate that either the winemaker lies bound and gagged next to an empty vat or are just brazen bottlings of an industrial by-product that turned a handy colour of red. However, at ¥15.90 (an offer price, the usual price is a mighty ¥24.90) I threw caution, and moral compass, to the wind.

These wines hail from various realms of the globe and all bear the stark generic descriptor 'Dry Red Wine', along with Auchan's house label tag Pierre Chanau. First up a brightly labelled offering claiming to be from Spain turns out to be indeed dry, red and, here's the real shock, correctly termed wine. Certainly not complex stuff, and I couldn't guess at the grapes, but it does have a detectable kiss of the Spanish sun. Warm, versatile and light, it's extremely gluggable with just a trace of tartness on the finish to keep your interest piqued. A real revelation and the wine is light enough, I might even venture the word supple, to pair well with pastas, pizzas and the like. On its own it's a party necessity for both the price and manageable ABV, being just 11.5%, and fetches a legitimate 14.5 points, thus putting it firmly in the land of party prop but perhaps deserves even a point more for sheer cheek and value. Spain's my pick of the crop but consider the 'Dry Red' hailing from Xinjiang; worth the candle as a conversation starter at least though it is a little too dry, and 'dusty', and just a tad too sour to sustain the dialogue. I would keep the Spaniard at hand for the longer haul, though the home grown offering garners a creditable score of 12, which still adds up to prodigious price per points value in the glass. 