

CORKER

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

Wines with Altitude

■ **A**lta Cima wines hail from Chile's Lontué valley, one of two appellations within the DO of the Curico Valley, in Chile's Valle Central, which is approximately two hours south of Santiago, where the climate is Mediterranean-esque; warm and semi-arid. Alta Cima 4.090 and the Alta Cima 6.330 take their, very precise, names from the heights of two of the volcanoes forming part of the Andes mountain range, Peteroa and Parinacota respectively, which overlook the vineyards from the east. Grown in Chile but designed by Germans; Klaus Schröder and Katharina Hanke started their Alta Cima project in 1974, and the winery greatly benefits from remaining a boutique Schröder-Hanke family affair.

Carménère, as Corkers already know, is Chile's signature grape having emigrated from France disguised as Merlot, until outed in the nineties. For the hard core wine nerd, China's own Cabernet Gernischt (probably itself a bad translation of Gemischt – meaning “mixed Cabernets”) is in fact Carménère; the similar DNA established only very recently. Gernischt generally plays the supporting role to Cabernet and Merlot that Cabernet Franc plays to Bordeaux reds in China's ubiquitous Bordeaux facsimiles but, outside of the warmth of Chile's central valley, can produce an unpleasant “green” note in some Chinese wines. Not so here. The Carménère 4.090 2008 (Cabernet and Merlot are also available at the same height) is fantastically exuberant on the nose with peppery and toasty notes jostling in perfect counterpoint to ripe red and dark berries. A rich, intense, spicy mouthful that would be grand with grilled pork (17.5 points).

Craning the neck a little higher to examine a deft blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 10% Syrah, and 5% Petit Verdot, the Alta Cima 6.330, also from the 2008 harvest, is forceful and complex with a parade of berries; cassis and hints of plum mingle with sweet spices such as vanilla, courtesy of French oak that persist long after leaving the tongue. Go for gamey meats or Xinjiang style mutton while it would also do well alongside a very mature cheese (18.5 points).

Alta Cima means “High Summit” and you could be forgiven for thinking that the name may also be a dry double entendre in reference to their altitudinous prices; ¥388 for the 6.330 and ¥268 for the 4.090 at Eminence Cellar in Wutaishan. I tasted the wines without prejudice, not knowing the prices, and thought them both the summit of excellence. So if you are feeling flush or celebratory, splashing the cash works well in all cases. For these sleek, loftily imperious, though not unsympathetic wines will reward the outlay tenfold. **NJ**

