



CORNER

Taking the Spotlight

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



Despite regularly playing one of the biggest wine gigs in the world Cabernet Franc is a grape that seems destined to live a life of relative obscurity. As a mover in the renowned Bordeaux red wine blend the grape takes a sliver of the share of a triumvirate dominated by wine celebrities Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, whose joust for overall ascendancy is broadly decided by which side of Bordeaux's Gironde estuary the wine is made from (Cabernet Sauvignon dominates on the left; and Merlots tend to take the lead in the right bank Châteaux). It has only a small part to play (averaging around 15%) but Cabernet Franc is certainly no random fat kid on the triangle supplying the interlacing fragrant finesse and understated elegance - of a French horn, perhaps - in integrated contrast to the muscularity of Cabernet Sauvignon and mellowing notes from Merlot. You miss it when it's not there, and it is true that great ensembles can create a holistic exuberance greater than the sum of its parts, though if allowed its place in the sun those individual parts may reveal nuances and intrigue of character otherwise hidden. Silkily complex ripe-berried Cabernet Franc singletons can be found in Chinon in France's Loire valley, with some careful searching. If there was ever emphatic proof needed that Cabernet Franc should step out from the shadow of its illustrious frontmen on occasion then the magnificent, and magnificently expensive, Châteaux Cheval Blanc from St.Emilion on Bordeaux's right bank provides it, invariably producing ethereal and captivating liquids from their Cabernet Franc dominated vineyards.

Further afield though, Cabernet Franc has found some footing as a more earthly (affordable) single varietal wine and laudably takes the lead in this Chilean production; Carta Vieja Limited Release Cabernet Franc 2010 (¥108, Metro). A much punchier, more hedonistic, style than a stand-alone Cabernet Franc from France, it combines authority and density with satin textured plum, soft tannins and a neat peppery finish; a red with a suggestion of 'le noir' about it - the sensuality of a midnight wooded walk, not in the Michael Howard kind of way (the British politician noted for his vampirical tendencies) and collects a hefty 17.5 points, which is a lot of bang for the buck.

Cinsault is another grape similarly unsung as a solo performer, traditionally playing a supporting role in France's classic southern Rhône blend along with Mssrs. Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, although not always finding its way onto the label. As with Bordeaux this blend has a global voice and is established enough to be branded by an acronym; GSM, a mix which supplies robust blackcurranty drinking from the new world, especially Australia, with a quieter, more savoury, earthiness emanating from France's vineyards. Though Cinsault rarely even makes the billing in those Rhône style wines, it has gained some standing around the more southerly French climes as a single varietal rosé wine, and here in the hands of pioneering and self-taught Languedoc iconoclast Yves Falmet, the grape confidently holds centre stage as a lesser-spotted straight red. Terres Falmet Cinsault 2011 (¥79, Auchan) has a surprising perfumed opulence and soft, delicate fruit - light enough to considerably chill on torrid days - and projects the schisty minerality from the soils around its hometown St. Chinian with toothsome bites of crunchy cherry; simple and delicious. Drink without prejudice and with some skewers of well-seasoned mutton (16 points). 