



The Great Unkempt

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



I am a little suspicious of too much polish; not just the kind applied to a prominent Chinese politician's head. From the unremitting suaveness of an oil-slick salesman to a highly manicured newsreader, I feel there must be something wrong (the obvious answer quickly covering a range of possibilities, even perhaps Kenny G aficionado, appalling images all). If you agree, then you are probably also with me on overly buffed wine. There is a crack in everything, that is how the light gets in, to borrow from Leonard Cohen, and papering over those cracks will likely lead to a sterile affair. Life; that is what is missing, and there is plenty of life to be released from the mistral-maddened, schist-strewn slopes of the Languedoc when placed in the right hands.

Languedoc-Roussillon (Languedoc now an appellation which comprises blends from the entire area) is the largest wine growing region in the world stretching from Nimes and Montpellier in the East, around the Gulf of Lyon right up to the Spanish border. All of this divergent landscape is lumped under this moniker, still it embraces a broad gamut of wine styles covering a distinctive array of reds, whites, rosés and sweets.

Though now usually appended to the double-barreled name for the whole area, Languedoc and Roussillon were once separate entities and geographically and culturally they remain so; Languedoc towards the East of the region with vineyards predominantly on coastal plains and Roussillon, making sense of a more rugged terrain in the far Southwest, produces wines with more of a Spanish inflection. Stemming from the development of railways in the mid-19th Century, which enabled the region to supply enormous quantities of bulk wine more easily "uphill" to the rest of France, the region has garnered a reputation for quantity, not quality. This allows the possibility for great value finds from the more artisanally inclined vigneron, who are increasingly delivering more sophisticated structures to hold those wilder Mediterranean flavours.

Domaine de las Chique 2011 is from the Côtes du Roussillon appellation and resonates warm white stones amid an enticing medicinal tang, along with slighter, lighter, near tropical notes, which sing over the top of grippier darker berries; a dense, inky, reverie of a Grenache and Carignan creation, with the tougher Carignan providing purpose to the softer Grenache. Say what you like about the terrorists who espouse holding a wine to account chiefly by its postcode; I taste this wine and I am there, walking the tousled landscapes with warm blasts of air containing scents of apricots, cherries, olives and other fruits all equally at home here with the gnarled old Carignan vine stumps. All this drama for ¥129 from your local Carrefour (17.5 points).

Back to good old, slightly abandoned of late, Metro for Languedoc-Roussillon with more of a French leaning; Marius 2010 (¥99) is created by Rhone Valley supremo Michel Chapoutier, the wine a tribute to his great-grandfather, winemaker Marius, and here in more southerly climes he produces an IGP Pays d'Oc (the echelon formerly known as Vin de Pays d'Oc), which is really quite suave and well dressed, but by no means uptight, supplying a toothsome take on a blend of Syrah and Grenache. Warmly robust, with a dash of finely ground pepper and a sweet finish; interesting, savoury, and satisfying, which is a fittingly broad proclamation for the entire region (17 points). **NW**