



CORNER

## Drinking your way around Spain

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



■ Spain is home to the largest area of land devoted to wine in the world, with a climatic diversity that spans the wet vineyards of Galicia next to the north Atlantic coast to the baked vineyards of the Mediterranean of the south east, crossing a clutter of districts and regions, some of which, with some digging, yield great treasures.

Tempranillo is Spain's indigenous and now most widely planted varietal with several aliases, most notably Cencibel and Tinto Roriz (in Portugal where it is an important grape for Port) and is also referred to as "the Rioja grape". Generally well muscled with leather and tobacco leaf aromas, the Tempranillo typically plays the mannish partner to the lighter, juicier, more feminine Garnacha in Rioja's wines. Rioja is a wine icon and its offerings can be superb, ranging from easy drinking, less wood-aged, Crianzas to the Reservas and Gran Reservas of the top estates which spend more time in barrel and may mature for decades hence, along with their accompanying price tag.

The emerging Navarra region lying alongside Rioja's northern and eastern borders offers more international grapes and is usually more prudently priced, if less consistent in quality. Gran Fuedo 2005 Reserva (¥89, Auchan if you're quick; usual price ¥118) delivers an earthy dark berried concentration and a peppery dynamism that belies its bottle age.

Look to the north-east for more of a French accent. The sparkler Cava has played an important role in putting Catalonia on the international wine map and this region is also home to Spanish wine grandees Torres, a big name in Spain, and increasingly China. A quarter of Torres overall wine production takes place in Catalonia and Sangre de Toro is a staple; Monsignors Torres have been turning bull's blood into wine for around 60 years. The Sangre de Toro 2010 (¥178, New Old Wine World) with a blend of 65% Garnacha with 35% Cariñena (Grenache and Carignan when in France) is deep red with a savoury tangy edge against some very slightly sweet fruit; a lovely rustic grip which is very amenable to stews and other robust meat dishes (17 points). White wines can cut it from Catalan too, the Torres Vina Esmeralda 2007 (¥178, New Old Wine World), is mainly Moscatel, with a touch of Gewürztraminer. Therein also lie a hint of lychee; aromatic, sweet, fresh and bright (15.5 points).

Segura Viudas in Catalan's Penedès region is known principally for Cava production. However, try their 2009 Crianza (¥138, Eminence Cellar) for a toothsome mix of Tempranillo, Cabernet and Merlot; jammy with liquorice nuances amid smoke edged fruit keeps it juicily interesting (16 points).

Drums are beating outside Spanish town halls as the country struggles with enormous debt and a quarter of the population out of work. Domestic wine consumption is falling as trendy wine bars built at the height of the construction boom empty to an echo. More happily, Spain's wine exports are increasing spectacularly, with the China market alone doubling in value to 78m euros in 2011. There is a lucidity to Spain's own thin-skinned Tempranillo grape; low acidity and blending skills producing wines that are glowing and engaging in the glass, perhaps, in these times, representing some illumination at the end of the tunnel. Can the glass you raise make a difference to a nation with such myriad economic woes? Tasting the wines above will make you feel we should at least try. 