



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 WINE EXPRESSION



Cock and Bull Stories

“Wine comes in at the mouth and love comes in at the eye”, wrote William Butler Yeats, and behind any conscious coupling lies a tangled path festooned with dates, dinners, flowers, tiffs and countless other sweet fabrications, and, of course, wine. These rituals along the path of courtship take place under the liberating and intoxicating canopy of the liquid that excuses such concoction, while usefully morphing more sober perceptions of serious drawbacks into endearing imperfections en route. Wine goggles, in other words, William, are an essential accoutrement in courtship’s elaborate dance.

La Granja Garnacha Syrah 2011 (¥158, Brisk - a newish supermarket opposite the east gate of the Olympic Stadium), complete with a strutting cockerel on the label (having apparently defied the confines of its DNA and laid a golden egg), is tailor made for such sensory tampering. A deep and dense purple-red colour in the glass with muscular and rustically supple textures on the palate, this is sotto voce drinking though endowed with an abundance of lithe dark fruit amid flecks of cracked black pepper, which gradually surface to deliciously zing a very integrated and masculine wine. Ready for anything from lamb chops to pasta, with the Garnacha (aka Grenache when in France) contributing bright strawberry flavours which are balanced by the structure and spice provided by the darker Syrah on a straight 50/50 split, and making for a wonderful precursor to a fulsome evening. Very adaptable and thus makes a great “everyday wine” if not at such an everyday price (16.5 points).

Such value is provided by the El Toros Cabernet Sauvignon (¥58, Brisk) and Tempranillo (¥78, Brisk), and this robust pair of bulls may be exactly what you need to safely navigate the whirl of sharpened pens, and even sharper in-laws in some cases (whatever happened to dancing ‘round your handbags to test the mettle of the proposer) which can dominate the early stages of courtship in the Middle Kingdom. Both wines offer plenty of Spanish vigour to gird the loins with the Cabernet (15.5 points) making a useful foil to gamey meats; kangaroo coming to mind for a less clichéd, romantic evening out (check Bluesky for antipodean delicacies); providing firm attacking edges which soften over time yielding to a juicier, more blackcurranty definition. The Tempranillo (16 points) is a thinner skinned berry, famous for being the backbone of Spain’s Rioja region, and thus a tad lighter, and together with a slight sliver of vanilla sweetness, is more suited to paella and pasta than big meats. Both wines are the 2010 vintage and on this tasting they should be quaffed soonish to avoid any ‘sherryish’ notes which may emerge much past their cusp.

Where the cadence calls for a more cultured tale then the elegantly dressed rosé Les fables de Jean 2011 (¥128, Brisk); referencing the finely penned fables of the late 1600s by Jean de La Fontaine, makes for an attractive proposal, where presentation is everything. The lovely label is perhaps a little lovelier than the contents where Grenache Gris (a pink mutation of the red Grenache grape) gives up enticing stonefruit aromas, though it may be a touch too ethereal on the palate for some. A wine to be presented with chocolates and a long stemmed rose; resist any temptation to place the flower between your teeth is my hard-won advice (15 points).