



# Just Desserts

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



Recompense for sacrificing one's liver, and more visibly midriff, in the cause of disseminating gustatory enlightenment over the years, is the tendency for friends, and acquaintances, to put on a bit of a show when they think you know something about wine. The sudden production of a flight of prominent Burgundies, weighing in at the best part of a thousand pounds on a conservative estimate ("you're into this aren't you?"), and an adroit choice from the loftier end of the wine list where the Sauvignon Blanc in question melded perfectly with the clearing evening skies above Graz are recent examples, and never occasions subject to any faux modesty on my part. The most lastingly useful gratuity this summer though came via the more modest courtesy of an earnest Oxford chemistry lecturer, who, after some carefully composed Rioja comparisons over the main dish (along with some authoritative evidence, at the molecular level, to support my theory of never using cheap wine to cook), produced a properly sweet wine to pair with dessert, sharply reminding me that this has been an area of neglect of mine in recent years. It proved an important moment, as so satisfying was the intricately honeyed apricot of the second label Sauternes (when that which is considered a lesser vintage goes out under-cover) that I pushed the meringue to one side.

This restraint on pud is not the fatuous nod to calorific indulgence it may at first appear; it marks the turning of a new leaf. The benefits of a regular intake of wine are increasingly acknowledged, especially with regard to cardiovascular health, but just as compelling is a new, sobering, report from the Harvard School of Public Health which finds that drinking alcohol every day, in moderation, reduces men's risk of developing diabetes by a weighty 36 percent. Also take note of the findings in The Archives of Internal Medicine where responsible drinkers of alcohol are found to be indeed thinner, on average, than people who stay off alcohol altogether (though it is sketchy as to explaining why). It is important to drink, therefore, even though there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that excess intake of any kind will result in ballooning to unfeasibly large proportions, and is bad. So, taking a holistic approach to the research it can be concluded that wine for dessert, and not with dessert, is the way forward.

"Properly sweet" refers to a wine hewn from the practice of letting the grapes hang on the vine and literally rot. Noble rot, as it is known, is revered enough a category to have had its own conference termed, with a flair for marketing typical of most of the wine world, the Botrytis Forum. It sounds like an infection, and it is. The most famously infected come from Bordeaux's Sauternes region where the unappetising looking mould, botrytis, sets about its work on very ripe grapes and, subject to the whims of weather and human skill, will turn all to nectar, or possibly just rot. It's a risky and expensive business which is why a Château d'Yquem, a celebrity of the region, can set you back thousands.

No such rot with the following where a richly flavoursome Muscat de Saint Jean de Minervois, from the tiny southern French village of the same name in the Languedoc-Rousillon area, can be found at BHG for ¥198. Aromatic with deliciously sweet citrus fruit in abundance and a zing of clean lemon make a very complete post prandial fist of things (16.5 points). Not to be outdone Auchan has a dependable old friend in the shape of Brown Brothers Orange Muscat and Flora 2012 (37.5 cl) for ¥103.5, where a bouquet of fresh orange gives way to a delicious soft mingle of lemon and pear, all cloaked by a sweet warmth which finally reveals a trace of firming citrus peel at the finish; no finely chiselled d'Yquem this is much more round and Rubenesque with a mouth filling opulence which emanates through and through on every sip, and so resoundingly plump and rich it is, you will need only half a glass at any one sitting, thus you could even pour a little over some ice cream and still feel smug in the knowledge that you are doing the right thing. Now that's a sustainable diet (17.5 points). **NW**