

WINE NEWS

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"France hasn't discovered Alsace yet. In Paris, it's Loire for whites and Bordeaux for reds,"

Located in France's far northeastern corner, Alsace is symbolically and literally cut off from the rest of the country by the imposing Vosges mountains on its western border and the mighty Rhine (Rhin in French) to the east. "Globally, Alsace has a communication problem. Our Riesling is beautiful, and for the price..." says Frédéric Blanck, his voice trailing off. "I don't understand why someone would pay \$30 or \$40 for a Chardonnay when you can get *grand cru* Riesling for \$25." This statement from Blanck, who, with his cousin Philippe, runs Domaine Paul Blanck, a house that has gained quite a following in important export markets over the last ten years, alludes to several of the factors that operate to hinder his region's wines from attaining their rightful place on American tables.

While the region is undeniably French, its most important grape, riesling, is associated with the nation found just across the river. And just as importantly, that grape, along with a handful more that includes pinot gris, gewürztraminer, muscat and pinot blanc (to name the more well-known ones), certainly will never be mistaken for either chardonnay or sauvignon blanc, no matter the oak regimen. A quick parse of Blanck's pricing comparison suggests even more fertile ground for consumer confusion: How can any wine labeled "*grand cru*" cost as little as \$25, a price closer to everyday Pinot Grigio than even the "humblest" Corton-Charlemagne? A consumer willing to give such a wine the benefit of the doubt couldn't be faulted for being suspicious, especially after suffering from 20 years of California "reserve fatigue."

Domaine Paul Blanck

2004 Gewürztraminer, Furstentum Grand Cru, Vendange Tardive — \$N/A: Gently floral in the nose; positively lush in the mouth with lychee, orange blossom and clove notes. *Score: 94*

2003 Riesling, Schlossberg Grand Cru — \$33: Rich, though still quite young; massive flavors of stone fruit, nuts and lemon curd are "cleaned up" nicely by the lime peel in the close. *Score: 95*

2002 Pinot Gris, Furstentum Grand Cru — \$79: Deliciously jammy peach, apricot preserves and hazelnut flavors. Great balance with a dry close that refreshes the palate. *Score: 94*