



2013 IMPORTER of the Year

For 20 years, Fran Kysela's international portfolio has helped shape this country's perception of quality wine.



Visit the Web site of Kysela Père et Fils, and you'll notice a graphic of a mustachioed vigneron wearing a French beret and an ankle-length apron. He holds a wine thief in one hand, and gazes fondly at a wineglass in the other. The image suggests artisanal, old-school winemaking—or, in other words, a classic approach. And that focus on quality, says founder Fran Kysela, is precisely what drives his company.

"Nothing else matters but the quality of the juice in the bottle," says Kysela. "I look for wines that are true to type and classic in their flavors. I prefer wines that are fresh and bright, and show good fruit-acid balance."

He grew up in Cleveland, the fortunate son of a father he calls "the consummate Francophile." French wines were often on the dinner table, but it was a German wine that he remembers best—a 1975 Steinberger Riesling Kabinett from the Staatsweingüter in Eltville.

"That was the first incredible wine experience for me," Kysela says. "That wine was like

an epiphany. It was the first time I thought that wine could be something special."

In the early 1980s, a full-time job selling Fetzer and Gallo provided his entry into the wine business. It quickly led to work as a wine steward and stints as national sales director for Kermit Lynch and Weygandt-Metzler.

Along the way, he picked up his Master Sommelier credential in 1989, and passed half of the Master of Wine exam (the rest is still on the to-do list).

When he started his own company in 1994, Kysela's goals were clearly defined. He focused on what he knew and loved: French country wines from the Rhône and select domaines from Burgundy, along with a number of German, Italian and Spanish wines.

But he quickly realized that the wine business was going global. Today, the portfolio includes products from Europe, the Americas, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Japan—194 producers in 13 countries.

It's a well-chosen smorgasbord of the global

wine business, although French wines still account for one-third of the company's \$28 million in annual sales. KPF wines are distributed in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and the Caribbean islands of Turks and Caicos.

In his 33rd year in wine sales, Kysela shows no sign of slowing down. He travels six to nine months each year in search of new brands.

"If you're gonna find the good wines, you've got to root them out," he says. "You're not going to find them by staying at home. The wines I select are focused and on target—there is nothing more exciting than tasting a wine that hits the mark."

And what "hits the mark" for those rare, precious meals at home?

"I like to cook, and I like drinking Sancerre, Chablis, crisp whites—in particular, French whites," he says. "I also enjoy Rioja."

For his clear focus on finding regional wines that has helped define a new, global vision of quality, Fran Kysela is *Wine Enthusiast's* 2013 Importer of the Year. —Paul Gregutt