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On the Cheap

By [Matt Kramer](#)

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It started with a phone call from a friend in Aspen, Colo. "We're selling our condo. We're looking at \$1.795 million," he said.

This, mind you, for a condo no bigger than a two-rabbit warren where one bunny has to announce to the other that he's turning around in order to ensure adequate room for the maneuver. "Our agent said that it should fly off the market in a couple of weeks," he added.

What's this got to do with wine? Just about everything these days—or so it seems. Fine wine, like so much else in 21st-century America, is increasingly all about money. Have you seen the nosebleed prices for 2005 Burgundies? Why, I saw an offering for a Bourgogne blanc selling for \$82 a bottle. A Bourgogne blanc, for heaven's sake!

Now, I long ago learned that there's no such thing as the "right price" for a wine. If you can get \$82 for a Bourgogne blanc—or \$1.795 million for a condominium smaller than some plasma-screen TVs—then you've found the right price. I truly believe that.

But I also believe that it's nuts. The disconnect between money and value in wine (and a lot of other things, like art, real estate and stereo equipment) has now gotten so great that the Continental Drift theory couldn't explain it adequately. Of course, we know what's happening: A lot of money is sloshing around the world looking for a place to land.

What's amazing is how much really good—allow me to repeat that, really good—wine is available for a pittance because it's not in the "right" neighborhood.

In my search for wine sanity, I've grown increasingly fond, even ardent, for the sparkling wines of New Mexico's Gruet winery, particularly their Blanc de Noirs and Brut non-vintage bottlings. Each is 15 bucks and I'm willing to bet that you can put them in a blind tasting with bubbles three times that price and they'll hold their own. (And I can guarantee you that if these exact same wines said "Napa Valley" they'd cost three times as much—and get it.)