

VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

THE 1985 VINTAGE

BORDEAUX

The Quantity

Normally the size of the crop is published in January. This year, officially because of a new computer (!) but also because of the need to hide ones hand in the permanent poker of EEC negotiations, details only became available mid March.

The vintage produced:

3.95 million hectos Appellation Contrôlée Red

0.23 million hectos Vin de Table Red

0.46 million hectos Vin de Table White

0.99 million hectos Appellation Contrôlée White

The total of 5.62 million hectolitres is 10% below the 1979 record, 5% below 1982. But for AOC red it is the largest crop ever, 10% above that of 1982. The total white crop was almost exactly the same as in 1984, and perhaps it was improving prices that incited growers to declare 8% more of it as appellation contrôlée. The percentage of production which is white has now fallen to 26% - it was over 50% until 1971.

The Weather

As most of Europe Bordeaux emerged from its arctic winter in trepidation, there was every reason to fear that the damage to the vines could be as great as in 1956, and no way of knowing until spring brought the dormant buds to life. Experiments were carried out, forcing the growth, but these provided inconclusive results and no Bordelais farmer would anyway find comfort from some researchers hocus pocus in a laboratory. When spring did come almost all the vines responded, though here and there were belts of desolation to confirm how close the disaster had been. In slight pockets, where either there was greater humidity or air circulated less well, perhaps causing the temperature to be 2° to 3° below that of the surrounding land, spring left the vines black and stark but the areas affected were very limited and for all except those directly hit the damage was negligible. Hail storms followed in May, particularly in the Premières Côtes and the Southern Medoc, doing severe damage to vineyards such as La Lagune and Cantemerle, but again the vast majority of growers came through unscathed.

Thus the curtain rose on a summer which was to start well, to improve as it went along, and to finish magnificently. The dominating feature was the almost total drought which extended from July 4th to October 31st. In that long period there only fell 59 millimetres of rain (in 1984 312 mm fell during the same period, in 1982 393 mm). In the vital months of August and September there were only 22 mm. The only summer of the last 60 which has been drier was 1929, and the only other when there was less than 50 mm was 1961. But it was not exceptionally hot. If July was about average (20.8°) August was certainly on the cool side (18.1°) - in fact since our records began in 1959 only 1979 and 1963 have had cooler Augusts. On the other hand September was more than 1.5° warmer than the previous month - only in 1961 and 1964 do our records show a warmer September.

Needless to say the grapes came in under ideal conditions. Perhaps the cold winter helped to clear the vines of latent disease but certainly the combination of that and the drought provided a level of health in the vineyard which warmed any hearts still suffering from the winters' freeze. It is rare to see Bordeaux vineyards in such exuberant health.

The Quality

Reds

Dry summers produce grapes with a high ratio of skins to juice. Wines, therefore, which may be expected to have good colour, high tannin and plenty of dry extract. Cool summers leave more acidity in the grapes and produce wines with less fat and fruit than hot summers, but more length and elegance. The prospect was, therefore, for wines with good colour, rather tannic but with good length, clearly defined character resulting from

the perfect health of the grapes, and sufficient acidity to guarantee elegance. Many vats have provided all this, but a surprising number have not.

There seem two main reasons for some wines having none of the exciting qualities of the best. The very high yields must be the most important. It was simply not possible to produce wines with concentration from plots yielding over 60 hectolitres to the hectare. This is particularly true of the Cabernet Sauvignon, which exceptionally often yielded more this year than the generally more prolific and easier to ripen Merlots. Linked to this fundamental problem is that of the cool, dry summer exacerbating the situation. Though drought conditions produce wines with great extract they also slow the functioning of the plant. It takes longer for grapes to reach full maturity and perhaps this problem was increased in turn by the relative low temperatures of August, leaving the large number of grapes short of calories. Though the Merlots ripened magnificently, the Cabernets remained well below the high sugar levels of the warmer (and wetter) summers of 1982 and 1983. Eventually those plots of Cabernet with reasonable yield ripened satisfactorily but many growers picked them too soon, producing vats which are light in colour and suprisingly light in body. Where the yield was too high no amount of patience would make the difference, and those vats too bear no resemblance to the most successful of the vintage.

The variation of quality within any particular vintage must strike all those who have the opportunity to taste a wide range of young, unblended vats. What makes the variation so vivid in 1985 is the quite exceptional potential of the best.

There seems a good chance that the best vats will produce the most classic, compact wines since 1961. They have more tannin than 1982 and 1983, but not the aggressive edges of a year such as 1975 when so often the fruit below the tannin was diluted by heavy local rain storms. Perhaps in style they are reminiscent of 1978, though the best seem fuller, particularly the Merlots. They are not easy wines to decipher at this stage, being so full of extract that they fill the mouth but often have not yet developed definition. They do not have the chubby charm of 1982, they have more body than 1983, are probably not as concentrated as the best 1961's but their structure is extremely solid and it is possible that some of the Merlot will reach that level. It is certainly a year which has produced some outstanding vats of serious - perhaps Wagnerian - wine. In texture they are often too serious to suit "petits chateaux". The great joy of 1982 was the abundance of fruity flavour which was not only seductive when very young but provides the charm on which petits chateaux must rely. By definition they do not have the potential to produce wines with great complexity, elegance or finesse so conditions which produce wines with additional fruit and charm at the expense of more subtle or deeper qualities can only be advantageous. Certainly there are good petits chateaux to be found - particularly in areas where Merlot predominates - but it seems that many smaller growers picked too early, had yields which were too high or simply did not have the knowledge or could not afford to separate the best from the not so good.

If 1982 was the perfect environment for petits chateaux to show at their best that of 1985 is more severe. 1982 was great for Boy Scouts but 1985 is Napoleonic! There will be heroes from the ranks, but this a battle of generals, of big decisions for high stakes, of discipline, ambition and vanity. It has the stuff which great wines are made of!

The decisions are big because they are expensive and long term. To make great wine many vats will have to be declassified. Vats which could perfectly well be included if the ambition is limited to making good wine will have to be excluded by proprietors with sufficient vanity to want to make something better. This is expensive because the difference in the selling price of a top chateaux' first wine and second wine is about F 50 per bottle. Somebody with a production of 20,000 cases who rejects 20% of this production will therefore be investing F 2,400,000 (£218,000 or \$345,000). It is a long term investment because it is unlikely that if a good proportion of the rejected wine is included in the blend even expert tasters would reject it as disappointing whilst the wine is young. It is only as the wine matures that the difference will become apparent. By then much of the crop will have been consumed, it will certainly all have been sold, and it is probable that many of those making the decision will be in a better world. The only reward will be the satisfaction of knowing that in a year in which they were given the opportunity to make something great they had sufficient vanity to take it.

White

Dry white wines are more dependant on technique than on nature. In 1985 it was important that they be picked early, before the September heat robbed them of acidity and elegance. Once picked, often at temperatures of 25° or more, it was important that they be pressed rapidly and brought down to 15° so that a hot fermentation did not have the same effect on the must as the sun would have had on the grapes. Some were successful, producing full bodied wines with excellent natural fruit and sufficient acidity to provide liveliness. Many failed, producing wines which are fat rather than fruity, lacking character and freshness.

If it was warmer than producers of dry white would have liked it was too dry for producers in Sauternes. The lack of humidity prevented any botrytis producing mists until well into October. The sugar content of the grapes was certainly high but only the very brave and very patient were able to wait for some slight humidity towards the end of October to produce any real botrytis character.

The Market

Red

It could not last for ever. For three years all the factors for a balanced vigorous market were present. An abundance of availability, recognised and often exciting quality, important currencies which were strong against the franc, YUPES and others finding themselves in improved economic circumstances drawn to the culture of wine and the apparent limitless potential for prices of top chateaux to rise, creating an investment market which added spice and glamour to the whole adventure.

All categories of red Bordeaux profited from the situation each according to its circumstances. The basic category of "Bordeaux Rouge and Cotes" to expand their demand dramatically, adding 50% to the consumption from 1981 to 1984, nearly trebling the consumption over ten years. This at a time when total wine consumption on the all important home market was falling and when all the much vaunted expansion on the anglo saxon and certain other export markets was due to white wine finding its way to both public and private bars and when red wine consumption in the USA was falling dramatically. A considerable achievement, accomplished it must be admitted less as the result of the genius of any marketing directors or the brilliance of any promotional campaign than as the result of the failure of both to acquire for Bordeaux any proper share of the booming white market, forcing those growers to convert to red production, which in turn kept prices down to a level that acquired for Bordeaux Rouge, or Claret, many linear feet of supermarket shelving throughout the world! The Medoc on a higher scale of quality and a lower scale of quantity has behaved similarly. Gradually growers have been regaining confidence. It must still be the only high quality production area in the world where the amount of land under vine is less than it was 70 years ago but there are now 1,900 (21%) more hectares (4,600 acres) than there were 10 years ago and this too has provided a price stability which must have greatly contributed to the fact that demand here has also more than doubled in the same period. By contrast there could be no finer example of the function of price to adjust demand to supply than what has happened in St Emilion. Here it would be difficult to plant another hectare. Every square metre seems already occupied with an impeccably tended vine. Limited supply has resulted in a more erratic price curve, containing demand within restricted, unexpandable availability.

And at the top? What a joy ride. Who can blame proprietors for being on a euphoric high. There seems no limit. Within weeks of their 1982's and 1983's being launched at prices often more than double those at which they had launched 1978/79 they were being bid up 25% to 50%. Within a year the prices of both vintages had often doubled again. A joy ride in overdrive where the exhilaration of overtaking, of discovering the full potency of power overrides any sense of danger, unless it is the very sense of danger which renders the experience the more exhilarating.

If this was the situation before the 1984 vintage with all signals 'go' and all factors positive the road started to narrow when the flowering in the spring of 1984 made a small crop inevitable. Prices of basic wine had to rise in order to reduce demand to the new limited supply. The period of expansion was at least temporarily stopped. The open market forces reacted well, bulk prices increased steadily, reaching levels 50% to 75% higher than they had been in the spring of 1984. Stocks of wine in the pipe line at all levels of distribution ensured that increases at consumer level were not brutal and in fact only 10% less "Bordeaux et Cotes" left growers cellars in the 12 months to August 1985, than had been used in the previous twelve months. If this end of the market behaved soundly, at the top many proprietors seem to have been so insulated from the real world that they did not realise they had left the motorway and needed to slow down in order to handle the tight bends of the new situation, let alone the on coming traffic which was not yet in view. All the reasons for asking higher prices for 1984 than 1983 sound so absurd to the market that there is little point in dwelling on them, but for the record here are some of them:

- The severe winter of 84/85 put at serious risk the size of the 1985 crop.
- Because 82's and 83's had often doubled in price 1984's were in fact put on the market at half the (current) level of those vintages.
- To bring prices down would be to "confess" that the wines were of less quality.
- Because the crop was half the previous vintages it was necessary to sell at higher prices in order to guarantee a similar revenue.
- "(Our wines) can concern only great wine lovers or people who can afford such wines" and anyway "I am proud of offering value for money with my Bordeaux wines".

In fact of course all of these are perfectly rational statements. But, with reason, the market considered the 1984 vintage much less desirable than its predecessors, really did not need it anyway and was certainly not going to happily pay the ransom required. But happy or not many *did* pay - and a ransom it was - to keep their place as privileged buyers for the future.

The open Bordeaux market is a complex affair which defies all business school rationale. Its only justification is that it works. Exclusivities come and exclusivities go, direct sales too, but the bottom line is that the top chateaux have all made their name and their prices by abandoning themselves to the infuriating anarchy of the Bordeaux Market. One of the many quirks of the system is that less good vintages are frequently overpaid. If 1972 was the most impressive example, 1977's opened at least as expensive as 1976's, and 1980's were at the same or higher than 1979's. It is true that in some cases the price asked for 1984 was as much as 30% up on the opening price of 1983 - and in one case which should become a classic or irrationalism a proud owner of a second growth asked more for his 1984 than the *current* price of his 1983 on the market - but this is only a matter of degree. Perhaps it must be accepted that the price the market has to pay to share in the profits of the great years is to share the losses of the less good years. It is not a conscious condition, but the product of a system which has proved its illogical worth. In fact it was only the most sought after names which were able to place a large proportion of their crop. For others a large percentage is still in the hands of their proud producers, and probably the Bordeaux trade is still holding well over half of what they had reluctantly purchased. There is no doubt that to open at such a high level was an error. Not only because of the bad feeling it was bound to create but also because instead of flowing through to the consumer they will now have to be financed by growers and the trade, probably for many years. They are often surprisingly good - particularly in the northern Haut Medoc - and will provide an excellent follow for 1977's and 1980's in the restaurant trade. A thoroughly useful destiny as certainly it seems unlikely that either 1982's or 1983's, both bid up by the investment market, will find their way to restaurant lists at prices accessible to any but the very rich.

So 1985 was a year of readjustment. The increase in demand for basic red Bordeaux had to be halted by an increase in price, whilst the less exciting quality should have inspired an easing of prices at the top. As proprietors declined to take this responsibility the market took the matter in hand and severely restricted the volume of sales.

To this situation has been added the large and often exciting 1985 vintage. Can the market pick up where it left off, putting 1984/85 into brackets? Not as far as basic wines are concerned anyway. If it takes many months for an increase in vineyard prices to be passed through to the consumer and to have an effect on consumption it takes almost as many for a decrease to have the reverse effect. Bulk prices of Bordeaux rouge and Medoc have already come back 15% or so but even if that was enough to increase requirements it would not begin to show in the figures until the middle of 1986. It seems probable that consumption will continue to fall, that stocks, which had reached a dangerously low level, will be reconstituted and that it will not be until after the 1986 flowering that the future direction will become clear. If the crop promises to be large prices will ease further, particularly when the CIVB releases the 400,000 hectos of Bordeaux Rouge which have been blocked at the vineyard to prevent prices from falling too fast. These must be released before the next vintage. If there is some disaster which reduces the next crop to something below average price levels will probably remain much the same as today, preventing any increase in demand.

And of course when it comes to the export market, which during the 1984/5 campaign represented 36% of all red Bordeaux sales, there is the unknown effect of the fall of the currency of two of the areas most important customers, UK and USA. As far as the basic wines are concerned the effect on the Bordeaux economy is likely to be negligible. The two countries together are only responsible for about 10% of red Bordeaux consumption. Within the countries concerned there is bound to be a period of readjustment and it is likely that consumption of basic Bordeaux will at least temporarily fall abroad as it will in France. Looking at the figures of the recent years there are reasons both for optimism and pessimism. Expressed in dollars the bulk price of Bordeaux Rouge at the vineyard hit a high in 1979 at \$1.20 per litre. The following year imports of Bordeaux Rouge fell by 40%. By 1983 the cost per litre had fallen to \$0.58, leading to high in exports of 484,000 cases in 1984. At present the cost is \$0.97 - so well below that of 7 years ago even before considering inflation. Sales for 1985 were already below those of 1984, and are likely to fall further. On the other hand what is most striking is the insignificance of sales of Bordeaux Rouge in the USA. 450,000 cases for the whole country. Even at \$4.50 instead of \$3.50 it is excellent value against any competition so that when it is considered that one brand probably has 70% of the market (!) and sells at a premium it would seem more a question of poor marketing by its competitors than purely a question of price. In the UK the position is a little different. Sales rose rapidly from 1976 to 1979 (from 254,000 cases to 497,000) and this in spite of the bulk vineyard cost per litre during the same period rising from £0.26 to £0.56. As a result of that high price point, however, they fell to 368,000 cases in 1980. By 1981 the cost

had fallen to £0.32 and sales have since risen steadily to reach a record 656,000 cases in 1985. Today's cost is £0.66, which is nearly 50% up on two years ago. Of course the percentage of the rise is much less once flat rates of bottling costs, duty and freight are added but past performance does confirm that such an increase in bulk wine cost is sufficient to have a real effect on sales. For four years in the USA stable vineyard prices and the strengthening dollar resulted in Bordeaux Rouge becoming progressively cheaper. Less dramatic in the UK prices were at least close to stable. And this at a time when inflation was high in both countries. Now because of a small crop prices have been rising and this rise instead of being cushioned by strengthening currencies is being accelerated by weakening currencies. The boat will surely rock.

Exchange rates must be even more significant at the top and this has no doubt contributed to the flat prices at auctions in recent months. Combined with the apparent dementia that besieged the top growers when it came to marketing their 1984's it seemed that the good days were over. Perhaps funds from BES schemes in the UK would replace belittled dollars but many thought it was the end of the road with investors cellars full of 82's, waiting for their 83's and with their confidence unsettled by the failure of auction prices to move ever upwards. *Cris de coeurs* were published in wine journals, long missals sent to top growers by a number of professionals pleading that 1985's should not be a penny higher than the inflated 1984's. The CIVB even had a meeting on the subject. So far reason has prevailed. At the time of writing all the crus classes released on the open market have declared the same prices as 1984, the most significant being Ducru Beaucaillou who could certainly have got away with more. It is by no means certain that his most ambitious neighbours will be as reasonable and certainly those who made an effort to keep their prices down in 1984 will expect to catch up with the pack for their 1985's. How reasonable is this level? Everybody will be making their own assessment but it will be difficult to blame those who have made the financial investment to make something of outstanding quality for selling at the top price the market will bear. Those primarily interested in the investment value will presumably be comparing prices to the current cost of 1982's and 1978's at auction - or often still available on the market. One factor which sometimes escapes proprietors is that often older vintages are available more easily and more cheaply elsewhere than they are in Bordeaux. Those enthusiasts who are sufficiently wealthy to indulge in their passion should be guided by the fact that there is every chance that the best will turn out to be outstanding bottles of wine, which will live for many many years and also by the fact that it is extremely unlikely that they will ever be cheaper. Certainly there has so far been absolutely no problem of placing within minutes anything which has come on the market.

If the US and UK market are hardly significant in the basic red Bordeaux market they are of great importance to the top. No figures are available of sales of classed growths to different destinations but a good idea can be gleaned by looking at the breakdown of shipments of Margaux and St Julien (which consist largely of classed growths) during 1984/85 (during which most of the 1982's left growers cellars). Of the total shipments:

- 25% was to the home market
- 23.5% to the USA
- 15% to the UK
- 10% to Belgium
- 7.2% to Switzerland
- 19.3% to the rest of the world.

No doubt the US figure is distorted by their unprecedented passion for 1982's but the figures are nevertheless significant. If the trade there is not at present reacting to 1985's with the fervour that was bestowed on 1982 it is because 1983's are still readily available at retail prices not much higher than the importers cost of 1985's. Also there is the psychological problem of a weaker dollar. A bottle costing \$20 must be cheap when the dollar is high but the same wine costing the same \$20 is expensive when the dollar is low! But it is still quite possible that the US market will get excited. So far the press there has been relatively silent but if the influential American wine writers show enthusiasm and with money now at only 8% the demand could become lively.

Any slackening of interest from the USA is likely to be quickly taken up by the home market, which is showing ever increasing interest and where the economic environment has greatly improved. But first from the starting block seems to be the UK again. If in the US 1983's still belong to the trade in the UK they are largely already sold on to consumers and investors. Wine drinking continues to increase impressively in the UK, where not even the chancellor has done anything to discourage it. In the USA the increase has at last temporarily come to a halt. The UK trade seems to find opening prices entirely acceptable, the interest is quite as great as for 1982's and many traditional buyers seem anxious to take strong positions whilst BES schemes are still trying to interpret their future and before buyers from those companies can usurp their position as privileged customers.

So the die seems cast. The prospect of some wines of outstanding quality has overcome the hesitation the market was showing only a few months ago. But there must be a limit and we still believe the first signs of its being reached are the stability of first growth prices, the fact that it seems likely there are quantities of these from the 1983 crop still unsold, and that the flair in prices for certain second growths has been partially caused by traditional purchasers of first growths looking for the next best. This will probably not prevent the first growths putting F 30 or so onto their prices, which have now been stable for three years. So it does seem that at the top it is, at least for the time being, possible to put 1984 in brackets and carry on where we left off.

The problems will of course arise again with the next vintage of less than exciting quality. Proprietors will again feel that to ask less for a new vintage is to repudiate it, that any market requires confidence and that if the producers themselves show a lack of that valuable commodity it is difficult to expect their customers or other investors to retain theirs.

White

When considering the white Bordeaux market it must always be remembered that 10 years ago over 40% of total sales were to Germany, mostly for blending purposes. Any progress must therefore be judged from 77/78 which was the first year this market became severely reduced, though even since then it has continued to fall, representing now little more than 10% of what it was at its height. In volume this "lost market" (even if it was at uneconomic prices) meant that either some 2.5 million cases had to be sold elsewhere, or production reduced by a similar amount. If much land has been converted to red it is nevertheless a fact that a good part of this gigantic task of reorganisation has been achieved by getting at least some share of the white wine boom. If sales to the home market have increased by only 14% since 1977/78 exports, other than to Germany, have increased by over 70% or 2.2 million cases. The star performers have been:

HOLLAND	+ 309% for a total last year of 1.02 million cases
USA	+ 88% for a total last year of 1.00 million cases
CANADA	+ 69% for a total last year of 0.72 million cases
JAPAN	+ 270% for a total last year of 0.21 million cases
DENMARK	+ 103% for a total last year of 0.35 million cases

Though the UK imported 777,000 cases in 1984/85 this is only 12% above the quantity imported seven years previously. But apart from wondering what tiny Holland does with all that wine the quantities sold look insignificant in relation to the total consumption of white wine in Anglo Saxon markets particularly. The potential for growth must still be enormous.

When compared to white wine prices elsewhere it is difficult to criticise growers in Bordeaux for trying to move theirs upwards but at the same time it is difficult to justify a leap during the last year which varies from 25% on Entre Deux Mers, to 60% on Sauternes. A renaissance of interest in sweet wine is much spoken about but nothing in the figures shows an increase in demand. It seems possible that the fear of a small crop excited the market and it may be that now that the figures are at last known the pressure will subside, and prices with it, though this not perhaps until after the flowering.

Other Vintages

1984

Generally lacking fruit they seem most successful in the Northern Haut Medoc, where the Cabernet Sauvignon is used to going it almost alone! Elsewhere the lack of Merlot is more cruelly felt, but the grapes were healthy, the wines have character - though they do have a "lean and hungry look". They will need 3 to 8 years in bottle but the high percentage of Cabernet may result in them developing well for longer than this.

1983

Those who doubt the importance of rainfall please refer to our full report on this vintage when we drew attention to the extraordinary variation of the 1983 summer rainfall even within the Medoc (in August 161 millimetres in Lesparre, 50 mm in Margaux). It is now generally recognised that wines of the Margaux area are particularly successful in this year which has produced elegant, stylish wines with great character throughout the Bordeaux area. St Emillions are sometimes on the light side (compared to 1982 anyway) but it is a vintage of classic claret, without too much tannin but with sufficient acidity to produce the complexity which sets Bordeaux apart.

1982

Full, round, delicious petits chateaux are already giving great pleasure. As already mentioned it must be one of the best years ever for such wines. Further up the scale it is a question of whether they are too round and fat to develop great elegance. We still think they are similar to 1970, are likely to become rather dumb in bottle during the next five to ten years and then gradually emerge as the 1970's are beginning to do only now. They will certainly give great pleasure - but patience will be necessary.

1981

Still rather ungainly. Product of a hot summer followed by a wet vintage, they are taking time to find a balance but are very well worth exploring. They seem to have escaped the attention of investors, leaving prices reasonable. Excellent follows to 1980 for drinking during the next 10 years, they have more structure than their predecessor, often more character, perhaps less immediate charm but more staying power.

1980

Soft, light, round and pleasant. Not much definition of character but easy drinking. With weather conditions almost as bad as they could be a fine example of what better technique and greater discipline has achieved in Bordeaux. Though rot is discernible in some, most top wines are clean and well made. Drink over next four years.

1979

Great character, length and elegance. The product of a summer which was not too hot, leaving good acidity which gives the wines a lively freshness often lacking in warmer years. St Emilions drinking well now, best Medocs 1988 - 2000.

1978

Often disappointing at present they are compact, concentrated wines which have all that is required to develop into classic claret. The high extract, resulting from a summer not unlike that of 1985, is taking time to mature but patience will surely be rewarded. More fruit than 1975, perhaps greater definition than 1970, more body than 1966 it will certainly develop some of the most concentrated wines since 1961. Best Medocs need 5 to 20 years.

1977

Incite little enthusiasm but deserve protective understanding from those who put character above charm. Their high acidity - resulting from grapes borne of a sunless summer - leaves the wines lean if not mean but the absence of rot and small yields result in clean, penetrating definition. Some approaching their best but there is no hurry and the most successful should be good over the next 10 years or so.

1976

Very ripe, sometimes lacking character because of the vintage rain, sometimes with a tendency to volatile acidity as a result of the exceptional heat. The best have good fruit, are powerful, beginning to show character, but still tend to be a little clumsy. More regular than 1964 but many of the same virtues and some of the same problems. The best Medocs should be given another five years at least. St Emilions should be drunk.

1975

"It seems possible there could be a lack of fruit and fat, reminiscent of such tough years as 1937, though almost certainly more amiable than that" was our forecast in 1976. A year of both high temperatures and high rainfall. Balanced wines are made in years when the weather pattern is balanced. 1975 was a mixed up year and so are the wines. Some are outstanding but others are tough, without the fruit to support the high tannin. They will eventually soften, as did 1937, but are likely to remain rather stark. The best are well worth keeping for the ten years or so they still need.

1974

1974's are often showing well. Never great but they show character and balance. A large yield and rained on before picking they tend to be a little hollow and lack fat but the grapes were ripe and generally healthy - so are the wines. Drink over next 5 years.

1973

1973 was another large crop, the rain came earlier but it was not so warm. Soft, light, pleasing wines which should now be consumed.

1972

A more extreme form of 1977. They will always be mean and need understanding - which is not always easy, or fun!

1971

Stylish, balanced, great delicacy and finesse. A very pretty vintage now at its best.

1970

Still slumbering, but beginning to emerge. Lots of body and lots of fruit, they will probably never project great elegance but are thoroughly reliable, with excellent character and will accompany us well into the next century.

Tasting older vintages provides constant reminders that good Bordeaux of even light vintages "live" for much longer than we expect. Probably good wines of years such as 1980 and 1973 which we consider to be near the end will still be providing excellent drinking in ten years time. Those who doubt it should look at bottles of those other "light" years 1960, 1955, 1950 etc.

OTHER AREAS

For many years our vintage reports have also covered the Rhone and Burgundy. As the trade becomes more specialised our own activity has become increasingly centered on Bordeaux, sadly it has not been possible to visit those areas since the last vintage and we therefore do not feel qualified to comment on their situation.

CONCLUSION

Bordeaux continues to prosper. For those who do not feel that old but who remember the struggle of trying to sell classed growths in bulk for the equivalent of less than F 3 per bottle it all seems as far fetched as walking on the moon. For those who remember the uncontrollable thrust of prices in 1973 and what followed nothing is quite secure but the position is totally different this time. Then a threatened shortage sent all prices rocketing. This time basic wines remain entirely reasonable and it is only the pressure on certain names leading to restaurant bills such as this from a Bordeaux establishment:

Dinner for 3	F 339
1 bottle 1982 Ch d'Angludet	144
1 Glass 1980 Ch Petrus	290

which add an element of lunacy to an exciting trip.

Peter Allan SICHEL