



ESTABLISHED 1883

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### VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

#### BORDEAUX

For six years, from 1957 to 1962, Bordeaux enjoyed the luxury of being short of wine. Prices, which had been below subsistence level for many growers, increased, stocks were quickly absorbed and gratifying prices were even paid for wines that had not yet been made. Partly due to increasing demand, this shortage was primarily the result of a series of small crops which followed the frosts of 1956. Although there were somewhat fewer acres in production in 1965 than there were in 1955, the average production of Appellation Contrôlée wines for the five years 1956 to 1960 was only 1,740,000 hectolitres compared with 2,880,000 hectolitres for these last five years of 1961 to 1965—a difference of some 65%. Not entirely aware that their new prosperity was at least in part due to a temporary shortage, growers were carried along by the impetus of those years of activity and 1964's were launched upon the market at prices which reflected a belief that, not having bought 1963's, the world markets would be in immediate need of 1964's and would quickly absorb them. In fact, merchants had bought heavily of 1959's and 1962's, the vacuum had been filled, and buyers were again in a position to be selective and to look for value. Prices weakened in the late Spring and early Summer and, if September had not brought incessant rain, they would almost certainly have tumbled. Since the vintage, prices have inevitably remained firm, but there are still good wines available at similar prices to those being asked a year ago.

1965's, though by no means a write-off in the sense of 1963, are realised to be wines which will be difficult to sell and are opening at prices similar to 1963—somewhat below the opening prices of 1960.

When there are no disasters such as the 1956 frosts, which affect the crop of not only one year, but several in succession, Bordeaux, unlike Burgundy, would seem to produce more wine than it can sell, and now that stocks have been reconstituted, it would seem reasonable to expect that, unless there is severe frost damage this year, or loss of quantity from any other cause, there will be a tendency for prices to ease. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the bulk of Bordeaux stock is, as a result of 1963 and 1965, of a quality that is unlikely to interest export markets, and the high prices being fetched for older bottled wines in Bordeaux bears added witness to the fact that there is not yet anything like a surplus of quality wine. Export markets are generally only interested in buying the most successful years and demand is concentrated on those vintages. If every vintage was equally successful, or if buyers divided their purchases over more vintages, prices would of course quickly become more stable, but, until this happens, or until there have been just two consecutive vintages of both quantity and quality—which strangely has not happened since 1952/53—there seems unlikely to be any great reduction of prices for the top quality vintages. Growers will undoubtedly hope to recoup some of the losses they have had to support with 1963's and 1965's with the next acceptable year and, not having bought two out of the last three vintages, it seems likely that buyers will show interest in it. It is only if it is followed by another good year giving also a reasonable quantity and quality that the invigorating need, which has now become a comfortable sufficiency, will in turn become uncomfortable surfeit.

### 1965 Vintage

A late Spring, an insipid Summer and torrential rain throughout the month of September are not conditions for making fine wine, but anybody who visited the vineyards shortly before the vintage and witnessed the sad sight of bedraggled vines bearing fruit that was sometimes still green and sometimes rotting could be pleasantly surprised at some of the wines that will eventually be marketed. The only factor that has prevented it from being a disaster of similar magnitude to 1963 is the discipline that growers have inflicted upon themselves. With 1963 still fresh in their minds, and stocks of 1964 still unsold, it was immediately realised that if they were going to be able to sell their wines at all, they would have to go all out for what quality could be extracted from such poor raw material, and be prepared to make considerable sacrifice in respect of quantity in order to do so. This process of selection started at the time of the picking, when many growers either abandoned their rotten grapes completely or else took care to keep them apart from those that were healthy, and has been going on ever since. A further selection was made at the vat when much of the wine made was voluntarily declassified to vin rouge rather than declared under the more noble appellation to which its origin could have entitled it, and others are in the process of being declassified at the "label" tastings. As well as fulfilling the requirements of origin, most Bordeaux wines now also have to submit themselves to this blind tasting before they are entitled to the appellation of that area. During the first years of this new control the panels of tasters, formed by a grower, a broker and a shipper, had been reluctant to deprive growers of what was looked upon as their birthright and tended to accept the insufficiencies of nature, in years such as 1963, as mitigating circumstances for producing wines of inferior quality. This year, for the first time, the Appellation Contrôlée authorities gave specific instructions that no allowance should be made for the difficult conditions and that the sole criterion should be whether the wine was worthy of its origin or not. Combined with the determination of most Bordelais not to recommit the errors of 1963, the result has been a much more stringent control. Over 25% of the wines presented at the St. Emilion tasting failed to get through, the proportion was similar at Margaux and at one of the Haut Médoc tastings almost 50% of the wines were judged unacceptable.

As suggested above, wines that have survived this process of selection, and have further survived the even more effective commercial selection by shippers who are by no means short of stock, may one day prove useful. The red wines are light but true of flavour, clean, and their relatively high acidity, whilst giving them a refreshing liveliness when young, may also serve to conserve them beyond the span that their light weight would at first suggest. Certainly none of them will be great, but they will not be expensive, and we expect the best to be as good as 1960's. Being clean, they will, unlike 1963's, be useful to shippers for their non-vintage generic blends and will be useful for maintaining these at the present price level.

For the third consecutive year it was impossible to make sweet wine of any quality—indeed if it had not been for the unfailing ingenuity of growers it would have been impossible to make sweet wine at all, nature having failed dismally to provide any natural sugar. Happily for the declining band of enthusiasts for the remarkable and delicious fine wines of Sauternes there are still stocks, in bottle, of 1962's and older vintages at very reasonable prices.

Bordeaux is trying hard to re-establish for itself a reputation for dry white wine and to fulfil the modern requirement of light wine that can be drunk young. 1965 produced grapes that with their relatively high acidity and low sugar content lent themselves well to the making of this type of wine. They lacked maturity to make wines of great quality but, as in other parts of France, pleasant, light, dry wines will undoubtedly provide the most successful of the vintage.

### 1964 Vintage

Tending to be clumsy and lacking in backbone when they were very young, the red wines have often made remarkable progress. They have found a balance of which many, ourselves included, thought them incapable. Certainly the quality is even more irregular than usual, but carefully selected the year will provide some extremely good bottles. Lighter than 1959 but with similar fruit and equal charm they tend, like all hot years, to lack acidity and will develop relatively quickly. As usual there is good value to be found amongst the Bourgeois, but this is particularly true of this year when the classed growths, traditionally the last to start picking, were caught by the rain which did so much to diminish the general quality of the vintage.

Essentially late pickers the producers of fine sweet wine were badly hit by the rain and very little wine of quality was made. Some of the dry white wines, picked before the rain, are excellent.

#### **1963 Vintage**

If one cannot say anything nice perhaps it is better to say nothing at all. We have not tasted any wine of the vintage that we would choose to have in our cellar and we have not tasted a single wine, classed growths included, that we think would stand a remote chance of being selected if submitted as a generic wine in a blind tasting.

#### **1962 Vintage**

Settling down in bottle they are beginning to show some of their great charm. Somewhere between 1952 and 1953 in character they are elegant, lively and have great balance. Refreshingly natural and typical of their origin they will most successfully fulfil their destiny of providing the backbone of most merchants' lists for drinking from 1968 to 1972.

#### **1961 Vintage**

Undoubtedly with the control science has enabled producers to exercise over their vinification there is less difference of quality between one vintage and another than there used to be, but, just as there can still be disasters such as 1963, it is encouraging that, when conditions are perfect, quite exceptionally great wines are still being produced. 1961 has produced the finest wines since 1945 and, we think, will provide some of the greatest bottles of the century. Big without being clumsy, firm without being harsh, generous but without false ebullience they provide the undeniable proof that all wines are not born equal. The crop was small and by the time the wines are at their best most will have been consumed. They will live for many years and our own policy is to keep precious our stock for at least five years before even looking at it, but to drink other people's whenever the opportunity presents itself.

If our enthusiasm for the Médoc is unbounded we would add qualifications in respect of the wines of St. Emilion. We have tasted a number of the most reputable recently and though good they are considerably lighter than the Médoc and lack greatness. Many are already approaching their best.

#### **1960 Vintage**

Discovered late in life by merchants running prematurely short of 1959's, they are, as they have always been, useful stop-gap wines. For the name conscious they provide reputable labels at reasonable cost, though, for similar prices Bourgeois 1962, or even 1961, are available and are superior in quality. They should be drunk within the next two years.

#### **1959 Vintage**

In many ways similar to 1949. Both years were extremely hot ; both, because of the perfect holiday weather, were built up to be great years and both are illustrations that the hottest years do not produce the greatest clarets. Lacking acidity they are big and generous but often have a tendency to clumsiness. As they attain some maturity their unevenness of quality is becoming more apparent and though some have sufficient balance to approach greatness, and most are pleasing and robust if somewhat unsound, we have tasted some recently which are quite evidently constitutionally unsound. Because they tend to be top-heavy they will develop more quickly than their bulk would suggest, and, having provided some thoroughly pleasant drinking, are likely to decline rapidly. A vintage on which it is particularly difficult to generalise but when carefully selected will provide some good drinking from next year onwards.

#### **1957 Vintage**

Dedicated claret drinkers will find signs of character but on the whole they are unrelenting in their austerity and lack any charm. Some may soften over the years but they will always be one of the less amiable of vintages.

#### **1955 Vintage**

Straightforward, pleasant and thoroughly satisfactory. Nearing their best they are not great but are adequate, clean wines with style, charm and an easy-going character. Unlikely to send anybody into raptures they are much less likely to cause anybody offence.

## **BURGUNDY**

Unlike Bordeaux, Burgundy, for many years, has known nothing but prosperity. Even in poor years demand for appellations is such that an insatiable market quickly absorbs all that has been produced. Growers are the first to be amazed at the prices they are paid for any mediocrity so long as they can supply with it a popular appellation, and have to be strong-minded not to abandon the search for quality and merely concentrate on producing as much as possible. Happily the laws of Appellation Contrôlée do not prevent shippers from rendering the wines they have had to buy saleable, but it is demoralising to see wines selling for five times their real value simply because the shipper is being forced to buy a certain name. However, the system seems to keep everybody prosperous and so far the consumer seems happy to pay the bill; though it seems likely that as far as the British market is concerned there could be a sharp reaction if suddenly Nuits St. Georges was only available at prices which truly reflected its cost at the vineyard.

Whatever the rights or wrongs of the Appellation Contrôlée system the demand for Burgundy is such that even wines of poor quality, such as 1963, are quickly absorbed at high prices and the market remains permanently "firm".

### **1965 Vintage**

The red wines of the Côte d'Or will only be of interest to those who need to buy appellations. 1965 for these wines was what 1963 was to red Bordeaux. Beaujolais suffered less from the heavy September rain, and though light, some useful wines for quick consumption have been produced. Their lack of body will make them more suitable for drinking in France than for export.

Not having yet tasted any white wines of the Côte d'Or we cannot express an opinion on them. We have however had extensive tastings of southern white Burgundies (Mâcon and Pouilly) and also of Chablis. The latter are remarkably successful. Though the Summer was not warmer than elsewhere the area did not have the same heavy rainfall in September, there was consequently no rot and growers were able to wait for the fine weather in mid-October before starting to pick. The vintage then took place under perfect conditions. The result is classic Chablis—light, lively, more acidity than would please the mass market but exactly right for what real Chablis should be. Prices are not high and these wines offer remarkable value. The southern white Burgundies are also well worth attention and will undoubtedly prove useful. Ripe enough to have developed some character, their acidity is not excessive and the wines are clean, refreshing and well-balanced.

### **1964 Vintage**

Now being bottled the red wines have fruit, style and character. They are balanced, generous wines and a number of the individual vineyard wines approach greatness. Perhaps more standardised than Bordeaux vintages those of Burgundy follow each other well and 1964's will make good follows to 1962, 1961 and 1959.

We have seen a number of quite outstanding white Burgundies but have also found many that lack the acidity necessary to prevent premature flabbiness and oxidation. This is true of both the Côte d'Or and Chablis—some outstanding wines but they must be selected with care.

### **1963 Vintage**

Less of a disaster than in Bordeaux but, except for some white wines—Chablis in particular—not of sufficient quality to be of interest to export markets.

We have tasted few bottled Burgundies recently but generally speaking 1959, and 1961's are both drinking well. 1959 was perhaps more successful in Burgundy than in Bordeaux, whereas the position was reversed in 1961. Both are good commercial vintages and 1962 will in turn follow them on well. We feel that it is not until one gets into the category of well-selected single vineyard wines that the finer differences, between one good vintage and another, become evident.

SICHEL & CO.