

ESTABLISHED 1883



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## MARKET AND VINTAGE REPORT

### BORDEAUX

Until a few years ago forecasts of a new vintage in Bordeaux were made with a modicum of restraint and in measured terms. Then someone created the phrase "vintage of the century", in French as well as in English, and vintage forecasts tended to become as reliable as Derby winner forecasts. The public by long experience knows what value to place on the latter, but are still inclined to believe that it is possible to forecast the exact quality of a wine two months before the grapes are picked. The influence of the weather still to come, the hazards of fermentation and the vagaries of the vine are unsuspected and ignored. The prophets, on the other hand, being unaware of the ignorance of the public, make their lighthearted announcements in the manner of racing correspondents in the belief that their words will be given just as much weight as the circumstances allow. They are perhaps justified. Out of the last six vintages, three have been hailed prematurely as the "vintage of the century", and it might be thought that the public are beginning to notice this, and drawing their own conclusions about the accuracy of early vintage reports. The Trade for the most part is well aware of the value to be placed on early prophecies and the economic facts which inspire them, even when they are made by such eminent authorities as Ministers of Agriculture. The French Minister predicted the "vintage of the century" some time during the summer and by September the skies appeared to be committing lèse Pizani.

High hopes for the 1964 vintage were certainly justified in July. The flowering had started fairly early and was in full swing by the 9th June, it took place in perfect conditions and there were indications of a big yield. July was hot, sunny and dry without any rain at all, and August produced a little much-needed rain and some very hot weather. The grapes had suffered somewhat from the dry weather and did not start to change colour until August, rather later than usual, as they did in 1962. The vintage in parts of the red wine area started on September 22nd, earlier than expected but a normal time for good vintages. The weather was fine and warm. The early musts were on the light side and the acidity, so necessary to the balance and development of fine wine, was low. It was another indication that perfect grapes are not made by sun alone. At this time the Sauternes had not been able to think of starting the picking. The dry, fine weather had prevented the appearance of the pourriture noble which is essential to the production of Sauternes. A few days later, about September 26th, some heavy showers fell, followed by more days of fine hot sunshine. The rain did little harm and although some indications of the bad kind of rot were noticed in the Médoc, it did only good in the Sauternes areas. About October 1st a few days heavy rain set in, pourriture noble made its appearance in Sauternes and pourriture "ignoble" began to be a problem in red wine areas. Those who had started their vintage on September 22nd had by this time got in a large proportion of their crop, those who had delayed their picking until 28th were not in so fortunate a position and were not helped by dull weather and a good deal of rain during the week that followed. By the 5th October, however, fine warm weather set in again, must weights remained apparently satisfactory, although these are sometimes falsified if there is a large proportion of rotting grapes in the tubs that bring the grapes to the press house. Sauternes was happy with the general appearance through the area of Botrytis Cinerea, the noble rot. On the 8th October heavy rain set in again and continued until the 12th. At the time of writing this is the position in the vineyards of Bordeaux.

It seems very unlikely that the wines will equal the 1945's or the 1961's in quality. They may, however, be more commercially interesting than either of these. The general impression in Bordeaux seems to be that they will be soft, dark, well-flavoured classic clarets that will attract wine drinkers whilst still quite young and are likely to develop a considerable degree of quality without taking too long about it. They have been likened to 1959's and to 1953's. They appear to us to have been born in conditions not unlike the 1962's, with a little more difficulty in fermentation because of the occasional very hot days of late September, unlike the continuous rain of late September and October, 1962. Whilst at present we do not believe that 1964 will rank amongst the greatest clarets of the century, we think it may be an excellent vintage, amiable and satisfying in character and flavour and attain a high degree of bottle maturity, that is to say concentration of flavour and bouquet in a reasonable number of years. It will be possible to be more precise after the March rackings. The quantity made should be well above the average.

We estimate it at 5 million hectolitres—and do not expect to be more than 20% out one way or the other. The average for Bordeaux is 4 million hectolitres. We offer a free hogshead (f.o.b.) of 1964 Château d'Angludet to the British Wine Merchant who sends us the nearest estimate of the quantity declared for the Gironde before November 9th.

The market for 1964's is at the moment less active than might have been expected in view of the need for some good wine to make good the gap left by the 1963's. Growers have been encouraged in the high prices they are now demanding by a certain amount of speculative buying by foreign importers soon after the flowering was over. These activities, concentrated for the most part on the classed growths, tend both to increase prices and to lower quality, the weather, the vine and human nature being what they are. The grower has had to take risks if he wanted to make good wine in 1964. Grapes gathered in wet weather do not make for a high quality. Growers who have sold a large part of their crop at good prices before it is made have less incentive than others to risk a part of their crop in order to make fine quality. Many growers also are refusing orders for 1964's unless the buyer will take part of the 1963 crop as well. This does not appeal very much to the shipping houses who have no outlets for bad wine with a good name at a high price. They are able to maintain the reputation of Bordeaux at considerable less expense to themselves than can the growers. With prices at a level approaching that of the 1961's, shippers are reluctant to commit themselves to the classed growths of 1964 which are likely to make three times as much wine as they did in that year of a quality still to be assessed. The Bourgeois wines are once again the most interesting group. There are many of them and they will make a lot of wine which will have to be selected carefully. Their value to the importer depends not on their name, which is often unknown, but on the comparative quality individual wines attain after 3 to 5 years in bottle. A tasting today of 1955 wines or of 1959's illustrates this very well. Tentative price levels of 1964 Bourgeois wines are equivalent to shippers' prices of £70 to £100 per hogshead, rising to £130 for exceptional quality. In view of the quantity available, it is to be hoped that these prices will ease by March-April, 1965. If conditions for the next vintage are favourable they may ease still more by June, 1965.

As for the 1964 white wines, with the exception of Sauternes, which will depend on the weather from now onwards, the quantity appears to be almost normal and the quality to be good. Prices are reasonable and we hope to be able to report a satisfactory vintage in our Spring issue.

The "Hors Quantum" regulations which limited the production of Vin Ordinaire and facilitated their export have come to an end. By devious complicated means these regulations had the effect of subsidising exports to Great Britain by something like £2 per hogshead. An increase in prices to importers may, therefore, occur on this count, although there are hopes and talks concerning an alternative form of subsidy taking place in France.

### 1963

There is a lot of wine still unsold. Except for a very few classed growths that have made a passable wine, the vintage is likely to be an embarrassment to the growers.



They can be drunk now but, with a few exceptions, look as though they would still improve for some years. The famous 1953 Lafite appears to be amongst those working its way back to its former greatness. La Mission Haut Brion is a perfect example of this vintage.

#### 1952

This is another traditional type of Bordeaux vintage which started slowly albeit full of promise, and has developed gradually, steadily and along the expected lines. A year ago we believed this vintage could eventually produce better wines than the 1953's, but in view of the remarkable resurgence of strength noticeable in the 1953's we are now less certain of this. Both vintages are certainly fine, the 1953's perhaps lighter and more perfumed than the 1952's and certainly quicker developing.

**Older Vintages** are becoming rare and are of little commercial interest to the Trade. For the sake of a record, we give below our opinion of some that we have tasted during the last twelve months:

#### 1950 Château Lafite

Fragrant and complete wine. Great finesse. A true Lafite. Might improve for another 4 or 5 years.

#### 1950 Château Latour

Light for a Latour but otherwise very typical of this wine. Good bouquet. Pleasant. Could improve still but can be drunk now.

#### 1949 Château Calon Ségur

Good stylish wine. Big, obvious flavour. Could probably do with 5 more years in bottle.

#### 1949 Château Cheval Blanc

Solid wine, delicate for Cheval Blanc, but typical of year. 5 or 6 more years to reveal its best.

#### 1947 Château Mouton Rothschild

Truly great claret. Gentle, soft and remarkable finesse. Possibly at its best.

#### 1947 Château Latour

Perfect Grand Vin of Bordeaux. Needs at least ten years to continue improving. Very big with the typical flavour of Latour.

#### 1947 Château Margaux

Still has a very concentrated flavour. Might improve still with time. Plenty of body and fat.

#### 1947 Château Palmer

Has now entirely lost the taste of acidity which has dogged it since birth. A very fine, vigorous, perfumed Margaux needing another 7-8 years.

#### 1947 Château Calon Ségur

Softening very considerably, now a pleasant mouth-filling, straightforward St Estèphe. Another 7 years to reach its best.

#### **1947 Château Cheval Blanc**

One of the most famous wines of the year. It is gaining in finesse and delicacy after a hibernating period, and should be very fine indeed in 7 or 8 years from now.

#### **1947 Château Grand Puy Lacoste**

A Grand Vin, still a little hard. Great ripeness and growing finesse. A handsome wine that probably needs another 10 years.

In none of these 1947 wines have we found any trace of the acidity which caused so much despondency in the trade 10 years ago.

#### **1945 Château Margaux**

A magnificent wine. Beginning to refine its flavour, it is soft and caressing and has still great possibilities of development.

#### **1945 Château Beychevelle**

Soft, attractive, very pleasant, typically conventional St. Julien. Attractive, uncomplicated finesse. Possibly needs another 4 or 5 years to complete its development.

#### **1934 Château Haut Brion**

A gentle, true Graves with a delightful bouquet and well-defined flavour. This to us was a remarkable experience, as we have always previously found this wine over-emphatic and lacking in balance of flavour. This is now a worthy Premier Cru.

#### **1928 Château Calon Ségur**

A solid, true, impressive wine, no longer obviously suffering from the excess of tannin which characterised this vintage in the early years.

#### **1923 Château Palmer**

Aromatic, light, well-balanced, perfect claret. A remarkable example of a vintage which was considered to be too light and not likely to live long.

#### **1923 Château Pape Clement**

Well-balanced, dark colour, a fine old wine but dominated by the mushroom smell of old age.

#### **1914 Château Latour**

Not a great Latour but remarkably fresh and full-flavoured. Likely to live a few years yet.

#### **1900 Château Palmer**

Fine old claret, alive and interesting but quickly disintegrating in contact with air in the glass.

### **BURGUNDY**

This year the situation in Burgundy is very similar to that in Bordeaux. The weather has been very much the same, the flowering was in full swing from June 5th to 15th, the maturing process of the grape (la veraison) started in August, as it did in Bordeaux, and the vintage started on September 20th. There seems to have been a little less rain during the vintage than there was in Bordeaux although even in Bordeaux the rain that did fall was not spread over more than 4 or 5 days and was more intense



than prolonged. Burgundy is expecting to make even more wine on the Côte d'Or than it did in 1963 and talks of beating all records for quantity. Beaujolais does not expect to distinguish itself in this way but has hopes of a really fine quality, probably of the full-bodied character usually described as "type Beaujolais export" and not the light, flavoury wines favoured by the French market. The Côte d'Or is modestly nervous that the big quantity will react against quality, particularly as the musts and acidity were both on the low side as they were in Bordeaux. The vine is, however, notoriously unpredictable, and quality will have to await a first estimation at the Hospices Sales in November and a more detailed appreciation next March and April. At the moment opinion seems to expect a quality a little better than 1962 and not as good as 1959. If this is achieved and prices remain reasonable, 1964 may well be a very interesting year for the British market. No transactions are as yet recorded, but stocks unsold at the end of August were larger than at any period since the war and this, combined with the expectation of a record quantity in 1964 has raised hopes that growers will be able to satisfy their legitimate aspirations at prices considerably below those of recent years. For once it looks as though there may be a buyers' market which will enable wines to be selected carefully according to their quality, a particularly important factor this year as there is likely to be a great difference between wines grown on vineyards which, because of their soil, have suffered from the dry summer and those which have not suffered. The stability of the market will depend greatly on the activities of the big direct-buying retail organisations of France, who need Appellation more than they need quality, and on the speculative activities of blind buyers from abroad, who are prepared to risk quality for the sake of a few pence per bottle extra profit.

We hope that Beaujolais prices will be less exaggerated than they were for 1962, but with the growing interest in Great Britain in wines from the Côte du Rhône, under their own name, the Beaujolais wines are of rather less importance than they were a few years ago. With considerable stocks still in shippers' cellars as well as in the country, and a certain shortage of money amongst shippers, there is some hope that 1964/65 will see a slow and more normal start to its buying campaign.

#### 1962

The wines of this vintage have maintained their fat and freshness. They are mostly in bottle and likely to develop into very pleasant, distinctive Burgundies in 3 or 4 years' time.

#### 1961

Very big and some very distinguished wines amongst them. They are nearly all well-constituted, but have not yet moved in bottle and will need time to develop.

#### 1959

Are not by any means ready but are being drunk now. At this present state of progress they are big, soft, sweet-flavoured, pleasant wines, many of them showing the distinctive characteristics of their vineyards. It is a pity they cannot be kept a little longer.

Older vintages are seldom seen, and we have not had an opportunity of tasting a representative collection. Those we have seen have confirmed us in our preference for 1947's over 1949's. The variation in quality of the latter vintage is, however, very pronounced.

#### SUMMARY

With big crops expected in both Bordeaux and Burgundy, and the hope of a very satisfactory quality, there is an opportunity now for careful, selective buying from April, 1965, when the wines can be tasted. This may help to bring back a more healthy atmosphere to the markets, and would be of great benefit to growers, shippers and importers.

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