

ESTABLISHED 1883



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BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY 1961 VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

In 1955 Bordeaux was responsible for nearly 50% of all wines exported from France. By 1960 this had fallen to 32½% and the proportion of all other districts, particularly Burgundy and Alsace, had increased. Because of the shortage of wine created by the war and the severe set-back to production in Bordeaux by the frosts of 1956 in that area, prices have continued to rise until in 1960 the average export price of Bordeaux wines had increased by 72% as opposed to Burgundies 45% and Alsace 38% in devalued francs. The ready demand for the 1959 vintage apparently justified these increased prices, and will no doubt re-instate Bordeaux as the main wine exporting area of France. This will be the picture by the end of 1961, and it remains to be seen what the reaction of export markets will be to the still further increased prices of the 1960 wines. How urgent is the world need for 1960's and how much good wine will be made in 1961? These are the considerations governing the immediate future of the market. The United Kingdom is one of Bordeaux's important markets, but now takes fourth place instead of her traditional third. Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany retain their lead, and Sweden, whose consumption has been steadily rising since 1956, now imports more Bordeaux wine than the United Kingdom. An important consideration in estimating the future needs of export markets is the demand in the U.S.A. Exports to the United States have increased by nearly 30%, and in 1960 were only 25% below the United Kingdom figure, as opposed to 56% below in 1956. It is difficult to see from published statistics whether this demand affects one class of wine more than another. All wines to the U.S.A. are exported in bottle (except apparently for seven hogsheads in 1960) and there is no means of knowing what proportion represents Château Bottled wines. It seems possible at least that America with her increasing consumption and intensive sales methods may be largely responsible for the increased outlet for Classed Growths and their consequent rise in price. It is this astronomic rise in the price of the Classed Growths which has encouraged the proprietors of lesser vineyards to ask exaggerated prices. But there are only some 60 Classed Growths and well over 2,000 Bourgeois, so that the individual Bourgeois can scarcely hope to benefit from the glare of American publicity as much as can the Classed Growths. There are signs that the limit has been reached even for the Classed Growths, but it seems likely that the impact of a reduced demand will have its greatest effect on the Bourgeois wines. These, in our opinion, remain the backbone of the Claret trade in the United Kingdom. With the variety available and the quality attained in such years as 1959, they enable any knowledgeable wine merchant to increase his reputation and his profits in a manner that Classed Growths, under normal conditions, can never do. The wine trade is gradually reorganising itself in all its branches to meet the changed requirements of a shrinking world, but we doubt very much whether the tendency we have noted to base distribution methods on names instead of the quality which made those names will in the long run benefit the consumer or the Trade.

At present the indications for 1961 are good. The vine is in flower now, May 20th, nearly three weeks before normal—weather conditions for the flowering are a little unsatisfactory. The result will be known by the time this report is read. An early vintage at the end of August is possible, and this generally means a high quality. If 1961 is of really high quality, we expect prices to be high.

1960 Vintage

Light, easy, agreeable week-day wines at Sunday prices. There is a considerable variation of quality depending largely on the amount of local rain during the vintage, but on the whole it is useless to pretend that this is anything but a mediocre year. There are many light, pleasant wines of the same type as the 1958's, and some less soft like the 1956's. They would be useful gap-stoppers at half their present prices. A few of the Classed Growths are worth serious consideration. They are at prices well above the opening prices of the 1959's, but well below the figure these latter are now fetching on the open market. Demand for them will inevitably be affected by the result of the 1961 vintage, but we find it hard to believe they can go any higher in price.

1959 Vintage

The original selections, well cared for by shippers, are showing extremely well, and have in many cases improved since the last Spring rackings. The bigger wines will be bottled towards the end of this year, and should begin to show the qualities that charm the public in three or four years' time. We expect the best of them to go on improving for another seven years after that. Not all 1959's were as successful as the most successful.

1958 Vintage

The 1958's have surprised many people by their agreeable character just as the 1960's would do if they were given the chance. They will never make fine old bottles, but we have no doubt that they will play their part in creating new friends for Claret. They can be drunk now and for the next four or five years.

1957 Vintage

We have never understood the somewhat lukewarm reception of this vintage. The wines are now beginning to show their quality, and given two or three years more should produce some of the soft, robust types that many Claret lovers are looking for.

1955 Vintage

The 1955's are justifying their good reputation—they are refining down to a notable degree and are showing a subtlety and breed which was not obvious in earlier years.

1953 Vintage

The 1953's are most surprising wines. At first they were almost irresistibly charming, and seemingly a little superficial. Then they started to change, lost their charm and developed other less seductive, but more fundamental qualities. Today they seem to have stabilised into a classical pattern of well balanced, quite full bodied wines likely in two years' time to replace their original attractive young bouquet with a solid, deep and true Claret aroma. There are exceptions. Notably the St. Emilion wines seem less solid than they should be.

1952 Vintage

The 1952's are now showing openly the latent qualities which we have previously noticed. They are particularly well balanced wines gradually, in their own time,

developing into fine Claret. We believe they will need another five or six years yet to reach a very pleasing best, and that in the meantime they can be drunk with increasing pleasure.

1950 Vintage

The 1950's are probably at their best. Long, graceful, not very big wines, but true in flavour and character, and cheap by comparison with today's prices.

1949 Vintage

The sheep have definitely parted from the goats. The best are likely to need still more time to reach their best, and the feeble amongst the vintage should be drunk quickly. Wines of this vintage seem to vary considerably from bottle to bottle.

1947 Vintage

We do not subscribe to the often expressed opinion that these wines are breaking up. The vintage has had its difficulties, due mainly to the very hot weather at the time of the gathering and the attendant difficulties of fermentation. The development of the wines has been slow, long and awkward, but there are signs that they are now coming round. The marked acidity that characterised many two and three years ago, is now greatly diminished and in some cases completely overcome. We believe in a good future for most of the wines of this year.

1945 Vintage

The 1945's are now, alas, unobtainable. The Lafite is continuing its development and is worth laying down for the next 20 years. The Latour also is very good.

BURGUNDY

No one in Burgundy even pretends that 1960 was anything but a disaster so far as the quality of the Red wines is concerned. The quantity was enormous, and wines, for a time after the vintage, were stored in anything that would contain them. The quality of White wines was distinctly better, and in some cases very suitable for British tastes. In Chablis particularly, good White wines were made in 1960. Following as it did on the fruitful vintage of 1959, the 1960's have swelled considerably the stock still unsold in the vineyards. Only about 50% of these stocks, however, are saleable and the large quantity has, therefore, no influence on the prices of any good wines of 1959. The good White wines are at about the same prices as the 1959's, and should provide the British importer with a reasonable choice of wines suitable for bottling early in 1962 and capable of two or three years' development in bottle.

1959 Vintage

The 1959's are now almost all sold in wood, and many already bottled in Burgundy—largely for the American market. There is a variation of quality which is sufficiently pronounced to make careful selection well worth while. The best of the Reds are agreeable, complete, fairly light wines with good colour, and true and distinct flavour. The White wines are excellent provided they have sufficient natural acidity, as many of them have. The others are agreeable also, but should not be kept more than two or three years in bottle.

The Beaujolais on the whole has followed the Côte d'Or, but some of the Red wines of 1960 are pleasant and complete, and will be useful as stop-gaps in Great Britain.

1957 Vintage

Very satisfying wines ; mostly great breed, complete in flavour and construction, but they seem to be developing faster than we had expected and in many cases some of the bigger wines may be at their best in two or three years' time. Some of the medium grades are good to drink now and likely to hold their present qualities for another four years or so.

1955 Vintage

Are generally big wines, often very complete and ripe in flavour, sometimes with a distinction that brings them near to being great wines. There are, however, some that seem to be going through an awkward period in their development and lack definition—a few we have seen have developed an acidity at the end which we believe will pass. On the whole, the vintage can be considered ready for drinking.

1953 and 1952 Vintages

We have seen too few of these now scarce wines to be able to form an opinion of any essential difference between the two. Both vintages seemed to have produced very complete wines, perfectly constituted and of character and individuality. We are inclined to think they are on the whole still improving in bottle.

1947 and 1949 Vintages

We have seen even less of these two vintages. We shall never know which is the "better" of the two. We have seen more 1949's to attract us, but the best we have seen have generally been 1947's. Both produced big wines.

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