

ESTABLISHED 1883



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BORDEAUX, November, 1965

VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

Bordeaux is rather more depressed than is usual at Vintage time. Even the ebullient optimism of the Gascon is dampened by the September rainfall, which was more than three times the average and followed a heatless summer. The rain fell on grapes, which, by the end of August, were for the most part still green imitations of what a ripe grape should look like. Summer rainfall from the flowering in June to the end of August had been below average, but cold, dry summers do nothing to help the maturing process of the grape. Generally, the grapes are fully formed with all their requisite constituent parts intact by the end of July or the beginning of August and have changed to their purple or yellow colour and ready for the traditionally hot August sun to ripen them. 1965 produced none of the requisite conditions and when the September rains fell on the half-formed grapes, the less robust started to rot and even the sturdier and older plants were left with a high acid and low sugar content by the end of September. October produced mostly fine and surprisingly hot days, which rapidly raised the sugar content of those grapes that had survived despite cold nights and the year's previous deficiencies.

Many growers who had started picking their grapes about October 1st in the miserable hope of saving something from the wreck, stopped again, or went slow in order to benefit from the hot weather which started then and eventually lasted most of the month. However, cold nights produce early morning and evening mists in the vineyards in October and these accelerated that process of decay to which the 1965 grapes were particularly vulnerable and forced growers to renounce some of the benefits they might have obtained from the belated October sun. The result has been that a harvest that in its youthful stages promised a bumper crop of good wines has succeeded in producing a, so far, unknown amount of wine, some of which is within sight of the minimum alcoholic degree required for its "Appellation". Modern vinification methods will repair some of the damage and supply some of the deficiencies and growers who, at one time, despaired of recovering any of their costs may gather in a few francs.

The areas making sweet white wines, particularly Sauternes and Barsac, are suffering now from three consecutive bad years; for them, 1964 was as bad a failure as 1963 and now 1965 must be added to the list. Prices of commercial stocks are bound to be affected by this drastic reduction of supplies, but the impact on the British market, where the demand for high quality Sauternes is limited, is not likely to be very serious. Good quality, dry white wines, for which there is a steadily increasing demand, are in fairly plentiful supply and it is even possible that 1965 may produce some useful wines in this category.

1964

The quality as a whole is developing very much as expected. It will be remembered that the year is one in which it has been necessary to select wines with some care because of the great variation in quality brought about by the variation in the time of vintaging and the effects of a dry summer on vineyards of differing soils and vines of differing ages. The successful wines resemble both 1959 and 1962 at the moment, but because of their relatively low acidity, may be ready for drinking before the 1962's and at about the

same time as, or a little after, the 1959's. The classed growths are now mostly in shippers' hands, or sold by them to their customers for shipment in 1966. The majority of the better known classed growths sell by contract to groups of shippers. These groups have been formed in recent years by shippers to safeguard their own interests against large foreign corporations who, often interested more in name than quality, tend to buy direct from the Châteaux and to by-pass the traditional Bordeaux shippers. Under these conditions some such protective system for shippers is inevitable, since growers are not prepared to be left with vintages which foreign buyers do not want and shippers are not prepared to buy growers' remnant stocks after the cream has been sold direct by the Châteaux to the shippers' customers. Shippers' groups therefore contract with a Château to buy all vintages—good or bad—and are able, not only to prevent the direct access of their customers to growers, but to control the price at which their wine is sold for export. As a consequence of this organised system of name buying, stocks at the property of the more popular classed growths are now low and prices rising steadily. Not all of these seem to us to be good wines, not excluding at least one or perhaps two in the top flight. On the other hand, some of the independent Châteaux amongst the classed growths still have available wines of excellent quality at original prices in spite of the 1965 failure. These prices are admittedly high, varying between £180 and £220 per hogshead for wines to be invoiced when shipped next year and including all keeping charges. We do not, however, believe that there is now any chance of these prices easing as they might have done if 1965 had produced a reasonable vintage.

Bourgeois wines are still available in the country at the same prices as in January. The fall in prices which we predicted in our last Report did in fact take place and, by July, wines were available at between 10% and 20% below opening prices. Now, because of the 1965 failure, they are firmly re-established at the January level. The same variation of quality as in the classed growths is noticeable, but we have the strong impression that the Bourgeois wines are relatively better than the classed growths. St. Emilion was at first considered to be the favoured district, but, with the satisfactory development of the Médocs during the past month, we doubt whether this opinion is still widely held. All those selected for our stock are full-bodied, dark in colour and soft and, in some cases, have a classic Bordeaux flavour which we find very attractive and which we believe augurs well for their eventual quality in bottle.

The dry white wines of 1964 are elegant, well made and shew a great deal of attractive personality. They are fresh and lively and will be in perfect condition for bottling in the Spring of 1966.

The sweet wines were not generally successful, but there were some which are suitable for blends, both from Sauternes and the lères Côtes.

1962

Settling down in bottle, but we have not examined them during the past six months.

1961

Fine, forceful wines, generally needing at least another eight years in bottle. Some exceptionally soft wines likely to be very attractive in four or five years' time.

1960

We have not tasted many, but Château Latour is light and attractive and the Château Dutruch-Grand-Poujeaux at Moulis is remarkably full-bodied, full flavoured and soft. The 1960's in general can be drunk now.

1959

Generally graceful, well-balanced and fragrant; they need another five or six years before they begin to shew their real qualities.

1957

Many approaching their full development. Some of them developing a remarkably fine bouquet.

1955

Ready to drink and rather more distinguished than at first seemed likely.

1953

Many want five to six years to reach their best. They have developed great body and flavour and seem to be recapturing some of the charm which they started with and tended to lose during their development period. A few are ready to drink.

1952

Less ready than the 1953's, because they are likely to improve more than the 1953's will, with keeping. They are, however, pleasant and interesting to drink now, but lack the charm of the 1953's.

The following older wines have been noteworthy amongst those tasted during the past six months. We report on them for the benefit of those merchants who may have remnants left to sell or drink.

1920 Château Brane-Cantenac

Fine drinking, although probably past its best. Good fruit still and very old nose and taste.

1950 Château Cheval Blanc

Solid, straightforward St. Emilion. No great charm.

1923 Château Gruaud Larose Faure

Fine, lively, a penetrating classic flavour.

1929 Château Gruaud Larose Sarget

Beautiful bouquet, fine complete flavour. Probably at its best.

1947 Château Grand Puy Lacoste

A magnificent wine—strength, grace and generosity. It was better than the 1947 Latour with which it was compared—unless of course somebody switched the glasses! Tasted at the Château.

1924 Château Lagrange

Young, fresh, soft, sweet flavour, typical of the year.

Château Latour

1948

A little overweight and over tannin—may still improve, but will always have too much tannin.

1947

Closed and unforthcoming on this occasion. Will probably break out eventually.

1944

Remarkably pleasant wine for an "off" year. Well balanced. A little tired.

1929

Another grand Latour in the true style. Seems likely it may still develop although perfect drinking now and probably inadvisable to risk waiting further.

1924

Perfect Latour. Should be decanted at least two hours before drinking.

1865

If any wine merchant has a bottle available, we shall be glad to let him know how it compares with the one we tasted at the Château in September. Ours was magnificent.

Château Lafite

1953

Worth special mention because at last beginning to fulfil its early promise. Very fine.

1949

Every bottle of this wine seems to taste different. This one was disappointing.

1947

Fine wine. Still a little hard, but a near perfect Lafite.

1945

Disappointing. Unforthcoming. Negative, but more likely than not to break out one day.

1924

Tired, but clean, and beautiful flavour and slight mushroom nose.

1924 Château Léoville Lascases

Beautiful nose. Drying up a little. Great finesse.

1949 Château Léoville Barton

Very fine Claret. Good balance; still improving. Worthy of its reputation as one of the finest wines made in 1949.

Château Margaux

1950

Fatter than most wines of this year. Satisfying, but did not seem to have fulfilled its early promise of ten years ago.

1947

Powerful, complete, very ripe and full flavoured. Grand style and still improving.

1923

Lively, fine old Claret. Great breed. Needs drinking.

Château Palmer

1953

Worth special mention also for the same reason as Lafite. Re-capturing its old charm, whilst at the same time more solid than it was. Probably needs another five or six years to reach its best.

1948

A little too much tannin—plenty of fat and likely to improve for ten years.

1947

Greatly improving after a disappointing interim. Should turn into a really fine wine in ten years.

BURGUNDY

Burgundy also had a cold summer, but rather more humidity than Bordeaux, so that, by the beginning of September, the grapes were becoming liable to decay even in their unripe state. September rains looked like destroying the vintage entirely and when the fantastic sudden floods of September came at the end of that month, most Burgundians gave up hope. Forty-eight hours of torrential rain turned many roads lead-

ing down from the hills into cascading rivers, which invaded cellars and living quarters during the night. There were some deaths and a great deal of material damage, flooded basements and cellars, demolished walls and outbuildings and some vineyards flooded to a height of three or four feet, destroying the grapes entirely. As in Bordeaux, fine weather, warm and sunny, came in fair measure in October and Burgundians started talking about making wine similar to the 1960's. Possibly, some of the higher slopes may produce wine that will find a market in France but we do not believe that any wine suitable for the British Market will be made in 1965.

The market for 1964's has become active and prices have hardened considerably, in particular for the successful wines of this uneven vintage. A Code of Practice, designed to curb the more exaggerated abuses of Appellations has also been generally adopted and is likely to protect the quality of the best areas of the Côte d'Or, whilst still leaving a reasonable amount of latitude to the Export Trade, with little or no effect on the prices of genuine wines.

Our September tastings of this vintage have been most satisfactory. Earlier tastings had been inconclusive, the wines seeming to be affected by the unnatural, cold summer of 1965 and the conditions of their own maturing in the summer of 1964. Many delayed their malolactic fermentation and other phases of development. They have been difficult to bring up; their sporadic development causing all sorts of unpleasant tastes and lack of definition in early-drawn samples. Left to themselves, with the minimum of interference from Maîtres de Chais and Oenologists, they seem now to have achieved their own salvation and are shewing very well. Mâcon and Beaujolais also have produced good wines, the latter, with its larger spread of quality, providing in its higher categories excellent alternatives to the expensive names of the Côte d'Or, St. Amour, Morgon, Chiroubles and Brouilly—and Moulin-à-Vent when available—from £60-£75 per hogshead, compare well with the Beaune, Pommard and Volnay at £90 to £120. We believe the whole range of 1964 Burgundies to be well worth consideration and a little trouble in selection. Some shew a remarkable definition and clarity of character encompassed in a soft, generous and classic flavour. We believe that the next five or six years are likely to produce some outstanding wines amongst this vintage.

Old Burgundy vintages are difficult to assess, because of the variation of quality of identically named wines. We continue, however, to find fine examples, both amongst the 1947's and 1949's and believe that whereas the latter should be drunk now and have superior charm, the 1947 should be kept, and will eventually surpass the 1949 in quality. We have taken every opportunity that has offered itself of tasting the 1957's, which we hoped might fill the gap when they eventually came round. For the most part, they still seem to be asleep, although a Beaune Bressandes and a Nuits les Cailles shewed some signs of awakening albeit to a rather austere way of life.

1959's are very satisfactory wines for drinking now and some of the greater 1953's and 1952's are just about at their peak. There are, admittedly, great variations and the above somewhat vague remarks are intended only as a general indication of trends.

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