

ESTABLISHED 1883



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BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

Bordeaux is convinced that the whole world will want its 1959's, and Bordeaux may well be right. This is the dominant feature of the Market today. The other important feature is that the devaluation of December 1958, has still not brought about a corresponding increase in the cost of living and therefore in the cost of wine. There is a shortage of high quality fine wine because of the small quantity of great wines made since 1954, but the supply of cheap wine of good export quality has become more normal. Both these factors are accurately represented in Market quotations for new wines which are dealt with in detail in the following section.

The French Government has made a bold and constructive attempt at reconciling the demands of the growers of Vins Ordinaires with the demands of the populace for cheap wine. The scheme includes regulations designed to encourage the export of Vins Ordinaires. These regulations have been widely misunderstood by importers. To clarify the position, we cannot do better than quote verbatim a report on this subject received from Mr. Peter Sichel in Bordeaux. This we add as an appendix to the present report.

Two other factors are having their effect in changing the character of Bordeaux Wines. The first, affecting the Red Wines, is the increasing demand for wines ready for immediate drinking. This is manifested in the big increase in the sale of the wines of the Beaujolais and in the enthusiasm with which the 1958's have been received by those members of the public who have been introduced to them already by their wine merchants. The other factor, affecting the White Wines, is the increased demand for dry wines and the diminished demand for very sweet wines. This is a challenge to Bordeaux, whose soil and climate is capable of producing dry wines of a quality comparable to those of any other vineyard and at a relatively much lower cost. Already there are examples of the new Sauternes being sold at lower prices than successful Graves. In 1647 the Jurats of Bordeaux fixed the price of the White Wines of Graves at 100 livres per tonneau and the White Wines of Barsac, Preignac, and Fargues at the same figure. By 1730, Red and White Graves were fetching higher prices than Red and White Sauternes. Now Bordeaux is once again adapting itself to what it conceives to be the taste of its customers. We believe the effort to produce dry White Wines to be right and the effort to produce Red Wines ready for early consumption to be wrong.

1959 Vintage

Now, during the first week of October, the Red Wine vintage is mostly finished and the new wine fermenting in the vats. Declarations of quantity will not be made for a few weeks yet. Estimates, as usual, vary considerably. There have been no disasters on a large scale, the weather has been good, and there has been no disease. The variations from normal quantity which will be apparent when the district declarations are published will be mostly due to the adequacy or inadequacy of water during the development period of the grape from early July to early August. The fears of a quantity substantially below normal are due to the lack of rain in some parts and the consequent drying up of the ripening grape during August and September. Our own estimate is for a normal quantity in the near neighbourhood of 4-million hectolitres.

The quality, which can scarcely fail to be high, will be affected also by the same local conditions, with a danger of thick skins in the Red Wine areas, and over-ripeness and a lack of life-giving acidity in the White Wine areas. All these are imperfections much more easily corrected by modern methods of vinification than they were in, say, 1937. The variation in the weight of the musts is considerable: all are largely sufficient, but the vines growing on a clay sub-soil retaining a certain amount of moisture have borne better fruit and produced higher sugar contents than those on the more arid soils.

In the White Wine areas, the production is likely to be above normal. In the Sauternes the "noble rot" has appeared in such profusion that in the great vineyards it is possible to pick whole bunches of grapes at one gathering and avoid the expensive and laborious practice of normal years of picking individual grapes. There may be some difficulty in producing good, dry wines this year, but it is a problem which can be solved by selection of the most suitable types of vine and careful timing of the picking.

1959 will produce a high-level vintage but it will be as necessary as ever to select individual wines when they can be tasted with some degree of accuracy in the spring of next year.

1958 Vintage

The pleasantly flavoured, soft, light wines which form some 20% or 30% of this otherwise unsatisfactory vintage have been and no doubt will be well received by consumers who want easy-drinking, cheap wines. To wine merchants who need to fill the gap in cheap wine between their present stocks and the 1959's, they are a boon. The vintage should, however, be bottled not later than the spring of 1960.

1957 Vintage

A relatively small proportion of vineyards have produced good wine on a higher level of quality than that of 1958. Where these latter can replace cheap wines, the 1957 can provide better quality wines to be offered, matured, with bottle age, about 1962/63—long before the 1959's can be ready. If stocks of 1955's are insufficient to fill the gap—which is considerable—between 1955 and 1959, the good 1957's can be bottled with confidence. The successful wines have lost the hardness which was a characteristic of the vintage, and are long, firm, well-flavoured Clarets with a great deal of style.

1955 Vintage

These wines are developing fast. They are soft, easy to drink, well-balanced, and clean-flavoured. They are being sold already, and it appears to us that stocks will need careful husbandry if they are to last until the 1959's can be drunk.

1953 Vintage

These have developed quickly as was expected. They are beginning to lose some of their fragrance, and we doubt whether the degree of dignity to be acquired with age will in this case compensate for the lost charms of youth. Stocks seem to be very low.

1952 Vintage

The wines of this vintage, maturing more slowly, are now beginning to develop a fine, classic character which in a year or two should show highly interesting individual qualities. They are more solidly built than the 1953's.

1950 Vintage

These have surprised many by their graceful development and comparative longevity. They are good, easy, and agreeable wines to drink now.

1949 Vintage

The wines of 1949 should also be drunk now, in general. They are soft and pleasant.

1947 Vintage

These wines are at last beginning to develop but are still not ready for drinking. Many are overcoming the acidity which they developed about seven years ago.

BURGUNDY

Since the peak prices of Burgundy were reached in the spring of 1958, prices in sterling, with the help of the devaluation of the franc in December 1958, have fallen by 35% to 40%. It is true that this fall was largely induced by a substantial quantity of very light wines made in 1958 and a noticeable quantity of inferior wine made in 1957; but the avalanche brought down with it some excellent 1957's which were better in quality than many 1955's and now are available at lower prices than were asked for the latter. At present, the market is somnolent as is general at this time of year in Burgundy. The 1959's now being made promise a satisfactory quality and a large quantity but, unlike Bordeaux, no pre-vintage transactions have taken place on which an estimate of their prices can be based. Some large Paris houses have already bought at high prices but it remains to be seen if these are maintained. First real indications will come at the Hospice sale in November.

In the Beaujolais, the quality should be better than 1958 and 1957, and there is a good chance that they will be eminently suitable for the special rôle which wines from the area play on the British market. They are high in alcoholic content—not necessarily an advantage for this type of wine. Again, for the moment no prices are established.

1958 Vintage

Some good White Burgundies were produced by this vintage, particularly in the Chablis area where they were comparatively cheap. On the Côte d'Or, the Whites are, in our opinion, equal to those of 1957—but they are much too expensive.

1957 Vintage

This vintage produced a restricted quantity of good wine. It was a year in which the skill and judgment of the vigneron was more than ever responsible for the quality of the matured wine. They have been sold freely in Great Britain. They are wines which should be bottled rather earlier than usual. The pure examples of this vintage are well bred and show clearly the characteristics and flavour due to their origin. They are dark in colour, well-balanced, and lack only a little of the natural glycerine of a first-class vintage: it is for this reason that they should be bottled during the next few months. Their prices are at present unnaturally low. Small stocks only remain to be shipped and if the 1959's fetch high prices in the forthcoming sales, the prices of 1957's will automatically increase.

Good White Burgundies are few in 1957. Chablis made practically no wine because of frost. The Côte d'Or made some, but only a few of the high quality needed for the British market, and prices are very high.

1955 Vintage

These wines are developing normally. They will be ready for consumption, in general, from 1960 onward and should last until the 1957's are ready in 1964.

1953 and 1952 Vintages

These vintages are both probably at their peak of development. The 1953's are charming and attractive whilst the 1952's are a little more restrained in their appeal. They are reliable, solid and conservative in character.

Older Vintages

Older vintages are rapidly disappearing from the market. Of the 1947's and 1949's recently seen, we find the successful 1947's more to our taste than the sweeter 1949's. The 1947's have generally lost the hardness which was their only failing and now reveal the forceful purity of their character, presented with uncompromising aplomb. The best 1949's are more friendly and more popular in their general appeal.

CONCLUSIONS

1959's will be ready to bottle in 1961 at the earliest and ready to drink in 1966 at the earliest. There is no hurry to buy them until they can be carefully tasted and selected. In the meantime, the only wines to bridge the gap between 1955's and 1959's are:—

- (a) 1958's—for selling now and during 1960.
- (b) 1957's—for bottling now and selling in 1963-64.

One London Wine Merchant has already had a great success with the 1958 Clarets. We emphasize once again that this vintage must be bottled within four months and used for early drinking.

SICHEL & CO.

EXPORT CONCESSION ON NON-APPELLATION WINES

The French Government is going to control prices of Vin Ordinaire for two purposes:—

- (a) To make wine growing an economic proposition by keeping the price of wine in France up.
- (b) To encourage exports by keeping prices for export down.

The Government is doing this by dividing Non-Appellation wines into two groups:—

- (1) QUANTAM—This will represent the needs of the home market and growers will be allowed to sell a certain proportion of their crop at the controlled price of about Fr. 525 the degré hecto (the Government allowing freedom of the market of 8% in either direction).
- (2) HORS QUANTUM—This is the balance, or what is left over of the crop after home requirements have been catered for. Négociants who buy these wines must export them within twelve months. The price of these wines will be entirely free and it is generally expected that the '59's will start at about Fr. 230 the degré hecto.

In order to establish a working stock of Hors Quantum wine, a scheme has been devised which leaves itself wide open to all kinds of legal interpretations. It is as follows:—

For any non-appellation wine exported between October 1st and December 31st of this year, a certificate will be issued of "proof of export" and the holder of such certificates will be able to buy an equivalent quantity of new wine hors quantum without, in fact, exporting it within a year as would normally be necessary. It will constitute a completely free stock which he can use however he likes. The possibilities are great, but boil down to two main ones:—

- (i) He can keep this free stock for blending purposes; or purely as a floating stock; or
- (ii) If the négociant does a trade in France he can use these certificates of export to obtain wines hors quantum at about Fr. 230 (by proving export in advance) and sell them on the home market at prices which will be based on the quantum cost of about Fr. 525.

As a result of this, a market in certificates has already started. Exporters can "déclasser" their Appellation Controlée wines to Vins Ordinaires and thus get a certificate of exportation of that quantity of Non-Appellation wine. These they keep if they deal normally in Non-Appellation wine and "the stock" is therefore useful to them, or they sell the certificates to négociants who do not normally export much but to whom a free hors quantum stock would be extremely useful. The "market" is at present at about Fr. 25 per litre for these certificates.