

ESTABLISHED 1883



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SICHEL & Co.,

HAMBRO HOUSE, VINTNERS' PLACE.
UPPER THAMES STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

TELEPHONE No: CENTRAL 8871/2

BORDEAUX OFFICE AND CELLARS: 19, QUAI DE BACALAN.

BORDEAUX, April, 1964

BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

Britain continues to be an important customer for Bordeaux, although now only 5th in importance, so far as quantity is concerned it remains the 3rd biggest source of income. The United States of America beat the United Kingdom on both counts for the first time in 1962 and maintained its lead in 1963. The champion remains the Benelux countries, who take four times as much wine as we do from Bordeaux for a total bill of only twice as much. All of which would be far more interesting if the statistics from which these figures are taken were not based on Appellation Contrôlée wines, a great many of which leave for Britain without their identity papers and are therefore not included in the above figures. Perhaps the fact that Britain gets the biggest bill of all France's export customers for Alcoholic Beverages in general will serve to restore a proper sense of national pride. We beat Germany, the runner-up, by £118,000 in a total bill of £17 million.

Activities in Bordeaux are for the present confined to the preparation of the shipment of the 1962 vintage and rejection of the 1963 vintage. The quality of this is poor and it would in fact have been a most disturbing miracle if the 1963 weather conditions had produced wines of quality. These conditions have been described in our Autumn report and the hot sunny days vouchsafed Bordeaux in October since the report was written, were not sufficient to make any worthwhile impression on the quality. This applies particularly to the St. Emilion area where, because of the nature of the soil the grapes tended to rot before the fine weather arrived and therefore had to be picked early. There are of course the usual exceptions to the general debacle, but even these are fewer than might be expected and of value only to importers who are prepared to bottle them at the end of the year and sell them quickly and cheaply. Red and White are equally poor, it is likely that many classed growths will be sold under their district names only, some have already announced their intention not to ship 1963 under their Château names. Very few transactions are taking place, prices are comparatively low, but may easily fall lower if 1964 is born in May-June without any pre-natal set-back to Mother Earth from storm and frost. Three million Hectolitres of Appellation Contrôlée were made in Bordeaux in 1963 out of a total of 5 million. This is about 25 per cent total crop above the average. Not all Appellation of better districts will be confirmed eventually, but will have to be sold at a low price under the lesser Appellation of Bordeaux Rouge or Blanc.

The fact is that France is saddled with an excess of poor quality wines and it is highly desirable for the sake of everybody, that it should be disposed of quickly.

1962 Vintage

Mostly destined for bottling this Spring. They have maintained their flavour, their bouquet and their remarkable balance and should without doubt develop into unusually attractive wines in bottle. The year has already produced so many surprises that we hesitate to estimate the length of their life in bottle. Although they have always been remarkably and happily low in tannin content, they are solidly constituted and beautifully proportioned. They have a lot to give and we believe that the medium priced

Bourgeois wines will begin to reach their best in 6 years or so and are then likely to hold their quality for a long time. We would expect them to be much sought after for their quality in 1970/1975—at about the same time as the classed growths of 1945 and 1947. Their quality depends not on weight but on the purity of breed represented by their flavour, bouquet and their ability to live long enough in bottle to let these qualities develop in full. Their constitution should give them time to develop their charms.

1961 Vintage

Majestic and impressive. The last are being bottled now. They have retained all their fruit, although on the whole 2½ years in cask is as much as they needed. We had originally believed that 3 years would be wanted to prepare them for the bottle because of the intensity of flavour they acquired from the hot Summer of 1961. As it is they are now mostly bottled and likely to take a long time to develop. The best of them deserve to be forgotten for 20 years before being tasted and may then well be found to need 20 more. An excellent vintage to celebrate the 50th birthday of a new born son. Bourgeois wines seem likely to need 8-10 years to show their best quality.

1960 Vintage

A year that has demonstrated the usefulness and attraction of good wine in poor years. There have been several on the market, including the 1960 Ch. Palmer, which have earned praise, given pleasure and have now fulfilled their destiny by holding the fort whilst the 1959's were settling down in bottle.

1959 Vintage

Resigned to their dethronement after a brief reign as “Wine of the Century” they do not try to compete with the usurping 1961's, but have a character and charm of their own approaching more nearly the 1962's than the 1961's. They are very ripe wines, a little harder than 1962's and perhaps will take a little longer to start their development in bottle. They have made progress during the last 3 years, but we have the impression that they are a little backward and that at any moment they may develop the gaiety which is characteristic of the year. The general level of quality of this vintage is high. The vintage is already being consumed—which is a pity. They seem to need another 7-8 years to reach their best.

1957 Vintage

Since our last report we have carried out extensive tastings of the Château bottled wines of this vintage. In the Médoc particularly, there are many solid wines which have mellowed well with time in bottle and in some cases developed a soft, attractive and even appealing character with good bouquet. The wines nearly all show breed and well defined characteristics of their areas. This is the last of present Château bottled vintages to be available at anything resembling a reasonable price. We enclose a report on a few selected wines of this vintage and strongly recommend it to the notice of those of our friends who want to make provision in large or small quantities for reasonably priced Château bottled wines pending the development of later vintages. The 1959's and 1961's are both quoted in Bordeaux at much higher prices than the 1957's. The 1957's have risen by something like 50 per cent in price during the last 2 years—we expect the increase in price to continue until it approaches the price at present being paid for 1959's.

1955 Vintage

Continuing to develop more and more finesse to the increasing surprise of the early cynics. A good vintage, originally reasonably priced but has steadily increased in price since the 1956 frosts and is now very expensive on the Bordeaux market.

1953 & 1952 Vintage

Despite their tender age these two excellent vintages are rapidly disappearing from the market. Some of the 1953's at the moment appear to have reached their best, it is possible they may find their second wind and enter a further period of refinement, but we would still suggest that they should be drunk before the 1952's which are continuing to progress.

BURGUNDY

As already reported, the 1963 Burgundy vintage gathering took place in fine warm weather conditions. Although the better conditions started 3 weeks earlier than they did in Bordeaux they unfortunately do not seem to us to have had much effect on the red wines of the area, which are thin, light in colour and quite unsuitable for the export market. We have been unable to form an estimate of the quality of the White wines in the Côte d'Or, they have not yet completed their secondary fermentations. It seems possible that once again a mediocre vintage may have produced the type of light, crisp wine which is more appreciated in the United Kingdom than in France. There is a good quantity available. Côte d'Or, Macon and Beaujolais made 1,300,000 Appellation Contrôlée hectos in 1963 as compared with 1,000,000 hectos in 1962. These figures are around the average for Appellation Contrôlée in the last 5 years with the exception of 1961, which made under 1,000,000 hectolitres. They take no account of the large quantities of the Vin de Consommation courante made in 1962 and 1963.

White wines account for about 33 per cent of this quantity. Despite the uncertain quality of 1963 and the stocks still lying in the country the price of Chassagne Montrachet and Meursault, the two wines most in demand, are very high. We have found once again that the best value obtainable comes from Chablis, where it has been possible to taste the 1963's. Prices are reasonable and we have been able to select from the large quantity made—24,000 hectos—a few wines that will find favour in the United Kingdom. We do not subscribe to the opinion widely held in Britain that Chablis is a generic term for White Burgundy. The character of wines from this area is very different from that of the White wines of the Côte d'Or. We hope to be able to offer in our Autumn list a range of Chablis from £50 to £80 per hogshead. The White wines of Macon are more generally successful in 1963 than either the Red wines of the area or the Whites of any other district. They are, however, greatly in demand and are not cheap whilst remaining the lowest priced wines available amongst acceptable White Burgundies. They should be available in the Autumn at about £42 per hogshead and provide excellent dry White wines to retail at about 10/6d. per bottle.

1962 Vintage

Red Burgundies are now all in shippers' cellars and for the most part sold. Although there is quite a large variability in quality there is more than sufficient outstanding and good wine available to make the vintage rank amongst the best of the area. For the most part, they will be bottled this Spring and should need 5 to 6 years for their true qualities to become apparent.

1961 Vintage

This vintage remains solid, good and safe. It is developing peacefully. Stocks have never been large and are now for the most part in bottle and lying in the cellars of Wine Merchants and Importers. They should develop steadily, but will need their time, the best of them needing 9 to 10 years in bottle to prove their quality. Beaujolais, however, made a great deal of wine in 1961 and the outstanding quality of this area has already been remarked upon. The "Villages" wines are developing very well and are good for drinking now.

1959 Vintage

By today's standards is already an 'old' vintage and rapidly disappearing from the market. They are likely to be at their best around 1970, but at the present rate of consumption are unlikely to survive until then.

Amongst **older vintages**, of which we have lately seen only occasional bottles, the 1947 would seem to be asserting its superiority over 1949. Both are good. The 1952's and 1953's are probably at about the peak of their development. The days of old matured Burgundy that has been allowed to take its time and develop all its qualities are temporarily, we hope, in eclipse.

RHONE

Wines of the Rhone are becoming of more and more interest to the United Kingdom, where proportionate consumption of these satisfying Red wines is still well below that of other countries. Their price is reasonable and the Appellation area is being rapidly expanded. Unfortunately, 1963 has not produced wines of interest. The restricted areas of Châteauneuf, Hermitage, etc., have become very expensive through the heavy demand, but the large Côte du Rhone areas are still able to offer good value.

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