

ESTABLISHED 1883.



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BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

Exports of Bordeaux wines have been increased during the past twelve months, and internal consumption of export quality wines has been well maintained. The Bordeaux market was, at the end of 1952, ready to absorb a new vintage and interest quite naturally centred early on the vintage of 1952. The comparatively comfortable liquid capital position of most of the big buyers, coupled with the optimistic opinion then current of the quality of the wines, let loose a flood of competitive buying which may or may not prove to have been justified. We examine the question more closely later in this report. It seems fairly certain that growers were pleasantly surprised by the strong demand evinced by the market, and prices rapidly reached a level considerably higher than that ever attained by the 1950's. In accordance with what seems to have become the practice since 1945, the Classified Growths have been proportionately far more in demand than the Bourgeois. Once again, we draw attention to the extremely good value, by any standards, available in the Bourgeois category. They are being offered in this country between £28 and £35 per hogshead—that is to say, they can be bottled by merchants at a cost varying from 65/- to 70/- per dozen and their quality, always comparable to that of the Classified Growths at twice their price, often equals and sometimes, in extreme examples, surpasses them. If the Bourgeois Growths are to survive, there will have to be an increase during the next few years of some 20% over their present market prices. This may be attained with the return of Germany, traditionally Bordeaux's biggest customer, into the market, and, we venture to hope, with the support of far-sighted British wine merchants to whom these Bourgeois wines offer an unsurpassed opportunity of building goodwill and reputation.

The general position of the White Wines is divided into two parts. The tragic destruction of half the 1952 vintage in Sauternes by hail, following on the poor 1951 vintage and the restricted output of fine wine in 1950, has inevitably made good Sauternes and Barsac very scarce, and concentrated interest somewhat on the right bank of the Garonne at St. Croix du Mont, Loupiac, Rions, etc. The supply of good dry and medium dry wines from the Graves is, however, satisfactory, and prices remain at about the same level as last year.

In Great Britain, great and welcome activity in the cheapest categories has been in evidence for nearly two years now. New techniques in vinification in Bordeaux have enabled palatable young White Wines to be offered to the consumer as low as 6/- and 6/6 per bottle. These cheap wines are doing an invaluable service in creating new groups of wine drinkers. We believe that an equally important group consisting of the newly impoverished old friends of wine has been somewhat neglected. These are mostly Red Wine enthusiasts. The Bourgeois wines mentioned above, with a few years' bottle age, could eventually help to maintain this important market but immediate satisfaction could be given by well selected Red Wines of the 1951 vintage. Classified Growths of this vintage are available at £36 to £40 per hogshead; the wines lack the body of a good vintage but many are ripe and well made with an easy attractive flavour and the breed expected of their famous vineyards. Bordeaux, in fact, at the moment offers a variety of attractive possibilities to the wine merchant who is not brand controlled.

1952 Vintage

Even the most experienced tasters are not yet prepared to pronounce finally their opinion of this vintage. The wines have only just undergone their spring racking and there is no reason why they should have revealed themselves yet, nor is there any reason why at this stage a final opinion should be expected. Within these limits, our own impressions are quite definite. There are, once again, wide variations of quality due to the date of vintaging in individual vineyards and the consequent weather conditions at the time of the vintage. In general the wines are light in body, good in colour, and on the whole have rather more flesh on them than the 1950's. Many are less well built than the 1950's and we have visited many vineyards where the 1950's are considered superior. We have found the wines of Médoc generally the most successful, and those of Pomerol better than the average in St. Emilion. We have seen a few excellent wines in St. Emilion chiefly amongst the more conservative-minded growers. This automatic comparison with the 1950 vintage which we found widespread in Bordeaux is some measure of the general opinion. We believe that many of the wines will grow yet, and others, flattering to the palate at present with the charm of their youth and misleading to many tasters inexperienced in tasting six-months-old wines, will age quickly and fade quickly. We believe that a very few of the greatest growths will be really fine wines, but not even these great in the sense that 1928 and 1929 were great. We estimate that 60% of the vintage, which was about normal in quantity, will be rather better than the average 1950's, and the remainder less good. The First Growths are at present quoted at very high prices, other Classified Growths are appreciably higher than the 1950's, even when less good. There is little activity at the moment in 1952's but we believe that the reputation of this vintage will ensure a demand, and that there are perhaps not enough really good wines to justify the reputation.

Amongst White Wines, we have seen one or two from the districts that escaped the hail which we believe will be great wines. Inevitably they will fetch very high prices. There are no medium priced Sauternes of this vintage; all that survived the hail and were vintaged late are good, but they are pitifully few and very dear.

1951 Vintage

There were many sound, ripe and boneless wines of good breeding made in this year. As we have pointed out in our introductory remarks, they could fulfil a very useful role. Classed Growths can be sold for about £40, under their district or secondary names since they are unworthy of the names of their respective Chateaux. They can be shipped and bottled now and they can be sold immediately after their bottle sickness. Bottled early, they will retain their charm for two or three years.

White Wines of this year are of no interest.

1950 Vintage

The good reputation universally accorded a year ago—despite the poor early opinion in many quarters—has been well maintained. The wines have developed well, the First Growths have just been, or are in the process of being bottled at the Chateaux ; the vintage will maintain and almost certainly increase the good reputation it has won. We repeat that many are superior to their counterparts of 1949. They are quick maturing, ripe, well-constituted wines.

Many White Wines are very good indeed.

Older Vintages

The 1949's continue to develop as expected. They are light, not always as complete as the 1950's, with a good flavour and bouquet, probably at their best in 1955 and good to drink in 1954.

The 1948's are certainly amongst the early rejected vintages which have surprised many. They are slower maturing than any postwar vintage except 1945. Not as fine as these, with a little hardness still to be got rid of, but they should be excellent drinking around 1956-7. They are still cheap and well worth laying down.

The 1947's and 1945's are justifying their fine reputations. We believe some of the best wines of these two vintages will be amongst the greatest of the first half of the century. There are failures in both vintages, but they are a small minority.

For drinking now, the 1943's are still the best available, though some are getting tired. Good wines can also be found amongst the 1942's and 1944's.

BURGUNDY

The whole of Burgundy, from Beaujolais to Chablis, is experiencing great prosperity. The export figures have risen steeply. The consequent high prices for wines still in growers' hands have had a dampening effect on the home demand which, in its turn, will possibly affect the merchants' demands from the growers and so eventually bring prices to a more reasonable level. The fact, however, remains that according to published figures, the total exports of Appellation Controlée Burgundies very nearly equal the crop of about 160,000 hectolitres. These figures, however, ignore the 550,000 hectolitres produced in the Beaujolais and Maconnais, and largely consumed in France.

1952 Vintage

A good average in quantity. No exaggerated claims to greatness are made locally. The wines have a good colour, are fairly well covered, and are generally better than the light and emaciated 1950's. They have often a well developed and attractive bouquet and an individuality of character which reminds us of some fine vintages. We believe these wines will grow considerably during the summer, and feel assured that the vintage has produced many wines that will be very welcome in Great Britain. Prices are very high.

The White Wines are particularly attractive, lively and graceful, and of the light type appreciated in this country.

1950 Vintage

With the aid of the special vinification methods that were authorised, this large vintage has produced quite a number of useful medium-priced bread-and-butter wines. They can be bottled for use in eighteen months' or two years' time if required, and may well serve to conserve stocks of 1947's and 1949's until these can be followed by the maturing 1952's.

The White Wines of this year are excellent.

Older Vintages

Our own preference is still strongly for the 1947's. The 1949's are developing very quickly, have plenty of flavour, but will not, in our opinion, develop as well or last nearly as long as the 1947's. Prices of both these vintages in bottle have naturally increased as stocks become seriously depleted and demand continues.

RESUMÉ

For immediate needs and laying down for early maturing, we recommend the 1950 vintage in Claret. In Burgundy, we recommend 1950 for current qualities to help out depleted stocks of 1947 and 1949. In Sauternes we recommend urgent attention to stocks. We hope to show samples of 1952 Clarets in October to those of our customer friends who wish to see them, but the wines will not be ready for shipment at the earliest before the Spring of 1954, and samples will be available during the whole of that year. We do not think that present day quotations are likely to increase to any significant figure.

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