

ESTABLISHED 1883



ALLAN SICHEL LTD.

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.

1960

BORDEAUX, October, 1960

BORDEAUX AND BURGUNDY VINTAGE AND MARKET REPORT

BORDEAUX

"Our Merlot's are rotting on the vine at Margaux."
"Really; at St. Julien with us its the Cabernet-Sauvignon that we have to pick quickly."

"Moi, je ne sais pas—at Pauillac I have no sign of rot."

This sort of conversation, heard in Bordeaux since September 12th when vintaging started more or less generally, together with: "This rain will ruin the crop", and "We have had no rain", and "Our first musts were 14°", "Ours were 10½°", is typical of the 1960 vintage condition. It is in fact typical of the weather during this Bordeaux Summer. This has been indeterminate from the middle of July until the rain really set in in mid-August. Before then from May to July it was fine, warm and sunny, and gave rise to great hopes for the wines. In the beginning the rain had been very welcome after a June and early July which threatened to grill the grapes before they could ripen. Then the rain swelled the ripened grapes which reached full maturity earlier than expected, and led to hopes of an early vintage starting at the end of August or beginning of September. Grapes in this condition rot easily in the excessive rain which followed, and although many waited for finer weather to eliminate excessive water, others were compelled to start gathering in the first week of September. By the second week everyone had to start and fine weather had still not come. The Ban des Vendanges celebrated by the Commanderie du Bontemps at Château Pontet Canet on September 17th, representing as near as is possible in modern France an official opening of the vintage, was a triumph of wine over water and of Pontet Canet over puddles. Three or four magnificent, warm and sunny days about 23rd-26th September were not enough to raise the degree of sugar much in the wetter parts of the Médoc, or at St. Emilion, and yet by the end of the vintage musts of 12½° were fairly common. For once we are inclined to think that Bordeaux has been over-pessimistic under the influence of the really depressing rains of September. There are many reasons for unsatisfactory vintages, from sheer lack of sunshine and unripe grapes and acid wines through excess heat and tannin-bound wines, to washed-out, over-watered, feeble wines. 1960 is none of these; the grapes were ripe and fully mature at a certain stage and the wine they have made will depend on the state they were in when vintaged. We think it quite likely there may be some sound, easy, well-flavoured wines made of the type that are at their best after 3-4 years. The colour in general is rich and dark—another hopeful sign. A large quantity has been made amongst Red wines; the Whites, vintaged later, have unfortunately suffered greatly from the rain and in some cases rotted to such an extent that the grapes cannot be picked successfully. It looks as though our optimistic estimate of the damage done by the Spring frosts will be justified and that, in spite of the loss then incurred, at least a normal quantity of Red wine will be made in Bordeaux in 1960 and perhaps something over the average.

Prices at the moment are high, but they are nominal and there is in fact no market. A good deal of 1960 was bought "on the vine" by smaller French and some larger foreign firms; prices were based on the high hopes of May, June, July and the excellent market then available for the 1959's. Present prices of 1960's are based on these transactions, but in our opinion have become unrealistic in view of the uncertain quality of the vintage. The two main unknown factors are: How good will the classed growths be—for which there is a big potential demand; and: How much demand will there be for those Bourgeois wines which are good? It is impossible yet to form an opinion on the first question. As to the second, we are inclined to think that in the United Kingdom there may be a demand provided wines are available at not over £50 per hogshead, but that this will not manifest itself until the result of the 1961 vintage is apparent. The U.S.A. market has only a slight influence on this category; the Scandinavian Monopolies, despite their increasing consumptions, are now very well stocked, leaving the French, Dutch, Belgian and German markets which may have need of substantial quantities if prices become more reasonable.

We hope to give a more precise estimation of the 1960's in April, 1961.

Prices of classed growths now in bottle are extremely high. The 1959 first growths are offered to shippers on the market in Bordeaux at about 400/- a dozen. Other classed growths of this vintage are rare and are being offered at the moment in cask at prices varying between £120 and £160 a hogshead. Older vintages are following suit: 1957 first growths are at about 300/- to shippers, 1955's varying between 280/- and 450/-.

Cheap Red Wines

One of the most important problems of Bordeaux is the supply of cheap pure Bordeaux wines to be retailed at 7/- to 7/6d. per bottle. This means wine at £20 to £25 per hogshead, and is at present very difficult to find. Many leading Shippers are meeting the demand by blending good wines to be offered as Vin Rouge as opposed to Bordeaux Rouge, and these are generally admirably suited to the present demand for wines that can be drunk young. There should be a good market for them under importers' own brands.

White Wines

The ability of Bordeaux to produce better and cheaper dry wines than many districts traditionally associated with this type is becoming more and more apparent. We would like to draw special attention to those quoted on our current list.

Bottled Wines

To those who believe that a good wine bottled at the right time in the cellar in which it has matured has a better chance to develop well than one which has suffered all the hazards of both transport in cask and bottling at the convenience of the importer, a new field of possibilities is opened by the reduction of United Kingdom duties on wines imported in bottle. Château Bottling is likely to become the rule for all classed growths, and Shippers' stocks of three- or four-year-old Bordeaux bottled Bourgeois wines are now well worth examination.

1959 Vintage

We maintain our opinion that the substantial percentage of fine wines made in this year are great wines in the best tradition of Bordeaux. They have been sold freely and prices have risen considerably since January of this year. Shippers' prices have also hardened but often to a lesser degree, since many firms, content with their

turnover of original purchases, are offering their replacement stocks at reduced rates of profit. The wines have a deep colour, clean distinctive aroma, plenty of flesh, a true flavour, and sufficient but no excess of either acidity or tannin. They are well balanced, and give every promise of developing into fine bottled wines. Some lighter wines will be shipped next Spring, but the majority not until October, 1961.

The White wines are in many cases also highly successful. They are graceful, well made and distinguished. Lacking perhaps some of the heaviness and fat much prized by French palates, they approach much nearer to the refreshing quality preferred in the United Kingdom. Compared with the Red wines they are not expensive.

The unevenness of the vintage in general started with uneven flowering of the vine in June, and was accentuated at the vintaging end of the season by the early school-return date which reduced the number of families available for the picking.

1958 Vintage

Bought only by a few firms of unusual perception in the United Kingdom, we now regret that this vintage has not been offered more freely. The carefully selected, soft, well-flavoured and bouqueté wines shipped in November, 1959, and March, 1960, have a charm and ease which has made them popular wherever they have been shown. They are being drunk now and will fill the gap until 1962/3 when the 1955 and 1957 will be more ready to drink than they are today. A few of the bigger wines of this vintage are still available in cask at their low prices from £32 for a St. Emilion, to £68 for a cru exceptionel of the Médoc. They are in perfect condition for bottling now.

1957 Vintage

Still big and robust. There is not much more to report. Bottlings have now about finished, and the wines will give an indication of their quality in twelve months' time. We think highly of the selected wines of this year.

1956 Vintage

Another neglected year of fast developing, easy wines. Perfect stop gaps. They should be drunk during the next year with great pleasure.

1955 Vintage

Developing well and could do with another year or two to show their quality. They are straightforward, soft and satisfying without any element of excitement.

1953 Vintage

These are in perfect condition for drinking now. Their evolution has been a most interesting progress from youthful flirtatious attraction, through a period of shy change to their present mature and lively charm.

BURGUNDY

The unhappy and uncomplicated situation in Burgundy needs little elaboration at this stage. A large quantity of poor wine is all that has so far emerged. Whether any rare acceptable wines will eventually be offered remains to be seen. It seems unlikely except in the Beaujolais area where possibly some wines fit for quick consumption in 1961 may be made. We think, however, they will lack the body demanded in Northern Countries. 1960 must be considered useless as a follow to 1959. Chablis has made no wines worth speaking of this year.

1959 Vintage

The best wines of this medium quality year are well up to the standard acceptable to Burgundy drinkers throughout Europe. They do not, however, amount to more than 20% of the large vintage produced—at a rough estimation. Inevitably, the very reasonable prices at which they were first offered to importers must harden under the influence of the 1960 failure. They are being bought rapidly by the United Kingdom Trade. The best have a good colour and flavour, and a finesse that sometimes even makes it possible to recognise their origin.

1957 Vintage

Big, sound and solid. Mostly now in bottle, and should prove very useful in two or three years' time. They will probably take some time to adjust themselves, but should become the full, strong-flavoured type that is appreciated by most Burgundy lovers.

1955 Vintage

Are now most attractive and in the cheaper categories can be drunk with pleasure. The bigger wines are developing smoothly, but need a few years yet to develop their finesse and bouquet to the full.

1953 Vintage

Stocks of these must be getting very low. Those wines we have seen recently seem to be at about their best—it is a year depending to some extent on superficial characteristics for its charm.

White Burgundies

In White Burgundies we consider the 1958 in Chablis to be the best of the last three vintages. In the Mâconnais also we prefer the 1958's to the 1959's; whilst on the Côte d'Or we believe some of the 1959's, particularly at Meursault, to be outstanding. The wines from Chassagne and Puligny are becoming very expensive, and in 1959 tend to lack sufficient acidity.

RESUME

Both in Bordeaux and in Burgundy it would seem to be wise to lose no time in covering requirements for 1959 wines. Cheap wines will be difficult to find in either area, but there is some hope that reasonably priced, useful 1960 wines may eventually be forthcoming from the cheaper areas of Bordeaux and perhaps also, with careful selection, from the Beaujolais. Dry white Bordeaux wines are now worth careful examination.

SICHEL & CO.