



# SAVAGE SELECTION

*Wine Merchants & Shippers*

## **2006 BORDEAUX REPORT AND OPENING OFFER**

The obvious temptation for the supposedly independent commentator will be to conclude that 2006 is somehow an inferior vintage on the grounds that it is less good than its predecessor. In view of the easy excellence of 2005 and the euphoria that surrounded it, 2006 was always fated to lie in its shadow, but those who have almost predetermined that it should be written off as substandard or undeserving of a place in any good cellar will be ignoring much of the truth about the vintage. Children cannot be held responsible for events that predate their own birth, nor should 2006 wines be judged simply in the light of 2005. Let us then for a moment pretend that 2005 had never happened and try to think what we would be saying about 2006 Bordeaux.

As with most Bordeaux vintages, the year 2006 was not without its problems. If we consider the difficulties we may be able to discover the innate character of the vintage and find out why it is, as all Bordeaux vintages are, unique and distinct from any of its predecessors. The most significant months of July, August and September tell the story. July was extremely hot and dry, bringing a halt to the vegetative development of the wine and simultaneously provoking the maturation process of the grape. As a result, the crop was ripe relatively early, around 18-25 September for the red grapes on the right bank, depending on the individual site. August was unusually cool and overcast, as indeed it was in England, and this will have contributed to the aromatic freshness and intensity of the grapes, which were rather small as a result of the July drought. September was marked by some heavy rainstorms. The month was also hotter than usual, so the conditions were extremely propitious for what turned out to be a fabulous crop of mushrooms. That meant a simultaneous danger of botrytis. It was important to avoid being panicked into harvesting too soon when the grapes still had green tannins, but equally to avoid leaving it too late by which time rot would have set in. This was a harvest that required access to a large team of pickers available at very short notice so that the job could be done as fast as possible at the moment of optimum maturity.

For those able to get it right, 2006 was a vintage of ripe fruit, producing wine of excellent density, aromatic intensity, freshness and proper individuality. More challenging for sure than the easy years of 2000 and 2005 when anyone half competent could come up with a good result, 2006 is likely to prove itself a very good, but admittedly less homogeneous vintage than its predecessor. It will be harder therefore to find the best wines, but there will be no shortage of quality. Whether the market needs the wines is another matter, but those who like to assure themselves of a succession of good Bordeaux vintages in the cellar for the years ahead should not dismiss 2006 just because it is less 'mediatique' than 2005. While I tend to talk down the claims of overhyped vintages (e.g. 2003), especially if I can see that media frenzy is causing prices to escalate out of all proportion to those prevailing for earlier vintages, conversely I am happy to be more positive if I feel a vintage is coming in for more criticism than it strictly deserves. It is too soon for me to try and be definitive about 2006 on the basis of tasting a very small cross section of half educated wines, but my feeling at present is that we will be happy to recommend a small number of wines at the 'en primeur' stage and that in the years to come we will be able to select further good, classic Bordeaux wines for drinkers rather than speculators.

In conclusion, this is a vintage where one can still buy with confidence from the well managed estates. The fruit was ripe, and it was possible to avoid the common Bordeaux dangers of rot and dilution. It was decidedly not a year for overextraction and those wines made with sensitivity have a real potential for elegance. The vast majority of the wines that I tasted at the end of April, admittedly from a handful of exceptionally good chateaux that could be relied on to produce wines that would be properly representative of the best of their respective communes, were more than merely commendable. What the reader of this report wants to know from me in a nutshell, I imagine, is my view on whether the latest Bordeaux vintage should be regarded as good, bad or merely indifferent. The purpose of my perennial springtime visit is to allow me to establish my own opinion on that score and to do so, if possible, without being prematurely influenced by any other tasters or commentators. I therefore avoided the scrum of the Union des Grands Crus tasting week when the majority of the world's wine writers and tasters descend on Bordeaux, preferring myself to taste more independently at individual chateaux rather than at centralised mass tastings, in a less hurried and confusing atmosphere, and with much less risk of exposure to either tired or fallacious samples. My view overall is that this is a good vintage, not one to be afraid of. Vintage comparisons in Bordeaux are always irresistible, however odious or unsatisfactory, but if pressed for comment at this early stage, I would merely allow myself to find similarities with such vintages as 2004, 2001, 1998 and 1996, all in their different ways to be regarded as good years for the region. Whether it represents good value must wait until the prices are revealed.

## 2006 BORDEAUX

## “EN PRIMEUR” OFFER

The following is a short selection of wines that I consider worth considering for purchase at this stage. My usual criteria apply, that the wines be of exceptional quality for their respective locations and are likely to be cheaper now than after they are bottled.

### **THE WINES OF FRANCOIS MITJAVILE, Saint Emilion and Bourg-sur-Gironde**

No producer in the world has given us finer wines with such unfailing regularity as Francois Mitjavile, unheard of 30 years ago, but now recognised as one of the brightest stars in the Bordeaux firmament. His wines should never be confused with the so-called ‘garage’ wines that have emerged in recent years, incidentally, which are typically produced in a forced, overextracted style that drowns out the personality of each vineyard. A Mitjavile wine is always a true ‘vin de cru’, made along solid traditional lines whose quality is above all a testament to extreme attention to detail most particularly in the actual vineyard. If one may talk about man hours per vine, then I am confident that no vines benefit from more attention than those of Francois Mitjavile. Having achieved the supreme objective of producing fruit that is fully mature, no easy task in this Atlantic climate, the winemaking side of things is made that much more straightforward. Francois has no special tricks or secrets in that department, but it is true that the ‘elevage’ or maturation in the cellar has no small part to play in the final result in bottle. One salient characteristic of his wines is their immediate charm. Even in cask they are almost impossible to spit out, due to the opulence of the fruit combined with the softness of the tannins. We sometimes think of them almost in the way that we think of great Burgundy. This precocious charm takes nothing away from their potential for great longevity, as all the past vintages of his wines in the cellar eloquently testify, even those from the supposedly minor vintages such as 1980 or 1987. Market forces have forced the price of his most famous wine to higher levels than most of us can afford, but the consolation is that his Roc de Cambes is of comparable quality at a much sweeter price and the Domaine de Cambes, coming from the part of the vineyard closest to the Gironde estuary, at a point about opposite to Margaux on the left bank, must have one of the best ratios of price to quality in Bordeaux. For Francois Mitjavile, the 2006 looks like a vintage of great elegance that will age very gracefully, in character quite different from its predecessor 2005. As he himself puts it, if in 2005 we were dealing with deep, roasted tannins, playing the cello, in 2006 we are playing with violins.

**DOMAINE DE CAMBES Bordeaux**

**£195.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

**ROC DE CAMBES Cotes de Bourg**

**£295.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

**TERTRE ROTEOEUF Saint Emilion**

**£850.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

### **HAUT MEDOC**

**CHATEAU PUY CASTERA**

**£72.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

Another excellent performance from this ‘cru bourgeois’, with a wine marked by its component of cabernet franc, picked fully ripe by the 10<sup>th</sup> October, giving ‘fraicheur’ without greenness. The merlot, picked from 23 September, gives the wine its usual suppleness and plummy, precocious charm. The yield here this year was a very modest 42 hectolitres per hectare. Puy Castera frequently appears in my list of ‘en primeur’ recommendations by virtue of the fact that it always offers the early buyer an obvious incentive with a price significantly lower than that which is likely to prevail after the bottling. Thus it makes obvious sense to buy the wine at close to £6 per bottle while it is still in cask when one knows that it will be closer to £12 a bottle later on. This is also a wine that has the added advantage of being very drinkable when young, so no great patience is required by the purchaser. The 2005 is already in bottle and about to be shipped and plenty of it may well be enjoyably consumed even before this year is out.

### **SAINT ESTEPHE**

**CHATEAU PHELAN SEGUR**

**£188.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

It may not be the top wine of St.Estephe, but it comes at a much more sensible price than Cos d’Estournel or Montrose and is a proper reflection of the true character of the commune. The management of this estate is meticulously professional, inspiring confidence. The blend of the vineyard has now become approximately 50/50 merlot/cabernet

### **PAUILLAC**

**CHATEAU HAUT BATAILLEY**

**( ? £195.00 per dozen )**

Made with the same skill as the other Xavier Borie property Grand Puy Lacoste, always a favourite of ours, this wine is one of the real good value buys left in Pauillac. The 2006 is very promising, with lovely ripe cabernet sauvignon (75% of the final blend) character, a sensible, well constructed and balanced wine with the style and charm more typical perhaps of a good St.Julien than a Pauillac at present.

## **SAINT JULIEN**

### **CHATEAU LANGOA BARTON**

**( ? £275.00 per dozen )**

The charm is already obvious in this archetypal St.Julien wine and this 2006 looks to be even better than the excellent 2002 which is possibly our favourite wine from the commune in that vintage. Anthony Barton represents a refreshing oasis of sanity in the crazy world of the Bordeaux wine market.

## **MARGAUX**

### **CHATEAU BRANE CANTENAC**

**( ? £275.00 per dozen )**

It is nice to find a Margaux wine that resolutely aims to taste like a Margaux rather than a Pauillac or St.Julien. The great Emile Peynaud always considered Brane Cantenac to be a naturally delicate wine and we are pleased that Henri Lurton, the present custodian of this important estate and the fourth generation of his family to be so, wants his wine to be elegant rather than powerful and has no desire to follow the more brutal recipes of Michel Rolland. Here furthermore is a rare opportunity to buy a second growth at a comfortable price. This 2006 illustrates the continuing improvement of the wine at Brane in recent years. It promises to give much pleasure to those who appreciate classic Margaux claret.

## **GRAVES**

### **DOMAINE DE CHEVALIER**

**£275.00 per dozen In Bond UK**

Here is a 2006 wine that may turn out to be as good as the 2005. A wine of precision and refinement, it continues to offer great left bank Bordeaux value since the Graves district is simply so much less well known than St.Julien, Margaux and Pauillac. The management of this estate remains in superb hands, under Olivier Bernard and Remi Edange, and the wines always inspire confidence. The rare white wine here has found the perfect vintage in 2006, a year that looks as if it may well be for white wines in France what 2005 was for reds. It shows lovely aromatic intensity, with beautiful structure and balance.

## **POMEROL**

### **CHATEAU GUILLOT CLAUZEL**

**( ? £245.00 per dozen )**

Several commentators have expressed the opinion that this vintage has proved to be particularly successful in Pomerol, so perhaps it is a good one for us to introduce a name that is new to us, and probably to most people. At a little over one hectare, it manages to produce around 400 cases per vintage. In fact I counted just 14 'barriques' in the chai on my recent visit, which would produce some 350 dozen bottles. Such small affairs are not unusual in Pomerol, the most celebrated example being Le Pin, which lies within shouting distance. I have tasted 6 recent vintages of this property's wines and detect steady improvement since 2004 which we also intend to buy since it is exemplary, and the same can be said of the 2005. These wines have the immediate appeal which account for much of the popularity of Pomerol.

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