

IDEALWINE UPDATE: THE THIRST FOR FIRST

25th January, 2019 by Angélique de Lencquesaing

Château Mouton Rothschild made Bordeaux history when it was re-classified as a first growth in 1973. It's no surprise then, that the wines from this Pauillac powerhouse can cause a stir at auction.



VINES HAVE been cultivated on the deep and well draining gravel-rich soils of the Château Mouton Rothschild estate since the early 18th century. Today, the property spans 90 hectares, and the blend is typically 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. Vinification takes place in gravity fed oak vats, a hallmark Mouton method. Hailed for their opulence and depth, the wines of Château Mouton Rothschild possess great complexity, boasting aromas that range from blackcurrants to roasted coffee and leather.

The property came into the hands of the Rothschild family in 1853 when it was bought by Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild. In preparation for the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1855, Emperor Napoleon III requested an official classification of the great wines of the Médoc, based on the then current market prices. Mouton Rothschild missed out on the top spot, and was handed mere second growth status.

In 1922, Baron Philippe de Rothschild, a passionate racing car driver and lover of the arts, inherited the property from his great grandfather. With the young Baron in the driving seat, the château underwent a steady and miraculous transformation that began with the bold decision in the 1920s to bottle the wines

on site, where Baron Philippe could oversee the whole process. Quality greatly improved, and other domaines followed Mouton's lead, choosing to bottle at their estates rather than sell to the négociants in barrel.

GREAT WINEMAKER

The Baron proved to be not only a great winemaker but a clever marketer. He channelled his love of art into his wine, commissioning artists to design labels for the bottles. The first label of this kind came with the 1924 vintage, a Cubist work of art created by Jean Carlu. Halted by World War II and the German occupation of the estate, the tradition returned with the 1945 vintage. The bottle, adorned with an ornate 'V', commemorated the victory of the Allied Forces and a return home for the Baron from his exile in Britain. Baron Philippe was never content with second growth status, and devised a house motto to express his sentiments: "Premier ne puis, second ne daigne. Mouton suis" ("First I cannot be, second I do not deign to be. I am Mouton"). In 1973, the 50-year campaign to promote Mouton Rothschild to a first growth finally came to a triumphant end. The momentous occasion was enshrined on the 1973 label where, below an illustration by Pablo Picasso, the revised motto in all its newfound, first growth glory read: "Premier je suis, second je fus. Mouton ne change" ("I am first, I was second. I'm still Mouton").

iDealwine average auction prices of selected vintages of Château Mouton Rothschild Premier Grand Cru Classé

Source: iDealwine

Vintage	Price estimate in 2008	Price estimate in 2013	Current price estimate	Evolution since 2008		Evolution since 2013	
				Total	Per Year	Total	Per Year
1945	€6,369	€7,320	€8,442	33%	3%	15%	3%
1982	€693	€842	€1,006	45%	4%	19%	4%
1986	€578	€519	€705	22%	2%	36%	6%
1989	€200	€237	€389	95%	7%	64%	10%
2000	€520	€920	€1,642	216%	12%	78%	12%
2010	–	–	€669	–	–	–	–

When Baroness Philippine de Rothschild was handed the estate in 1989, she continued her father's ambitious projects, adding a white wine, l'Aile d'Argent, and a second wine, Le Petit Mouton, to the château's output. Since her death in 2014, Mouton Rothschild has been under the charge of her three children, Camille Sereys de Rothschild, Philippe Sereys de Rothschild and Julien de Beaumarchais de Rothschild. A pioneer of estate bottling, labels designed by some of the world's most famous artists and the only first growth newcomer, despite its many achievements, Mouton Rothschild remained in the shadow of Château Lafite on the fine wine market for a long time, especially since the Asian market, and the Chinese in particular, fell in love with Lafite's grand cru classé and its second wine, Carruades, in the late 2000s.

However, over recent years, speculation has given way to a more concrete and established demand for Pauillac first growths, and Mouton Rothschild has seen its prices steadily rise. As is the case for the 2000 vintage, a bespoke bottle embossed with the Augsburg Ram. A case of six magnums of the 2000 fetched a total of €22,618 (£20,446), or €3,770 a magnum, in November 2018 (+13% on the iDealwine price estimate). Today, even the 'off' vintages, such as 1992 and 1999, are highly sought after at auction, proof that the market is thirsty for Mouton Rothschild, and that quality is recognised, no matter the year.

