

The 2011 Liv-ex Bordeaux Classification

Background:

Liv-ex – The Fine Wine Exchange – has once again updated the 1855 Bordeaux Classification using the same criteria as were used in 1855: price.

The Liv-ex Bordeaux Classification is updated on a two year cycle to reflect the current trading conditions.

The full classification can be found on the Liv-ex Blog from Thursday 26th May 2011. (www.liv-ex.typepad.com).

Highlights of the 2011 Liv-ex Bordeaux Classification:

- Lafite retakes its position as the top wine of the Left Bank, a position it surrendered to Latour in 2009.
- Mission Haut Brion retains the First Growth status it was awarded in 2009, although it has started to fall behind its fellow firsts.
- Duhart Milon, Beychevelle and Pontet Canet join the ranks of the Second Growths.
- Leoville Barton drops down to become a Third Growth.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Left bank wines only (both Medoc and Pessac-Leognan)
- Minimum production of 2,000 cases (to remove distorting effects of 'super cuvees')
- First wines only

How we calculated the rankings

- First we calculated the average case price for every qualifying wine (lowest available wholesale price for an in-bond ovc 12x75cl case in good condition, excluding duty and sales tax) for the past five vintages, 2005-2009. Prices are as of 30 April 2011.
- As the brokers did in 1855 (and we did previously in 2009) we then split up the wines according to price band, which for 2011 are as follows:
 - 1st Growths: £3,300 a case and above
 - 2nd Growths: £700 to £3,299
 - 3rd Growths: £400 to £699
 - 4th Growths: £280 to £399
 - 5th Growths: £220 to £279

These price bands were modified from those used in 2009 by calculating the average price difference between the 2009 and 2011 studies for each level of the classification and then applying this modifier to the previous price bands. This change ranged from 11% for the Fifts, to more than 60% for the Firsts.

The rankings:

It remains a matter of academic debate whether the wines were listed in their respective classes in order of price/quality – although the evidence seems to point to them being so. We have assumed they were for the purposes of this analysis.

The Second wines: if the second wines from the great estates were included, where would they rank?

- 13 second wines would make the cut
- Carruades would be a first growth
- Forts de Latour would be the top second growth, with Pavillon Rouge, Petit Mouton and Clarence Haut Brion also positioned within the ranks of the second growths.

Quotes:

“The Liv-ex Bordeaux Classification aims to recreate the conditions of the 1855 classification. To base it wholly on price – as the 1855 classification was – and include only the major estates of the Left Bank. In essence, to create the classification that would have been drawn up if today’s prices were those prevalent 156 years ago.”

“When comparing the 2011 Classification to the study we did in 2009 the main cause of wines moving up the rankings has been their popularity in Asia. Those wines that have pushed into the ranks of the Second Growths - Beychevelle, Lynch Bages and Pontet Canet – are all exceptionally strong brands that are appreciated by a global audience.”

A short history of the 1855 Classification:

The 1855 Classification was produced by the Bordeaux Brokers Union at the request of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce. Its purpose was to be used as part of the regional display at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855.

The Brokers returned their classification just two weeks after the original request was made. As Dewey Markham Jr writes in, *1855: A History of the Bordeaux Classification*: “There were no chateau visits, no requests for samples, no tastings involved in the establishment of the rankings, nor was there any need for them.”

The 1855 classification was based wholly on the price each chateaux’s wine reached on the Bordeaux market. It drew on the many existing classifications of Bordeaux wines that were prevalent at the time, most of which had five distinct ‘cru’. It was not intended to be a definitive selection; it was intended as just another in the long line of such classifications, with others sure to follow.

The letter from the Brokers to the Chamber, which accompanied the return of the classification, made this clear: *‘You know as we do, Sirs, how much this classification is a delicate thing and likely to arouse sensitivities; also it was not our thought to draw up an official state of our great wines, but only to submit for your consideration a work whose elements have been drawn from the best sources.’* They also mentioned the price each cru was worth in the market, with each having a defined price band.

The attention that the 1855 classification received as part of the exhibition was unexpected, and set it apart from previous efforts. It became routinely reprinted in books and newspaper articles on the region and was soon considered an ‘official’ classification, particularly by those outside the Bordeaux trade. Chateau Margaux was the first property to put the designation ‘cru classe’ on its label in 1917, by which time even the Bordelais had come to view it as official