

A CELEBRATION OF “THE NOBLE BUBBLE”

Sotheby’s Christmas Wine Sale features magnificent Champagne and other vinous delights

IN TRUE festive spirit, Sotheby’s Wine Department pre-Christmas sale in London on December 6, 2000 will include a celebratory selection of top Champagnes, many of which were winners in a major tasting of 150 of the 20th century’s greatest champagnes.

A number of the Champagnes, including a single magnum of the Billecart-Salmon Brut 1959, which was the unanimous winner of the tasting, will be included in the sale.

Serena Sutcliffe MW, Head of Sotheby’s International Wine Department, was one of the judges at the three-day event held in Stockholm last year, which she described as a “task of pure joy”. The tasting was organised by Richard Juhlin and Jan Netterberg. Serena Sutcliffe said: “Richard Juhlin’s love for the noble bubble led him to assemble this extraordinary collection of Champagnes which came mostly directly from the Champagne houses”.

The Billecart-Salmon, Cuvée Nicolas-François 1959, the winner of the event, was given an outstanding 101 marks from Serena. She described it as “very pale with a greenish tinge. The ultimate ‘divine hedgerows’ bouquet – like coming home. This is it! Creamy delicacy and yet huge flavour (this must be the Holy Grail for which all Champagne blenders search). Mega dimension. Great depth and yet finesse. Perfect composition. Remains fabulous in the glass.” Only a tiny amount of the historic 1959 vintage champagne is left in Billecart-Salmon’s cellars and they have released only one magnum to be included in sale. The auction, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to acquire a magnum of this awe-inspiring Champagne. The magnum is estimated to fetch £1,000/2,000.

The proceeds of the sale of this magnum and several other champagnes in the auction will be for the benefit of the charity Médecins sans Frontières. Another example of one of the winning Champagnes are three magnums of Perrier-Jouët, Belle Epoque 1985, which have an estimate of £300/360. In the tasting in Stockholm it was described by Serena Sutcliffe as having a “very bready, boulangerie nose. Utterly tempting. Superb and stylish, so soft and full of flavour. Utterly divine taste. Ripe, full and bready. A dream”.

Dom Pérignon 1961 also shone through at the tasting and was awarded 100 points. With its “breed, fascination, typicité, allure and incredible bouquet” a magnum is estimated to fetch £400/500. A bottle of the Pol Roger 1921 is another great gem in the sale with “a miracle of toasty flavour” (est: £200/300), as is Laurent Perrier’s Millésime Rare 1976 which Serena Sutcliffe found to be “absolutely wondrous – a classy, elegant Champagne of finesse and seductive fruit” (est: £90/110 per magnum).

Among the other star lots in the sale is a case of Château Margaux 1945 from a Belgian family cellar, which has an estimate of £8,000/11,000. Twenty private cellars are included in this 1,717-lot sale, and the range is such that there should be something for everyone. Sauternes is particularly well represented in anticipation of serious festive dining.

For Christmases yet to come, there is a strong range of 1995, 1996, and 1997 Claret.

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Press Office contact:

Amanda Stücklin

Tel: 020 7 293 5169 Fax: 020 7 293 5947

Email: amanda.stucklin@sothebys.com