THE VAULT

JUNE 2026

FOR LOVERS OF
FINE WINE

XIX



OCTAVIAN



WELCOME TO THE VAULT, AN OCTAVIAN PERIODICAL

In times of uncertainty and risk, it's only natural that we should seek out surety. With access to their own online portal, Octavian customers benefit from the assurance of visibility of their wines at any time, plus useful information, including suggested drinking windows and current market value.

The 'closed' trading environment of our Exchange facility allows customers to buy and sell wines to one another other, safe in the certainty of each bottle's storage history from the date it entered our cellarage. These provenance insights provide customers with the confidence to buy older vintages and add to their collections. Over £3m stock has changed hands since the Exchange started in 2021 and an increasing number of our trade customers are now using it too. If you haven't yet logged in, there are some great treasures to be found at every price point.

Pricing features prominently throughout this issue of The Vault: Charles Curtis MW details how after some market correction, the tide appears to be on the turn, with some positive trends and some of the highest prices attained in recent times by the auction houses. Guest contributor, Sara Danese – curator of In the Mood for Wine, a weekly publication exploring wine investment – considers what constitutes 'fair' pricing and the conundrum created when a highly rated back vintage can be purchased for the same price as a 'young wine requiring years of waiting.' And MW Sarah Abbot conveys the 'Case for En Primeur' and how rather than market value stealing focus, wine's true value lies surely in 'the day, the people, the moment.'

More of the good stuff – commentary from a series of prominent names within the wine world - can be found within our Journal at www.octavian.co.uk which we aim to develop over the year ahead. Contributors Sara Danese has recently been nominated for a 67 Pall Mall Global Wine Communicator Award and in 2024, Henry Jeffreys scooped the Fortnum & Mason Drink Book of the Year for his work on English wine.

Octavian's sponsorship of the Institute of Masters of Wine has enabled us to expand our network and develop these relationships. We were recently delighted to host both MWs and MW students to showcase the importance of good storage in the journey of fine wine. We hope to host more visits in the near future and shine a spotlight on the critical, though unromantic and often overlooked role storage plays in savouring mature fine wine.

We hope you enjoy this issue.



Vincent O'Brien
Octavian Managing Director



MARKET UPDATE

DESPITE CONSIDERABLE MARKET VOLATILITY, TENTATIVE SIGNS OF RECOVERY EXTEND FROM THE CORRECTION THAT BEGAN AT THE END OF 2022, SUGGESTS

CHARLES CURTIS MW

The fine wine market's road to recovery has been fraught with difficulty: one would have to go back to the global financial meltdown of 2008/2009 to find a comparable period of instability in value and volume. This instability is far from unique to the wine market, but it has felt different this time, leaving traders and collectors alike despairing about the future of the wine category.

The reason for the bleak outlook was that instability in the broader economy often drives investors towards tangible goods, but this did not occur in the period from 2023 to 2025. The only real winner was the price of gold – up 55% in 2025, clearing £3,200 per ounce in 2025, and flirting with £4,000 this year. In the wine category, prices across the market for all collectible wines declined more than 25% since the peak, according to the London Vintners' Exchange (Liv-Ex). Because tariffs on imported wines in the US have curtailed demand there, and Chinese buying has also slowed, the market for collectible wine throughout 2025 was a buyers' market.

Into this turbulent picture came the Bordeaux 2024 En Primeur campaign. The conditions of the poor 2024 vintage, combined with current economic uncertainty, made for a challenging campaign. Prices were heavily discounted, but quality was variable to say the least. En Primeur prices were down last year (off the 2022 peak), and quality was reasonably good. Even with further declines in price for the 2024 vintage, this proved a hard sell given the diverse quality of the vintage.

THE WORLD IS HOLDING ITS BREATH REGARDING PRICING AND QUALITY

Many wine regions, including Burgundy and Champagne, will also have short vintages and variable quality in the 2024 harvest. Although top Bordeaux and Burgundy estates will undoubtedly produce admirable wines, savvy buyers will need to be selective. The 2024 Burgundy campaign began in January of 2026 with markedly lower volumes, and thus without the handwringing attendant to the Bordeaux campaign. As we move into the 2025 Bordeaux campaign, the world is holding its breath regarding pricing and quality. We will see the market reaction unfurl over the next several months.

· A PRICE CORRECTION ·

A modest quality vintage En Primeur often drives demand for top-quality recent vintages in the secondary market. Because of economic headwinds, however, this was very slow to happen. The confluence of these varied forces means opportunities abound (still), but caution is of the essence. However, those who buy carefully could reap the same prodigious rewards as those committed collectors who stocked up during the 2008 global financial crisis, another period when the market was also at a nadir. The amount of the correction depends on the category and specific collectible, but since the Q3 2022 peak, prices have fallen by 20 - 40%. A bit of background will help us to understand the current market.

The overall wine market is generally in decline, a phenomenon due to several factors, including declining demand in the over-60 demographic from ageing Baby Boomers. Demand is also lagging among the 21- to 29-year-old demographic as they explore low- or no-alcohol and non-wine alternatives. These factors, coupled with widespread neo-prohibitionist trends in countries such as the US, UK, and France, mean that wine consumption has been declining for decades. The International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) reported last year that global consumption fell 2.6% to an estimated 221 million hectolitres (hl) in 2023 – one of the lowest levels since 1996.



Image courtesy of Acker Wines

THE MARKET FOR FINE AND RARE WINE

LEADING INDICATORS: AVERAGE AUCTION HAMMER PRICE FOR ICONIC WINES / 2026 Q1 UPDATE

VINTAGE	WINE	PRODUCER	2026 FY	2025 FY	Δ YTD
1996	Brut Vintage Clos du Mesnil	Champagne Krug	$2,473.00	$2,193.00	12.8%
1990	1er GC Saint-Emilion	Cheval Blanc	$990.00	$964.00	2.7%
1989	Pessac-Leognan	Haut Brion	$1,564.00	$1,578.00	-0.9%
1982	Pauillac	Lafite	$1,529.00	$1,458.00	4.9%
1986	Pauillac	Mouton	$684.00	$648.00	5.6%
2000	Pomerol	Petrus	$3,817.00	$3,488.00	9.4%
1990	Romanee Conti	DRC	$22,000.00	$18,954.00	16.1%
1999	La Tache	DRC	$7,070.00	$6,330.00	11.7%
1993	Musigny	Domaine Leroy	$18,000.00	$15,003.00	20.0%
2010	La Romanee	Liger Belair	$5,395.00	$4,947.00	9.1%
1990	Chambertin	Rousseau	$ 4,099.00	$ 3,604.00	13.7%
1996	Corton Charlemagne	Coche Dury	$ 6,209.00	$ 5,072.00	22.4%
2005	Montrachet	DRC	$ 8,440.00	$ 7,156.00	17.9%
1999	Cote Rotie La Mouline	Guigal	$ 583.00	$ 553.00	5.4%
1978	Hermitage La Chapelle	Jaboulet	$ 1,240.00	$ 1,078.00	15.0%
1990	Chateauneuf-du-Pape	Rayas	$ 2,218.00	$ 2,414.00	-8.1%
2007	IGT Toscana Masseto	Ornellaia	$ 727.00	$ 652.00	11.5%
1997	Napa Cabernet Blend	Screaming Eagle	$ 3,668.00	$ 3,571.00	2.7%
2001	South Australia Shiraz Blend Grange	Penfold's	$ 371.00	$ 347.00	6.9%
1963	Vintage Port Nacional	Quinta do Noval	$ 2,910.00	$ 2,322.00	25.3%

COINCIDENT INDICATORS: AVERAGE AUCTION HAMMER PRICE / 2026 1 UPDATE

VINTAGE	WINE	PRODUCER	2024 FY	2023 FY	Δ YTD
2002	Brut Vintage	Champagne Krug	$ 409.00	$ 389.00	5.1%
2008	Brut Vintage	Dom Perignon	$ 260.00	$ 233.00	11.6%
2000	Pauillac	Lynch Bages	$ 198.00	$ 195.00	1.5%
1996	Saint Julien	Leoville Las Cases	$ 241.00	$ 240.00	0.4%
2010	Gevrey Chambertin Clos Saint-Jacques VV	Fourrier	$ 861.00	$ 649.00	32.7%
2015	Vosne Romanee Aux Malconsorts	Sylvain Cathiard	$ 669.00	$ 675.00	-0.9%
2010	Chateauneuf-du-Pape Reserve des Celestins	Henri Bonneau	$ 455.00	$ 418.00	8.9%
2004	Barolo Monfortino	Giacomo Conterno	$ 1,153.00	$ 1,116.00	3.3%
2013	Napa Valley Cabernet Blend	Dominus	$ 441.00	$ 435.00	1.4%
1977	Vintage Port	Taylor's	$ 93.00	$ 95.00	-2.1%

Auction results from https://www.winemarketjournal.com

· CHANGING FORTUNES? ·

Despite this generally bearish news, it appears the tide has begun to turn. Christie's reported an exceptional sale in June of 2025 of the cellar of billionaire collector Bill Koch, which totalled $28.8m (just over £21m), more than 150% of the pre-sale estimate. The top lot in the sale was a methuselah of 1999 Romanée-Conti, which sold for $275,000 (£203,000) against an estimate of $100,000 - $150,000 (£75,000 - £110,000); this also represents an advance over the last recorded sale of $200,000 (£148,000) by competitor Sotheby's in 2023.

TARIFFS IMPOSED BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WERE HINDERING THE FREE FLOW OF COLLECTIBLE WINE

Also, at the end of June, Chicago-based HDH reported a 99.9% sell-through rate and $42m (£31m) in sales through the first half of the year, an increase of 38% over the same period in 2024. They trumpeted an exceptional result in their June sale, with a 1999 La Tâche Methuselah that sold for $179,250 (£133,000). This world-record price is indeed an interesting precedent, although the average price of '99 La Tâche in standard bottles stands at $7,461 (£5,500) for the year, compared to $9,198 (£6,800) per bottle in 2022, a decline of 18.89%.

· FALL 2025 ·

In the normally quiet month of August, HDH conducted a live sale that generated $7.9m (£5.8m), with 42% of the results exceeding the high estimate. September began after the bank holiday with a sale by Acker, Merrall on 12 September. According to John Kapon, the sale totalled 'nearly $8 million...20% above the pre-sale estimates.' His top lot was a 1990 DRC Assortment, which sold for $93,750 (£70,000). This result is considerably ahead of the average price over the past three years, yet still lags behind the price he achieved during the pandemic of $115,055 ($85,000).

FALLING OFF A CLIFF

BETWEEN 2009 AND 2025, EN PRIMEUR SALES DROPPED BY A WHOPPING 98%. COLLECTORS KNOW THEY CAN BUY THE SAME WINES FOR LESS ON THE SECONDARY MARKET.

SARA DANESE EXPLAINS WHY.

It is not easy to determine the 'fair' price of things. Perhaps because the word itself carries a sense of moral righteousness, as though there were some sacred duty to do the right thing and, for heavens' sake, sell something at a reasonable price. The wine world loves this kind of language. Alas, not everything is 'fair'; certainly not markets. Take the coffee I am drinking as I write this. I willingly paid £5.30. Really? Yet here it is, in my hands.

In Bordeaux, as in many regions producing the world's best wines, the question of 'fairness' has become particularly difficult to answer. Wine today is now both a consumer good and a luxury asset. It is food, but also something to collect, store, trade and, let's face it, signal status.

For most things we throw down our throats, pricing is still anchored to production: land, labour, raw materials and distribution. Margins vary, but the link between cost and price remains broadly intact. Even my £5.30 mochaccino, reckless as it is for a daily habit, ultimately reflects the cost of coffee, milk, wages and rent in whichever part of London it happens to be sold.

Wine used to be priced like this. It was an agricultural product, which meant production costs plus a reasonable margin for the producer. As Simon Farr, one of the most successful figures in the wine trade, and a leading authority on Bordeaux En Primeur, explained, "before the early eighties, and the modern era of En Primeur and the influence of Robert Parker, release prices bore some relation to a combination of cost of production plus some adjustment for prestige."

WINE NO LONGER WANTS TO BE SEEN SOLELY AS A CONSUMER GOOD



But over the past four decades, Bordeaux, in particular, has steadily moved away from that model. Wine no longer wants to be seen solely as a consumer good. The high-end stuff is now considered 'luxury' and, as such, pricing has become increasingly detached from production costs and instead driven by perception – and by what neighbouring châteaux are doing.

What, then, in a perfect world, would be the 'fair' release price of Lafite? £20? £50? £200? At what point does the price of a bottle of wine stop being 'fair'?

It is at this point that, if you are reading this, you probably either love Château Lafite Rothschild or are dying to try it, which means we probably cannot be entirely objective. So perhaps, to illustrate the point, it is easier to use Pokémon cards as an example.

In February, a Pokémon card sold for £12m. Why, you may ask. Surely the people obsessed with Pokémon cards are too young to have that kind of money, and the people with that kind of money should have moved on to, I don't know, Château Lafite Rothschild? Yet, clearly, we live in a world where these two groups overlap.

But one could also speculate that, one day – perhaps not even in the too distant future – the hedge fund bros/ Pokémon cards aficionados Venn diagram may no longer exist. And then what happens to the person who spent £12m on a *Pikachu Illustrator* PSA 10 card?

THE MARKET WILL DETERMINE THE 'FAIR' PRICE, ONE THAT HINGES ON WHAT SOMEBODY IS WILLING TO PAY

Basic economics tells us that a Pokémon card (supply) is only worth what somebody else is willing to pay for it (demand). If tomorrow nobody wants it, or a hitherto undiscovered hoard of *Pikachu* cards has been found, I could kid myself that it's still worth £12m, but the market may only be willing to pay a fiver. The market will determine the 'fair' price, one that hinges on what somebody is willing to pay. Take fur coats for example. I recently inherited two. What am I to do with them?

The same is true with En Primeur and so to arrive at some reasonable measure of 'fair value' for this year's Bordeaux En Primeur campaign, I took the current market prices of two great vintages – 2016 and 2019 –

EN PRIMEUR BUYERS ARE GOING IN BLIND, EFFECTIVELY FINANCING THE CHÂTEAU YEARS IN ADVANCE AND TAKING ON THE RISK



and adjusted them to account for the fact that those wines have already aged for six to nine years longer than the newly released 2025s and these years have incurred storage costs, market risk and uncertainty. We also have far more information about its quality and evolution.

By contrast, En Primeur buyers are going in blind, effectively financing the château years in advance and taking on the risk. Hence, that risk should be rewarded with a meaningful discount.

COMPARE WHAT BUYERS CAN ALREADY PURCHASE TODAY WITH WHAT THE 2025 SHOULD COST TO COMPETE ON VALUE, THE GAP BECOMES UNCOMFORTABLY SMALL

But what is 'meaningful'? When you compare what buyers can already purchase today with what the 2025s should cost to compete on value, the gap becomes uncomfortably small. In fact, once you adjust for ageing and carrying costs, the implied 'fair' release price for a new vintage is barely above the raw cost of bottling and distribution – in reality, just a few pounds per bottle.

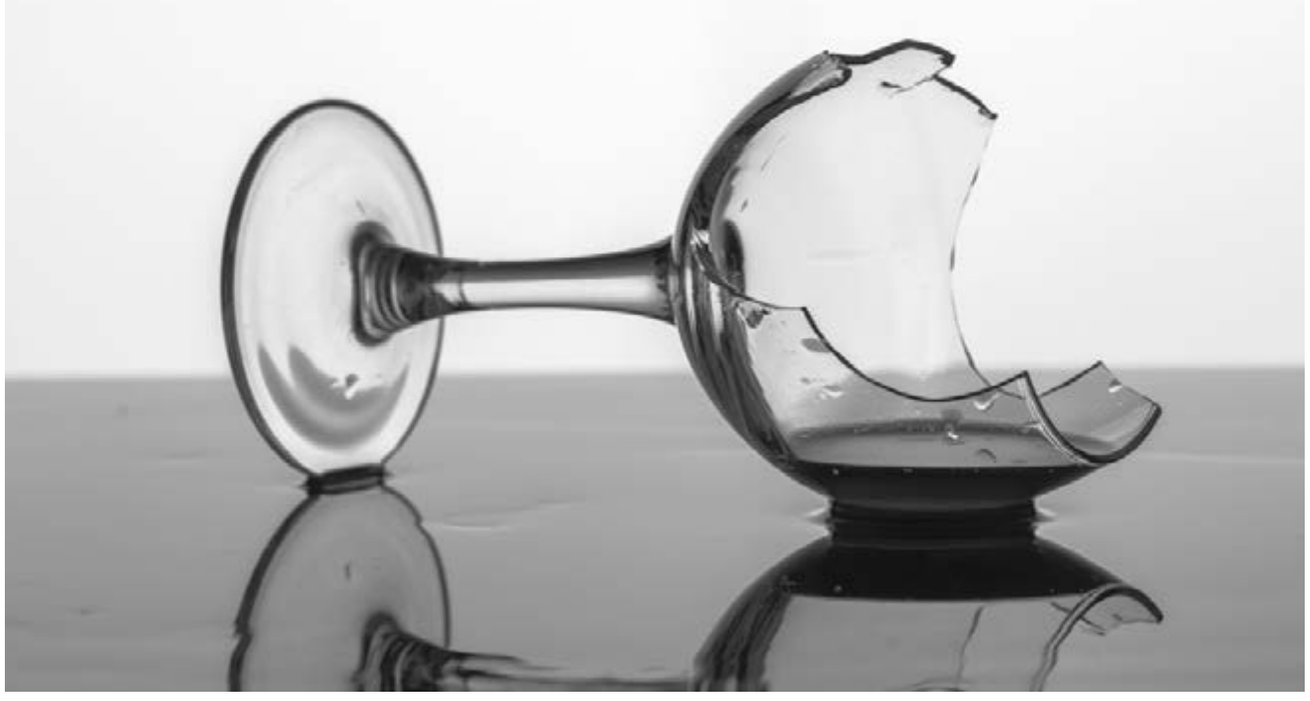
If this sounds absurd, it is because, from the producer's perspective, it probably is. Many châteaux have significantly higher operating costs and expectations around pricing. But if a buyer can purchase a physically available, highly rated back vintage at the same price – or even cheaper – than a young wine requiring years of waiting, why would they choose the En Primeur release?

THAT IS A STRUCTURAL ISSUE FOR THE INDUSTRY TO CONFRONT, NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BUYER TO SUBSIDISE

You see, the markets only care about what comparable alternatives are available. If the trade and the châteaux cannot make money at those levels – which, in some cases, I doubt they can – that is a structural issue for the industry to confront, not the responsibility of the buyer to subsidise. And that is precisely the problem facing En Primeur.

The system is struggling, not because younger consumers suddenly stopped caring about wine, or because the wines themselves are poor. It's simply because there isn't enough discount to make them interesting.

Sara Danese worked as an investment analyst at Russell Investments and AXA Investment Managers, and later built a wine trading business focused on China, powered by social media. She now curates In the Mood for Wine, a weekly publication for modern collectors exploring wine investment.



THE CASE FOR EN PRIMEUR

SARAH ABBOTT MW BELIEVES IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT THE BOTTOM LINE



Why do we age wine? The incorrigible cycles of market boom and bust are bruising, and made more so by the sloppy practices and slick offers of some bad actors. If you bought En Primeur in the last few years, the spreadsheet is unkind. If you are paying to store wine that is worth less than what you paid for it, the invoice is unkinder.

And yet we do. At Octavian we know you do, because so many of you have stored with us for decades. We are in old company: Pliny prized his Old Falernian, and Falstaff his Good Sherry Sack. The fine wine 'asset class' is predicated on our visceral response to something beautiful. Like other investments of passion, wine's aesthetics, craft and heritage create the demand that fuels the value. But wine has a unique power in its experiential quality, and a unique vulnerability in that to enjoy it, we must destroy it. There are no other asset classes powered by the joy of collective, ritualised drug-taking.

LIKE OTHER INVESTMENTS OF PASSION, WINE'S AESTHETICS, CRAFT AND HERITAGE CREATE THE DEMAND THAT FUELS THE VALUE

Wine is meaning and mimesis. The life of a wine tracks an adult life, and marks milestones. In my cellar there are a few bottles of Bollinger Grand Année 1996, from my wedding. The case of 2006 Léoville Barton bought for my son's birth year. A single Graham's 1970 I am keeping for my sixtieth in 2030. You have your own waymarkers. Opening the bottle is a little judgement day, irrevocable and destructive. As Vincent O'Brien, Octavian's MD, says: wine is an investment, until it isn't. What is being valued, here? Transcendence, I think, and something understood.

This is the covenant that En Primeur was meant to keep. A pact between maker and drinker, mediated by time. The storage conditions are a kind of 2nd terroir, essential for the wine to fulfil that last magical margin of potential beauty. They make it, you cellar it. Fine wine needs metabolomic space. Our role at Octavian is to give wine the cool, dark, unhurried years so that anthocyanins and procyanidins, flavanols and glycosides can react and evolve full dimensions of aroma, texture, intensity and harmony. The covenant isn't broken, but it is cracked, because the value of ageing is not accounted in the pricing on release.

THE STORAGE CONDITIONS ARE A KIND OF 2ND TERROIR, ESSENTIAL FOR THE WINE TO FULFIL THAT LAST MAGICAL MARGIN OF POTENTIAL BEAUTY

Which means there are two judgements being delivered on your cellar right now. The market's verdict is loud, public, and provisional. It moves with capital flows, the cost of money, and liquidity. It tells you what someone else would pay this week. The bottle's verdict is quiet, private, and final. It is delivered once, on the day you open it, in the company you open it with. That day is still ahead of you.

Octavian's role in this is unromantic and essential. We keep the conditions under which the covenant runs. Temperature, humidity, light, vibration, provenance, chain of custody; the slow work of holding a bottle in the state its maker intended, for as long as the



wine needs. We do all we can so that when the day of judgement arrives, the wine meets the moment, and the maker's vision is fulfilled.

The reason to persist is not that the market will recover, though it will. The reason to persist is that the market was never the point. The point was the bottle, the day, the people, the moment when the cork comes out and the wine answers for itself. You bought into that, and that has not changed. The wine is doing what wine does. The years are passing. The judgement is coming.

Sarah Abbott is a Master of Wine, Director of Swirl Wine Group and The Old Vine Conference, and consultant to Octavian.

THE REASON TO PERSIST IS THAT THE MARKET WAS NEVER THE POINT. THE POINT WAS THE BOTTLE, THE DAY, THE PEOPLE, THE MOMENT





MARKET UPDATE

CONTINUED

Zachys also had two interesting sales in September. The first was a multi-vendor sale that marked their first sale in the tax haven of Delaware, following the lead of Acker and HDH. This sale was 97% sold, and the aggregate hammer was 9% above the pre-sale low estimate. These results are strong, if not exceptional, and must be considered in light of estimates and reserves having been lowered during the correction. The second Zachys sale was extraordinary: wines from the estate of Jacqueline de Rothschild Piatigorsky, which included venerable Bordeaux that had been stored for her at Lafite-Rothschild (her grandfather's domaine) caught the attention of bidders worldwide; several lots sold for 10 times the high estimate. The top lot was a magnum of 1870 Lafite that sold for $387,500.00 (£286,000) with premium. According to Jeff Zacharia, the aggregate hammer of the sale as a whole was 233% above the pre-sale low estimate.

Charles Antin, Zachys Global Head of Auction comments, "It's a great time to be an auctioneer, and a great time for consignors. After some market correction, we're now seeing the highest prices we've seen in years."

The positive trends continued into the final quarter of 2025, albeit at a muted pace. After a very busy September, October was fairly calm, save for a modest sale by Acker in Delaware. Hart Davis Hart conducted two sales in early November, each of which exceeded the high estimate. Sotheby's sale for the Hospices de Beaune earned just over €18m, the third-highest total, a fairly modest result. In early December, Christie's sold the first tranche of the Jürgen Schwarz cellar for $4.2m (£3.1m), while Sotheby's opened the first of four sales of the wines of the estate of Belgian collector Willy Michiels. The Sotheby's sale continued with an installment in Hong Kong in March, and a two-day sale in London. Acker's year-end press release announced an auction total of $140m (£104m), $200m (£148m) including retail, which they position as 15% above last year's totals.

· 2026 ·

The auction calendar got off to a slow start in 2026. The first notable sale was the Acker Hong Kong sale at the end of January, which totalled HK$80 million (£7.5m). My own clients' sales at auction in February exceeded expectations. At an event held on 10 February for prospective bidders, the audience seemed to agree that there was relatively little property in the pipeline and that prices were trending up, in part because the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration were hindering the free flow of collectible wine.

The recent (March 2026) La Paulée sale by Acker generated more than $25m (£18.5m) in sales. The top lot provided a spectacular result, when a bottle of 1945 Romanée-Conti with pristine provenance sold for $812,500 (£600,000), eclipsing the previous result of $558,000 (£412,000) for the same bottle set before the pandemic. The March 2026 sale by HDH earned a more modest $8.9m (£6.7m), yet this result is also noteworthy, since 100% of the more than 2,000 sold, and the aggregate hammer price was 136% above the pre-sale estimate. Results such as these tend to indicate that the correction is at or coming to an end.



Image courtesy of Zachys

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