

Sotheby's buyer's premium rises by 50 per cent

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Sotheby's buyer's premium, the extra charge levied by auctioneers on those who buy wine in the saleroom, has risen from an already- rather- resented 10 per cent to 15 per cent in London, while in New York it has been raised from 15 to 17.5 per cent.

On 1 April Sotheby's (which has just announced expensive golden handcuffs for its key employees) increased its buyer's premium for goods other than wine even more rapaciously. Before 1 April, it had been 20 per cent of the hammer price up to £10,000, 15 per cent on the next £50,000 up to £60,000 and 10 per cent thereafter. On April 1, 2002 it changed to 19.5 per cent on the first £70,000 and 10 per cent thereafter.

So wine buyers are at least favoured above those who invest in fine art and furniture, but the whopping increase in wine buyer's premium also came into effect on 1 April without, one might say, much trumpeting of the fact.

Indeed Christie's, which followed suit with a similar buyer's premium structure for everything other than cars and wine, effective from today 15 April, did not appear even to know that Sotheby's had raised their wine buyer's premium from 10 to 15 per cent when I discussed the matter with them this morning. I asked what Christie's wine department's plans were for their wine buyer's premium and was told that they intended to keep it at 10 per cent for sales at their London headquarters in King Street (Christie's South Ken and many European salerooms are exempted from the new increases) and in the US it remains at 15 per cent up to \$100,000 and 10 per cent thereafter. Mind you, Christie's needs some competitive advantages over Sotheby's in its wine sales at the moment.