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Stormy Napa Auction Raises $7.3 Million

Weather doesn't dampen spirits as vintners celebrate raising $100 million in 31 years

Tim Fish
Posted: June 6, 2011

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Jason Tinacci

Garen Staglin (left) and other Napa vintners spray the crowd at Auction Napa Valley.

This year's Auction Napa Valley raised a cool (and soggy) $5.8 million at Saturday's live auction, the culmination of four days of events that raised $7.3 million. Not bad, considering the unseasonable torrent of rain and wind that hit Meadowood Resort in St. Helena during Saturday's bidding. Rather than dwell on the weather or fret that this year's take was a million shy of the 2010 total, vintners celebrated a milestone—passing the $100 million mark during the event's 31-year history of raising money for local healthcare, youth services and affordable housing programs.

2011 Auction Napa Valley:

Monday, June 6, 2011
Bring Your Own Fun

The atmosphere Saturday was more laid back and casual than usual, as the 800 guests seemed to accept the unusual weather and make jest of it. Stylish skirts were matched with wading boots and slickers replaced sport coats. "This is the one year where you really feel like drinking Cabernet," said vintner Tor Kenward, alluding to previous auctions when temperatures regularly reached the high 90s.

The top money-raising lot was from the Staglin and Chiarello families, which raised a total of $600,000 ($300,000 from two separate bidders) for a three-day Napa excursion for six that includes cooking lessons with chef Michael Chiarello and seven large-format bottles of wine.

John Thompson of Woodside, Calif., was one of the winning bidders. "We love what the auction stands for and we love the Staglins, and having Michael involved is a bonus," said Thompson, chairman of the board for software company Symantec.

The day's top single-bid was $180,000 for the Opus One lot, purchased by Aria Mehrabi of Florida. It included an eight-day tour of China for six, including dinner inside the Forbidden City, airfare, lodging, meals and an eight-magnum collection of wine.

Three other lots also doubled their money by offering a duplicate of the winning bid to a second bidder. Chappellet Vineyard raised a total of $400,000 for a seven-day California excursion and three 3-liter bottles of Pritchard Hill Estate 2009. Raymond Vineyard took in $390,000 for a seven-night French excursion and a collection of four 3-liter bottles of Raymond Cabernet Sauvignon. Bond raised $240,000 for a dinner party at the winery, a wine-and-food pairing class and five 3-liter bottles of 2007 wines.

Dan Cristall, an investment banker from Calgary, and his wife, Lindsay, won the final lot of the night, paying $140,000 for an extravagant package put together by the Napa Valley Vintners. It included a nine-day food and wine holiday to Maui and Deer Valley, Utah, with transportation by private jet, custom-made clothing, jewelry and timepieces and a 20-bottle collection of magnums from various Napa wineries.

"The more wine I drink, the more likely I'm going to bid," said Cristall, laughing. "And it looks like something we'd love to do."

Children with brightly colored balloons took the stage at one point for the annual "Fund a Need" lot. Guests

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raised their paddles, donating in increments from $10,000 to $100,000, raising a total of $1.1 million for children's health programs.

The four days of events kicked off officially on May 29, when bidding was opened for an online auction. Live events got underway Thursday night as bidders attended exclusive dinners at dozens of Napa wineries, including Hall, Pride Mountain and Melka.

Friday's Barrel Auction and Marketplace at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena drew a crowd of nearly 2,000 and raised $1.2 million. The top barrel lot was for 10 cases of Shafer Hillside Select Cabernet 2009 that sold for $59,500. Guests meandered the castlelike stone Greystone cellars, tasting barrel samples from wineries such as Round Pond, Saintsbury and Blackbird. They noshed on treats from dozens of local restaurants, including Morimoto Napa, Model Bakery and Dim Sum Charlie's.

While the rain held off during the barrel auction, a deluge arrived early Saturday morning, but vintners were prepared with a small city of white tents covering the Meadowood lawn. Chef Cindy Pawlcyn of Mustards Grill had planned an old-fashioned outdoor picnic but remained undaunted, serving hearty barbecued ribs, spicy grilled quail and duck burger sliders under the canvas. After the live auction, Chiarello prepared an old-fashioned Italian menu of ricotta gnocchi and Zinfandel rigatoni with roasted lamb and sea bass.

Afterward, the dance floor may have been a little muddy from the surrounding drenched sod but no one seemed to mind. Ovid winemaker Janet Pagano said the damp weather added to the day's camaraderie: "This will be the auction that everyone remembers."

Top Six Live-Auction Lots

1. Staglin Family and Chiarello Family: $600,000 A three-day Napa excursion for six, including lodging, meals, cooking lessons with celebrity chef Michael Chiarello and seven large-format bottles. Winning bid was $300,000, paid by two separate bidders.

2. Chappellet Vineyard: $400,000 A seven-day California excursion for six, including lodging, meals and a collection of three 3-liter bottles of Pritchard Hill Estate 2009. Winning bid was $200,000, paid by two separate bidders.

3. Raymond Vineyard: $390,000 A seven-night French excursion with stops in Paris, Baccarat and Beaune, including airfare and transportation, lodging, meals and a collection of four 3-liter bottles of Raymond Cabernet Sauvignon. Winning bid was $195,000, paid by two separate bidders.

4. Bond: $240,000 Dinner for eight at the winery, wine-and-food pairing class and a collection of five 3-liter bottles of 2007 wines. Winning bid was $120,000, paid by two separate bidders.

5. Opus One: $180,000 An eight-day tour of China for six, including dinner inside the Forbidden City, airfare, lodging, meals and an eight-magnum collection of wine.

6. Rombauer Vineyards: $160,000 A seven-day California excursion for four, including airfare from Napa to Lake Tahoe and Yosemite, lodging, meals, four tickets to the 2012 auction and 26 cases of wine.

Member comments 1 comment(s)

Garen Staglin — Rutherford, CA — **June 6, 2011 7:42pm ET**

As always, its the generosity of many including the volunteers that makes this annual event so special. The Rombauer family knocked themselves out and it showed in the results and the details. Thank you to all who participated.!

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