



Tasting Room

Highlights from Auction Napa Valley, the best of the best

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At Auction Napa Valley bidders had an appetite for goodwill, raising a record-breaking \$16.9 million. Pocket change for the well-heeled?

To capture the color of the auction weekend – the fashion, the humor, the bidding mentality – here’s this year’s list of “bests,” from best dressed, to best lot, to best dish. For those who went to the auction events and for the curious who didn’t, here are some snapshots.

Best lot: The joint venture between the Antinori Family Wine Estate and Opus One features a whirlwind trip through Europe, with stops in Paris, Bordeaux, Florence and Chianti before a stay in San Francisco and Napa Valley. This lot at the live auction had passport appeal for the insatiable traveler.

See photos [here](#) and read about the event’s record-breaking numbers [here](#)

Best dressed: At the Napa Valley Barrel Auction, Jean-Charles Boisset was wearing a suit with a polka dot Dolce Gabbana silk jacket, a white shirt made from Egyptian cotton, red silk and nylon socks and Dior black shoes. Mind you, there we’re plenty of well-heeled contenders but Boisset’s red socks put him over the top.

Best rationale: Gary Rieschel of Qiming Ventures in Shanghai bought the highest-priced, individual lot at the live auction, but he shrugged off the \$800,000 price tag. “You don’t go to the Napa auction to save money,” he joked. “You want to do something to honor the valley.” Rieschel said he also wanted to buy a memory. The lot featuring a vertical of 20 vintages of Harlan Estate cabernet piqued his interest because he had done a similar tasting at Shafer Vineyards in the past.

Best sentiment: Nashville singer-songwriter Billy Dean wrote an original song — “Walk with Me” — and he sang it at the live auction, inspiring a wellspring of bids totaling \$3.7 million for children’s mental and physical health and education.

Best one-liner: Margot Armbruster said she and her husband Mark call themselves a “bi-state couple” because they have a house in Los Angeles and a house in Calistoga.

Best one-upmanship: Auction Napa Valley has regained its title as the front runner in wine charity auctions. Napa’s live auction take of 14.3 million trumped Naples Winter Wine Festival, which raised \$8.5 million in January. The Naples, Fla., auction had eclipsed the Napa Valley event as the nation’s top wine-related fundraiser in recent years, raising about \$12 million in 2011 and 2012.

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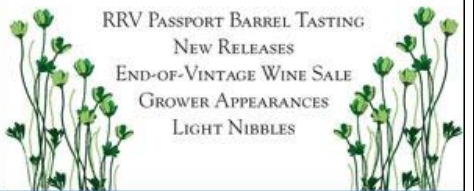
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Best dish: This was truly a tough call. At the live auction there were so many high caloric contenders, including polenta with forest mushrooms, Colorado lamb sliders, and seared lamb with spiced tomatoes. But the best, the most shamefully rich was the butter soup with shellfish, caviar and honey. Butter soup? Come on. When's the last time you had butter soup? Ummmm ... never.

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