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Auction Napa Valley 2013: Top Chefs, Vintners and \$16 Million For Charity

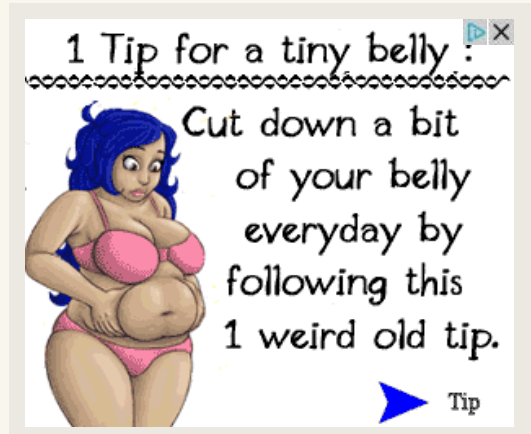


Chicago's Stephanie Izard

By Carolyn Alburger

The 33rd annual Auction Napa Valley, a four-day mecca for wine country insiders and international high-rolling oenophiles, peaked on Saturday with a record-breaking day at **Meadowood Napa Valley**. Not only did the thermometer push a scorching 93 degrees, but the cumulative bidding exceeded \$16 million dollars for Napa Valley charities, the highest amount on record, and more than double what was raised last year. Media wasn't permitted to photograph the actual live auction inside the tent, but we can report that there was a sea of predominantly 40-something bidders inside sporting tanned skin, neon pastels and sparkly white teeth to match all the diamonds on their fingers.

The top lot of the day, Dana Estates' "Discover the Soul of South Korea" was the only one that surpassed \$1 million (It went to two different bidders for over half a million each.) A vertical tasting of Harlan Estate cabernet sauvignon sold for \$800,000.



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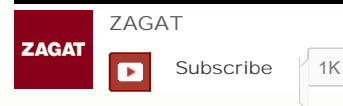
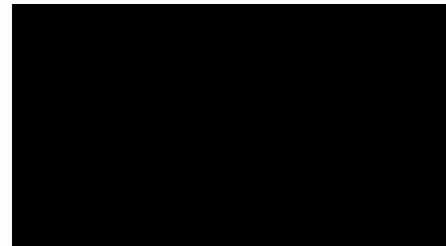
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Before the live auction kicked off, ticket-holders sampled bites from nine stalls run by past *Top Chef* winners. Richard Blais doled out mini-pimento cheese sandwiches and denied any rumors that he'll be opening a San Francisco restaurant. He did confirm that he's in the process of moving to Del Mar, San Diego, where he'll be opening a restaurant. He plans to split time between California and Atlanta, where most of his business is headquartered. Blais, however, hasn't ruled out Northern California all together, "My heart will always be in San Francisco," he said.

Meanwhile, many agreed that the best bite of the day was from Ilan Hall: a heady slab of ox tongue on thick crostini with romesco and green garlic. Recent *Top Chef* winner (and Zagat 30 Under 30) Kristen Kish handled the heat with poise. "It's way stickier in Boston," she said, while serving shrimp, oyster, crab and caviar in "butter soup." Stephanie Izard also doled out a shrimp bite, saying that she's finally entertaining the idea of another TV show, now that her second restaurant, [Little Goat](#), is open. "Before it was just bad timing," she said. "Now we're talking to our producer again." Other notable snippets: 1) Harold Dieterle commenting on the French brasserie push happening in New York right now, and 2) Ben Fileccia, GM of [Sbraga](#) in Philadelphia, didn't deny that he and chef Kevin Sbraga are working on another restaurant: "Wait for the press release," he said, smiling.

Other highlights of the weekend happened at Friday's Barrel Auction, when 40-something Napa Valley chefs and hundreds of wine purveyors gathered under several tents on the lawn at Raymond Winery. "The" Mike Grgich of [Grgich Hills Estate](#), who hasn't attended the last two Auction Napa Valley festivities, came out this year with a constant smile in celebration of his 90th birthday. The other winning social butterflies of the day were Jean Charles Boisset, of JCB Wines, ever-ready with a charming remark, a wink and a glass of white, and Margrit Mondavi of Mondavi Wines, now in her 87th year, socializing like a pro. Check out more of the action: chef, vintner and otherwise, in the slide show above.