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Peek Inside The World's Grandest Wine Event: Auction Napa Valley

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I have to hand it to the California wine community—they raise money doing what they know how to do best: throw a party. Last weekend, Napa Valley Vintners sponsored me and a handful of lucky journalists to witness the 36th year of Auction Napa Valley, where vineyard owners, their friends, and well heeled enthusiasts descended upon Napa for a 4-day kick-down that culminated in a 6-figure bidding frenzy for exotic trips, fancy dinners, and of course, a river of wine. And when the dust settled and the hangovers began, over \$14 million was injected back into the Napa community—money earmarked to provide top-notch education and healthcare for the entire Valley's community.

"Through ANV funding, we are able to provide support each year for more than 100,000 clients of local nonprofits in the areas of community health and children's education," says Emma Swain, chair of the Napa Valley Vintners board of directors and CEO of St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery. "One of the things we're most proud of is our Napa Valley Early Learning Initiative, which helps ensure that every child in Napa County will enter kindergarten ready to learn."

And here's how they do it. On Thursday and Friday evenings the wineries host vintner dinners where 30-40 guests feast on gourmet meals served by esteemed chefs, and expertly curated wine pairings.

My first meal took place at Raymond Vineyards, owned by one of Burgundy's biggest wine producers, Jean Charles Boisset, who's notorious for over-the-top decadence that's seasoned with a bit of kink. The reception happened in the "Red Room" which is just what it sounds like— a lush, velvety, and extremely *red* room decked out with Playboy books and suggestive sculptures that made some wonder aloud, "What *other* kind of parties do they have in here"? Dinner, prepared by Raymond's house Chef Michel Cornu, was served in a working fermenting room decorated with lingerie clad mannequins hanging from trapezes while guests were spoiled with rich foie gras, escargot, and steak. (I had the pescatarian menu.)