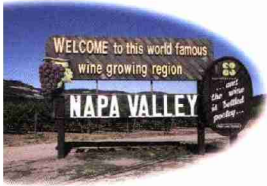


NapaInsider



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Napa's New York Stock Exchange

By Christina Julian

To say traveling with nine-month old twins is taxing would be the grossest understatement of my life (and theirs, too). I'm still recovering from our first trip as a family to the East Coast. I learned many lessons as my babies boo-hoed their way across the country. For starters, no matter how vigilantly you encourage babies to suck something on take-off and landing, and regardless of how many goofy faces you make, they will cry. During the flying home hysteria, as I resigned myself to sucking down subpar vino, I had some revelations of the Wine Country varietal. For all of the guts and glory that the New York Stock Exchange is infamous for, we have our own rendition, right here—Auction Napa Valley.

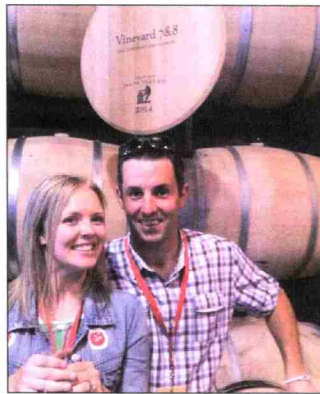
This June, I attended my first-ever Barrel Auction, where I trolled from aisle to aisle in search of the perfect swig. Minions clad in "App Me" T-shirts peppered the lawn at Charles Krug Winery, and encouraged passersby to download the new app that let attendees bid on the go. Apparently, the tease worked, as this year's auction scored \$18.7 million for community health care and children's education.

Sneak peeks at Saturday's live auction lots tempted at every turn. The Amuse Bouche lot drew me in with mile-high Miami Heat sneakers and a Tony Curtis painting. The gargantuan shoes were far more fascinating than they should've been, which I'll attribute to being intoxicated on Woodhouse chocolates, which flowed as freely as the wine. Running on a chocolate high, I nearly knocked over a leggy blond decked out in royal garb, who seemed overdressed for the occasion. Turns out she was eye candy for the Charles Krug Royal Legacies lot, which included a trip to London to view the Crown Jewels. Each display aimed to outdo the next. Raymond Vineyards ultimately did just that, taking top bid, at \$840,000, for its romp to the Oscars. To ensure the crowd didn't take themselves too seriously, there was even a life-size game of Operation at play. I'm not sure why, but boy, was it fun.

Melt-in-your-mouth goodness abounded. From the sauced and goey ribs from Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen and Don Giovanni's meatball on a stick, to Brix's prosciutto, burrata and truffle on toast—which was so good, it almost made me cry. I even slurped down Pointy Snout caviar from the crook between my index finger and thumb. I must've looked aghast, as Domaine Chandon's Chef Perry Hoffman coached me to indulge with, "Don't be afraid." With that

nudge, I sucked and slurped with all the pomp and swagger of a Wall Street suit.

It's impossible to list all the standouts, but here's a swipe, according to nobody's palate but my own: At the outdoor marketplace, the unfiltered 2011 Newton Chardonnay, crisp and clean. The 2012 Darioush Viognier was sheer stone fruit bliss. In the barrel room, there was the Kongsgaard Cabernet Sauvignon, dark chocolate cherry, deep and delicious. The 2012 Jones and Vineyard 7 & 8 were equally bawdy. And just when I found myself giving into the pleasure and power that only superb wine can conjure, a shotgun burst of confetti filled the barrel room, signaling an end to my day on Napa Valley's Street.



Vineyard 7 & 8 was pouring an outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon.

All the excess and money aside, there's a major difference between our event and the Manhattan exchange. While Wall Street is all about gluttony for the good of numero uno, our foray has nobler roots. Yes, there's a lot of money in Napa Valley and, as I often rant, it takes a lot of money to live here. But when it comes to raising grapes and wallets for the community, we can't be rivaled. More than 1,000 vintners, chef teams, volunteers and donors stepped up to make the auction happen. With more than 2,000 attendees at the Barrel Auction and 900 at the main event at

Meadowood, we proved that not even inflated ticket prices will stop folks from swilling for the greater good. Even the Fund-A-Need lots that offered no wine, trips or glitz, just the satisfaction that comes from donating, raked in \$3.8 million.

My family back East still doesn't get how wine can be considered a legitimate business. Health care and banking, they get. "It's the sticks," my dad often gripes about my new hometown, from the comfort of his Right Coast abode. I consider explaining how wine is our industry, and a lucrative one at that, but land on one of my Wall Street bud's clichéd lines instead: "The numbers don't lie."

A total of \$18.7 million was raised at Auction Napa Valley this year. Not bad for a small town soiree.

Christina Julian worked in technology and publishing before, during and after the dot-com bubble burst. She eventually traded in city life for country and unearthed a new philosophy—life is complicated, wine and food shouldn't be. You can reach her at cjulian@northbaybiz.com and read more at christinajulian.com.

