

Bring Your Own Fun

Wine Spectator's magnum parties in Napa and Sonoma mark the beginning of auction v

BY MARYANN WOROBIEC

Usually California is warm and dry as June dawns, but unusually cold, soggy weather couldn't discourage the vintners and wine industry insiders attending *Wine Spectator's* annual Bring Your Own Magnum parties, held on the evenings of May 31 and June 1 in Sonoma and Napa, respectively. These annual events usher in Auction Napa Valley festivities.

Though it rained off and on all day Tuesday, the skies cleared for the first party that evening at Hotel Healdsburg and the adjacent Dry Creek Kitchen in downtown Healdsburg. Hundreds of guests attended, including a who's who of Sonoma vintners such as Ed Sbragia, Dan Kosta and Michael Browne, Williams Selyem winemaker Bob Cabral, Jamie Kutch, Merry Edwards, David Ramey, Mike Benziger, Mark Lyon of Sebastiani, Kim Star Wallace and Dave Wallace of Dry Creek, and Dave and Patty Rafanelli.

Dry Creek Kitchen chef Charlie Palmer and his staff prepared a tasty selection of charcuterie, seafood and roasted meats, with Palmer personally carving the honey-glazed pork, served with a whole-grain mustard jus. There were plenty of wines to sample with the food, particularly Pinot Noirs and Zinfandels. Single-vineyard bottlings of 2008 Kosta Browne wines got plenty of buzz, as did the Bevan Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Showket Vineyard 2008.

Siduri's Adam and Dianna Lee were excited to taste two bottles from two different producers, but from the same vineyard, 10 years apart: the De Loach Zinfandel Russian River Valley Pelletti Ranch 1995 and the Carlisle Zinfandel Russian River Valley Carlisle Vineyard 2005.

Captûre owners Tara and Ben Sharp brought some of their white wines to sample, including their debut 2008 Sauvignon Blanc. They were excited for their wine-making colleagues to try their wines. "It's the highest compliment you can get," Ben Sharp said.

Wednesday night's gathering at Tra Vigne in Napa was preceded by a day of unpredictable weather, ranging from sun to rain and hail. But by party time, the skies had cleared once again. The energetic crowd included Margrit Mondavi, Bill Harlan, Garen and Shari Staglin, Caymus' Chuck Wagner, Doug and John Shafer, Beth Novak Milliken of Spottswode, Delia Viader and Fred Schrader. Some traveling winemakers were also in attendance, including Pip Goodwin, of New Zealand's Palliser Estate, and O. Fournier owner José Manuel Ortega, from Argentina.

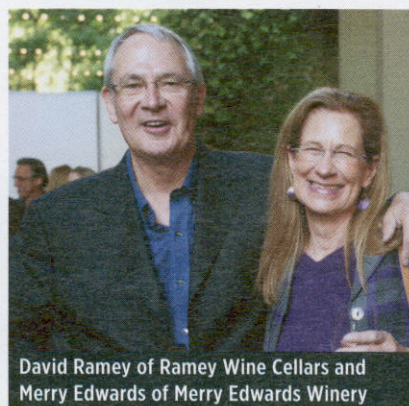
Wine poured freely from magnums provided by the guests, such as the Joseph Phelps Insignia Napa Valley 2006 and the Shafer Cabernet



Revelers enjoyed great food and wine at Napa's Tra Vigne.



Sbragia Family Vineyards owner Ed Sbragia (left) and William Foley of Foley Family Wines



David Ramey of Ramey Wine Cellars and Merry Edwards of Merry Edwards Winery



Sue Cross, Cross Cellars; Susan Kenward, TOR; Naoko Dalla Valle, Dalla Valle Vineyards; Mary Novak, Spottswode; Margaret Duckhorn, Duckhorn Vineyards



Chef Charlie Palmer at Dry Cree

Sauvignon Stags Leap District Hillside Select 2005, and included older wines like Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Reserve 1987, Turley Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley Grist Vineyard and Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Private Reserve. Guests enjoyed pastas, wood-fired pizzas, quail, steak and cal

As the sun set, some in attendance found warmth in music from a live band and an active dance floor, others puffed on cigars, while revelers continued the search for rare and sought-after bottles. Despite the chill in the air, people lined up at a gelato bar and ice, many sampling the basil-chocolate chip flavor.

Most vintners didn't seem interested in talking about the weather, instead enjoying one another's company and wines. "We don't care enough of this in our industry," said winemaker Daryl Groom. "It's important, so let's keep doing it every year!"

TOP & BOTTOM LEFT: KENT HANSON; MIDDLE & BOTTOM RIGHT: ANDY KATZ