

FOOD & DRINK

Reinventing Wine Auctions: Napa Valley Succeeds With \$1.5 Million Raised At 2022 New, More Inclusive Auction Format

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Jean Charles Boisset & Team Welcome Guests at 2022 Collective Napa Valley Barrel Auction ALEXANDER RUBIN FOR NVV

The famous Auction Napa Valley that has been running successfully for the last 40 years was reinvented for 2022 into a series of smaller events throughout the year. Renamed [Collective Napa Valley](#), the charitable focus remains the same, but participants now have the opportunity to attend a variety of year-round programs and events in-person and online, with proceeds going to a wider variety of charitable organizations.

The new format must be working because this year's barrel auction raised \$1.5 million, with the average price per case at \$1,873, 9% higher than 2019. It also broke records by achieving the highest ever average lot price of \$18,683.

Linda Reiff, President and CEO of [Napa Valley Vintners](#), explains the rationale behind the new auction format. "The Auction Napa Valley has been wildly successful for 40 years," she states, "but it had gotten out of control. We did raise \$200 million for charities over the years, but we had all of our eggs in one basket. When Covid hit in 2020, we had to cancel the in-person auction, and had some much-needed time to step back and re-imagine what a new auction could look like. The result was Collective Napa Valley."

In the past, it was difficult to obtain a ticket to the Auction Napa Valley. With celebrities jetting in from around the world to attend, tickets would often sell out quickly, and the prices could go as high as [\\$20,000](#) per couple to attend. Many people in the local community couldn't afford to attend.

How the New Collective Napa Valley Works

Instead of waiting all year to attend one auction, participants can now attend two auctions in Napa Valley: the barrel auction in June and the Vintage Celebration and Live Auction in November. In addition, there are other [events](#) throughout the year, including a complimentary Community Celebration with food and wine tastings, live music, and games for kids. “In the future,” states Reiff, “we have plans to do more events on the road, and to expand the virtual offerings so more people can participate. Collective Napa Valley will be even more open and inclusive.”

In order to attend the auctions, participants must become a [member](#) of Collective Napa Valley. There is a complimentary membership that includes the Community Celebration, online events, subscription to *NAPA* magazine, and other benefits. There are also \$1000 and \$5000 membership levels, that feature two complimentary tickets to the June Barrel Auction, as well as access to some of the special winery dinners and other events.



Guests at the 2022 Napa Valley Barrel Auction for Napa Collective ALEXANDER RUBIN FOR NVV

2022 Napa Valley Barrel Auction Filled with Music, Acrobats and Gourmet Food

This year’s Napa Valley Barrel Auction was held at Raymond Vineyards on June 3, 2022 from noon to 4pm, and included winery events and dinners before and after the auction, as well as the Community Celebration the following day. With the new Collective Napa Valley format, the auction, which was managed by Sotheby’s, sold out in advance. In addition to the opportunity to taste the 75 auction wine lots directly from the barrel and meet with winemakers, participants were treated to live music, acrobats, and gourmet food from more than 20 local restaurants.

“When we surveyed our guests,” states Reiff, “they told us that their favorite event from the past was the barrel auction.” The June auction this year benefits children’s mental health and the November auction will focus on environmental initiatives.

All of the auction wines were donated by local wineries, with 44 of the 75 lots featuring the 2021 vintage of Cabernet Sauvignon. Other varieties included Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Red Wine Blends and Malbec.

Bidding took place online and in-person, with large TV screens placed around the barrel room to display changing bids. The top 10 bidders for each lot receive a 12-bottle case, with the highest bid also receiving the wooden barrel plate signed by the winemaker.

“There is something here for every tier of wine collector,” reports Teresa Wall, Senior Director of Communications for Napa Valley Vintners. “With this new Collective format and two auctions, it is more accessible,... and accessibility is good.”

Napa Valley Winemakers Support New Auction Format for Collective Napa Valley

Napa Valley has always been known for the strong spirit of collaboration between winemakers and the local community, beginning with Robert Mondavi who encouraged people to work together as a whole to support Napa Valley, rather than compete with one another. This philosophy has been very beneficial, and most Napa Valley winemakers welcome the opportunity to give back, donate their wines and facilities, and support important charitable causes.

Linda Neal, Grower/Owner of Tierra Roja Winery, has been producing her own wine since 2003, and agrees with this thinking. “The Napa Valley Vintners have a philosophy of supporting one another and the local community. It is about the rising tide lifts all boats – we work together and help each other.”

Tom Eddy, Winemaker and CEO of Tom Eddy Wines, states. “I’m tickled to be here. It’s the right thing to do for so many reasons. It’s not only an opportunity to brag about the best wines in the world, but to support one another and give back.”

Associate Winemaker for Hall Vineyards, Pamela Solis, adds, “Hall is very much committed to Napa Valley Collective and the auctions. Our owners always want to be here. There is no way they can miss this!”

One of the biggest donors to the 2022 Napa Barrel Auction was Raymond Vineyards, owned by husband/wife team, Jean-Charles Boisset and Gina Gallo. By donating their spacious grounds and multiple rooms, along with special barrel offerings, they welcomed 1500 guests to the auction. Raymond is located in central Napa Valley, and is one of multiple wineries in the Boisset Collection.

“This event is at the heart of what Jean-Charles and Gina believe in,” reports Claire Tooley, MW, Vice President of Guest Experiences for the Boisset Collection. “They always want to be involved in community efforts and collaboration.”

“Every dollar raised will have a meaningful impact on the life of a Napa County child,” reports Jennifer Stewart, Executive Director of Napa Valley Education Foundation. “We are so thankful to be able to expand our efforts as a result of the funds raised.”

Don’t Forget the Wine Staff and Our Lady of the Perpetual Spittoons

Given that the U.S. is still suffering under a labor shortage, especially of skilled hospitality staff, the important job of emptying wine spit buckets and clearing used plates, utensils, and garbage cannot be overlooked. Without all of the many volunteers at the Napa Valley Barrel Auction, it could not have taken place.

Given this, each year, different Napa Valley Vintners employees take on the important role of overseeing wine spit buckets, and serve as both role models and trainers of auction volunteers for this role. The person in charge wears an apron emblazoned, ‘Our Lady (or Lord) of the Perpetual Spittoons.’

This year the apron was worn by Michelle Novi, Director of Industry Relations with Napa Valley Vintners. “My job today is to empty spit buckets, clean, and return them to the winetasting tables,” she says. “I also help train our volunteers to do this.”

Novi wears goggles, gloves, and a crown of corks, along with her apron. “All of us at Napa Valley Vintners have volunteered to take this role at least once,” she reports. “It is important!” Indeed, it is!



Michelle Novi as Our Lady of Perpetual Spittoons at 2022 Collective Napa Valley Barrel Auction THACH