

NEWS

Napa Valley Barrel Auction Raises \$1.5 Million in Collective Napa Valley Debut

The Napa Valley Vintners association has replaced the landmark Auction Napa Valley charity auction with a series of community-oriented events and fundraisers under the Collective Napa Valley umbrella



VGS Chateau Potelle owner Jean-Noel Fourmeaux (left) celebrates after a high bid for his winery's lot at the Napa Valley Barrel Auction. (Alexander Rubin Photography)

By Aaron Romano



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Napa Valley Vintners board chair Jack Bittner called the Napa Valley Barrel Auction weekend a “reunion.” And for good reason: It’s been 18 months since [NVV announced the discontinuation of the famed Auction Napa Valley](#), and more than three years since [Katy Perry headlined](#) the organization’s last major live auction event.

In its place is the newly dubbed [Collective Napa Valley](#), a year-round nonprofit charity program that will include events like the new Napa Valley Barrel Auction, which was the focal point of the weekend’s events, raising \$1.5 million for children’s mental health.

Vintner chairs Jean-Charles Boisset and Gina Gallo hosted the June 4 festivities at Raymond Vineyards. “It takes a daring vision to re-invent one of the wine world’s most beloved occasions,” Boisset told *Wine Spectator*. “The new format allows more consumers and community members to participate. It connects us with a broader audience, deepens our community connection, and inspires all of the wine world to continue to evolve to show how the wine world can enhance their regions.”



Vintner Doug Shafer (left) and winemaker Elias Fernandez poured samples of their 2019 Hillside Select at the 2022 Napa Valley Barrel Auction. (Alexander Rubin Photography)

The action and excitement was in the barrel room, where guests could sample the barrels and watch the bidding numbers shift on large television screens. But outside, there was a backyard soiree vibe, with live music and local restaurants serving food alongside wineries mainly pouring white wines as a counterpart to the mostly red barrel samples inside. There was a bit of whimsy, in typical Boisset fashion, with jugglers, contortionists and other performers scattered throughout.

Sotheby's managed the auction this year, allowing for both in-person and online bidding. Seventy-five wine lots were auctioned, including mostly 2021 vintage Cabernet Sauvignon. The top 10 bidders for each lot received a 12-bottle case, with the highest bid receiving a barrel head signed by the winemaker. In recent years, Auction Napa Valley totals, which typically exceeded \$10 million, were a combination of a live auction, and internet auction and a barrel auction. This year's event was solely about the barrels.

This year's top lot was [VGS Chateau Potelle's](#) 2021 Fourmeaux (\$12,500), a wine sourced from the Saffron Vineyard on Mount Veeder. Among the other top lots were [Alpha Omega's](#) King of the Mountain (\$7,200), a blend of five mountain vineyards on Diamond Mountain, Spring Mountain, Mount Veeder, Atlas Peak and Pritchard Hill; and Shafer's 2019 Hillside Select (\$6,300). Of the 75 lots up for auction, the average price per case was \$1,873, which is 9 percent higher than in 2019, with the highest-ever average lot price of \$18,683.

A Reimagined 'Weekend'

Auction Napa Valley was long one of the nation's premier charity wine auctions, and one of the most festive weekends of the year in Napa. So when it was announced in late 2020 that it would not return in its traditional form, many wondered what that would look like.

Rather than one big weekend, Collective Napa Valley will now host a series of events throughout the year. The summer barrel auction weekend also included pre-auction seminars and vineyard walks, post-auction dinners at Napa estates, and a community gathering the following day.

The new formats will encourage fundraising throughout the year, and each season of giving will go highlight a specific cause. For example, Collective Napa Valley's next fundraiser will take place in November, after harvest, and will include a vintage celebration, dinner and live auction component, with proceeds going to an environmental initiative.

“Our realization in the reimagining phase was that Napa is a beautiful place to be throughout the year,” said Bittner. “There are joys and pleasures at different times of the year, and sharing that at different times was compelling.”

“The best part about Collective is that it doesn’t end this weekend,” said Elizabeth Vianna, winemaker and general manager for [Chimney Rock](#). “This will be a year-round philanthropic endeavor, allowing residents, Napa wine lovers and collectors from all over the world to feel like they are a continuous part of our Napa community’s well-being. This is a whole new ball game in our valley’s rich history of philanthropy.”

Members of Collective Napa Valley, a tiered membership that offers varying levels of perks and access, will provide opportunities for access to special tastings, educational events, dinners and even virtual experiences.

Bittner said the inspiration for the membership element came from other institutions like museums. “We wanted to retain some elements but evolve and open our arms more to the entire community to an event that had become somewhat exclusive,” said Bittner. Collective memberships range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 annually. “It feels like we’re reconnecting and re-emerging from a period of collective challenge,” he said, referencing the pandemic and devastating wildfires. Bittner said the pandemic offered a perfect time to pause and think about how NVV might restructure to do more good in the community. “We think it’s wonderful that the greater community is involved. After all, the auction has supported the local community for many years,” said Boisset. “Now they can experience and see for themselves the many wineries and vintners who are invested in the community and making sure we all thrive.”

“I think the new format is much more reflective of the true spirit of Napa Valley,” said Vianna, adding, “Even the name ‘Collective’ is more reflective of the collaborative spirit which has been so foundational to the evolution of Napa Valley as a wine community.”