



Spirited bidding pushes past \$8 million

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Blockbuster lots and an upbeat mood among attendees came together last weekend to push Auction Napa Valley 2012 revenues over the \$8 million mark.

While no one wanted to say as much, many in our wine-centric county were a bit nervous about the skittish mood of Wall Street investors and unemployment numbers, and how the economy might impact the auction's bottom line this year.

There were nervous smiles as quite a few of the initial offerings at last Saturday afternoon's auction were snapped up at bargain prices.

But the paddle jockeying kicked into big-boy-bidder gear when auction regular Joe Schoendorf was the last man standing at \$115,000 for the 18 magnums of prized cabernet sauvignon offered by Shafer Vineyards. From that point on, as the Jule Styne lyric goes, everything was coming up roses.

David and Donna Reis, visiting from Westchester, N.Y., were determined to get the ultimate Kentucky Derby experience put on the block by Blackbird Vineyards. They got it for \$120,000.

The 32nd annual fundraiser's main event, the live auction, brought in more than \$6 million for the 40-plus lots — the plus occasioned by the auction duo (Ursula Hermacinski and Fritz Hatton) adding spur-of-the-moment items to the lineup, like New Orleans restaurateur Emeril Lagasse's chefs jacket. It brought in an unexpected \$9,000.

The last lot of the auction raised the most money. Fund-A-Need brought in more than \$1.2 million for children's health and education initiatives. With this lot, there was no prize to be captured other than the satisfaction of helping children, auction officials pointed out. This lot was established several years ago when the sponsoring trade organization, Napa Valley Vintners, pledged to provide health care for all uninsured children in the Napa Valley. Raising paddles for this lot last weekend were 82 bidders.

Auction regular Mary Miner of Oakville Ranch Vineyards was this year's top bidder. She picked up a half dozen lots, including group offerings from vintners from the Spring Mountain District and the Oakville Winegrowers. She also drove home a vintage Jaguar roadster.

In addition to Fund-A-Need, the Top 10 lots at this year's action included:

- Blakesley and Cyril Chappellet's 12-day safari in Africa for four that includes a two-night stay at Singita Sabi Sands in Kruger National Park — ranked by Travel + Leisure as no. 2 hotel in the world — along with tracking all manner of wild animals in South Africa and Zambia, plus a visit to Victoria Falls. The lot includes a dinner party at host Chappellet Vineyards for 10 and a pair of double magnums of cabernet from the 2001 and 2010 vintages, the latter including sketches of African game created by Lygia Chappellet. When Paul Jacobs, CEO of Qualcomm, and Michael Marks, owner of Gemstone Vineyard, attempted to outbid one another for the lot, the Chappellets agreed to double it. So both Jacobs and Marks paid \$360,000 for the trip, meaning the lot brought in \$720,000.
- Kendall-Jackson's Barbara Banke spent \$460,000 to take 27 guests to a private concert by Lady Antebellum scheduled at Napa Valley Reserve in October. As part of that lot, she will get to take a friend to London in July for a concert by the seven-time Grammy Award-winning trio at Hammersmith Apollo theater. The London visit includes accommodations, a tour of Abbey Road Studios; there's also dinner for all 28 Napa attendees prior to the concert. The lot also includes six double magnums of cabernet sauvignon from lot sponsors Chappellet Vineyard and Winery, Chateau Montelena, Gargiulo Vineyards, Raymond Vineyards, Shafer Vineyards and Silver Oak Cellars.

- Piero Antinori and Naoko Dalla Valle (Antica Napa Valley and Dalla Valle Vineyards) teamed up to offer wine explorations of both Napa Valley and Tuscany. The lot included meals, accommodations and winery tours for two couples at Dalle Valle, plus, in Italy, Gaja, Castiglione del Bosco and Antinori's Guado al Tasso, Masseto and Tignanello estates. Wines included in the lot are two magnums and six 750ml bottles each of Dalle Valle Vineyards Maya and Antica Napa Valley's Townsend Vineyard cabernet blend. A bidder who preferred to remain anonymous paid \$300,000 for the lot.
- Offered by Darioush Winery, Bordeaux Premiere Classe consisted of a two-night stay in Paris and four days in Bordeaux arranged by Darioush and Shahpar Khaledi. The lot included luxury accommodations, lunches, dinners and tours with the leading lights of the Bordeaux wine industry. The Darioush lot also includes four cases of Darius II Mount Veeder cabernet sauvignon. It was snapped up for \$280,000.
- Vintner Mary Miner was the highest bidder on the lot provided by Bure Family Wines, Morlet Family Vineyards and Vineyard 7 & 8, the centerpiece of which was a fully restored 1960 Jaguar XK 150-S roadster. In addition to getting a double magnum of cabernet from each of the wineries, the lot included accommodations for three couples at Mayacama Golf Club, golf on the Jack Nicklaus-designed, caddy-only course, tours, tastings and dinner at The French Laundry. Miner paid \$220,000 for this lot.
- Tulane MBA student Hayner Rude from Houston was the last man standing for an opportunity to be a guest racer — the sixth man — on one of the official race boats at the America's Cup preliminaries, taking place on San Francisco Bay this summer. Napa Valley Vintners, the auction's sponsoring trade organization, put together the lot for three couples that includes behind-the-scenes access to America's Cup goings-on, plus dinners, wine tours and accommodations in the valley. The twentysomething's parents, David and Roberta Rude, got to take home 45 magnums of wine from member vintners. The lot went for \$170,000.
- Another San Francisco Bay experience was offered by Harbison Estate Wines. A six-night adventure for six couples aboard a custom-built yacht, it also went for \$170,000. The lot also included a visit with vintners Joe and Patricia Harbison, dinner at their home and a pair of double magnums of cabernet.
- Napa vintner Stan Teaderman was high bidder at \$160,000 for the lot from Lokoya that featured VIP tickets to one of the world's premier racing experiences, the Monaco Grand Prix. It begins here with a day in the life of Formula 1 race car driver Stefan Johansson at the Sonoma raceway, along with being a member of the judging panel for the Robb Report's Car of the Year. Next May, following a business class flight to Monaco, Teaderman and a guest will join Johansson at the Grand Prix on the French Riviera for the race and VIP events. Also included is a helicopter tour of Lokoya's hilltop vineyards, followed by four days at the Four Seasons in Maui. Four double magnums of cabernet from Diamond Mountain, Howell Mountain, Mount Veeder and Spring Mountain are part of the lot.
- TV chef/New Orleans restaurateur Emeril Lagasse — who also prepared Saturday night's dinner for 800 guests — teamed up with Napa Valley Vintners to provide Laissez Le Bon Temps Roulez in New Orleans come November. The lot included four passes to the Lagasse Foundation's Carnival du Vin 2012, a three-day weekend of cuisine, wine and music, plus accommodations in The Big Easy. The winning bidder, who spent \$160,000, also took home 50 assorted magnums from member vintners.
- A single wine lot made it into the Top 10 this year. Oakville Winegrowers will present Mary Miner with 30 magnums of cabernet sauvignon and blends from the 2007, 2008 and 2009 harvests. The Napa Valley vintner paid \$150,000 for the lot.

Additional lots where wine was the focus included:

- The first vertical of the first seven years (2002-2008) of Colgin Cellars IX Estate syrah. Jim and Sheila Clary, of Scottsdale, Ariz., ponied up \$100,000 for this lot that also included for six guests a blind comparative tasting of Colgin wine with those from Chave, Guigal, Chapoutier and Penfold's Grange.
- Silver Oak Cellars and Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery celebrated a long-standing friendship with 20 double magnums of cabernet sauvignon dating from the 1970s and '80s to the present. A dinner party for eight at the historic Spottswoode Estate was included, along with a dinner party for up to 100, prepared by Silver Oak resident chef Dominic Orsini. The lot sold for \$140,000.

Other lots that saw spirited bidding included:

- A culinary journey to Singapore and Thailand with Raymond Vineyards' Jean-Charles Boisset, including cooking classes, accommodations and meals in Singapore and Thailand, the latter as a guest of winery culinary director Michel Cornu. The lot includes

a 15-year vertical of cabernet sauvignon from the Raymond library. Katherine Alden was top bidder at \$130,000.

- Vintner Dan Duckhorn will get to take seven friends to dinner with football legend Joe Montana. He paid \$95,000 to break bread with Montana at a dinner hosted by vintner Leslie Rudd and former San Francisco 49ers president/vintner Carmen Policy.

Battling over barrels

Friday afternoon's popular barrel auction took place in the giant underground aging cellar at Jarvis Winery. The top-selling barrel lot came from first-time vintner participant Phillipe Melka. Although Melka has made the wines for others who've entered barrels in the popular Friday event, this was the first time he offered a barrel under his own label. His lot generated the highest income at \$101,285 for the 10 cases that comprise the barrel.

But the honor of being crowned top lot at the barrel auction didn't come easy. Seems that Garret Murphy of Napa's Vintners Collective went down to the wire with Chris Edwards, vice president/general manager of Napa's winetasting.com, for that honor. Edwards was bidding up the barrel lot provided by Scarecrow, a cabernet blend from winemaker Celia Welch. The two bidders — one a retailer, the other an e-tailer — staged a spirited bidding contest, egged on by cheering event attendees, until the hammer came down on Murphy's final bid. The wines will be available eventually at their respective brick-and-mortar and online businesses.

"For (wife) Cherie and me, it has been many years of hard work, and to be here today is very special," Melka said at the close of the bidding. "The friendships we've made along the way and this strong showing today have made it all worthwhile, while helping to make our community a better place to live."

The Top 10 lots at this year's barrel auction were from Melka Wines, Scarecrow Wine, Shafer Vineyards, Chappellet Vineyard and Winery, Spottswoode Estate Vineyard and Winery, Kongsgaard, Crocker and Starr Wines, Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Realm Cellars and Vineyard 7 & 8.

The 100 lots in this year's barrel auction brought in more than \$1.5 million.

One moment of levity during the auction occurred when auctioneer Hatton opened up bidding on 800 cheeseburgers provided by Joel Gott of Gott's Roadside.

Auction officials knew that every year, auction regular and former Major League Baseball first baseman Rusty Staub orders two dozen cheeseburgers for friends who attend Auction Napa Valley. This year, they and Gott surprised Staub and auctiongoers with a mid-auction cheeseburger snack. Hatton made all believe that the cheeseburgers were an added auction lot and, with the help of a few paddleholders, that the lot sold for \$11,000.

Scheduled to chair Auction Napa Valley 2013 are Shari and Garen Staglin and family.