

Wine Spectator

www.winespectator.com

Revamped Napa Wine Auction Sets New Record of \$10.5 Million

Spectacular lots and big spenders brought new energy to the 25th event

[Tim Fish](#)

Posted: Sunday, June 05, 2005

With an assist from celebrity auctioneers Jay Leno and Teri Hatcher, the Napa Valley Vintners association marked the 25th edition of Auction Napa Valley this past weekend by raising a record \$10.5 million.

That figure is the highest take ever brought in by the Napa auction and twice what the event ranked last year. However, it falls short of the \$11 million raised by the live auction at this year's Naples Winter Wine Festival, which surpassed Napa as the country's top charity wine auction in 2004.

The results can also be viewed as a validation for the vintners who pushed for this year's extensive and somewhat controversial revamping the auction's format.

The event's top lot, from Colgin Cellars, sold for \$650,000, not quite a record for the auction. (In 2000, a lot from Harlan Estate sold for \$700,000.) Perennial bidder John Gorman of Austin, Tex., picked up four 3-liter bottles of 2001 Colgin wines, as well as dinner for eight prepared by Thomas Keller of the French Laundry. Gorman said he purchased the lot to thank vintner Ann Colgin for her support of charity wine auctions around the country.

Saturday's live auction at Meadowood resort in St. Helena was slightly less than sold out, drawing about 1,000 people, who paid \$7,500 a couple for the entire weekend. The increased ticket price and reduced attendance for the live auction were not the only breaks from the past. Rather than starting in early afternoon, the first gavel came early in the evening. Gone was the open white tent on the lawn that allowed guests to meander in and out during the bidding. Instead, the tent was enclosed and air-conditioned, and with multilevel seating, the atmosphere resembled a nightclub.

It was an appropriate venue for Leno, star of *The Tonight Show*, to warm up the crowd. "This is a performer's dream," Leno said as he reached the mic, "Rich people who have been drinking." His monologue was standard Leno schtick, but afterward the performer stayed on stage for nearly an hour, getting in some cutting comments as he assisted auctioneers Ursula Hermacinski and Fritz Hatton.

At one point, a coat made of corks that had been worn by Robert Mondavi was being auctioned off. When the bid reached \$60,000, Leno remarked, "We'll throw Robert in for that much money." Koerner Rombauer of Rombauer Vineyards in Napa eventually paid \$95,000 for the coat.



Kent Hanson

Desperate Housewives star Teri Hatcher joined Leno on stage to try to raise the price for a lot sponsored by Frank Family Vineyards. "Jay knows there's a lot I will do for more money," Hatcher joked to the crowd. VeriSign chairman and CEO Stratton Scavos paid \$300,000 for the lot, which included 17 bottles of wine, a trip to Hollywood for six, dinner hosted by Hatcher and a bit part for the bidder on Desperate Housewives.

Wine Spectator editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken, who purchased the first lot at the original 1981 Napa auction with paddle No. 1, donated one of the evening's top lots, a collection of 14 6-liter bottles of highly rated Napa wines from the 1986 and 1985 vintages. Each bottle featured a sandcarved, painted reproduction of artwork from the magazine's collection of Belle Epoque posters.

John Thompson, a software salesman from Woodside, Calif., and a first-time auction guest, paid \$235,000 for the lot. "We're building a cellar, and this is a wonderful addition," Thompson said. "The cellar holds 6,000 bottles, so I only have 5,986 to go."

Another first-time attendee, Joy Craft of Woodside, Calif., was one of the top overall bidders of the day. She paid \$550,000 for a lot that allows five couples to each select 25 bottles from each of the cellars of Cakebread, Chateau Montelena, Joseph Phelps, Schramsberg and Silver Oak wineries. Dinner prepared by Terra chef Hiro Sone was also included.

Craft also paid \$401,000 for the auction's sentimental favorite, a lot co-sponsored by the families of Robert Mondavi and his brother, Peter, who owns Charles Krug Winery. The 60-bottle lot--which includes several lunches and dinners and barrel tastings with the Mondavi families--marks the first time the brothers have made wine together since their infamous falling-out in the 1960s.

"Those two men have been the innovators and entrepreneurs of wine country," said Craft, chairwoman of the philanthropic WebbCraft Family Foundation. "I can't think who, 50 years from now, I'd rather say I had lunch with than those two."

While there were only 57 live lots, a drastic reduction from previous years in an effort to shorten the auction's running time, the final gavel didn't come until 10:30 p.m., some two hours later than expected. Instead of the usual mass dinner that ended the festivities in the past, guests retired to a collection of intimate tents where they were wine and dined by local chefs and half a dozen vintners.

Among other changes at the auction were an increase in the number of private winery hospitality events and some revisions to the annual barrel auction and Pride of Napa tasting, which this year featured 134 wineries and 64 restaurants and food purveyors. More than 3,100 people, including 950 registered bidders, attended the Friday event at Trinchero Family Estates. Between the new e-auction and the barrel auction, the Friday festivities raised more than \$1.3 million, compared to the \$1.2 million raised at the barrel auction in 2004.

Among the barrel auction's 106 10-case lots, the top seller was a barrel of Staglin Family Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2003, which brought in a total of \$221,000. The e-auction featured 57 lots; the high bid was \$25,100 for five 6-liter bottles of various 2001 Beringer Cabernets.

Top Live-Auction Lots

Colgin Cellars--\$650,000

Four 3-liter bottles of 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, plus dinner for eight by Thomas Keller of the French Laundry

Cakebread, Chateau Montelena, Joseph Phelps, Schramsberg, Silver Oak--\$550,000

625 bottles from the wineries' cellars, plus dinner for 10

Peter Mondavi and Robert Mondavi families--\$401,000

60 bottles of a collaborative blend between the families, plus meals and barrel tastings

Bond--\$400,000

Three 3-liter bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon, plus dinner for 10

Harlan Estate--\$400,000

Three 3-liter bottles of the 2001, 1997 and 1994 vintages, plus dinner for 10

Quintessa--\$400,000

20 bottles of the red blend, plus dinner for 10 by Thomas Keller and accommodations

Chappellet Winery--\$300,000

Six large-format bottles of Cabernets dating from 2002 to 1969, plus a Cadillac STS-V

Frank Family Vineyards--\$300,000

17 bottles of Cabernet, a trip to Hollywood for six, plus a bit part on the TV show *Desperate Housewives* (Second-place bidder received duplicate lot for \$280,000)

Napa Valley Vintners Chairs Lot--\$260,000

301 bottles donated by past auction chairs

Marvin R. Shanken--\$235,000

14 6-liter bottles of 1986 and 1985 Napa Cabernets with carved, painted reproductions of Belle Epoque posters