

COOL HUNTING

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PREMIERE NAPA VALLEY BARREL TASTING +AUCTION

187 LOTS OF THE REGION'S FINEST SELL TO BENEFIT THE NON-PROFIT NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS

David Graver 26 February 2019



For the 23rd time, a weekend in February saw key players in the wine world descend upon St Helena, California for an auction of epic proportions: Premiere Napa Valley (PNV). Hundreds gathered within the stony walls of The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone to taste 187 lots and take a chance on their value. All proceeds from the event go to the non-profit Napa Valley Vintners, a trade association that does everything from market the entire region to provide environmental guidance for its 550 member wineries. This year, that number neared \$3.7 million.



by David Graver

While the statistics may be stunning, PNV is about so much more than numbers. The wines previewed this year, and ultimately released under a Premiere Napa Valley label, lay expectation for each brand's 2017 vintage (which comprised 72% of the auction lots, and won't be released for years to come). PNV also demonstrates the sheer talent and creativity in the USA's most respected wine region. And, it ultimately enables Napa Valley vintners to engage with local charities and encourage even more creativity.



by Bob McClenahan for Napa Valley Vintners

Further, this isn't a competition between big, bold cabs; PNV wines are often one-off selections that will never exist anywhere else. This makes the auction a collector's paradise and a tremendous platform for winemakers, who bring something of uncommon merit, limited to either 60, 120 or 240 bottles. When the bottles are finished, they'll be hand-numbered and signed before delivery. As many are quick to point out, these are the rarest of the rare wines.



by David Graver

A complete understanding of PNV requires stepping back one day before the main event. In the morning, doors open to a vintage perspective blind tasting, coupled with access to wines from brands donating 20-case lots (240 bottles) to the auction. Members of trade, previous bidders and select journalists work their way around two floors, testing their palates and getting a first taste of what may pique the interests of paddle-holders. Afterward, wineries host several events on their premises into the night, with an aim to give additional early access.



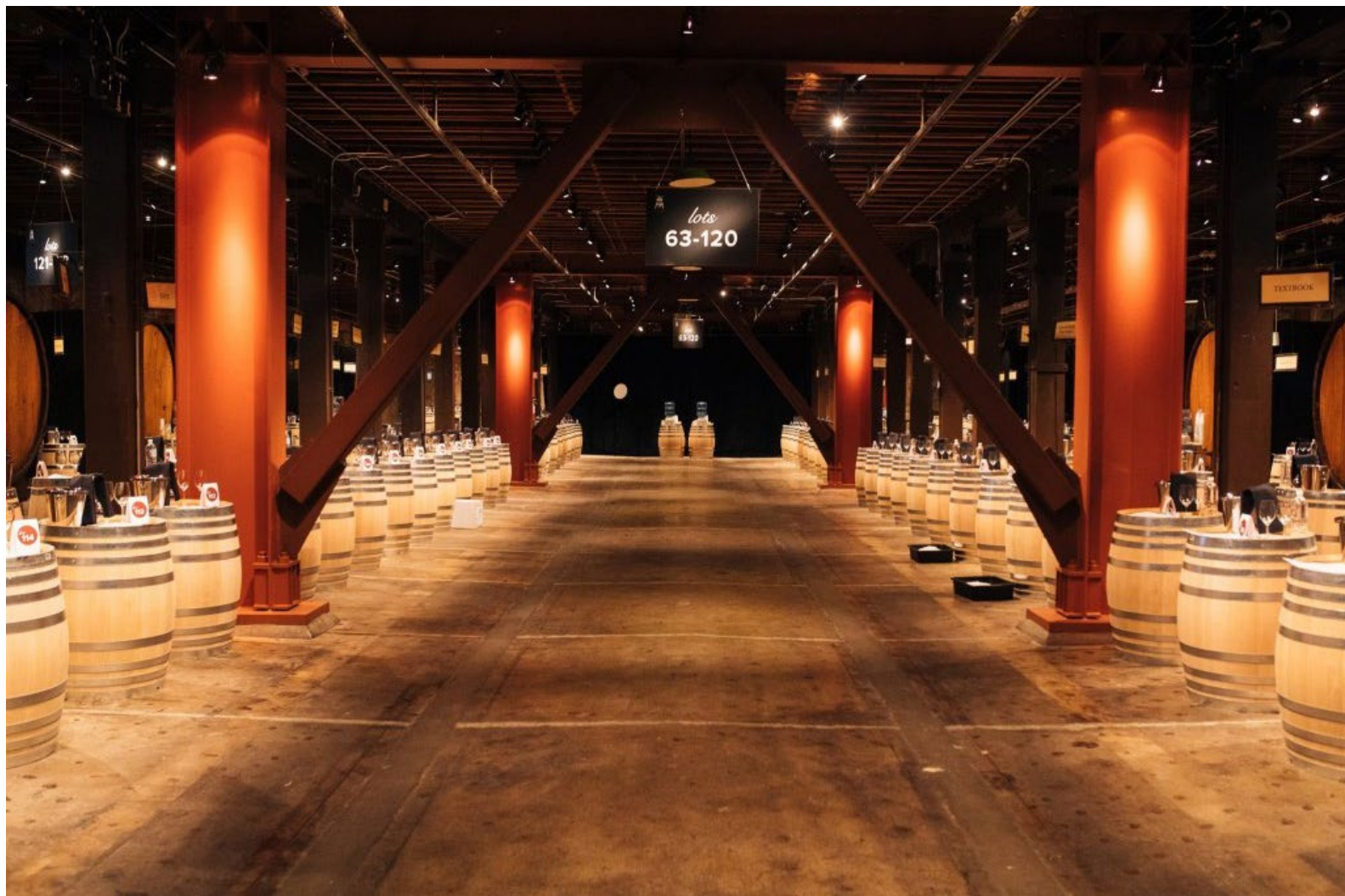
by David Graver

By the end of the first day, we'd already fallen in love with St. Supéry Estate Vineyards & Winery's estate grown Louis XIV 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Corison's 2017 Premiere Reserve, Duckhorn Vineyard's Block Selection 2017 Merlot and Hourglass' utterly extraordinary 50 Caliber 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon. Party host Spottswoode's 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon and Louis M Martini Winery's Mount Veeder's Share (also a 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon) left the most resounding positive impressions.



by David Graver

Auction day commences early as well. As guests file into the institute, barrel tastings commence. All 187 lots were available to sample. Eager attendees rush from one winemaker to another, starting first with lot one, from NPV honorary chairman Aaron Pott, of Pott Wines. “As people who make and cherish Napa Valley wines,” Pott shares, “we look forward each year to this gathering of our trade partners and friends.” Trade partners include wine distributors, retailers and even restaurateurs.



by Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

To list all of the individual highlights is a near impossibility, but must be acknowledged. In one corner of the tasting floor Lang & Reed's 2018 Chenin Blanc was unforgettable—and the only entrant of this varietal. The brand's proprietor and winemaker John Skupny has participated in PNV since its inception. Positioned nearby, Schramsberg Vineyard's 1998 J Schram Late Disgorged sparkling wine captivated every palate it graced. After 20 years on the lees in their caves, 60 bottles (which went for \$24K total) will soon be in the hands of a lucky few.



by David Graver

Big names like Continuum Estate (with their 2017 red), Inglenook (with their Three Part Harmony) and **Alpha Omega** (with Dr To Kalon, a Cabernet blend from two of their acclaimed vineyards) did not fail to impress. And lesser-known brands like Vineyard 29 won over new fans with their liquid, in this case, a 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon dubbed the St Helena Special.



by Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

“It’s incredibly important for the trade, first and foremost,” Fantesca’s director DLynn Proctor explains. “Myself, a former member of the trade and longtime sommelier, it gives me—like with Bordeaux Futures—an insight to what the vintage looks like and how it will progress.” He adds, “In the land of cult wines, it also gives many an opportunity to snatch up something great.”

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Silver Oak’s director of winemaking Nate Weis says, “We do have a different set of criteria for this event. Something that will show well here is a little more fruit-forward, has a lot of freshness and will jump out of the glass. We need it to show well today—and in 2022.”



by David Graver

Silver Oak provided the day's greatest theatrics, with their 240-bottle lot of delectable—sustainably farmed and produced—2017 Cabernet Sauvignon initiating a bidding war. When the gavel fell, a record-setting \$140,000 bid landed the estate-grown and bottled wine. Simple division reveals that the bidder paid \$583 per bottle, a price that clearly telegraphs a successful future for the already beloved brand. We can attest to the wine's deliciousness, having tried it twice during our two-day involvement. The bidder won't see this wine again at least until 2021, however.



by Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

As prestigious, exploratory and full-on extraordinary the entirety of PNV was, it's all just a precursor for one more event, summertime's Auction Napa Valley, which brought in \$13.6 million last year. That extravaganza could not exist without PNV, which allows Napa Valley Vintners to plan and execute the intricacies and grandeur of the second occasion. Still, the primary takeaway of PNV happens to be unadulterated passion of those who make wine—and those who covet it.

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David Graver is Senior Editor at COOL HUNTING, and a contributor to various print and digital outlets. His areas of expertise include art, technology, travel, film, fashion, and hospitality, with further specialization in watches, spirits and cocktails. David represents Cool Hunting around the world at events including Baselworld, Milan Design Week, Miami Art Week, Tales of the Cocktail and New York Fashion Week, as well as gallery openings, product launches and cultural happenings.