

HAUTE LIVING

Premiere Napa Valley Raises \$3.7 Million At 23rd Annual Auction

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Wine auctioneer Fritz Hatton at Premiere Napa Valley

Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

Over the weekend, the movers and shakers of the wine trade industry descended on Napa Valley for the 23rd annual **Premiere Napa Valley**—a fundraiser for the **Napa Valley Vintners** (NVV). \$3.7 million was raised at Saturday's afternoon auction that featured 187 lots. "Premiere Napa Valley is always electric, and this year we felt that current in bidders' appreciation of these truly unique wines," **Aaron Pott**, of **Pott Wines** and honorary chair of this year's event, said after the event. "As people who make and cherish Napa Valley wines, we look forward each year to this gathering of our trade partners and friends."



Aaron Pott, second from right, at the auction

Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

The wine auction is a bacchanalia unlike any other for many reasons. First, it's only open to trade, and a ticket to the barrel tasting and main event are incredibly hard to come by. Second, the wines are once in a lifetime wines that will never be replicated. The 187 participating wineries make a small quantity of a unique blend specifically for the auction. With as little as 60 bottles and never more than 240 bottles, it's a limited amount of wine that is only available just this once at the auction. Thirdly, there is an extreme sense of camaraderie, and community around the event—everyone wants to make great wines that are celebrated.



Cathy Corison pours a sample of her bottle

Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners



Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners



The mustard is blooming right now in the valley

Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan For Napa Valley Vintners

A fourth distinction made Premiere Napa Valley 2019 memorable: 72 percent of this year's lots were from the 2017 vintage. Attendees were the first to taste the wine produced in the year of the wildfires that ravished the Napa Valley. Surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly, as the region attracts some of the best winemakers in the world—the wines were excellent, elegant, and extremely drinkable. **Chris Phelps's** Three Part Harmony, **Inglenook's** lot of 120 bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon blended from three vineyards was wildly smooth and balanced. **Michael Beaulac's** 4x5 Cabernet Sauvignon at **Pine Ridge**, a 60 bottle lot of wine sourced from four estate vineyards was also superb—a sustainably produced velvety blend of the five noble grapes. Another standout was **S.R. Tonella Cellar's** Rutherford Bench Cabernet Sauvignon, a 60-bottle lot, that was so luscious, I wanted an entire glass.

Before the auction at the barrel tasting, there was a festive air of celebration, with winemakers working the room, mingling with past buyers and old friends. **Michelle Baggett**, owner of **Alpha Omega Winery**, was a defacto hostess of sorts, introducing writers to her fellow vintners who she thought would make a great story—and ensuring that everyone knew about the after party, she was throwing post auction. Promptly at 12:30, everyone filed up the stairs to the **Culinary Institute of America's** massive kitchen for a gourmet lunch consisting of duck confit, blue cheese bread pudding, beef tenderloin, truffle potatoes, and poached halibut.

The auction followed, and with so many lots, it lasted several hours. Although there were 30 fewer lots than at last year's sale, the average price for a bottle was up—with some selling for around \$500. The highest grossing lot was **Silver Oak's** 20 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon which went for \$140,000. The top per-bottle lot, was **Schrader Cellars'** 60 bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon, which went for \$80,000, or roughly \$1,333 per bottle. All in all, it was a successful event. "We are very grateful for the support of our longtime bidders, as well as the 14 new successful bidders that acquired Premiere Napa Valley wines for the first time today," said **Linda Reiff**, president, and CEO of the NVV. "These winning bidders will be ambassadors for Napa Valley, sharing the wines with customers in new markets."