



Auctioneer Fritz Hatton accepts a bid during Premiere Napa Valley 2010 at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena on Saturday. The two-day event is the Napa Valley Vintners' annual invitational barrel auction for the wine trade. J.L. Sousa/Register photos

Premiere 'exceeds expectations'

Bidders pack vintners' annual trade sale, spend \$1.9 million on Napa wines

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In spite of the current soft market for wine, Napa Valley Vintners' annual winter trade auction raised nearly \$2 million last weekend as bidders from around the globe snapped up some 200 lots of unique wines and blends to add to retail inventories and restaurant lists at home and abroad.

More than 500 bidders vied for the wines that had been crafted only for the 14th Premiere Napa Valley, spending more than \$1.9 million to take home everything from old vines semillon to blends crafted by multiple winemakers.

Napa Valley Vintners President Bruce Cakebread said revenues at Premiere Napa Valley 14 "exceeded expectations." Last year, the auction raised \$1.5 million for the NVV marketing effort. This year's total was only \$300,000 short of the all-time trade auction record of \$2.2 million set in 2008.

"The room (at CIA Greystone in St. Helena) was full and (this year) there were more bidders bidding," added Linda Reiff, executive director of the trade association.



San Francisco 49ers owner John York takes in the bidding at Premiere Napa Valley 2010 which took place at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena on Feb. 20.



Delia Viader, owner of Viader Vineyards and Winery, listens to the bidding at Premiere Napa Valley 2010 at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena. A special blend 20-case lot of Viader 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon sold for \$22,000.

Premiere Napa Valley is "the consummate networking event for vintners and industry professionals alike," Reiff noted. "Beyond the one-day tasting and auction is a nearly week-long 'homecoming,' where vintners offer private tastings of current and library wines, casual gatherings and business networking that build on the most fundamental sales philosophy of enhancing personal relationships. Even in this era of social media and new technology, market research still shows that the number one way wine is sold is through personal experience — a hallmark of the Napa Valley wine industry."

Industry analyst Barbara Insel of Stonebridge Research said at Saturday's auction that "the story, however, is not about the funds raised as being the benchmark of the Napa Valley wine industry's price stabilization in the current economy.

"It's about the confidence buyers for resale have in Napa Valley wines today, and the optimism and viability they feel about Napa Valley wines in the months and years ahead when these wines will be released for sale to consumers."

"This puts 2009 in the rear view mir-

ror," declared Stags Leap Wine Cellars general manager Jeff McBride, chair of 2010 Premiere Napa Valley. "It's time for a reset."

McBride indicated he'd had "good feedback from participants. I don't know of anywhere in the world where this kind of positive energy and camaraderie between the wine trade and the vintners is at this level of professionalism — or this level of fun."

The lots

Seventeen of the 200 lots at this year's auction went for \$20,000 or more. The top-selling lot of the day came from the cellars of Shafer Vineyards — five cases of 2008 Sunspot Vineyard cabernet sauvignon sold to Napa-based Winebid.com for \$37,000.

With three retail stores in New Jersey for Gary's Wine and Marketplace, perennial top bidder Gary Fisch said he "had heard so much about the 2008 vintage and came to taste that. We found that it rivals the best, so we were really excited to bid today. The wines show texture, flavor and acidity. Our customers are starting to



Ray Signorello, owner of Signorello Estate, left, talks with Katie Leonardini, center, owner of Whitehall Lane Winery, and his cousin Dave Signorello at Premiere Napa Valley 2010. J.L. Sousa/Register photos

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drink more premium wines, and they're calling on us to bring these kinds of wines home for them."

Fisch purchased 38 different wine lots for his clients from this year's catalog, including a concentrated, elegant 100 percent cabernet sauvignon, Quella, the latest addition to the Bond portfolio; a 100 percent cabernet sauvignon from Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard produced by Chateau Boswell; and a Rutherford cabernet sauvignon from Staglin Family Vineyard. Respective top bids offered by Fisch were \$26,000, \$24,000 and \$22,000.

Although its represen-

tatives didn't bid up lots as high as in past years, Nakagawa Trading Company from Japan was number two bidder overall. The Japanese firm purchased 13 offerings, including Lewis Cellars cabernet sauvignon (\$30,000), Schrader Cellars cabernet sauvignon (\$29,000) and a Tor Kenward Family Wines cabernet sauvignon from Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard (\$20,000).

The second highest lot of the day was five cases of Ovid Napa Valley's Block 1A cabernet sauvignon purchased by long-time Premiere attendee Marcus Graziano of Capitol Cellars in Roseville.

JP Richard, of Cache Road Liquors and Wine in Oklahoma, took home five lots, including 10 cases of Reynolds Family Winery cabernet sauvignon for which he paid \$23,000.



Guests attend the barrel tasting in the Barrel Room at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena.

Napa's Mark Pope, owner of Bounty Hunter, purchased 11 lots this year, including 20 cases of Duckhorn Vineyards cabernet sauvignon from Three Palms Vineyard (\$30,000) and five cases of Hourglass "36-24-36" cabernet sauvignon (\$22,000).

Also among the top 10 successful bidders was Canada's Willow Park Wine & Spirits, from Calgary, Alberta, which took home seven lots, including 20 cases of a blend of cabernet sauvignon,

cabernet franc, merlot and petit verdot from Cakebread Cellars (\$24,000).

Other lots that brought in top dollar were:

- An inaugural release of 10 cases of Moone-Tsai Vineyards cabernet sauvignon from Caldwell Vineyard purchased by the 90 Plus Wine Club of Japan for \$24,000.

- 20 cases of Howell Mountain cabernet saui-

gnon from Viader Vineyards & Winery, purchased by Joe Canals of Egg Harbor, N. J.

- Several lots were crafted by multiple vintners. One was a 10-case lot of cabernet sauvignon from Robert Foley Vineyards and Switchback Ridge. It was purchased by another Napa Valley retailer, V Wine Cellar of Yountville, for \$24,000.

Dean and DeLuca Japan

was another successful bidder bringing more Premiere wines to that country. Rounding out the top 10 bidders was Daniel Williams of Hi-Time Cellars, of Costa Mesa, who added five lots of Premiere wines for his customers, and John Wade, of Cliffwood Wine Syndicate, who purchased 12 lots — 80 cases in all — for his customers in Little Rock, Ark.



A bidder raises his paddle.



A capacity crowd filled the auction room at Premiere Napa Valley 2010 at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in St. Helena. Vintners from throughout the valley contributed to the Napa Valley Vintners' annual invitational barrel auction for the wine trade.