

Wine Spectator

Nation's Top Charity Wine Auction Posts \$12 Million Haul

Naples Winter Wine Festival offers unique lots and boosts proceeds by 55 percent

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The nation's biggest charity wine auction has overcome its recession-induced hangover. Saturday's Naples Winter Wine Festival live auction raised \$12 million in bids, nearly matching its earnings in 2006. That amount represents a 55 percent increase over last year's \$7.75 million auction total and a 137 percent leap over the \$5.06 million raised in a difficult 2009.

Bruce Sherman, retired founder and CEO of Private Capital Management and a chair of the auction this year, celebrated the successful event, which benefits the Naples Children & Education Foundation. "It makes me feel good that we fill the coffers up to really make a difference for these kids. I'm excited to bring so much money into the community." The annual event has generated \$94.5 million for area children's charities since it was first held 10 years ago.

Sherman cited several reasons for the upswing in proceeds this year. "I think we had a lot of fresh auction lots. I think the fact that 100 percent of the amount that we are able to announce goes to the children gives people a sense of great responsibility," he said. "A better stock market and better economy of course helps, too."

This year's lots were particularly exciting and rare. First among them was an 8-foot-tall, 2,000-pound bronze sculpture by artist Manolo Valdés, who donated it to the foundation and was in attendance for its sale. The lot brought in \$1 million. A 2011 Ferrari 458 Italia nearly equaled that price, at \$950,000.

The 580 attendees, among them Cal Ripken, Jr., Judge Judy Sheindlin and auctioneer Ann Colgin, bid feverishly on the auction's wine lots and wine experiences as well, all of which were donated by winery owners and private collectors. A 100-bottle cornucopia of wines rated 100 points in major wine publications, called "Perfection," pulled in \$400,000. The lot came with a custom cabinet to hold the wines.

Other top-grossing wine lots included four 3-liter bottles of 2005 Domaine Serene Monogram Pinot Noir and 12 assorted bottles of Domaine Serene, which sold for \$190,000, 39 bottles of Sine Qua Non wines, sold for \$160,000, and a complete quarter-century vertical of Shafer's Hillside Select along with 24 bottles of the not-yet-released Silver Anniversary Sensation, which garnered \$150,000.



Louis Venne

Monte Ahuja holds up his auction paddle to celebrate his winning bid on a Ferrari at the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

Wine-themed dinners and adventures proved popular as well. A Silver Oak wine dinner paired with a Clint Black concert for 24 guests sold twice for a total of \$620,000. Another dinner, at Bouchon and featuring a private tour by Thomas Keller, brought in \$240,000. Also in that package: two walk-on roles on the show *Californication* and four tickets to the Emmy Awards. Finally, a \$656,520 fund-a-need lot helped round out the day's tally.

Though tired and hoarse, Sherman was elated by the return to levels of generosity seen in more economically stable years. "I think if I had to do it all over again, I'd do it the same way." Naples' success should be a source of hope for all wine charity auctions in the year to come.