

In The News

Napa and Silicon Valleys blend in online wine charity auction
Groove CEO Rick Barsotti is quoted in this story, published in six countries.
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Napa and Silicon valleys blend in online wine charity auction

By Glenn Chapman Fri Jun 8, 10:29 AM ET
SAN FRANCISCO (AFP)

Bidders from as far away as China and Australia are dueling online for Napa Valley wines and personal lessons from vintners, as the Internet turns a local charity auction into a global event.

The showdown in the Napa Valley Vintners Association auction takes place Friday, when wine-lovers gathered at Trinchero Family Estates test their wills and their wallets against those participating online.

“The vision is to combine the technology of Silicon Valley with the elegance and beauty of Napa Valley,” said Rick Barsotti of Groove 11, the California experiential creative agency behind the technology for the event.

“The places aren't really that far apart. It's exciting. The wine industry is sexy. The best thing is, the better we do, the more money goes to charities.”

The association dabbled with an Internet component to the auction last year. This year, it shifted to a Web-based focus that pits local bidders against competition worldwide.

Within six hours of the “E-auction” launching at napavintners.com on May 25 bids arrived for each of the 75 lots, and 1,200 people were bidding online as of Thursday, said Terry Hall of the vintners association.

“You get that global feel,” Barsotti told AFP. “When we show the leader board you might see someone from St. Helena (California) leading on one lot and someone from Tokyo leading on another.”

E-auction bids tally approximately 210,000 dollars and are expected to surge as people at Trinchero vie with online rivals in the final phase of bidding, which ends at 21h00 GMT on Friday.

“We are using audio visual and everything to generate excitement here about what’s hot and what's jumping,” Barsotti said via telephone as he set up equipment at Trinchero. “Meanwhile, you’ll have people bidding from home in their pajamas or from work.” Bidders at Trinchero will have the advantage of tasting wines.

Online bids have been made from Shanghai, Tokyo, Britain and Australia, according to Hall.

“The online auction continues to gain momentum,” Hall told AFP. “It is a great way to engage people from around the world that normally wouldn't come to Napa Valley in the first week of June.”

Proceeds from the annual event go to an array of local charities including youth services, affordable housing, and medical care, according to Hall.

“It is cool that people are picking it up around the world,” Hall said.

“Even though charity auctions aren't necessarily a place to get bargains, it is a trusted source for wine because you're buying it from the vintner.”

Wine lots being offered at E-auction have been spiced up with additions such as “boot camps” with vintners; mud baths; a helicopter tour of Napa, and cooking lessons from the Cakebread Cellars culinary director.

The bulk of money raised at what is a Wine Country celebrity event will come from an offline-only auction, a day after the E-auction lots are sold, according to Hall.

Live auction lots include private jet trips with Napa vintners to international locales; a Maserati road trip in Italy and a hybrid Lexus car yet to be released to the market.

A wine-themed trip to France auctioned last year sold for \$1.5 million, according to Hall.