

Not a Wine Mogul? No Problem! Insiders' Tips to Napa Valley

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June 11, 2014



Guests sample wine during the barrel auction event of Auction Napa Valley at the **Charles Krug Winery** Friday. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Charles Krug
PETER MONDAVI FAMILY

Auction Napa Valley — the hottest event in the winemaking world — brought in a record high of \$18.7 million this year for a variety of local charities. Inside an ineffectively air conditioned tent on the grounds of Meadowood Napa Valley resort in St. Helena, California, however, water was a more precious commodity than wine.

It was as if bidders were waving their paddles just to stay cool. Attendees bid on everything from world cruises in privately owned mega-yachts (\$250,000) to Oscar party passes (\$420,000). One winner walked away with dinner reservations with Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis for \$150,000. Another paid \$240,000 for the chance to meet Heidi Klum. This year's top bid of \$600,000 was for a founding membership at Promontory — Bill Harlan's next winery, which doesn't yet exist.

"It's crazy — people are buying ideas," remarked California's Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, founder of PlumpJack and Odette and Cade wineries, who was on hand to witness his offering of a vacation package to Napa and Tuscany sell for \$150,000. "But it's all for a good cause."