Christie's Napa Valley sale, Friday 16 November at 10.30am, London

22 Nov 2004 by JR

Judging from a less-than-frantic pre-sale tasting today, Wednesday the 14th, there just might be one or two bargains here. Or not. Many of the winery owners are in town for their annual Napa Valley Vintners tasting so may be loth to see their precious bottles go under the hammer at rates below those they have become accustomed to back home.

Anyway, the correlation between what was presented at the tasting and what is being offered for sale was less than precise but the following looked interesting to me:

- **Lot 41** Three handsome double magnums of Freemark Abbey's three 1995 Cabernet bottlings, each of which, from the bottles served at the pre-sale tasting, looked very well balanced and true to their Rutherford origins to me without being over the top or excessively sweet. Suggested price £400-500 for the lot.
- **Lot 83** Eighteen bottles of Renteria Cabernet Sauvignon 1997. Unfortunately it was the 1998 that was poured at the pre-sale tasting but this new label from Mexican wizard viticulturist Salvador Renteria and his son Oscar looks like one to watch. And to judge from the form book, the 1997 should be even better than the 1998. Suggested price £340-450 for the lot.
- **Lots 116 and 117** Six magnums each of the 1997 and 1999 Swanson's Alexis bottling of Bordeaux varieties given savour with some Syrah. Yummy stuff. Suggested price £240-340 each lot.

Ask Christie's for the full catalogue. Postscript: Christie's Napa Valley sale update

Oh dear. On the day, Friday 16 November, the sale was pretty dismal with many lots being withdrawn from sale because there was so little interest - this despite the fact there was quite a good representation of the winery owners and winemakers in the room.

The only lots that reached prices seriously higher than their estimates were the only cult wines on offer. A double magnum of Harlan 1997 went for £3200 (est £1000-2000); a single bottle of Screaming Eagle 1997 went for £2900! (est £1000-1500); and a six-bottle vertical of Colgin 1992-1997 went for £3200 (est £1500-2000).

But there were also bargains as I told those of you who logged on before the sale. I wish I'd left a bid for at least one of the 12 cases of Kistler single-vineyard Chardonnays vintages 1996-1998 which went for £400-£620. A six-bottle vertical of Shafer Hillside Select 1992-1997 would surely have gone for several times £700 in California. And the six mags of Swanson's promising Alexis 1999 (mainly Bordeaux varieties with a bit of Syrah) were certainly worth £220. PPS ...

Lay & Wheeler of Colchester (tel 01206 764446) are asking £42.25 per standard bottle of Alexis 1998, by no means Napa Valley's finest vintage.

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