

# Wine Spectator

## NEWS

### Burgundy's Hospices de Beaune Charity Wine Auction Raises \$27.4 Million

Though prices are down, vintners are optimistic following this year's sale, which will support medical research and new hospital buildings



Ludivine Griveau, manager and winemaker of the Domaine des Hospices de Beaune, called 2023 a "yo-yo" vintage that required extra work in the vineyards and cellar. (Courtesy Sotheby's)

By Kenny Martin



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Few things are as captivating to Burgundy lovers as a packed auction selling more than 750 barrels of the Côte d'Or's greatest wines from the latest vintage. Last month, the historic Hospices de Beaune wine auction, conducted by Sotheby's, raised a grand total of \$27.4 million at its 163rd sale. The amount marks the second-highest total in the event's history, behind 2022's \$32 million total.

This year, sales will support winery modernization and the construction of new buildings at the Hospices Civils de Beaune—which has operated charity hospitals for nearly 600 years—and will fund medical research on aging and longevity.

The annual sale, a highlight of the fall season in Beaune, is often considered an indicator of how the new Burgundy vintage will be priced. **Mounir Saouma**, who makes wine with his wife in **Burgundy** and **the Rhône** and has supported the auction since 1995, told *Wine Spectator* that since 2005, the wines of the Hospices have been “in the top of the hierarchy in terms of finesse and quality.” The auction, he continued, is “a great event [that reminds] us that wine is also charity.”

**Albéric Bichot**, proprietor of **Albert Bichot** and a longtime supporter of the auction, said in a statement, “The results of the Hospices sale are extraordinary, and I’m delighted to see the mobilization of the industry in support of this institution and the fine causes it supports.” Bichot was the top bidder of the auction, purchasing 156 barrels in total, including 43 from *grand crus*.

## Top Lot Will Support Research on Healthy Aging

Though prices were down, the sale generated plenty of enthusiasm. Three auctioneers rotated over seven hours to sell 753 barrels of 2023 Burgundy. Over 700 participants from 24 countries filled the Halle de Beaune to bid on 51 different cuvées, sourced from across the Hospices' 150 acres of vineyard holdings, which are in their final year of **being converted to organic farming**.

In a sign of buyers' continued enthusiasm for white Burgundy, three barrels of Bâtard-Montrachet *grand cru*, Cuvée Dames de Flandres, sold for over \$380,000 each, and the five total barrels of Bâtard-Montrachet on offer (which were all bought by Albert Bichot) surpassed the price of last year's equivalent barrels by 14 percent.

The highlight of the sale, at over \$380,000, was the Pièce des Présidents, a unique barrel specially designated each year by the Hospices to support particular charities. This year, proceeds will support the Foundation for Medical Research and the Initiative for Research on Healthy Longevity. The barrel was bought by the owner of Château de Couches, a medieval fortress that belonged to the Dukes of Burgundy. This year's wine is a Mazis-Chambertin *grand cru* that will age in a barrel crafted with leftover wood from one of the 220-year-old oak trees used to restore the spire of Notre Dame cathedral.

## High Energy Despite Lower Prices

Average barrel prices were down by around 16 percent for reds and 13 for whites this year. There were also almost 50 fewer barrels sold compared to 2022. After two record-setting years—\$15.3 million in 2021 and \$32 million last year—the drop in prices may indicate some reservations over the quality of the 2023 vintage, which was marked by a rainy spring and a hot, stormy summer. To Bichot, the lower prices aren't necessarily a bad thing: "For many wines, we're back to prices that will arouse the interest of former aficionados of the event, which is rather pleasing."

Bichot noted that prices per barrel for the *grands crus* were down just 9 percent (for reds) and 11 percent (for whites), while village lots were down 41 percent (reds) and 25 percent (whites). The discrepancy may indicate that buyers of top wines are less impacted by economic uncertainty, while those seeking less expensive wines are more cautious. Whether the drop in prices for village wines will translate to a price break for consumers remains to be seen.



Aurélie Vandevoorde of Sotheby's calls for bids during the 163rd Hospices de Beaune wine auction. (Courtesy Sotheby's)

Notably, this year's average price decrease is the first since 2016. In 2021, a year marked by **extreme spring frosts**, low yields drove prices up dramatically, by 63 percent overall. Then, in 2022, prices increased by a relatively modest 8 percent—perhaps a sign of enthusiasm from buyers who missed out on the scarce and expensive 2021 vintage.

This year is the second relatively generous harvest in a row, and since there's generally plenty of wine to go around, price increases simply may not be justified. Saouma reflected that auction results don't always give clear signals on future pricing: "The human factor is very important."

## The 2023 Burgundy Vintage: Uneven but Promising

Ludivine Griveau, manager and winemaker of the Domaine des Hospices de Beaune, called 2023 a "yo-yo" vintage and said she "had to make some strong choices in the vineyard and during the harvest with my team, which resulted in lower quantities than expected." Nonetheless, she predicts that "the 2023 vintage will stand proudly on its own."

While yields were generally on the high end and quality was mixed, many winemakers share her optimism. "Whites are amazingly balanced, pure [and] deep and ... are showing the potential of a *great* vintage," said Saouma. The reds, meanwhile, show "a mysterious disconnection between color and tannins. They have deep, [beautiful] purple color but their tannins are very fine, very [typical of the] *terroir*."

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