

# Rare wines snapped up

Local buyers pay top prices at Nederburg's annual auction

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**E**ASTERN Cape buyers made their presence felt among wine enthusiasts from around the world at the 43rd Nederburg Auction in Paarl this weekend.

Peter Pitsiladi of Prestons Liquor Stores estimated that, although prices were high, he spent between R100 000 and R150 000 on rare and premium wines at the exclusive annual event.

"The prices versus three years ago are about double. Then you were paying R300 or R400 per bottle; now it's [more like] R1 000 a bottle," Pitsiladi said.

Richard Moolman, owner of TOPS at SPAR Village Square in St Francis Bay, spent about R120 000 but was also buying on behalf of several other TOPS outlets.

Susan Lottering, of Lombardini Game Farm outside Jeffreys Bay, shelled out about R30 000, while Ernie Blignault, of De Viswif Restaurant in Jeffreys Bay, also wielded his paddle with gusto, landing some exceptional wines.

Pitsiladi and his wife, Candice, achieved additional success at Saturday's charity auction, securing a magnificent 2m by 27cm wine-lands-themed artwork by former Eastern Cape artist Michael Chandler for a cool R40 000.

Known for his highly detailed illustrations, Chandler spent countless hours creating the piece in ink, and it is the largest and most detailed illustration he has done.

The long, narrow work was completed from left to right, starting



**WONDER OF WINE: Former East London artist Michael Chandler with his intricate artwork, 'The Wonderful Winelands of the Cape'**

Picture: MATT STOW

with an imagined depiction of Wellington and running through Paarl, Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, Somerset West and, finally, False Bay.

"The artist is from East London and we loved the story," Pitsiladi said, adding the couple planned to hang the piece in their private cellar at home in Port Elizabeth.

This year's auction saw a change in format, with Friday's programme devoted to a longer-than-usual tasting session of all but the very rarest of the 128 wines from 65 producers.

Bidding, previously held over

two days, was condensed into one day on Saturday, followed by a gourmet lunch by celebrity chef Liam Tomlin.

Both Lottering and Moolman said they preferred the new auction format.

"I liked that we had more time to taste the wines and go through them more thoroughly," Moolman said. "It made bidding a lot easier.

"These are wines you are not going to get anywhere else."

Just under 8 800 litres went under renowned British auctioneer David Elswood's hammer, totalling R6-million in sales. Elswood kept

the bidding going for six hours, sustaining the energy in the hall with trademark efficiency and wit.

The Meerlust Bordeaux Blend 1978 set an auction record for price per litre at just over R21 300, auction manager Dalene Steyn said.

The last three bottles in existence, selling for R16 000 each, are now off to Angola after being snapped up by a buyer from that country.

However, Steyn said South Africans were responsible for 70% of sales.

The oldest wine, a 1957 Chateau Libertas, received resounding applause when the hammer fell at

R55 000 for just six bottles.

All of the Eastern Cape bidders said they were impressed by the quality of wines on offer.

Referring to his successful bids, Pitsiladi said the Heramanuspitersfontein Die Martha, Tokara Director's Reserve, Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve and Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon were "probably the four I'm most excited about... these are stunning wines."

Moolman was delighted to secure the 2005 Axe Hill Cape Vintage Port.

"It was a new discovery for me and I thought it was exceptional."