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HONG KONG (Reuters) - A dinner for four with celebrated Spanish chef [Ferran Adrià](#) of the award-winning elBulli restaurant sold for a cool \$23,000 to an online Asian bidder on Wednesday, while a set of custom-engraved knives went for nearly \$8,000.

Wine from the famed restaurant hauled in a total of \$1.8 million, beating pre-sale estimates of \$1.1 million, with all 445 lots selling in the centerpiece of a strong first day of Sotheby's spring Hong Kong auctions, seen as a key benchmark of luxury appetite in China.

The \$23,000 did not include a buyer's premium and there were no estimates for the dinner.

The dinner, to be held at Adrià's brother's restaurant in Barcelona, was the first of two set to go under the hammer. The other will be auctioned on April 26 in New York.

"I think the New York sale will also go as well as this one, so it's going to be double the amount of money," Adrià told reporters after the auction. "This is a lot more than what I was expecting, so we are very pleased."

Proceeds from the auction will benefit the elBulli Foundation, a culinary centre Adrià, 50, will open in 2014 to teach his experimental techniques.

Adrià ran the world-famous elBulli restaurant in the northern Catalan town of Roses for 27 years until 2011, when it closed.

The three-star Michelin restaurant was renowned for "deconstructed" dishes including foams and jellies that required custom-made tools, many of which also went under the hammer on Wednesday.

A set of 10 custom-engraved knives went for \$7,700, while one chef's jacket went for \$1,030.

A man bidding for an unidentified Hong Kong businessman won the day's three priciest picks: three Romanee-Conti wine lots from 1990, 2000 and 2003, the most expensive costing \$59,000.

Some 82 percent of the elBulli wines sold above Sotheby's high estimate.

"I think there are people who look for the star power and that appeals to them, and there are people who look to the wine regardless of the star power," said Jamie Ritchie, president of Sotheby's wine, Americas and Asia. "I think we're seeing strength in both areas."

The auctions for wine, fine art, ceramics and jewellery this month are being especially closely watched in the wake of China's sluggish economic growth in 2012 and a crackdown on lavish official spending.

"I think there's a bounceback in the marketplace primarily because there's less wine on the market but also a growing appetite for wine in Asia," said Ritchie.

(Reporting by Chris Ip, editing by Elaine Lies and Paul Casciato)