American multi-zillionaire and collector Bill Koch is convinced he’s been dudded over the purchase of four late eighteenth century Bordeaux wines supposedly from the cellar of Thomas Jefferson (and purchased by Jefferson while serving as the Ambassador to France). In 1988 Koch had outlayed half a million bucks for the four bottles. He has since spent a million dollars (and rising) on investigating and proving his claim with the intent of nailing the supplier in both civil and criminal proceedings:

Koch may be as compulsive about filing lawsuits as he is about collecting. He waged a twenty-year legal battle against two of his brothers relating to the family business. (The matter was settled in 2001.) He sued the state of Massachusetts over an improperly taxed stock transaction and won a forty-six-million-dollar abatement. When a former girlfriend whom he had installed at a condo in Boston’s Four Seasons hotel refused to leave, Koch took her to housing court and had her evicted. He talks about “dropping a subpoena” on people as if he were lobbing a grenade.

[Koch’s opponent, the supposed fraudster, is also a dab hand in the art of litigation.]


[URL: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/09/03/070903fa_fact_keefe viewed 27 September, 2007 — readers seeking more information or just entertainment are recommended to read this article in its entirety.]

UPDATE: April 2010 news reports have the international auction house Christie’s, Inc added to the list of Koch’s litigation targets; the writ alleging that Christie’s knowingly promoted and sold counterfeit wine. Koch is determined to put those responsible for the fake wine in jail. Money is no object. He is associated with the three liquids supposedly never to be mixed: oil, water, and wine. The foundation of his fortune is the oil business founded by his father. He spent $65 million in winning the 1992 America’s Cup with his yacht America³. And of course he is a wine collector.

Like others before him he believes that any problem is soluble so long as sufficient money is thrown at it. Unlike many of the others before him, Koch has sufficient money to throw at the problem. In 2008 his lawsuit against the German wine dealer Hardy
Rodenstock (born Meinhard Görke) was dismissed. No problem. Koch re-filed. He currently has six active lawsuits against the alleged participants in the wine fraud and Benjamin Wallace’s book *The Billionaire’s Vinegar* is the subject of a proposed Hollywood treatment with actor Will Smith and the producer of the films *Forrest Gump* and *The Pursuit of Happiness* as principals. Separately HBO has purchased the television rights to the *New Yorker* article referred to above.

The legal profession again salutes a true and dear friend of the profession.

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