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Koch Sues Christie's Over Alleged Counterfeit Wines

Suit claims two German engravers testify they put "Th.J." on Jefferson Bordeaux

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Bill Koch has fired the latest salvo in his [crusade against counterfeit wines](#), filing a suit in a Manhattan federal court today against Christie's International, accusing the venerable London-based auction house of conspiracy to defraud and aiding and abetting fraud. In the complaint, Koch claims to have found witnesses who can testify that they engraved the so-called Jefferson Bordeauxs, several bottles of wine uncovered by German dealer Hardy Rodenstock, who claimed the wines were ordered for Thomas Jefferson. Christie's sold several of those wines. Koch also alleges that several other rare wines he bought from Christies are fakes.

Koch has filed multiple suits since he first came to believe that four Jefferson Bordeauxs he bought from London and Chicago retailers are fakes. He is currently suing Rodenstock in New York. After hiring investigators to comb his 35,000-bottle cellar, Koch has filed suits over other allegedly fake wine, including cases against New York auction houses Zachys and Acker Merrall & Condit, as well as the Chicago Wine Company and collector Eric Greenberg.

Christie's has been a leading source for rare and collectible wines for decades. The suit alleges that, "Christie's and Rodenstock are involved in a continuing scheme to sell counterfeit wines." Koch claims that former Christie's wine director [Michael Broadbent](#) knew of questions regarding the provenance of the Jefferson wines before the first one was sold in 1985 for \$156,000. The complaint says that two German engravers, who are not identified by name, told investigators that Rodenstock hired them to engrave several bottles, including the bottles engraved "Th.J."

Koch also alleges that he bought 32 counterfeit wines from Christie's for more than \$33,700. "To me the simple, straightforward solution to this problem was for Christie's to recognize its wine department was acting as an independent, rogue division, admit it, and clean it up immediately," said Koch. "That would have resulted in an easy settlement with me and greatly enhanced Christie's reputation in the collectors' world as an auction house

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that will not tolerate selling fakes of any kind."

"We have great respect for Mr. Koch," said Toby Usnik, a spokesman for Christie's in New York. "We believe the allegations in this complaint are incorrect." Neither Broadbent nor Rodenstock could be reached at press time.

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