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Can't wine about \$110M in revenue

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Wine drinkers worldwide are calling him the Anti-Christie's.

John Kapon, a 40-year-old New Yorker with a scruffy beard and gravelly voice, has become the world's biggest wine auctioneer during the span of a few years — and he has uncorked the growth with unlikely methods.

Flooding bidders' tables with complimentary doses of rare, pricey vintages, Kapon's auctions — staged by Acker Merrall & Condit, his family's 191-year-old Manhattan wine shop — are liable to get a little rowdy.

"He may pound his gavel a couple of times and tell people to 'shut the hell up,'" says Raymond Tuppsch, a 47-year-old investor from Tewksbury, NJ, who is a longtime attendee.

With Kapon working wine-obsessed bidders into a party mood from New York to Hong Kong, his events are on track this year to rake in \$110 million in revenue. That will make Acker the first wine auctioneer to cross the \$100 million mark — despite the fact that Kapon began Acker's auctions just 13 years ago.

"I work hard, and I drink harder," Kapon told The Post, chalking up his success versus stalwarts like Sotheby's and Christie's to his "love of wine, and a love of people who love wine."

But Kapon's nose for the global wine market has also led him to shrewd, lucrative bets — most notably a pioneering push into Asia that began in 2007.

At an event in Hong Kong today, Acker is slated to sell prize lots that include a 55-bottle collection of vintage DRC Romanee Conti — the most expensive wine in the world — for an estimated \$600,000 to \$800,000.

"Asia today is what the US was like in 2005," Kapon says, noting that budding wine collectors in China are now splurging more than their seasoned counterparts in the recession-addled West.



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Not any wine house: John Kapon, owner of Acker Merrall & Condit on 72nd St., has made a strong bid with his \$100M in global auction sales.

Widening demand has driven global wine prices to fresh heights. Customers say Kapon's free-flowing approach has helped fuel it since he began working at Acker's Upper West Side shop in the mid-1990s following a post-college flirtation with producing hip-hop records.

"There would be a different bottle open every night," says Michael Wilens, a Manhattan lawyer and client of 17 years. "He'd say, 'That's supposed to be the best? Let's taste it.' And then somebody would buy a bottle."

Likewise, Kapon has won attention for his tasting notes, which mingle erudition with the off-color. In client dispatches he refers to tannins and acidity as "T and A."

A glass of 1911 Moet champagne "had a crazy nose of luscious honey while frolicking in an open field," Kapon wrote in a recent note. A sample of 1961 Latour, meanwhile, possessed aromas that "gave off a cocaine-like intensity."

Kapon's next auction is slated for this Saturday at Marea in Midtown.