

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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# An Ocean of ART

## WILLIAM I. KOCH'S STELLAR COLLECTION IN PALM BEACH

Architecture by Bridges, Marsh & Carmo

Text by Steven M. L. Aronson

Photography by Kim Sargent



Even when I was a little kid in Kansas, I had a dream of the kind of house I wanted to have," says William I. Koch. The wonder is that its realization eluded him for so long, given that he's the son of the founder of the second-largest privately owned company in the United States, Wichita-based Koch Industries, and that he himself is the founder and CEO of a privately held diversified alternative-energy and technology company, the West Palm Beach-based Oxbow

Corporation. "An oxbow," he offers, as perhaps a way of explaining his own trajectory, "is the bow-shaped bend in a river where it changes course, where the water is deep and still and you catch the best fish. It's the pull of the past, but the river's hell-bent on moving on. Besides, 'oxbow' is one of those macho western words that I've always liked the sound of."

Koch bucks the odds but invariably gets what he wants—for example, the America's Cup, which is just about the most coveted trophy in all

ABOVE: The architectural firm of Bridges, Marsh & Carmo created an Anglo-Caribbean-style shuttered plantation house in Palm Beach for William I. Koch. Fernando Botero sculptures stand near the entrance.

RIGHT: Hanging in the living room, from left to right, are *Young Woman Dressed in Oriental Shawl*, 1929, by Matisse; Modigliani's 1917 *Reclining Nude*; and Picasso's blue-period *Night Club Singer*, 1901.









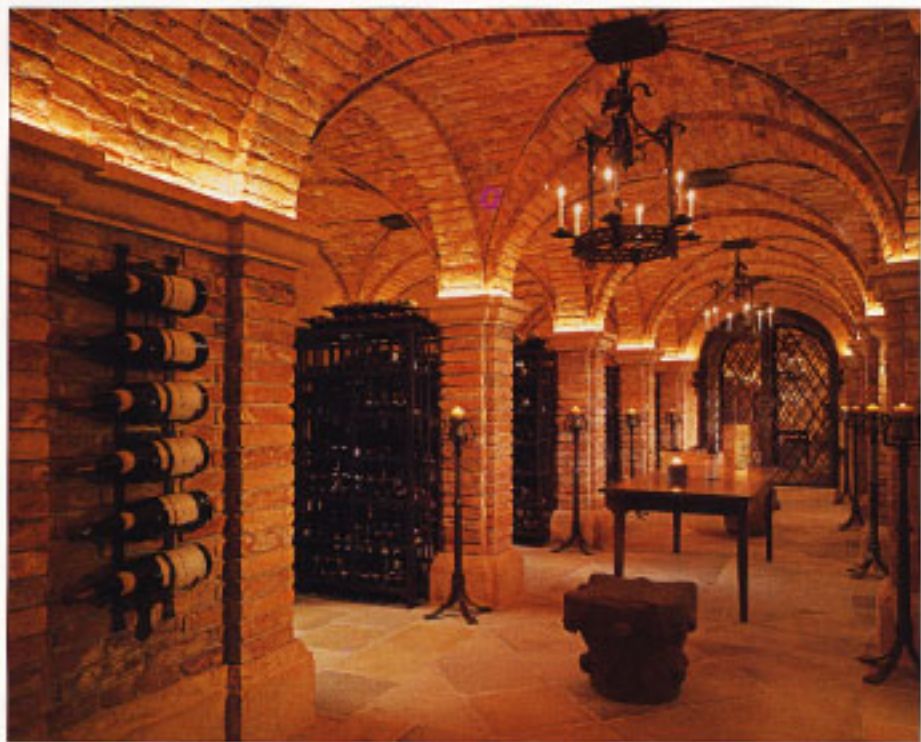


LEFT: The ancient and the modern coalesce in a hallway vignette composed of *Cubir de Ponle Rhinoceron-tique*, 1956, by Salvador Dalí, Maillo's bronze nude *La Montagne* and a late-Hellenistic or Roman marble Aphrodite. A Louis XV-style girandole provides illumination.

of sport. In 1992, only eight years after embarking on big-boat racing, Koch (pronounced "coke") skippered the yacht *America* (pronounced "America cubed") to victory over preternaturally seasoned sailors on his very first try. "When he does something," says a friend, "he does it first-class—he set his cap for that cup and he won it. And what he wanted next was a world-class house."

It was past time for an upgrade: Koch was living in an unremarkable two-bedroom rented house in Palm Beach, which could accommodate only a smidgen of what was by all accounts one of the world's estimable art collections. Some 400-odd works strong, it encompassed everything from Greek and Roman antiquities to mid-19th-to-mid-20th-century European and American paintings and sculpture. "Impressionists, Postimpressionists, Surrealists, western artists, marine artists, early modernists," Koch reels off. "I buy art that I respond to emotionally; I guess that's why they call my collection eclectic—I have a lot of different emotions."

He's certainly on heartfelt terms with art history's biggest names. Cézanne and Degas, Matisse and Renoir—Rodin, Corot, Dalí, Miró—Léger, Balthus, Arp and



LEFT: The wine cellar, which was laid out by Mark Lessard and Fritz Gruber, was built with 150-year-old bricks and a stone floor salvaged from an Austrian building dating back over four centuries. A computer system allows Koch to locate any of the 35,000 bottles instantly.





Chagall—Winslow Homer, William Merritt Chase and Thomas Hart Benton—are among those represented in Koch's very personal holdings. As are some (in every sense of the word) signature pictures: Monet's *Field of Oats and Poppies*, Modigliani's *Reclining Nude*, Picasso's *Night*

*Club Singer*, Grant Wood's *Arbor Day*, Frederic Remington's *Evening on a Canadian Lake* and Fitz Hugh Lane's *The Golden Rule*. For all that, Koch hoped that the house he was planning would have the feeling of a family place rather than of some dry and inanimate private museum.

"What I really wanted from the house was for it to reflect my passions in life outside of business, but then," he laughs, "I went and made the house itself a passion."

After purchasing one of the largest parcels of land in Palm Beach—four acres stretching clear from the Atlantic Ocean

The dining room's array of maritime paintings includes, from left to right on the bottom row, *The Ship Anonyma Off Liverpool* by Duncan MacFarlane, Fitz Hugh Lane's circa 1850s *The Golden Rule*, and *Confederate Armed Forces Shenandoah*, 1865, by George Alexander Napier.









LEFT: Koch, who is a world-class sailor, sits in the library next to a silver replica of the America's Cup trophy. He and his team won the premier race in 1992 while crewing the *America*<sup>3</sup>. Crystal boats from Baccarat. FAR LEFT: Mahogany bookcases flank a George III desk.

BELOW: The boat room, which is outfitted with teak like a yacht, displays meticulously crafted models of every defender and challenger to vie for the cup. The trophy is named after the schooner *America*, the victor in the first competition, held in 1851 off the Isle of Wight.



to Lake Worth—he began interviewing architects. “There’s a famous one down here who said to me right off the bat that he likes to take control—tell the homeowner what is good taste and what isn’t. I realized I would be spending my money to please *him*, and I said to hell with that. So I interviewed another local firm—Bridges, Marsh & Carmo. I liked their attitude: The attitude that they had was, ‘We’ll please *you*.’ ”

A man who takes a certain pride in not doing things the way everybody else does them, Koch immediately ruled out the idea of building his house in the prevalent Palm Beach

style. “He aspired to a lot more than just another Mediterranean biggie,” says Digby Bridges, who, with his partners, Mark Marsh and James Carmo—all of them working with project manager Carl Lessard—put up Koch’s just-shy-of-40,000-square-foot house. The look the owner had in mind was, characteristically, one that would “fit” in Palm Beach “but not exactly belong” there. He pictured it as “Anglo-Caribbean, with kind of a British colonial feeling”; it would have the grace and charm of one of the so-called great houses in a place like Barbados. His, moreover, would be struc-





LEFT: Degas's *Open Arabesque on Right Leg*, circa 1882–85, rests on a Neapolitan inlaid tulipwood commode in the master bedroom. *Girl in a Black Cap*, circa 1760, was painted by Pietro Antonio Rotari. The Louis XVI bergère is signed by J. B. Boulard. Pratesi bed linens.

tured around an open-roofed central courtyard that "drew beautiful breezes through the house" and was girded on all sides by a wide hall gallery. "All of the rooms were to be exceptionally well proportioned, based more or less on the golden mean," adds Bridges.

Because the site sloped, the architects were allowed to put in a basement—the result being that while from the ocean side the house looks like a comfortably scaled villa, from the lake side (where the basement surfaces as the first-floor elevation) it looms enormous. Koch wound up using every square foot of extra space that the basement afforded. First and foremost for a wine cellar (his collection is universally regarded as one of the finest). Then for a "boat room" (decorated in yachting style with alternating bands of holly and teak flooring) to harbor a model of every challenger and defender since 1851, when the schooner *America* won the first race, off the Isle of Wight, and with it the cup that would carry its name ever after. Room, too, for an "African bar" (boasting native spears and drums as well as some of Koch's father's old hunting trophies), and a fully outfitted gym. And for a movie theater "with," Koch enthuses, "a lobby like in an old popcorn palace." With an eye to safeguarding his art,



LEFT: The architects designed the freestanding beach house, alongside the infinity-edge pool, to give the impression of being on a nautical journey through the Greek Islands. The white stucco structure, which is punctuated with mahogany-framed glass doors, serves as guest quarters.





he also had a poured-concrete hurricane room with watertight battleship doors constructed directly beneath the courtyard (it gets activated the minute storm warnings go into effect).

As for the upstairs, he needed "kid-oriented rooms"—he has four children, ranging in

age from two to 15—which necessitated multiple playrooms and nannies' rooms. Another requirement was a big cypress-beam-ceilinged "cowboy room" (a kind of second living room, where he saw himself and his guests "ending up after dinner, smoking cigars and bragging," he laughs)

to corral his frontier-era firearms, furniture, artifacts (including the original reward poster for the capture of Billy the Kid) and art. The Remingtons and especially the Charles Marion Russell paintings now clustered there remind Koch of childhood summers spent

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Koch likes to relax and entertain on the second-floor loggia, a West-Indian-and-Mediterranean-influenced space that overlooks the gardens and Lake Worth. Set above the fireplace, which is bracketed with caryatids, is a circa 1950 stone-and-glass-tile mosaic, *Birds*, by Georges Braque.