Lawyer Wants Seized $125K Wine Collection Back

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PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A lawyer convicted of selling high-end wine from his home cellar despite strict Pennsylvania liquor laws hopes to win back the seized collection before it's destroyed.

Arthur Goldman's collection is estimated to be worth $125,000 or more, The Philadelphia Inquirer [1] reported in a story Friday. The lot includes rare vintages not sold in Pennsylvania's state-run wine stores.

Police seized nearly 2,500 bottles from Goldman after making undercover buys at his Malvern home. Goldman, 50, has pleaded guilty to several related misdemeanors and been sentenced to probation and community service.

State law calls for all contraband liquor to be destroyed. Wine enthusiasts blanch at the thought.

"It's not like we're talking about cocaine or heroin here," said Tom Wark, executive director for the American Wine Consumer Coalition. "We're talking about a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon from the 2012 vintage."

Goldman circulated his offerings to about 20 people on his email list. One buyer proved to be an undercover police officer.

"It was more 15 to 20 people who liked wine like Art, who he would get the wine for," defense lawyer Peter Kratsa said.

Chester County prosecutors, though, described the operation as a high-volume business designed to make money.

Pennsylvania is one of 10 states to ban wineries from shipping directly to customers and one of two, along with Utah, that exclusively controls wine and liquor sales. Efforts to privatize the industry have languished.

Kratsa vowed to go to trial to win back his client's collection, minus the bottles actually sold to state police. He said much of the wine is from Goldman's private collection and was never listed for sale. And he said Goldman bought many of the prized bottles when he lived in New Jersey.

For now, police have the wine stashed in an evidence room.

"At this point, the state police do not believe there is an obligation to store it in a climate-controlled environment," said Sgt. Dan Steele, district commander of the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement office in Philadelphia. "But it is being secured at room temperature."

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