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## William Dillingham, 64, Founded SF Boutique

Patience Haggin, The Recorder

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SAN FRANCISCO — Litigator William Dillingham, founder of San Francisco boutique Dillingham & Murphy, died Monday of liver cancer. He was 64.

Dillingham, known to friends as "Bill" or "Willo," was born in Mineola, New York, in 1951. He graduated Yale University in 1973 and Hastings College of Law in 1976. He started his career at Pillsbury Madison & Sutro (a previous incarnation of the firm that is now Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman) from 1977 to 1982, and retained many lifelong friends from his years there.

While still at Pillsbury he led and won a pro bono case vindicating the rights of gay foreign nationals. His client, a gay British man named Carl Hill, tried to clear immigration while wearing a T-shirt that made his sexual preference clear. He was barred from entry based on a rarely invoked prohibition classifying gay persons as "defective aliens." Dillingham won the case, arguing that courts could not conclude that a gay person was a priori defective by virtue of his sexual orientation.

After the suit Dillingham applied for attorney fees from the government. He did not win them, but his law partner and longtime friend, William Murphy, remembered defending Dillingham in a deposition.

"Bill was a great lawyer but as a client he was the absolute worst. He wouldn't just answer the question," Murphy said. Dillingham was so "bitten by the justice bug" that he took every question about his hours or briefs as a chance to rail against the injustice that immigration authorities had done to his client.

Dillingham and Murphy left Pillsbury 1982 to found their own firm. The firm, which started with "just two lawyers and one really overworked secretary," enjoyed success early, Murphy said. "We expected to get one or two clients the first year, and we got 15."

The boutique now has 16 attorneys, and regularly hires from Pillsbury, Murphy said. Dillingham chaired its products liability and estate-planning practices. In the mid-1980s Dillingham won what Murphy described as "an unwinnable case" defending chemical

company E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Co. from a products liability action relating to a toxic chemical found in its paint. Dillingham won DuPont a verdict of no liability, and became one of DuPont's short-listed counsel for life, Murphy said.

Dillingham ran a few lucrative side businesses in addition to his law practice. Through his work on Hill's case he met a business partner who introduced him to the catalog-sales business. His catalog-sales company grew into a multilevel marketing company Lawrence Research Group, which eventually became Passion Parties, a business allowing women to host "Tupperware parties" to sell sex toys.

"Bill had an infectious entrepreneurial spirit that made you say to yourself, if all these other guys can do it, why can't we go out and do it, too?" Murphy said.

Thomas Klitgaard, an of counsel at Dillingham & Murphy who also started his career at Pillsbury, said Dillingham ran the firm more like a Silicon Valley tech company than a stodgy law firm. Lawyers could wear tennis shoes and comfortable clothes, and sometimes Dillingham would leave funny comic strips on their desks. He is survived by his wife, Patricia Cavanaugh Dillingham, their two sons, James and William, as well as a younger sister and three younger brothers.

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