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## Salt-stabilized alkylzinc pivalates: versatile reagents for cobalt-catalyzed selective 1,2-dialkylation†

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The construction of  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  bonds through Negishi-type reactions using alkylzinc reagents as the pronucleophiles is of great importance for the synthesis of pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals. However, the use of air and moisture sensitive solutions of conventional alkylzinc halides, which show unsatisfying reactivity and limitation of generality in twofold  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  cross-couplings, still represents drawbacks. We herein report the first preparation of solid and salt-stabilized alkylzinc pivalates by OPiv-coordination, which exhibit enhanced stability and a distinct advantage of reacting well in cobalt-catalyzed difluoroalkylation-alkylation of dioenoates, thus achieving the modular and site-selective installation of  $CF_2^-$  and  $Csp^3$ -groups across double bonds in a stereoretentive manifold. This reaction proceeds under simple and mild conditions and features broad substrate scope and functional group compatibility. Kinetic experiments highlight that OPiv-tuning on the alkylzinc pivalates is the key for improving their reactivity in twofold  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  cross-couplings. Furthermore, facile modifications of bioactive molecules and fluorinated products demonstrate the synthetical utility of our salt-stabilized alkylzinc reagents and cobalt-catalyzed alkylidifluoroalkylation protocol.

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## Introduction

During the last decade, many significant advances have been witnessed in the efforts towards the development of transition metal-catalyzed selective dicarbofunctionalization of alkenes *via* cascade C–C bond formation, thus providing expedient access to the synthesis of carbogenic skeletons rapidly.<sup>1</sup> Among them, most of the efforts focused on the selective diarylation<sup>2</sup> and arylalkylation of alkenes.<sup>3</sup> However, rather rare examples for achieving twofold  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  cross-couplings across alkenes with two different alkyl moieties were reported. The early sporadic examples of catalytic alkene 1,2-dialkylation largely relied on the use of harsh alkylmagnesium halides as the nucleophiles.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise the tethered alkenes bearing a  $Csp^3$ –X (X = Br, I) center were utilized as the substrates for nickel-catalyzed intramolecular dialylation in the presence of alkylzinc reagents.<sup>5</sup> These results demonstrated the viability of sequential dialylation but there still remained drawbacks,

such as limited substrate scope and poor functional group compatibility. Towards the possible reaction pathway of transition-metal-catalyzed alkene dialkylation, the challenging issues could be ascribed to (i) the hampered oxidative addition of transition metal-species into the alkyl–X bond;<sup>6</sup> (ii) the facile propensity of other competitive side reactions *via*  $\beta$ -H elimination, atom-transfer radical addition and homocoupling pathways;<sup>7</sup> (iii) the difficulty in controlling regio- and site selectivity (Scheme 1A).

To overcome these aforementioned challenges, several approaches have been achieved by nickel-catalyzed alkene dialkylation with the chelation-assistance of 8-aminoquinoline,<sup>8</sup> enamide<sup>9</sup> or imine.<sup>10</sup> As such, these reactions displayed high chemo- and regioselectivity to install two  $Csp^3$ -fragments across a double bond. Despite these major advances, the use of air and moisture sensitive solutions of alkylzinc halides (halides = Cl, Br, I), which are difficult to handle and should be stored under an inert atmosphere, as well as the unsatisfying reactivity and limitation of generality in cascade  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$ / $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  cross-couplings, still represent drawbacks (Scheme 1B).

Therefore, we hypothesized that the above issues can be solved by devising a new type of alkylzinc reagent with enhanced stability and tunable reactivity as the  $Csp^3$ -nucleophile, as well as more a reactive catalytic system which operates under a radical relay process. Organozinc reagents are important intermediates with versatile reactivity in organic syntheses.<sup>11</sup> Lei demonstrated that changing the anions of Ar-

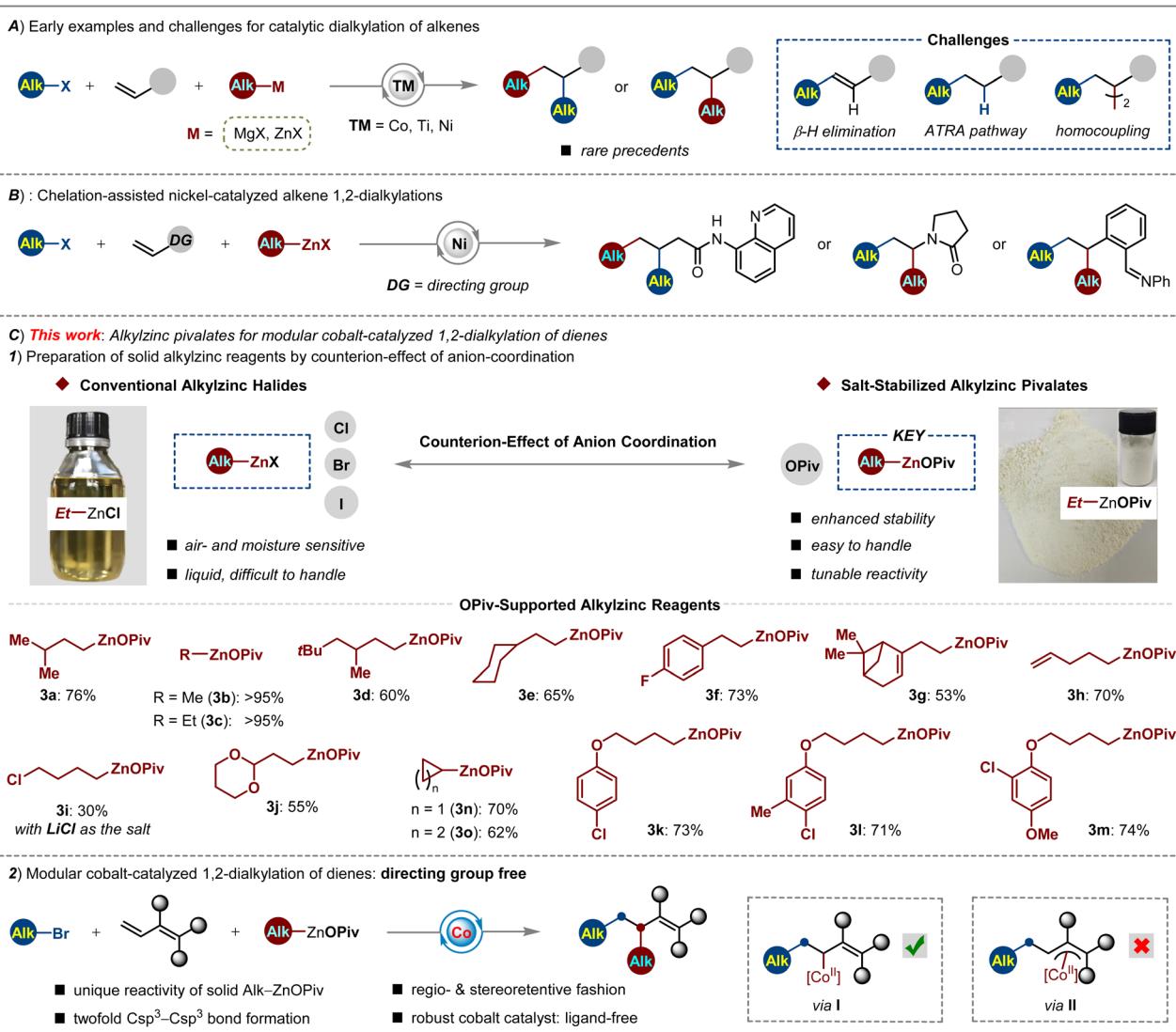
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**Scheme 1** Current applications and limitations of alkylzinc reagents in sequence 1,2-dialkylation of alkenes. (A) Importance of the  $\text{CF}_2$ -moiety in bioactive molecules. (B) Chelation-assisted strategy for alkene dialkylation. (C) Preparation of OPiv-supported alkylzinc reagents and their unique reactivity in modular cobalt-catalyzed 1,2-dialkylation of 1,3-dienes.

$\text{ZnX}$  from  $\text{Cl}$  to  $\text{Br}$  or  $\text{I}$  will result in very different kinetics in palladium and nickel catalysis.<sup>12</sup> Very recently, Knochel and us further disclosed the dramatic effects of carboxylate-coordination<sup>13</sup> on improving the stability and reactivity of  $\text{Ar-Zn}^{14}$  and  $\text{Si-Zn}$  reagents.<sup>15</sup> These observations gave us the perspective for tuning the physical and chemical properties of alkylzinc reagents by anion-regulation.

With this concept in mind, a new type of OPiv-supported alkylzinc reagents **3a-3m** has been designed and prepared in moderate to excellent yields (30 to >95%) through transmetalation of alkylmagnesium bromides with  $\text{Zn}(\text{OPiv})_2$ . As compared to the poor stability and user-convenience of conventional alkylzinc reagents, these solid alkylzinc pivalates showed enhanced air and moisture stability by operationally simple protocols (Scheme 1C, top). Considering that fluorine-installation<sup>16</sup> into bioactive molecules uniquely tunes their

solubility, metabolic stability and bioavailability,<sup>17</sup> we further illustrated the reactivity of this new type of alkylzinc pivalate by devising three-component alkylidifluoroalkylation of dioenoates. Therefore, we envisioned capitalizing on the combination of (i) solid  $\text{Alk-ZnOPiv}$  as the nucleophile which exhibits providential reducibility and transmetalation rate, (ii) a practical, robust cobalt catalyst<sup>18</sup> which favors rapid twofold  $\text{Csp}^3\text{-Csp}^3$  cross-coupling and (iii) simple reaction conditions at 23 °C to achieve regio- and chemoselective difluoroalkylation-alkylation reaction of dioenoates with broad difluoroalkyl halides and alkylzinc pivalates. Indeed, OPiv-coordination made  $\text{Alk-ZnOPiv}$  stand out among other salt-supported organozincs, which is the key to drive the highly active cobalt catalysis for realizing the modular, site-selective installation of  $\text{CF}_2$ - and/or  $\text{Csp}^3$ -groups across double bonds. Moreover, the formation of a flexible  $\pi$ -allylcobalt intermediate (**II**) was prohibited by steric interaction,

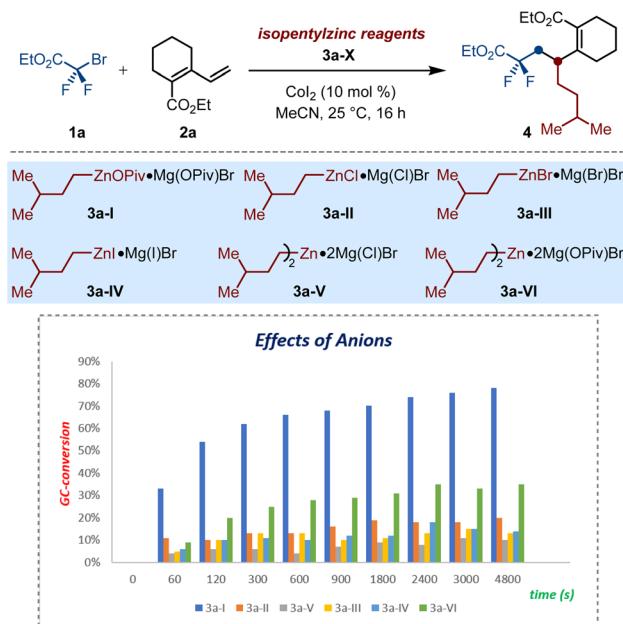


thus ensuring the 1,2-difunctionalization of dioenoates (**I**) in a stereoretentive fashion (Scheme 1C, bottom).

## Results and discussion

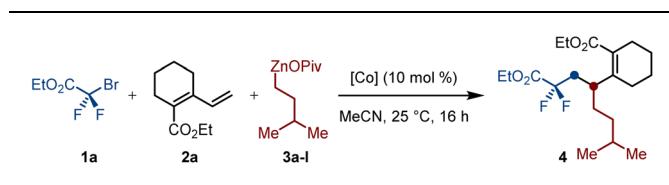
We initiated our investigations by reacting dioenoate **2a** with bromodifluoroacetate **1a** and OPiv-supported isopentylzinc reagent **3a-I** (Table 1). Among the representative cobalt complexes,  $\text{CoI}_2$  has proven to be the choice of metal source for achieving 1,2-alkyldifluoroalkylation of dioenoate *via* directing-group-free cobalt-catalyzed twofold  $\text{Csp}^3$ - $\text{Csp}^3$  cross-coupling, thus affording **4** in 78% yield of isolated product as the single regioisomer (entries 1–9). However, chelating ligands such as TMEDA, 1,10-phenanthrolines, as well as dppbz and dcype had negative effects, which decreased the yields of **4** to 31–68% (entries 10–13). As expected, no reaction was observed in the absence of a cobalt source (entry 14).

These results encouraged us to further evaluate the unique anion-regulation of solid alkylzinc pivalate among that of other salt-supported alkylzinc reagents. To this end, a series of isopentyl zinc reagents **3a** (**I**–**VI**) were prepared through transmetalation reactions of the corresponding isopentylmagnesium bromide with zinc salts ( $\text{ZnX}_2$ ;  $\text{X} = \text{OPiv}, \text{Cl}, \text{Br}, \text{I}$ ). With these nucleophiles in hand, their different kinetics in the cobalt-catalyzed alkene dicarbofunctionalization were examined by performing parallel experiments under the described conditions (Scheme 2). Generally, all of these reactions were almost finished within 60 min. However, the conventional halide-supported isopentylzinc reagents **3a** (**II**–**IV**) showed significantly poor reactivity and only furnished the desired product **4** in less than 20% conversions. In sharp contrast, on switching from halides to OPiv-anions, isopentylzinc pivalate **3a-I** exhibited superior reactivity and steered the success of cobalt-catalyzed selective 1,2-dialkylation process. Similarly, the results of comparison experiments by using **3a-V** and **3a-VI** as the



**Scheme 2** Kinetic experiments with alkylzinc reagents **3a** (**I**–**VI**). Reaction conditions: **1a** (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), **2a** (1.5 equiv.), **3a** (2.5 equiv.), 0.5 to 80 min, biphenyl as the internal standard, detected by GC-analysis.

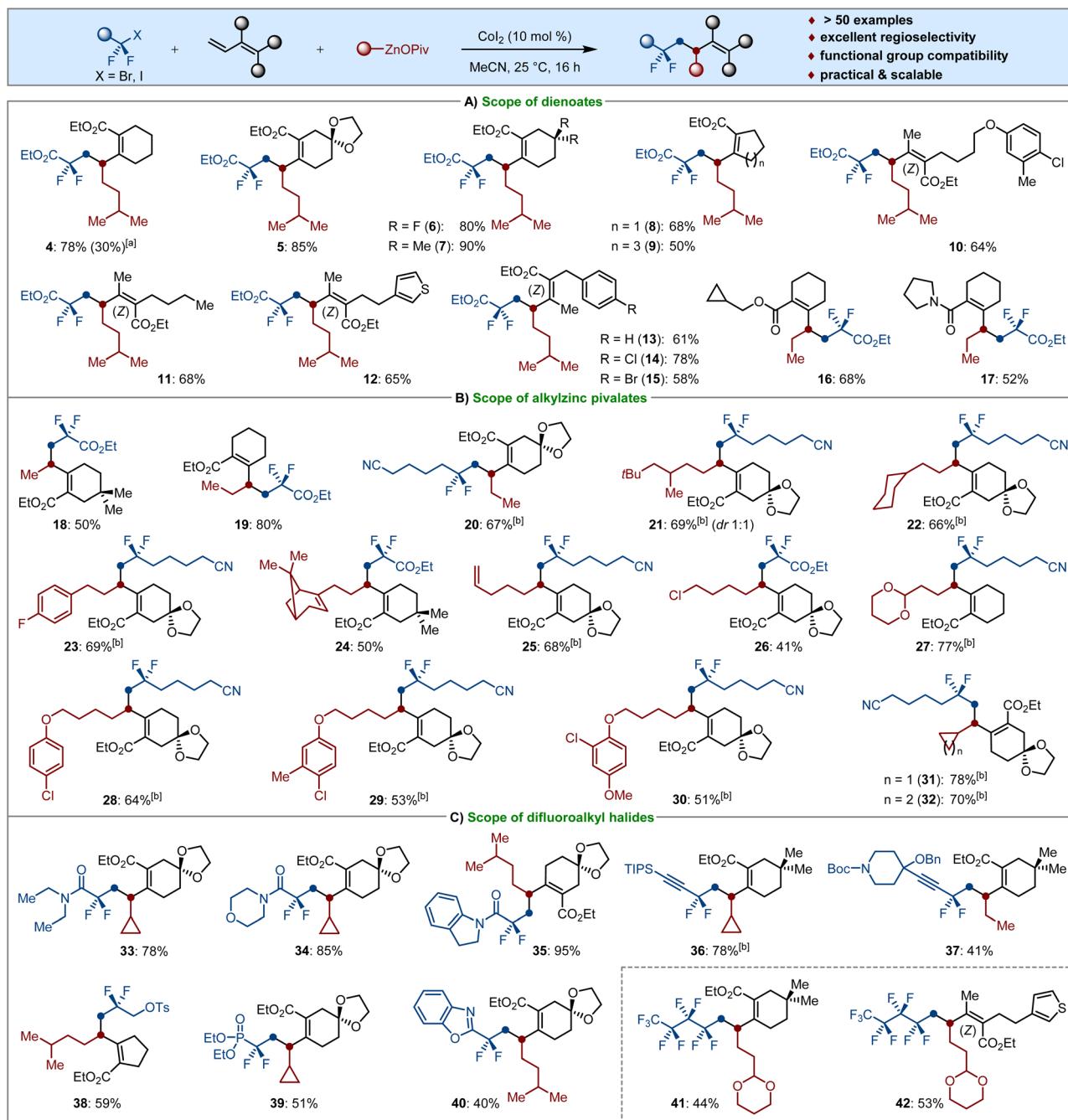
**Table 1** Optimization studies for cobalt-catalyzed selective alkylidifluoroalkylation of dioenoate with alkylzinc pivalate **3a-I**<sup>a</sup>



| Entry | Variation                  | Yield <sup>b</sup> (%) | Entry | Variation                     | Yield <sup>b</sup> (%) |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1     | $\text{CoCl}_2$            | 57                     | 8     | $\text{CoCl}(\text{PPh}_3)_3$ | Trace                  |
| 2     | $\text{CoBr}_2$            | 58                     | 9     | $\text{CoI}_2$                | 78 <sup>c</sup>        |
| 3     | $\text{CoI}_2$             | 62                     | 10    | TMEDA                         | 68 <sup>c,d</sup>      |
| 4     | $\text{Co}(\text{acac})_2$ | 56                     | 11    | 1,10-Phen                     | 54 <sup>c,e</sup>      |
| 5     | $\text{Co}(\text{acac})_3$ | 34                     | 12    | Dppbz                         | 31 <sup>c,e</sup>      |
| 6     | $\text{CoBr}_2\text{-DME}$ | 49                     | 13    | Dcype                         | 55 <sup>c,e</sup>      |
| 7     | $\text{Co}(\text{OAc})_2$  | 46                     | 14    | Without [Co]                  | 0 <sup>c</sup>         |

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: **1a** (2.0 equiv.), **2a** (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), **3a-I** (2.0 equiv.), [Co] (10 mol%), MeCN (1.5 mL), 25 °C, 16 h. <sup>b</sup> Isolated yields. <sup>c</sup> **1a** (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), **2a** (1.5 equiv.), **3a-I** (2.5 equiv.). <sup>d</sup> TMEDA (30 mol%) as the ligand. <sup>e</sup> Ligand (11 mol%).





**Scheme 3** Substrate scope for the cobalt-catalyzed selective 1,2-dialkyldifluoroalkylation of dioenoates. Reaction conditions: difluoroalkyl halides (1.5 equiv.), dioenoates (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), Alk-ZnOPiv (2.5 equiv.), Col<sub>2</sub> (10 mol%), MeCN (1.5 mL), 25 °C, 16 h. [a] Alk-ZnO-Piv·Mg(O*Piv*)Br·LiCl instead of **3a–l**. [b] Difluoroalkyl halides (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), dioenoates (1.5 equiv.), and TMEDA (30 mol%) were used. [c] 1.3 mmol scale.

configuration of the tetrasubstituted acrylates was completely retained in the catalytic system; the desired products **10–15** were obtained in 47–78% yields in a stereoretentive fashion. It is worth noting that various decorated 1,3-dienoate and 1,3-dienamide were also found to be viable substrates for the envisioned twofold  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3/Csp^3$  bond formation, thereby delivering selective 1,2-dialkylated **16–17** as the sole products (Scheme 3A).

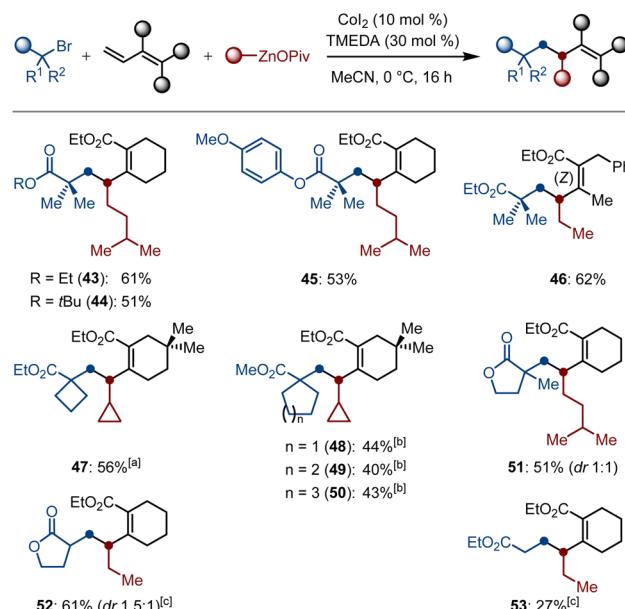
Thereafter, we next examined the sequential installation of  $\text{CF}_2$ - and  $\text{Csp}^3$ -groups across double bonds by using solid  $\text{OPiv}$ -supported alkylzinc reagents as the nucleophiles (Scheme 3B). Methyl and ethyl groups are important pharmacophores in many bioactive molecules. Importantly, both  $\text{Me-ZnOPiv}$  and  $\text{Et-ZnOPiv}$  underwent cobalt-catalyzed difuloroalkylmethyl- and ethylation to provide the fluorinated products **18–20** in 50–80% isolated yields. Likewise, a variety of primary alkylzinc pivalates,

as well as the functionalized organozincs are all competent  $Csp^3$ -nucleophiles in the conjunctive cross-coupling reaction, giving the fluorinated carbogenic skeletons **21–30** in moderate to good yields under simple and practical reaction conditions. Moreover, increasing interest has been devoted to the introduction of strained carbocycles such as cyclopropanes and cyclobutanes during the past decade,<sup>20</sup> which have found numerous applications in medicinal chemistry.<sup>21</sup> As such, we prepared the corresponding solid alkylzinc pivalates and tested the cascade difluoroalkyl cyclopropanation and cyclobutanation of dioenoates. It is worth noting that the expected products **31–32** were selectively obtained in 70–78% yields, which provides a perspective for installation of strained carbocycles and their further late-stage functionalization to afford highly complex molecules.

Inspired by these findings, the scope with respect to various fluoroalkyl bromides was further tested. As shown in Scheme 3C, different bromodifluoroacetamides were successfully utilized for the cascade cross-coupling reactions with dioenoates and alkylzinc pivalates to afford the corresponding products **33–35** in high yields. Importantly, *gem*-difluoropropargyl bromides bearing hindered triisopropylsilyl aliphatic substituents were proven to be viable substrates as well, leading to fluorinated alkynes **36–37** in 41–78% yields with no trace of carbometallated products. These results highlighted the excellent functional group tolerance and chemoselectivity of our cobalt catalyst. Therefore, the substrate scope could easily be extended to the use of  $\alpha$ -bromodifluoromethyl-substituted tosylate (**38**), phosphonate (**39**) and benzoxazole as well (**40**). It was particularly noteworthy that perfluorobutyl iodide was found to be successful for the cobalt-catalyzed 1,2-dicarbofunctionalization of dioenoates with [2-(1,3-dioxan-2-yl)ethyl]zinc pivalate, smoothly affording the polyfluorinated products **41–42** with high regio- and site-selectivity.

The substrate scope was not only limited to the difluoroalkyl halides; we further succeeded in examining alkyl halides. To our delight, various tertiary  $\alpha$ -bromocarbonyl compounds were proven to be suitable electrophiles for the generation of  $\alpha$ - $Csp^3$  radicals in the presence of a cobalt source, thereby smoothly undergoing the selective 1,2-dialkylation process to afford the carbogenic skeletons **43–51** in 40–62% yields. Moreover, the secondary and primary  $\alpha$ -bromocarbonyl compounds were proven to be suitable substrates as well, and the corresponding products **52–53** were obtained in 61% and 27% yields, respectively. Herein, a catalytic amount of TMEDA as the ligand is required for increasing the conversions to the desired products (Scheme 4).

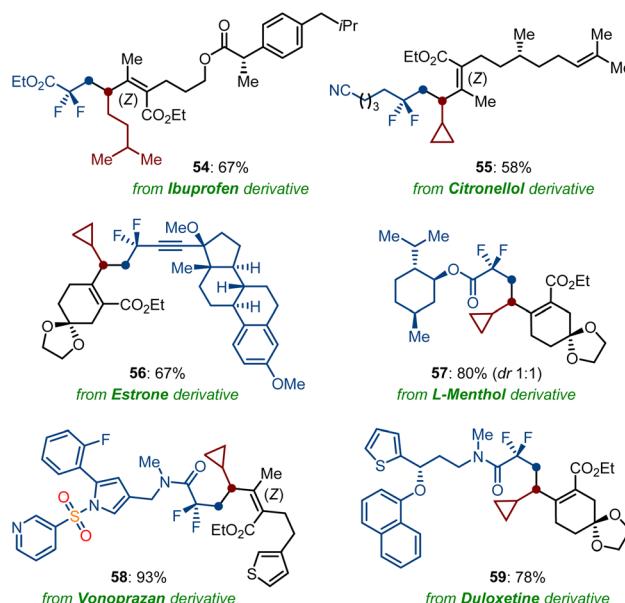
Encouraged by the robustness of our cobalt-catalyzed sequential difluorolalkylation-alkylation of functionalized dioenoates, we became intrigued by the demonstration of its potential synthetical utility in the fluorine installation of druglike molecules and natural products (Scheme 5). Remarkably, dioenoates derivatized from ibuprofen (**54**), citronellol (**55**), as well as difluoroalkyl bromides containing a complex molecule, such as estrone (**56**), L-menthol (**57**), vonoprazan (**58**), and duloxetine (**59**) derivatives, showed excellent compatibility to the direct twofold  $Csp^3$ – $Csp^3$  cross-coupling reaction by using



**Scheme 4** Substrate scope for the cobalt-catalyzed selective 1,2-dialkylation of dioenoates. Reaction conditions: alkyl bromides (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), dioenoates (1.5 equiv.), Alk–ZnOPiv (2.5 equiv.), Col<sub>2</sub> (10 mol%), TMEDA (30 mol%), MeCN (1.5 mL), 0 °C, 16 h. [a] 3 mmol scale. [b] Dioenoates (0.15 mmol, 1.0 equiv.), alkyl bromides (2.0 equiv.), Alk–ZnOPiv (2.5 equiv.), Col<sub>2</sub> (10 mol%), MeCN (1.5 mL), 0 °C, 16 h. [c] w/o TMEDA, at 25 °C.

OPiv-supported alkylzinc reagents as the nucleophilic partners. Thus, the high-yielding preparation of these fluorinated molecules should be proved instrumental for the discovery of novel drug precursors.

Intrigued by the outstanding catalytic activity of the cobalt catalyst, we sought to unravel the mechanism of this



**Scheme 5** Late-stage fluorine installation of drugs and natural products.

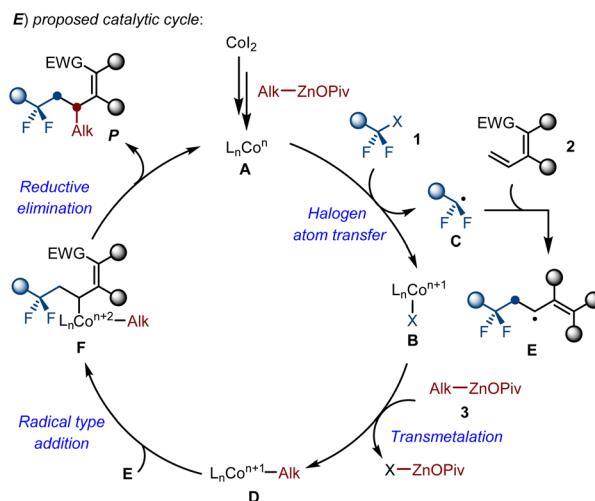
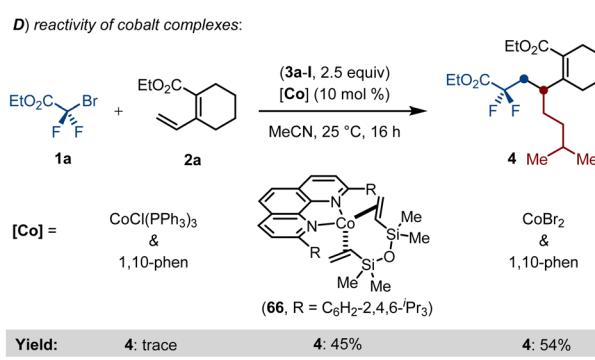
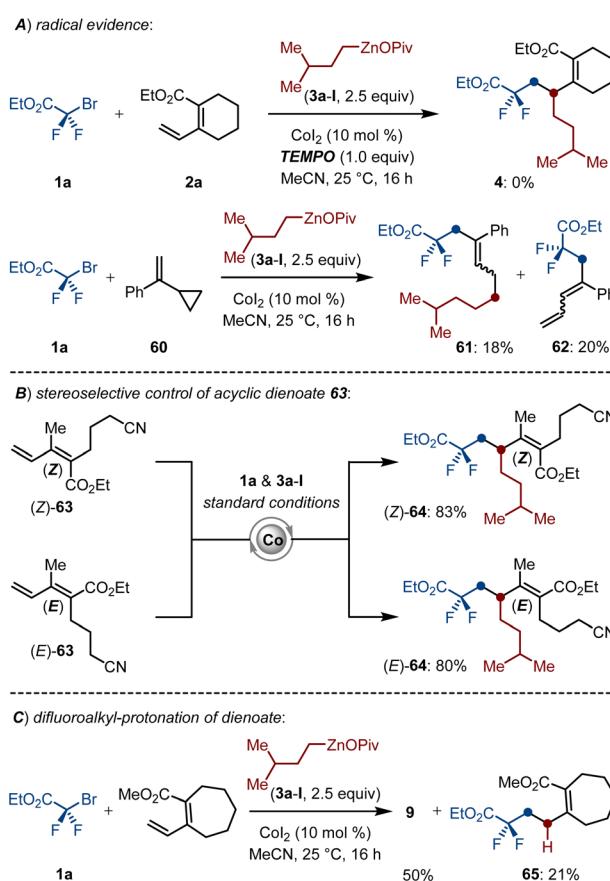


multicomponent cross-coupling. First, the cobalt-catalyzed difluoroalkylation-alkylation was completely inhibited by employing stoichiometric quantities of TEMPO as the radical scavengers. Moreover, a radical-clock experiment with the substrate *α*-cyclopropyl styrene **60** delivered the ring-opening products **61–62**, which suggested a radical relay process in the reaction (Scheme 6A). We next investigated the stereoselective control of the reaction by setting parallel experiments with stereodefined (*Z*)- and (*E*)-dienoates. Notably, both (*Z*)-**63** and (*E*)-**63** smoothly underwent the envisioned cross-coupling process and generated the corresponding products **64** in complete control of stereoretentive fashion (Scheme 6B). These results indicated that the initial radical insertion formed a stable allylcobalt complex rather than a flexible  $\pi$ -allylcobalt intermediate, thereby ensuring the stereoselectivity of the targeted reaction. Beyond that, the ester group is crucial due to its conjugation effect on the active dienoates rather than a directing group. A set of cobalt-catalyzed dialkylations of exocyclic dienoate not only formed the desired product **9**, but also delivered a hydrodifluoroalkylated compound **65** in 21% yield, which suggested that the reaction involves an initial 1,2-radical insertion (Scheme 6C). The well-defined cobalt(0) complex  $L_n$ -Co(dvtms) (**66**),<sup>22</sup> was examined for the radical relay coupling reaction, delivering the desired product **4** with equal efficacy as compared to the  $CoI_2/1,10$ -phen system. However, using

$CoCl(PPh_3)_3$  as the catalyst only gave **4** in negligible conversion (Scheme 6D). These observations indicated that the low-valent  $Co(0)$ -species might be the catalytically active catalyst.

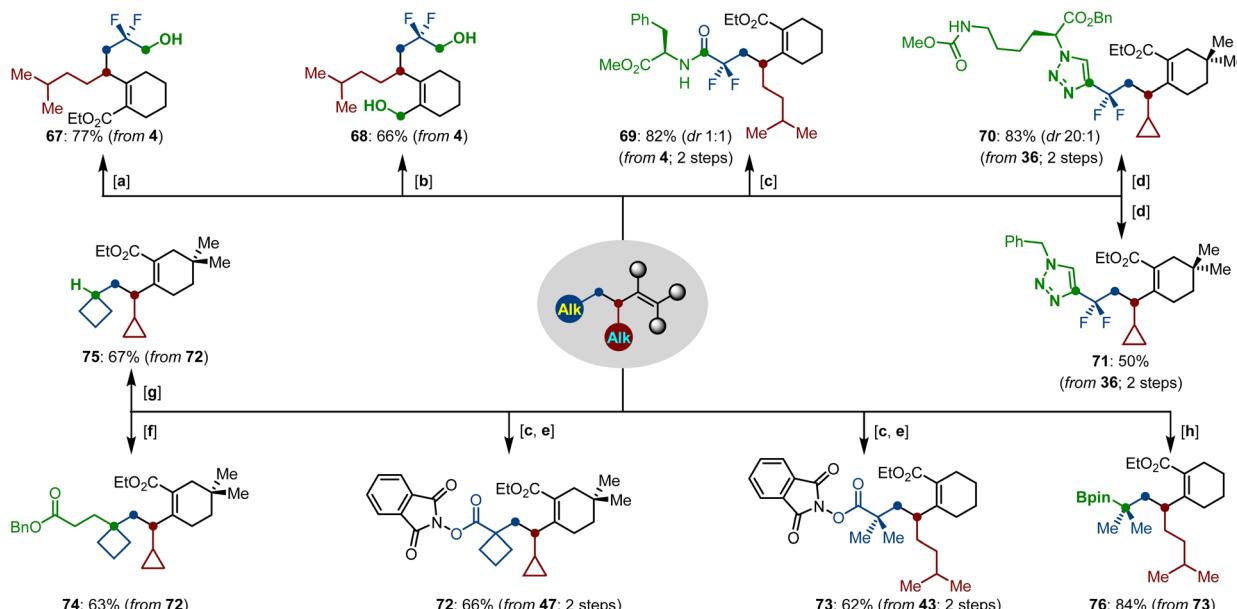
Based on our findings and previous insights,<sup>34,23</sup> a plausible catalytic cycle has been proposed as shown in Scheme 6E. The initial reduction of  $CoI_2$  with alkylzinc pivalates formed the catalytically active  $L_nCo^n$ -species (**A**), which promotes the intermolecular halogen atom transfer of difluoroalkyl bromides by SET to generate the difluoroalkyl radical **B**, then followed by a facile radical insertion of **B** into dienoates (**2**) to form the allyl radical **E**. Transmetalation between the newly formed  $L_nCo^{n+1}$ -species and  $Alk-ZnOPiv$  (**3**) gave the alkyl-Co $^{n+1}$  (**D**). Subsequent radical type oxidation of **D** and **E** furnished the key intermediate **F**. Finally, reductive elimination delivered the 1,2-dialkylated products and regenerated the active  $L_nCo^n$ -species.

Finally, the synthetic applications of functionalized difluoroalkylation-alkylation products were elaborated by various facile transformations (Scheme 7). First, the two ester groups could be selectively reduced by  $NaBH_4$  and  $LiAlH_4$ , generating the corresponding alcohols **67** and **68**, respectively. Facile base-mediated saponification of **4** gave a carboxylic acid, which can serve as a building block for the synthesis of a peptide with L-phenylalanine, leading to product **69** in 82% yield. Furthermore, we removed the protecting silyl group in the presence of  $TBAF$ , and performed



Scheme 6 Mechanistic studies.





**Scheme 7** Facile late-stage functionalizations of dialkylated compounds. Reaction conditions: [a]  $\text{NaBH}_4$  (2.0 equiv.),  $\text{EtOH}$ , reflux, 4 h. [b]  $\text{LiAlH}_4$  (2.5 equiv.),  $\text{THF}$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 4 h. [c] (i)  $\text{LiOH}$  (17 equiv.),  $\text{THF}/\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 2 h; (ii) L-phenylalanine (2.0 equiv.), PyBop (1.2 equiv.),  $\text{Et}_3\text{N}$  (4.0 equiv.),  $\text{THF}$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 12 h. [d]  $\text{R-N}_3$  (1.0 equiv.),  $\text{CuI}$  (10 mol%),  $\text{DMF}$ ,  $80^\circ\text{C}$ , 12 h. [e]  $N$ -Hydroxyphthalimide (1.2 equiv.),  $\text{DIC}$  (1.1 equiv.),  $\text{DMAP}$  (0.1 equiv.),  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 16 h. [f] Benzyl acrylate (1.0 equiv.),  $\text{NiCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (20 mol%),  $\text{Zn}$  (2.0 equiv.),  $\text{LiCl}$  (3.0 equiv.),  $\text{MeCN}$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 12 h. [g]  $\text{PhSiH}_3$  (1.5 equiv.),  $\text{NiCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (10 mol%),  $\text{Zn}$  (0.5 equiv.), dtbppy (20 mol%),  $\text{THF}/\text{DMF}/i\text{PrOH}$ ,  $40^\circ\text{C}$ , 1 h. [h]  $(\text{MeB}_2\text{pin}_2)\text{Li}$  (3.0 equiv.),  $\text{NiCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (10 mol%), di-MeObipy (13 mol%),  $\text{MgBr}_2 \cdot \text{Et}_2\text{O}$  (1.5 equiv.),  $\text{THF}/\text{DMF}$ ,  $23^\circ\text{C}$ , 2 h.

a click-reaction of the newly formed terminal alkyne with benzyl azide and azido ester under copper catalysis, thus providing the polyfunctional triazoles **70–71** in good yields. Beyond this, the tertiary carboxylate moieties of the dialkylated compounds can be easily transformed into the *N*-hydroxyphthalimide esters **72–73**, which displayed versatile transformations, such as the Giese reaction, reductive decarboxylation and borylation, leading to the corresponding products **74–76** in good yields.

## Conclusions

In summary, we have reported the preparation of a new type of solid and salt-stabilized alkylzinc pivalate, which shows enhanced stability and unique reactivity in the cobalt-catalyzed alkylidifluoroalkylation of dioenoates under directing-group-free conditions, thus achieving the modular installation of  $\text{CF}_2$ - and  $\text{Csp}^3$ -groups across the double bond of dioenoates *via* a cascade  $\text{Csp}^3$ - $\text{Csp}^3$ / $\text{Csp}^3$ - $\text{Csp}^3$  bond formation with complete control of the regioselectivity and stereoretentivity. Particularly noteworthy is the dramatic OPIV-tuning effect on Alk-ZnOPIV, which leads to superior stability and reactivity among other halide-supported alkylzincs. Moreover, the synthetic simplicity and utility of our 1,2-selective dicarbofunctionalization are well illustrated by the facile modifications of drug-like molecules and natural products, as well as the late-stage derivatizations of the fluorinated products. We believe that this work will provide a perspective for the design of novel organozinc reagents by the anion-regulation strategy and find wide applications in Negishi-type reactions.

## Data availability

The datasets supporting this article have been uploaded as part of the ESI material.†

## Author contributions

Jie Li conceptualized the project and wrote the paper; J. Lin and K. C. contributed equally to this work; J. Lin, K. C., and J. W. designed and performed the experiments; J. G., S. D., J. Lin, and Y. H. prepared the starting materials, all the authors were involved in the interpretation of the results presented in the manuscript.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

## Acknowledgements

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