

## ★ **In Vino Duplicitas: The Rise and Fall of a Wine Forger Extraordinaire**

**Peter Hellman**

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*Wine aficionados and teetotalers alike would savor the well-reported true crime tale where FBI stands for Fake Bottle Investigators.*

Peter Hellman's *In Vino Duplicitas* is a heady, intoxicating book that shines a light on the esoteric and intriguing world of ultrarare, ultrafine wines that can cost more per bottle than a car or even a house.

This is the tale of Rudy Kurniawan, an ambitious young Indonesian immigrant whose claim to have “arguably the greatest cellar on earth” falls flatter than a flute of two-day-old champagne. Kurniawan, known as Dr. Conti for his fondness for Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, was infamously convicted of selling fake high-end wines at auctions where he made millions. The book charts his rise and fall, and how he was able to dupe sophisticated wine connoisseurs, including billionaires with MIT educations.

The book demonstrates a deep, wide-ranging knowledge of wine and wine culture, going behind the scenes of elite wineries, top vineyards, high-roller auctions, and unconventional drinking clubs like the Twelve Angry Men, where members “had pockets deep enough to pay for crazily expensive wine and physical constitutions strong enough to drink a lot of it.”

Deep, thorough reportage fleshes out key players, like Bill Koch, who waged a war against forged wines after he was tricked into splurging on them. Court transcripts and television interviews are expertly used to paint a portrait of a man who spent millions on “drinking wines” to enjoy with superlative food, friends, and art, but was so paranoid about authenticity that he brought them to châteaux to check them out and enlisted an army of experts for vetting. The description of a “scorched-earth, costs-be-damned crusade” feels free from hyperbole.

The title gives away the outcome, but the book still reads like a mix between a crime thriller and a fascinating magazine feature that elucidates a particular subculture. *In Vino Duplicitas* maintains suspense over how long the con will go on, and when it will finally come crashing down.

*In Vino Duplicitas* is an engaging journalistic feat that can be enjoyed with some of the world's finest vino, Two-Buck Chuck, or while perfectly sober.

JOSEPH S. PETE (July/August 2017)

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