It was the most expensive bottle of wine ever sold.

In 1985, at a heated auction by Christie’s of London, a 1787 bottle of Château Lafite Bordeaux—one of a cache of bottles unearthed in a bricked-up Paris cellar and supposedly owned by Thomas Jefferson—went for $156,000 to a member of the Forbes family. The discoverer of the bottle was pop-band manager turned wine collector Hardy Rodenstock, who had a knack for finding extremely old and exquisite wines. But rumors about the bottle soon arose. Why wouldn’t Rodenstock reveal the exact location where it had been found? Was it part of a smuggled Nazi hoard? Or did his reticence conceal an even darker secret?

It would take more than two decades for those questions to be answered and involve a gallery of intriguing players—among them Michael Broadbent, the bicycle-riding British auctioneer who speaks of wines as if they are women and staked his reputation on the record-setting sale; Serena Sutcliffe, Broadbent’s elegant archrival, whose palate is covered by a hefty insurance policy; and Bill Koch, the extravagant Florida tycoon bent on exposing the truth about Rodenstock.

Pursuing the story from Monticello to London to Zurich to Munich and beyond, Benjamin Wallace also offers a mesmerizing history of wine, complete with vivid accounts of subterranean European laboratories where
old vintages are dated and of Jefferson’s colorful, wine-soaked days in France, where he literally drank up the culture.

Suspenseful, witty, and thrillingly strange, The Billionaire’s Vinegar is the vintage tale of what could be the most elaborate con since the Hitler diaries. It is also the debut of an exceptionally powerful new voice in narrative non-fiction.

**Personal Review: The Billionaires Vinegar: The Mystery of the Worlds Most Expensive Bottle of Wine by Benjamin Wallace**

"Rare wine may be the only luxury-priced commodity in the world that does not come with a guarantee of authenticity. The appearance of dishonest segments of society with only one objective, to take full advantage of the enormous opportunity that exists to make a quick buck by selling bogus wines, is not that shocking. This has always been a problem.......it is a subject that needs to be addressed."

This rather ominous warning sounded by the noted wine expert Robert H. Parker Jr. in 1996 seems to neatly sum up the state of affairs in the world of rare wines in the mid 1990’s. Over the previous quarter century or so the market for old and rare wine had changed rather dramatically. It was no longer the exclusive purview of the old money men of European descent. With the world economy booming, there were lots of nouveau rich players from America and Asia who now had the money and craved the notoriety of being able to participate in this rather prestigious pastime.

"The Billionaire's Vinegar: The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine" tells the tale of these frenzied years that saw the price of rare wines skyrocket. Author Benjamin Wallace gives his readers a look-see into a world that only the rich and famous previously had access to. It is at once a disturbing and riveting saga.

The story of "The Billionaire’s Vinegar" seems to center around a rather shadowy figure named Hardy Rosenstock. Rosenstock was a German collector who claimed to be in possession of a cache of extraordinarily old and rare wines that were discovered in 1985 in the basement of a house about to be razed in Paris. Rosenstock claimed that one of the bottles was a Chateau Lafite from 1787 which many collectors considered to be the Holy Grail of rare wines. Furthermore, Rosenstock alleged that the initials "Th. J." carved into the bottle made it likely that the bottle had belonged to Thomas Jefferson, a connoisseur of fine wine who had spent several years in Paris and who was known to have purchased large quantities of wine during his time in the city. Rodenstock consigned his highly prized bottle to Christie's for auction. The auction would be conducted by another major player in this drama, Michael Broadbent, who was the highly respected head of Christie's wine department. Before placing the bottle on the auction block in December of 1985 Broadbent conducted what he considered to be a thorough investigation of the bottle and became
convincing beyond a shadow of a doubt that this bottle was authentic. At the extraordinary auction a member of the legendary Forbes family purchased this bottle for the record setting price of $156,000!

Meanwhile, there were rumblings that something was amiss here. Rumors persisted that the bottle that Kip Forbes purchased for his family was a fake. Officials from Monticello (the home of Thomas Jefferson) could not vouch for the bottle's authenticity. Over the next several years more and more of the bottles associated with Rodenstock were deemed suspicious. A feud would erupt between two of the world's most prestigious auction houses. Sotheby's alleged that Christie's was handling a lot of bottles for which no provenance existed. And while all this was going on the prices for these bottles continued to escalate as more and more well-heeled collectors deemed them desirable. Although most wine afficianados went to great lengths to keep the problem under wraps the situation was clearly getting out of control and needed to be addressed.

In "The Billionaire's Vinegar" Benjamin Wallace chronicles what went down over the next two decades before many of these thorny issues would finally be resolved. You will learn the techniques of those involved in producing the faux vino. You will also meet many of the wine afficianados who became victims of these scams and the man who finally resolved to do something about it. Finally, you will discover the new technologies that would once and for all resolve many of these long standing issues. "The Billionaire's Vinegar: The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine" is an exceptionally entertaining and well written book. I learned an awful lot about a topic I knew nothing about. Very highly recommended!

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The Billionaires Vinegar: The Mystery of the Worlds Most Expensive Bottle of Wine by Benjamin Wallace 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!