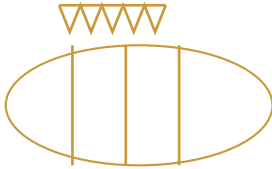


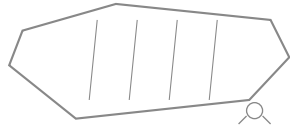
THE FUCKING FRENCH

BILTONG



Le Saucisson
600 years of civilisation

V
S



*Le Biltong**
* beef. left outside.

A Scientific Comparison Between Biltong and Real Food

thefuckingfrench.com

INTRODUCTION

There is a moment, somewhere between Johannesburg and Windhoek, when someone hands you a piece of biltong.

You eat it. It is fine. It is beef. It is dry. It has coriander on it.

You think: *this is fine*.

Then you think about saucisson.

And you realise that "fine" is not enough.

This book is about that realisation.

What this book is not:

— A recipe book. You don't need a recipe for biltong. You need a box and patience.

— A history of South African food culture. There are better books. This is not one of them.

— An attack on biltong. We respect biltong. We respect all dried meats. We just respect some more than others.

What this book is:

— An honest comparison.

— A love letter to saucisson disguised as journalism.

— A guide to French charcuterie for people who've spent too long where saucisson means a plastic packet at a petrol station.

You know who you are.



CHAPTER I

What is Biltong?

Biltong is beef.

Then someone forgot it outside.

This is the entire history of biltong.

South Africans will tell you there is more. There is vinegar. There is coriander. There is a specific drying process involving a wooden box with a small fan and a lightbulb.

All of this is true.

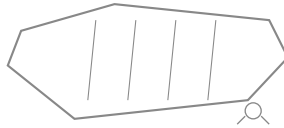
The French will tell you there is more to saucisson too. There is the selection of the pig. The specific ratio of fat to lean. The fermentation. The curing cellar. The humidity. The months of patience. The regional variation. The appellation. The history.

The difference is that when a Frenchman starts talking about saucisson, he cannot stop.

When a South African starts talking about biltong, he offers you some.

Both approaches have merit.

We prefer the French one because it lasts longer and involves more wine.



*Le Biltong**
* beef. left outside.

Le Biltong. Beef. Left outside. Called cuisine.

The Biltong Box

The biltong box is a wooden box with a lightbulb inside and a small fan.

You hang the meat inside. You wait four to seven days. You eat the biltong.

The French spent six centuries developing stone cellars with specific temperature gradients, controlled humidity, and airflow systems optimised for the development of beneficial moulds.

The South Africans built a box.

We admire this. The French admire almost nothing. We are making an exception.

The box works. The saucisson is still better.

On Coriander

Biltong contains coriander. This is its defining spice.

Saucisson contains black pepper, garlic, wine, and the accumulated culinary wisdom of a civilisation.

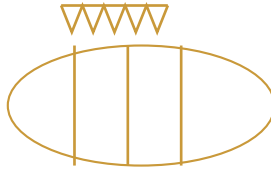
Both are seasoned. One was seasoned by a spice trader passing through the Cape in 1652. One was seasoned by the Roman Empire, refined by medieval monasteries, and perfected by French peasants over four hundred years of cold winters.



CHAPTER II

The Saucisson

A Brief History



Le Saucisson
600 years of civilisation

Le Saucisson. With crown. As it should be.

The saucisson sec is a dried pork sausage. It is also a philosophy. It is also a way of life.

It is the reason French people can survive any situation — a long train journey, an unexpected guest, a government strike, the end of the world — as long as there is a saucisson, a knife, some bread, and a bottle of Côtes du Rhône.

How it began:

The Romans came to Gaul. They brought pigs. They left. The Gauls kept the pigs.

They also kept the technique of preserving pork with salt and spices.

Over the following centuries, each region developed its own variation.

Lyon became the capital. The Lyonnais are not modest about this. They are right not to be.

The great saucissons of France:

Saucisson de Lyon — Dense, complex, spotted with fat, wrapped in a white bloom of noble mould. This mould is not a problem. This mould is the point.

Rosette de Lyon — Long, thin, elegant. Cured for months. The supermodel of dried sausage.

Jésus de Lyon — Large, generous, shaped like a rugby ball. Named after the nativity. The French have strong feelings about both.

Saucisson d'Arles — From Provence. Your grandmother kept one in a drawer. It was always there. Always good.

Coppa — Technically Corsican, technically influenced by Italy, entirely French in attitude.

Saucisson de montagne — Mountain air, cold cellars, simpler seasoning. The honest version.

What they all have in common: Pork. Salt. Time. A certain Frenchness that is impossible to define and immediately recognisable.



CHAPTER III

How to Eat Saucisson

The most important chapter in this book.



Step 1: Buy the right saucisson.

Go to a charcutier. Not a supermarket. A charcutier. Tell him what you want. He will recommend something. Listen to him.

Step 2: Let it come to temperature.

Take the saucisson out of the fridge thirty minutes before eating. Cold saucisson is edible. Room temperature saucisson is revelatory. The difference is the fat.

Step 3: Slice it.

Not too thin. Not too thick. Thick enough to taste something, thin enough to fit in your mouth. On a slight diagonal — larger surface area, better ratio of fat to lean.

Step 4: Build the board.

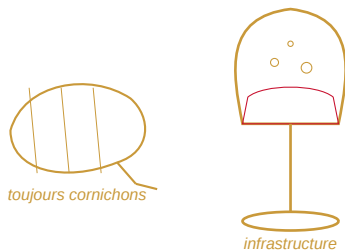
Saucisson. Cornichons alongside. Always cornichons. Non-optional. The acidity cuts through the fat. Bread. A fresh baguette. Butter if you want.

Step 5: Pour the wine.

A Beaujolais. A Côtes du Rhône. Something red, not too serious, €12-20, chosen by someone who knows the region.

Step 6: Stand in the kitchen.

This is not negotiable. The saucisson board is not eaten at the table. It is the apéritif. It is the best hour of the French day. Nobody rushes it.





CHAPTER IV

The Apéritif

A French Institution

The apéritif is not a drink. The apéritif is a ceremony.

It happens between six and eight in the evening. Before dinner. Whether or not dinner is ready.

Especially when dinner is not ready.

The apéritif requires:

— Wine. Or pastis. Or champagne if someone is celebrating or if it is a Tuesday.

— Something to eat. Saucisson. Olives. Something that requires no effort to prepare and considerable effort to stop eating.

— Conversation. About anything. About the neighbours. About the government. About the saucisson.

— Time. The apéritif lasts as long as it lasts. Nobody announces its end.

The South African equivalent is the braai. The braai lasts four hours.

The apéritif lasts one hour. Both are sacred. Neither can be interrupted. Both involve someone with very strong opinions about how to do it correctly.

In South Africa, this person manages the fire. In France, this person chose the wine.



CHAPTER V

The Scientific Comparison

We present the data without commentary.

Criteria	Biltong	Saucisson
History	<i>Some</i>	Too much
Wine compatibility	<i>Acceptable</i>	Religious experience
With baguette?	<i>No</i>	Obviously
Sophistication	<i>No</i>	Yes
French approval	<i>3%</i>	127%
Invented by	<i>Accident</i>	Civilisation
Pairs with	<i>Beer, mostly</i>	Everything
Mould exterior	<i>No</i>	That's the point
Requires cellar	<i>No</i>	Ideally
Requires box	<i>Yes</i>	No
Wait time	<i>4-7 days</i>	2-6 months
Worth the wait	<i>Yes</i>	Yes, but more so
At petrol station	<i>Yes</i>	This is a tragedy

** Study conducted by The Fucking French Institute of Gastronomic Excellence, Pointe-Noire, République du Congo. Sample size: one French person living in Africa. Methodology: eating a lot of both.*



CHAPTER VI

Being French in Africa

A Field Report

This chapter was written in Namibia. Or Congo. Or both. The geography is complicated. The saucisson is not.

The first thing you notice when you move to southern Africa is the biltong. It is everywhere. Petrol stations. Supermarkets. Office meetings. Airport lounges. Someone is always offering you biltong. You eat it. It is fine.

The second thing you notice is the absence of saucisson.

Not total absence. There are French expatriates in every African city, and where there are French expatriates, there is an attempt at charcuterie. But it is not the same.

A saucisson bought from a French supermarket, flown to Johannesburg, stored in a warehouse, driven to a speciality food shop, and placed on a shelf next to biltong is not the same saucisson that hung in the cellar in Lyon.

It has survived the journey. It has not survived intact.

This is not a complaint. This is an observation. The French observe things. We then explain why they were better before. This is called culture.

What you learn, living in Africa as a French person:

- You can adapt to almost anything.
- You cannot adapt to the absence of good bread and good saucisson.

— These are not luxuries. These are structural requirements. Like running water. Like electricity.

— Like the right to have a strong opinion about the correct thickness of a saucisson slice.

The biltong at the office

Every office in southern Africa has biltong. There is a jar on someone's desk. There is a packet in the meeting room.

This is community. This is generosity.

The French bring wine to dinner parties and argue about which glass to use.

The South Africans bring biltong to the office and share it without ceremony.

Both are correct. In different ways. For different occasions.



CHAPTER VII

Recipes You Don't Need

This chapter exists because it's a book and books have recipes.

The Board

1. Take saucisson. Slice it.
2. Take cornichons. Put them next to the saucisson.
3. Take bread. Put it next to the cornichons.
4. Pour wine. Stand in the kitchen.
5. This is the recipe. This is also the best thing in the world.

The honest tip

The only technique required is the ability to stand still long enough to enjoy it.

The Biltong Board

1. Take biltong. Put it in a bowl.
2. Take a cold beer. Open it.
3. Sit somewhere comfortable. Eat the biltong. Drink the beer.
4. Think about saucisson.

The honest tip

For when there is no saucisson. Acceptable. Honest. Fine.

The Saucisson-Beurre

1. Take a slice of fresh baguette.

2. Butter lightly with unsalted butter.
3. Lay two slices of saucisson on top.
4. Eat it standing at the kitchen counter.

The honest tip

Nobody calls it a croque-saucisson. Everybody eats it. One of the ten best things you can put in your mouth. The other nine are also French.

The Emergency Saucisson

1. Open the saucisson.
2. Smell it.
3. Slice it immediately.
4. Eat half before you've even found a knife.
5. Feel immediately better about everything.

The honest tip

For when a French friend visits and brings a saucisson in their luggage. This is not a recipe. This is therapy.



CHAPTER VIII

The Verdict

Biltong is good.

Saucisson is better.

This was always going to be the conclusion.

We arrived here honestly.

We tasted both. We compared them rigorously — see Chapter V.

The data supported what we already knew.

*This does not mean biltong is bad. Biltong is good. Biltong is honest.
Biltong does exactly what it says it does.*

*The French find this suspicious. In France, everything pretends to be
more than it is. The wine pretends to be philosophy. The bread
pretends to be architecture. The saucisson pretends to be history.*

And somehow, inexplicably, it is.

You can leave France. You can spend years in Namibia, in Congo, in places where the bread is not right and the wine costs too much. You will eat biltong. You will enjoy it. You will be grateful for it.

And then someone will arrive from France with a saucisson sec in their bag, slightly squashed from the flight, wrapped in paper, smelling of cellar and pork and six centuries of culinary history —

And you will remember.

APPENDIX

Things the French Have Also Left Outside and Improved

Wine. Grapes, left in the sun. Then fermented. Then aged. Then argued about.

Cheese. Milk, left out. Then cultured. Then moulded. Then aged. Then argued about.

Bread. Dough, left to rise. For twelve to twenty-four hours. By a baker who woke up at 4am. Then argued about.

Confit de canard. Duck, left in its own fat. For months. In a jar. Then argued about.

The French have a systematic approach to leaving things out and arguing about the result.

It works extremely well.

The South Africans built a box.

Both civilisations are, in their own way, doing their best.

Fin.

Coming next: THE FUCKING FRENCH KISS

thefuckingfrench.com