
VOLUME IV

The Fucking French Fries

A Manifesto for the Only Fry That Matters



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We did not invent the fry.

We perfected it.

The rest is details.

Let's get this out of the way immediately. The French did not invent the fry. We know. The Belgians will remind you. The South Americans will send you a Wikipedia article. Food historians will write lengthy footnotes about potato cultivation in the Andes and street vendors on the Pont Neuf.

Fine. We did not invent it. But here is what happened next: everyone else kept making it wrong, and we quietly, methodically, without making a fuss — well, perhaps a small fuss — figured out how to make it right.

The frite. Not the fry. Not the chip. Not the 'side.' The frite. A word that already sounds better in French, because most things do.

This book is not a history lesson. It is not an apology. It is a manual. A guide for the civilised human being who is tired of eating beige, limp, flavourless sticks of disappointment served in a paper bag with a corporate logo on it.

You have been lied to. We are here to fix that.

You're welcome.

The Potato Problem

Not all potatoes are equal. Most are not.

There is a particular kind of audacity required to pick up the wrong potato, slice it, fry it, and serve it to another human being without shame. This audacity is widespread. It is, frankly, an epidemic.

The potato is not a neutral object. It is not interchangeable. The variety you choose will determine everything — the texture of the skin, the density of the flesh, the way it holds up under heat, the way it falls apart in your mouth at exactly the right moment. Choosing the wrong potato for a frite is like choosing the wrong grape for a Burgundy. Technically possible. Morally indefensible.

The Bintje. The undisputed queen. A floury, slightly waxy Dutch variety that the French adopted without the slightest guilt, because we recognise greatness when we see it. High starch content. Golden flesh. A skin that crisps without burning. If you find Bintje, you buy Bintje. No discussion.

The Mona Lisa. A worthy second. Slightly firmer, good sugar content, holds its shape during the first fry. Named after a painting. Painted by an Italian who lived in France. We are noticing a pattern.

The Charlotte. Too waxy. Beautiful in a salad. A disaster in a fryer. Do not make this mistake twice.

The sweet potato. This is not a potato. This is a root vegetable that has been invited to the wrong party and refuses to leave. We respect its existence. We reject its presence in this conversation.

THE RULE

High starch. Low water content. Medium size. Everything else is a compromise.

The Cut

An inch of difference. A universe of consequence.

Before you touch the knife, understand what you are doing. You are not slicing a potato. You are making a decision about texture, surface area, cooking time, and the ratio of crust to interior that will define the entire experience of eating this frite.

L'allumette. The matchstick. Three to four millimetres wide. Thin, fast, intensely crispy, almost no interior. The frite of impatience. Of a quick lunch, a glass of white wine, a terrace in July. Delicate. Unforgiving — they burn in seconds if you lose focus. Worth it.

La pont-neuf. The classic. Named after a bridge in Paris, because of course it is. One centimetre by one centimetre, eight to ten centimetres long. The perfect ratio: a crust that shatters, an interior that is fluffy, almost creamy. This is the frite that exists in your memory when someone says the word 'frite.'

La gaufrette. The waffle cut. Made with a mandoline at alternating angles. Spectacular surface area. Maximum crispiness. Technically impressive. Slightly theatrical, which is not a criticism — theatre has its place.

The crinkle cut. No. The curly fry. This is a cry for help. We do not respond to it here.

THE RULE

Cut every single piece to the same size. Uniformity is not a bourgeois obsession. It is physics.

The Fat

A political position disguised as a cooking choice.

The question of fat is not merely technical. It is ideological. What you fry in reveals who you are, what you value, and how seriously you take the brief time you have on this planet.

Huile de tournesol. Sunflower oil. The responsible choice. High smoke point, neutral flavour. It is the frying equivalent of a competent civil servant: reliable, present, forgettable. Acceptable.

Huile d'arachide. Peanut oil. A slightly nutty undertone that complements the potato without competing. The oil of people who know what they're doing.

Huile d'olive. We need to talk. Olive oil has a lower smoke point. It will burn before your frites are cooked. Olive oil is for salads, for drizzling over burrata, for dipping bread at a table in Provence. It is not for frying. This is not opinion. This is chemistry. Please stop.

Graisse de canard. Duck fat. The answer to a question nobody asked but everybody needed. Rich. Deep. Unctuous in a way that sunflower oil could only dream about. A frite cooked in duck fat has a flavour that stays with you — not in the way of regret, but in the way of memory. The way a song stays with you. You will think about it later. You will want to go back.

THE RULE

Whatever fat you use, it must be clean. Dirty oil is the single fastest way to ruin a frite. Change it. Regularly. Without being asked.

The Double Fry

The secret they buried in the fine print.

This is the chapter that matters most. Everything else — the potato variety, the cut, the fat — all of it is in service of this moment. The double fry.

The first fry: 150°C, 5 to 7 minutes. This is not about colour. This is about structure. You are cooking the interior of the potato — driving out moisture, building the soft, fluffy core that will contrast with the crust to come. The frites at this stage will look pale, slightly translucent, almost sad. This is correct. Do not turn up the heat. Do not rush this.

Remove them. Drain them. Let them rest on a rack — not on paper towels, which trap steam and make them soggy — for at least five minutes. This rest is not optional. This rest is the entire point.

The second fry: 180°C, 2 to 3 minutes. Now you are building the exterior. The oil is hotter, the time is shorter, the transformation is violent and beautiful. Watch it. Do not look away. The window between perfect and burnt is approximately forty-five seconds wide.

Remove immediately. Salt with fleur de sel while hot. Immediately. Not in thirty seconds. Now. The salt needs the heat of the just-fried potato to adhere. Serve within three minutes. A frite does not wait.

THE RULE

Salt added to a cold frite sits on top of it like an accusation. Salt added to a hot frite becomes part of it.

The Sauce Question

A civilisational ranking.

We will do this calmly.

Niveau 0 — Barbarism. Ketchup industriel. A condiment made of tomato concentrate, high-fructose corn syrup, and the quiet despair of a civilisation that stopped trying. We are not saying ketchup does not exist. We are saying it has no business being near a frite.

Niveau 1 — Acceptable with reservations. Mayonnaise du commerce. Better. At least there is fat, at least there is emulsion. The Belgians eat their frites with mayonnaise and they are right to do so. However — the mayonnaise must be good.

Niveau 2 — We are getting somewhere. Mayonnaise maison. Two egg yolks, Dijon, lemon, sunflower oil, salt. Done in four minutes. The difference between this and the jar is the difference between a handshake and an embrace. Make the mayonnaise. It takes four minutes. You have four minutes.

Niveau 3 — Civilisation. Sauce béarnaise. Egg yolks, white wine reduction, tarragon, shallots, clarified butter. It turns the frite into a vehicle for something extraordinary. Order steak-frites béarnaise in a good Parisian brasserie and understand, for the first time, what a frite is capable of.

THE RULE

The frite must be dipped. Not drizzled over. You are an individual with preferences, not a passive recipient of someone else's decisions.

Fries Around the World

A horror tour conducted in the spirit of diplomacy.

We travel. We observe. We take notes. We return home with a renewed appreciation for what we have.

United States. The industrial fry. Pre-frozen, single-cooked, served in quantities that suggest the portion size is meant to be shared between a family of four but is consumed by one person in a parking lot. The waffle fry, the curly fry, the steak fry the size of a small novel — all variations on the same theme of more being better. More is not better. Better is better.

United Kingdom. The chip. Thick, soft, slightly soggy, served wrapped in paper with malt vinegar. There is something almost admirable about the British commitment to the chip. We do not agree with any of these choices. We respect the conviction with which they are made.

Belgium. We must be honest. The Belgian frite is excellent. The Belgians fry in beef tallow, cut thick, double fry with precision, serve with mayonnaise from a paper cornet. They have been doing this before we were paying attention. We acknowledge this. We move on.

South Africa. Slap chips. Limp, soft, heavily salted, eaten from newspaper at the beach. The name means 'limp chips' in Afrikaans. This is, remarkably, not a criticism but a desired texture. They are the antithesis of everything this book stands for. They are also, at the right moment, in the right place, exactly what you want. We do not understand this. We accept it.

THE RULE

The frite is a universal desire, expressed differently by every culture. France's expression happens to be the most technically rigorous and the most delicious. This is not arrogance. This is geography.

The Pairings

On what a frite deserves to be eaten with.

A frite is not a side dish. This needs to be said clearly, because decades of menu engineering have trained the western world to think of frites as an accompaniment.

Steak-frites. The classical canon. A bavette or entrecôte — pink at the centre, rested properly — with pont-neuf frites and a béarnaise on the side. This is not a dish. It is an argument that France won. It has existed for over a century in Parisian brasseries and will outlast every food trend that has appeared in the meantime.

Moules-frites. The great Belgian invention that France adopted without acknowledgement and made its own. Mussels steamed in white wine, shallots, parsley, butter — with frites on the side. The brine from the mussels dripping onto the frites creates something accidental and extraordinary. Let it happen. This is the point.

Oeuf-frites. The weeknight supper. Fried eggs in butter, yolk trembling, with well-seasoned frites and nothing else. Cheap, fast, deeply satisfying. The yolk broken over the frites, the richness of the butter, the salt. A perfect dish — and anyone who dismisses it has not been hungry enough or French enough to understand it.

Frites seules. Alone. With a glass of something cold. Standing at a friterie counter, or sitting at a zinc bar. The frite as a complete experience, requiring nothing, needing no justification. This is perhaps the most honest form.

THE RULE

Remove the frites from moules-frites and you have a bowl of mussels. With the frites, you have a meal. This distinction matters enormously.

Chapter 08

The Recipes

Theory is over. Here is what you do.

LA FRITE PARFAITE

For 4 people

What you need

- 1 kg Bintje potatoes (or Mona Lisa)
- Sunflower or peanut oil, enough to submerge
- Fleur de sel

What you do

1. Peel the potatoes. Cut into pont-neuf sticks: 1cm × 1cm × 8cm. Uniform. All of them.
 2. Rinse under cold water until clear. Dry thoroughly – completely, obsessively – with a clean cloth. Water in hot oil is not an accident. It is a decision.
 3. Heat oil to 150°C. Use a thermometer. Fry in small batches, never more than a third full. 5 to 7 minutes. Pale. This is correct.
 4. Rest on a rack – not paper towels – minimum 5 minutes. Raise to 180°C.
 5. Second fry: 2 to 3 minutes. Gold, not brown. Not amber. Gold.
 6. Remove immediately. Salt with fleur de sel while hot. Eat within three minutes.
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MAYONNAISE MAISON

Four minutes. No excuses.

What you need

- 2 egg yolks, room temperature
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar or lemon juice
- 250ml sunflower oil
- Salt, white pepper

What you do

1. Whisk yolks, mustard, and vinegar together until combined.
 2. Add oil drop by drop at first, whisking constantly. Once emulsified, add in a thin stream.
 3. Season. Taste. Adjust.
 4. If it splits: new yolk in a clean bowl, add the broken mayo drop by drop. It will come back.
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SAUCE BEARNAISE

For the days you mean it.

What you need

- 3 egg yolks
- 200g clarified butter, warm
- 3 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 1 tsp dried tarragon + fresh tarragon to finish
- Salt, white pepper

What you do

1. Reduce vinegar with shallots and dried tarragon until almost dry. Cool slightly.
 2. Whisk yolks with the reduction over a bain-marie until thick and ribboning.
 3. Add warm clarified butter drop by drop at first, then in a thin stream, whisking constantly.
 4. Season. Add fresh tarragon. Serve warm – not hot, not cold.
 5. If it scrambles: start again. This is the béarnaise's way of reminding you to pay attention.
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FRITES A LA GRAISSE DE CANARD

For the days you want to remember.

What you need

- 1 kg Bintje potatoes
- Rendered duck fat, enough to submerge
- Fleur de sel

What you do

1. Same method as la frite parfaite. Replace all oil with rendered duck fat. The rest is identical.
 2. Duck fat can be bought in jars in any decent French epicerie. It keeps for months.
 3. The difference in flavour is not subtle. It is the difference between a photograph and being there.
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THE RULE

The difficulty is not in the steps. The difficulty is in the attention.

Seven rules. No exceptions.

I

Use the right potato

The Bintje. No substitutes. If unavailable, Mona Lisa. If neither: reconsider.

II

Double fry. Always.

One fry is a warm potato. Two fries is a frite. The distinction is the entire point of this book.

III

Salt immediately

The moment the frite leaves the oil. Not when you think of it. Now. The salt needs the heat.

IV

Make the mayonnaise

It takes four minutes. You have four minutes. The jar is a choice, and it is the wrong one.

V

Never crowd the fryer

One third full maximum. Crowding drops the temperature. Dropped temperature steams instead of fries.

VI

Eat within three minutes

A frite does not wait. A frite left to cool is a different object. Eat the moment of its perfection.

VII

You're welcome

The world has been eating frites wrong for decades. Now you know. Do something with that.

Conclusion

You're Welcome

This book is now finished. You have been given the potato, the cut, the fat, the technique, the sauces, the pairings, and the recipes. You have been given the context — historical, cultural, civilisational — to understand why these choices matter and why the alternatives are, with very few exceptions, worse.

There are people who will read this book and continue to eat frozen frites from a bag. These people exist, they have the right to exist, and we have nothing more to say to them.

There are people who will make the foundational recipe once and understand immediately that something has changed — that they have crossed a line they cannot uncross, that the frite they have always known was a shadow of the frite that was possible. For these people, this book will have done its job.

The frite is not complicated. It is only demanding. It asks for attention, for patience, for the willingness to do things correctly when doing them incorrectly would be faster and easier. France asks the same of you.

— The Fucking French

Also in The Fucking French series:

Vol. I — The Fucking French Cook

Vol. II — The Fucking French Biltong

Vol. III — The Fucking French Kiss

Vol. V — The Fucking French Wine (coming)

Vol. VI — The Fucking French BBQ (coming)

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