

JOUR2FÊTE & LA FERME ! PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

STEAK (R)EVOLUTION

A FILM BY
FRANCK RIBIÈRE



DONOSTIA ZINEMALDIA
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SYNOPSIS

Steak (R)evolution travels the world in search of passionate cattle breeders, butchers, and chefs. Far from the intensive cattle farms with their industrial output, a revolution is already underway: good red meat is becoming an exceptional luxury product. But where can the best steak in the world be found?

Franck Ribière and his favorite butcher, Yves-Marie Le Bourdonnec, set out to meet the new players – generous, endearing, and ecological – to try to understand what makes good meat. But the new market issues aren't always where you expect them.



INTERVIEW WITH FRANCK RIBIÈRE

What was the starting point for *Steak (R)evolution*?

It can be summed up in one sentence: a meat lover tries to understand why meat in France seems so different from what he had the good fortune to taste while travelling abroad. And this meat lover is me! Being from a family of Charolais cattle breeders, I long thought our country was where the world's best meat could be eaten. Until the day I understood meat was in fact perceived in a totally different way in every country. The relation to meat in Argentina, the United States, Japan, as well as Italy and Sweden happens to be much stronger than ours.

Having defined your quest, what working method did you opt for?

I took the point of view of a consumer who loves meat. My approach was therefore first and foremost to look for quality products and also to try to understand the producer's philosophy. In practical terms, I started by asking people around me and they immediately confirmed that I should go to the great meat countries I mentioned earlier: Argentina, the United States, and Japan. Then if you search on the net for "world's best butcher" or "best meat specialist", you soon come across the name of Yves-Marie Le Bourdonnec. So I went to meet him and I explained my idea to him. I quickly realized that we both viewed meat in the same way, although naturally we didn't see eye to eye on every count, his approach being more professional than mine. He spontaneously offered to come with me to some places where he wanted to check whether his intuition was right. This is how he came along to Japan, Italy, and Sweden. Then, as I travelled on, I met another major figure, Mark Schatzker, a writer and journalist for the *Globe and Mail* in Toronto,

who wrote the book *Steak*. Confronting our views spared me unnecessary trips as they would have been redundant with others. For example, it was no use going to New Zealand, the cows being the same there as in Great Britain which I had already planned to visit. Mark also provided me with an outsider's most pertinent viewpoint on French meat.

So in *Steak (R)evolution*, you go in search of the best meat in the world. What criteria did you set out in order to define it?

Precise but obviously subjective criteria, as we are talking about the best meat according to my own taste. In short, I needed to get pleasure (allowing for the various textures, tastes and aromas) and well-being from eating it (which disadvantages fatty meats that are not so easily digestible). To draw a parallel with wine, it is like looking for quality wine that's not too strong in alcohol. In the same spirit, French meat could be likened to an excellent Beaujolais and Kobe beef to a Château d'Yquem. In the case of Kobe beef, you could actually argue whether we are still talking about meat. Over the course of my travels and encounters, I came to realize that my personal taste tends to be very close to the general taste.

When you embarked on this adventure, did you have any idea of what the best steak in the world might be for you?

I just had an intuition that the best steak in the world must be the one served in New York, at Peter Luger's restaurant. But, as it is shown at the very beginning of the film, it proved to be entirely wrong! It is actually the first thing that Yves-Marie told me: "You can't switch overnight from Charolais to Peter Luger." For Peter Luger's operation epitomizes the American relation to meat, the opposite of the French relation to meat. Their cattle are force-fed cereals and they are full of fat. Americans favor fat, soft meat over tender, tasty meat. So, when I began shooting *Steak (R)evolution*, I really had no idea of where I might track down this mythical world's best steak. One single detail was pointing towards Spain: the fact that this country was at the forefront of world cuisine, nearly always running off with the first three places in best restaurants rankings, year in, year out.

What films did you have in mind before tackling yours?

Mondovino, obviously. But rather than one film in particular, I essentially had in mind to make a documentary without a voice-over or running commentary. I didn't want to appear on the screen and give my opinion directly. I wanted the viewers to be able to forge their own from what they saw and from the testimonies of people I met. On top of that, my ambition was not to make an investigation *à la* Michael Moore or *Fast Food Nation* by Richard Linklater, a film which I







distributed in France at the time. *Steak (R)evolution* does not fall into the category of accusatory films. I had no desire to show the bad side of things, filming in abattoirs or at McDonald's. Others have done it before me, and very well at that. I'm not taking that stand. However, the point of my film is not to encourage people to eat meat at all costs. It is to offer some clues for those who want to eat it, so as to help them enjoy it.

So this is not a film in response to vegetarians?

No, because I believe that vegetarians are essentially right. Eating meat every day is probably unhealthy in the long run. But my "message" here is quite different. If we are going to eat meat, let's eat the best we can find. To achieve that in France, we must rebuild completely the consumer's culture which is solely based on meat's healthiness. Of course there is nothing wrong with that, but taste is quite another matter.

What surprised you most during your quest?

My journey through Argentina, the country which probably has the most powerful marketing of all! So much so that everybody firmly believes that the world's best meat is Argentinean whereas the one Argentineans eat every day (and a lot of it too: 60 kilos per head a year against 15 in France!) proves to be quite ordinary. You have to go to very expensive restaurants if you want to find good meat because a great part of it is reserved for export.

For this film, you had access to things otherwise rarely or never shown on screen. You give the viewer the privilege of going backstage at Peter Luger's restaurant, or in Japanese cattle farms... How did you manage to convince your hosts to let you film all this?

It clearly results from an extensive preparation. But I think I achieved it because all the people I met saw that my approach was a fair one. I didn't mean to praise or slam anyone, to give out good or bad marks, but to understand this very unique world of meat from within. Coming from a farming family was probably crucial in earning their trust.

How long did the shoot last?

Two years, producing nearly forty hours of rushes as each interviewee gave me another contact. All the people I met have something in common. They are passionate and they suffer from the negative image meat has. They form a community which tries to show it off as an outstanding product. They almost all know each other and they regularly visit one another.



How did you edit it from 40 down to 2 hours?

I went back to the initial question: Why did I want to make this film? It was something much more personal than I had thought. I am not at all into “French bashing” or into the old idea that “things were better before.” In fact, you could summarize *Steak (R)evolution* as a heartfelt cry from a Frenchman who, as he meets people around the globe, becomes deeply persuaded that a potentially radiant future awaits French meat. I try to show this by outlining the difference between our meats and others’. And I explain this difference. Is it a matter of culture? Of how we relate to animals? How we rear them? Feed them? I constructed the editing of *Steak (R)evolution* by structuring the images of my film around the answers to these questions.

So, it’s at the editing stage that you really found your narrative backbone?

Yes, this was when V erane Fr ediani - who accompanied me throughout this adventure and who did the editing - and I got a clear vision of the film. She suggested various structures and narrative threads. Then we went for the one that was most personal and truest of the whole experience and to what I had discovered over these two years. In fact, we found this structure the day I finally asked myself the right question. Instead of wondering what was on my plate to eat, I tried to find out what the cows had eaten. That’s where the real issue lies. Yet it is a concept that many people don’t understand. Even in France, some believe that cows don’t eat grass! Gradually, I came to a conclusion that is sheer commonsense: only a happy cow will produce a good steak. It is not strictly a question of maturation and cooking. A genuine and strong bond between man and animal is essential. The cattle breeder who keeps talking to his cow and feeds her for 15 years before killing her is guaranteed to produce better meat in the end.

Is this why you don’t content yourself with a mere hit parade, ranging from number ten to number one?

Exactly. Number one on my list simply results from big and small shortcomings, as well as from disappointments in previously tasted meats... until I experienced a true gastronomic shock. But this quest is merely a means to an end, not the purpose of my film. Therefore, organizing it like a hit parade would have been meaningless.

Besides, your film does not end on Spain but on Corsica. Why?

I was keen to conclude the film on France. So, at the editing bench, I searched for what had surprised me the most in our country during this two-year shoot. Without the slightest hesitation, it was this Corsican man I had heard so much





about. I went to meet him when I learnt he provided meat for the excellent Paris restaurant Le Sergent Recruteur. He gets along in his own quiet way, in a very different context to what we are used to nowadays. For instance he does not resort to European subsidies. He is at the same time breeder, butcher, and cook: the perfect combination. He grows his own hay and cereals. In short, he doesn't ask for anything and he is totally self-sufficient. So by ending my documentary on him, I want to show that the French can only benefit from getting rid of their prejudices about meat. Our country possesses exceptional possibilities. But, as meat producers, we just didn't choose the right bovine breeds. And as consumers, we are not given proper information. Thus on restaurant menus, we can read "meat from the European Community" but this is not what matters most. It would be more useful to know the breed and age of the cow, when it was slaughtered, for how long its meat was matured. Lastly and mainly, we have been taught to buy healthy thus fat-free meat whereas good meat is necessarily fat, since fat enhances its taste!

What are you aiming for with *Steak (R)evolution*?

I hope that my unusual approach will enable viewers to learn things about meat, and mainly about good meat. My intention was to make an honest inventory of the meat sector around the world while giving a certain optimistic vision of the future. For, unlike in the world of wine, there is hope in meat.



Franck Ribière

From a family of cattle breeders, Franck attended Sciences Po, the Paris Institute of Political Studies, before studying cinema at ESEC. He worked as a fashion photographer's assistant in New York, then as an executive producer of documentaries. He then ran Hachette Filipacchi's film department before setting up, with V erane Fr ediani, La Fabrique de Films and la Ferme Productions, two feature-film production companies which made films such as *  l'int erieur (Inside)*, *Thelma, Louise et Chantal* or more recently, *Les Sorci eres de Zugarramurdi (Witching & Bitching)*. *Steak (R)evolution* is Franck Ribière's first documentary film as director. It is accompanied by a book published by Les Editions de la Martini ere and was co-written with V erane Fr ediani.



Yves-Marie Le Bourdonnec

A born entrepreneur, Yves-Marie started his first butcher's, Le Couteau d'Argent in Asni eres (near Paris), at the age of 18. In 2003, he was voted best Paris butcher among 125 butchers after a blind test organized by the magazine L'Express. At 44, Yves-Marie Le Bourdonnec has the reputation in his field of seeing his ideas through. His credo is to pass on his expertise and to modernize the image of the profession. But also to pay the breeders a fair price for their work and the time it takes them to raise quality cattle, which he says is the only way of giving consumers good meat. In 2010, he was asked by Canal+ to present a 90-minute documentary on the meat industry around the world. The following year, he started the movement *I Love Bidoche* ("meat"). In 2012, *L'Effet B œuf*, his book published by Michel Lafon, allowed him to make a clear statement about the beef industry: it's time to feed the animals grass again.



V erane Fr ediani

Having graduated from Edhec Business School, V erane Fr ediani worked as a film journalist for almost a decade on MCM, then Canal Plus where she presented *Le Journal du Cin ema*. After interviewing hundreds of actors and directors, V erane moved on to the distribution and production of feature films alongside Franck Ribière. As the producer and co-writer of the documentary *Steak (R)evolution*, V erane naturally also edited the film which required many, many hours of derushing and a facility in foreign languages!

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Franck Ribière

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Franck Ribière and Vèrane Frédiani

Produced by

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