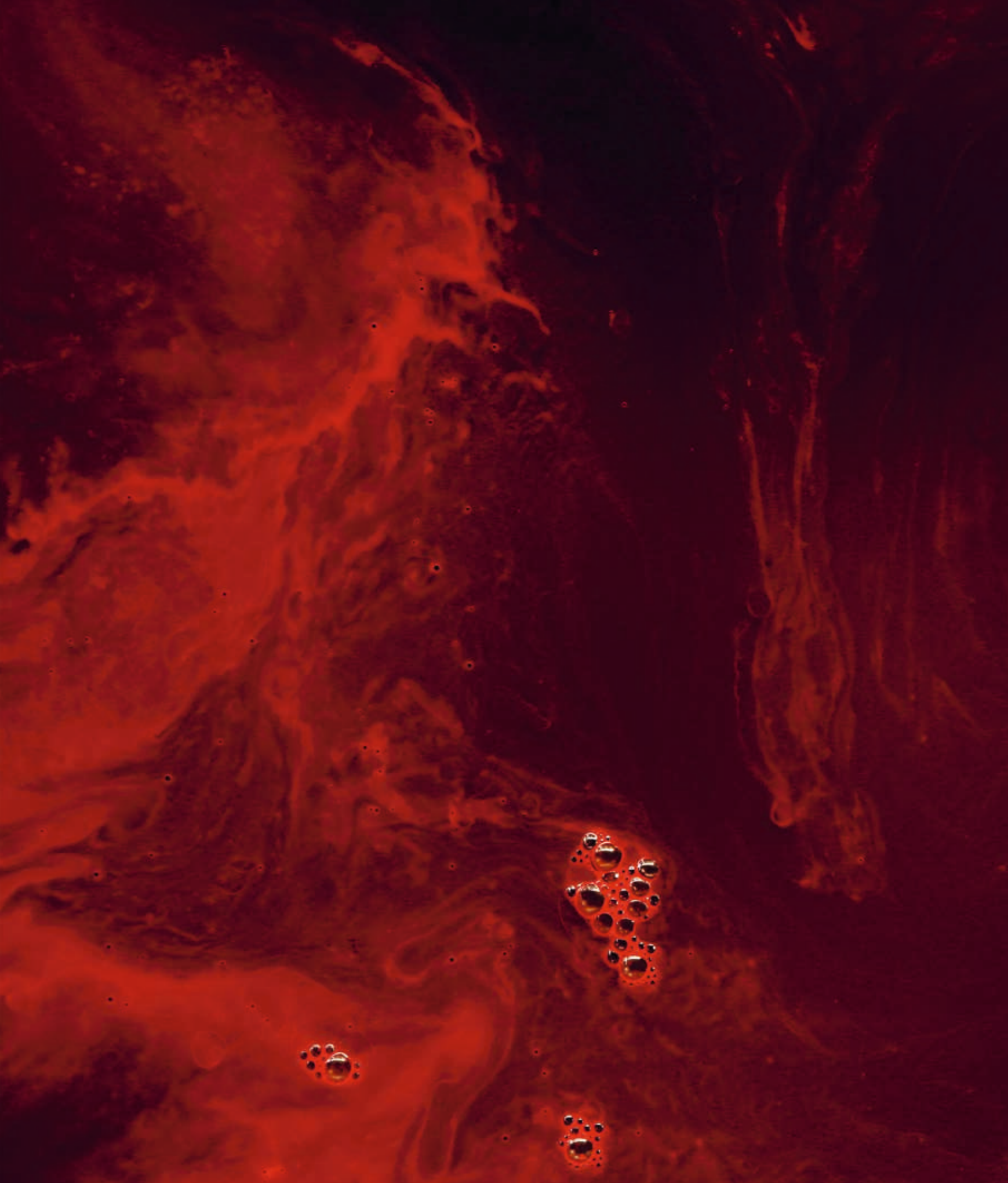


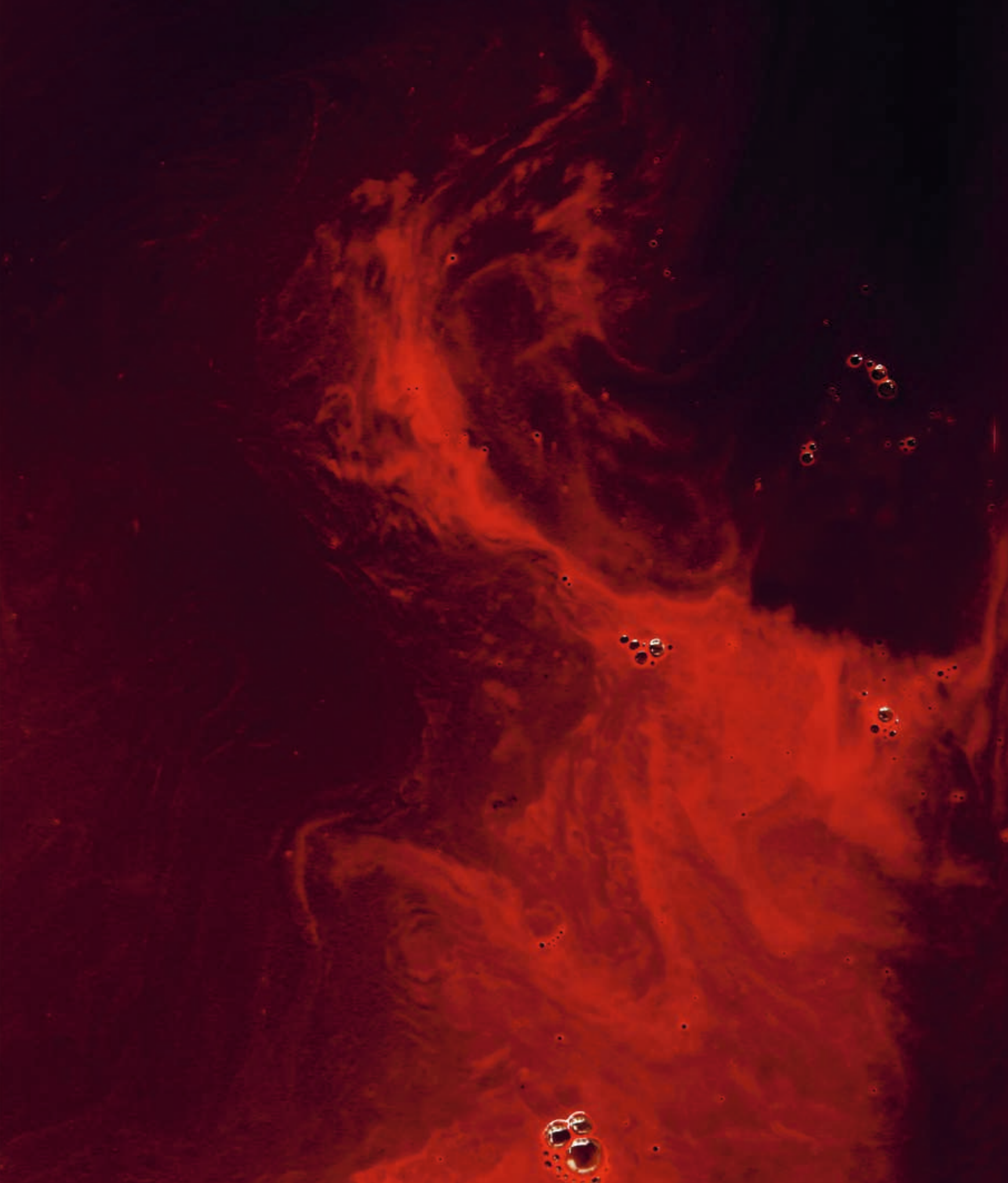


THE BUTCHER'S BOOK

DIERENDONCK

HANNIBAL





THE BUTCHER'S BOOK



HENDRIK DIERENDONCK
RENÉ SÉPUL
MARIJKE LIBERT
STEPHAN VANFLETEREN
THOMAS SWEERTVAEGHER
PIET DE KERSGIETER

DIERENDONCK

FOR RAYMOND

HANNIBAL

WHEN I WAS FOUR, I ALREADY KNEW IT: I WAS GOING TO BE A BUTCHER! I LEARNED EVERYTHING ABOUT MEAT FROM MY FATHER AND MOTHER. BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING IT WAS THE

PASSION

THEY SHOWED IN PURSUING THEIR CRAFT, AND THEIR DEEPLY FELT RESPECT FOR THE TERROIR, THAT MADE ME WHO I AM TODAY: A BUTCHER WITH A VISION.

PASSION, TERROIR, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND TASTE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN EVERYTHING I DO; WITHOUT THEM, THE REST DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. I ALSO STARTED MAKING THIS BOOK WITH THOSE VALUES FIRMLY IN MIND. TO HELP REALISE A FUTURE OF LESS BUT BETTER MEAT, THIS IS MY ODE TO ALL THE BREEDERS WHO DO THEIR WORK WITH A DEEP RESPECT FOR ANIMALS AND FOR NATURE. THEY KNOW THE POWER AND BEAUTY OF THE

TERROIR

AND OF THE LAND, AND OF THE FARM ANIMALS.

AT THE SAME TIME, THIS BOOK IS MY TRIBUTE TO ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE

CRAFT

THE BUTCHERS, THE 'CHARCUTIERS', THE CARVERS — WHO DAY AFTER DAY, HIDDEN FROM VIEW, WITHIN FOUR WALLS, IN THE COLD — PROCESS THE MEAT THAT WE EAT. THEY ARE SKILLED ARTISANS WHO ARE PROUD OF THE HARD WORK THEY DO AND RECEIVE FAR TOO LITTLE APPRECIATION FOR IT.

COOKS AND BUTCHERS NEED TO HONOUR, VALUE AND APPRECIATE THE ANIMAL THAT WAS SLAUGHTERED FOR PREPARATION IN THE KITCHEN, AND RESPECT THE FARMER WHO BREEDS THE ANIMAL.

TASTE

COMES FROM TASTING THE PURENESS OF A PRODUCT WHILE PAYING HOMAGE TO ITS ORIGINS, TO THE SOURCE AND THE PROCESSING. CAMOUFLAGING THOSE THINGS IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. TASTE INVOLVES BOTH RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

WITH THIS BOOK, I HOPE AT THE VERY LEAST TO PASS ON SOME OF MY KNOWLEDGE OF, AND SOME OF MY LOVE FOR, THE PROFESSION THAT MEANS SO MUCH TO ME. ONLY BY SHARING OUR PASSION AND KNOWLEDGE WILL THIS BEAUTIFUL CRAFT SURVIVE AND — I HOPE, AND SOMETIMES ALREADY SEE HAPPENING — IMPROVE AGAIN.

HENDRIK DIERENDONCK



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DIERENDONCK. THE NAME WAS A GIFT, THE CRAFT WAS OBTAINED THROUGH HARD WORK, FIRST BY FATHER, THEN BY SON.

THE NAME DIERENDONCK STANDS FOR BEING A REAL BUTCHER, WITH CLEAVER, KNIFE AND 'PÉTRIN'. BUT IT ALSO PERSONIFIES THE BURNING WISH TO KNOW THE PRODUCT, ON THE FARM, AT THE BREEDER'S, AMONG THE 'MARCHANDS'. HENDRIK, THE 'KLIENEN' (AKA 'THE LITTLE GUY'), IS SEEKING PURE FLAVOUR, "THE PATH ALONG WHICH EMOTIONS AND MEMORIES ARE TRANSMITTED". HE IS THE MAN WITH THE HARD-MUSCLED HANDS AND THE SOFT HEART, WHO IS MOVED WHEN HE LOOKS AT HIS SHOP WINDOW, HIS ATELIER, THE COLD ROOMS, THE CURING CHAMBER. PROUD OF HIS CRAFT. FILLED WITH

PASSION

IT'S WHAT EVERYTHING REVOLVES AROUND.







FDICK
Maded. Germany
Austria



THE CRAFT, HANDED DOWN FROM FATHER TO SON

WAKING UP

HEARING KNOCKS DOWNSTAIRS, sounds, echoes, commotion. The chopping block is sanded down, the knife is whetted, and then the first chop, *crack*, the first steak or cutlet, and another: *whack*. A little later, the rattle of the shutters going up. Hendrik hears his papa say ‘good morning’ to someone outside, in the still dusky fresh morning air. The father checks the display counter, his boutique, his shop window. He hopes that the meat will sell well and that it will taste good at the customers’ homes later. That’s what he does it all for. The sea is still a dark void, light is dawning from the east, an early customer dawdles in front of the door. The child Hendrik, smelling of soap, goes down the stairs, into the shop, eats a first sandwich in the kitchen next door, with freshly made mince. Papa sells his first slice of pâté and waves his son off to school. Later, the father hopes; later, the son thinks.

Hendrik: “It means a lot to grow up in a business where private and work life mingle, downstairs from the living room. You’d walk through the shop to go to school; in the afternoon you’d go through the shop to the back for a hot meal. You’d also go through the shop in the evening to play outside. *Hey!* they sometimes called, you’re walking over my clean floor. Raymond Dierendonck’s butcher’s shop was a household name in Sint-Idesbald – you could feel that even as a child. For us it also meant growing up with the familiar sounds of the knife, the mixing machine, the chopping block, the cleaver. I’m sorry about my children not hearing that any more, the sound of the

chopping block being sanded down, there’s something really magical about it. I also remember family moments, when, all of a sudden in the evening, the hob would be fired up. Papa makes his way downstairs to the refrigerator, and comes back with a few chipolata sausages. He throws them on the fire. It’s an instant party, just like that in the middle of the week: fresh *saucisses* sizzling on the grill right before your eyes.

¶ “You grow up and start being given light chores. *Schuttels kusjen*, cleaning the dishes. You like other jobs better. ‘Sticking in’ the meat after closing time is one of them. Your parents and the staff act a bit silly then because they let their hair down after another hard day’s work. You get infected by their enthusiasm. Once the shutters are closed, the radio is turned on. You can play your own music too, later. Listening to AC/DC, you tidy up the trays and carefully place the meat in the fridge. You see tiredness in your father’s face, and also see that he is already secretly longing for the next day. I see myself doing the same thing now, a generation later. I enjoy it when everything is top-notch, freshly made, when the meat and dishes are positioned correctly, no gaps anywhere, no crooked trays, all the labels lined up straight and neat. It has to be *just so* for the Dierendoncks. The shop window is a ‘sweet shop’, a paradise full of prepared food, but also a carefully considered composition. I acquired expertise and passion through my roots, because I was allowed to experience it.”

¶ Spring 2015. Father Raymond is still actively involved in the now much larger and newly conceived shop. He puts on the apron; he’s selling today. Hendrik runs back and forth. A little nudge there, a piece of meat in between here, just putting everything right. There’s a glow in Hendrik’s and Raymond’s eyes – is this the kick? “No, getting it ready is not the kick,” the father answers, “The kick is when a hundred people are standing in the shop.” Hendrik adds: “The kick is seeing our customers leaving here *satisfied*. You showcase your work in the window for them. You’ve done a great job, you have selected the purest meat from the farmer, the breeder, at the market in Paris or elsewhere; pork, lamb and beef. You’ve chosen the best methods for transforming the meat into a final product. It would be inappropriate if you just plopped that meat

I

down, without any vision, organisation or proper attention. You have to close the circle.”

¶ The circle is closed, the craft has been handed down from Dierendonck father to Dierendonck son, including recipes, wisdom, actions, unbridled commitment, as well as love and boldness. Only one thing is different. Hendrik doesn't live above the shop.

Hendrik: “The living room of days past has become an office. Gone are the sleeping areas for parents and children, and the rows of bunk beds on the third floor where our ‘summer guests’, the seasonal workers, stayed. Up to a dozen extra people would work here during the holiday months, peak season, and most of them slept there. They were often boys from the country, apprentice butchers. In the evening, we'd sit *ollemolle toope*, crowded together, watching television. It didn't bother me, the crowding, all of the people together. It's just how I grew up. When I was ten, I was already allowed to join in the simple work, such as making sausages or hamburgers.”

¶ It wasn't an obligation, father Raymond never made him do anything. His approach to encouraging his son Hendrik's enthusiasm for the work was “not to burn him”. Forcing him was out of the question. Calling the 15-year-old out of bed at 6am and making him work 12-hour days would have backfired. In Hendrik, they quietly fanned the flames. Raymond saw that the fire was there, that was enough. He saw it in the way Hendrik's eyes flickered when a new beef carcass was carried in, the way he would stand by his father, looking with admiration at that enormous beast. Raymond had the knife in hand, the boy not yet. He had to wait, and waiting fanned his ardent desire.

Hendrik: “I still remember the exact moment when I was allowed to bone a pork belly for the first time. ‘Here,’ my father suddenly said. He pushed a stepping stool up to the table because I was short. He handed me a boning knife that was already a bit worn and showed me how to do it one last time. I must have boned hundreds of pork bellies since then. Starting with the basics is essential. That's how you learn the craft. All the while, you yearn for the moment when the big cleaver will also finally be in your

hand. Father was a strict taskmaster, he set the bar high. He told me to treat the meat with respect. The animal was not only a precious commodity, the animal had ‘given’ itself for us. That is why not even one piece was allowed to be wasted. It was a matter of respect and professional pride. Later, my father and I were both horrified by mass production and the industrial meat-processing plants where meat was handled carelessly. In mass production, there is no room for finesse. Too much is thrown away in today's world. Not at Dierendonck; every gramme of meat is worth its weight in gold here.”

¶ Raymond Dierendonck wasn't born into a butcher's family. His father was a greengrocer who owned four cows, milked them himself and then went on the milk round, in Middelkerke. Raymond was not university-minded and he went to the butchers' school instead. The story repeated itself in the next generation.

¶ Hendrik was 16, a boy from the seaside, athletic, muscular and hard, doing tricks on his skateboard, but above all... small. He was – and still is – called our *klienen*: little guy. At 16, he was fed up with the traditional schools, Veurne college, Annuntiata Veurne. He grew sick of the comments: “Hendrik can't sit still”, “Hendrik can't settle”, “Hendrik can't concentrate”. Hendrik became discouraged and even started thinking “I'm just stupid.” Father Raymond could see himself reflected back in his son. Hendrik decided to go to the butchers' school, KTA Diksmuide. That school had a bad smell about it; it was the end of the line for the *rifje raftje* (riff-raff).

Hendrik: “Still, there were guys who were there with genuine motivation, and we also had a few good teachers. Some of them had worked in my father's shop. But all in all, I still learned more at home and at trade fairs, from the farmers and breeders. I was not being stimulated at school.”

¶ In Hendrik's mind, there is a caesura in his life; a turning point when he was 16/17. That's when one day something happened in and around him, a bright moment that is still a wonderful memory.

Hendrik got their attention and, more importantly: his message was heard, with the animal as exhibit A. After his talk, the cow, farmer and butcher received thunderous applause. The cow was unperturbed throughout.”

¶ Hendrik was delighted. Slowly but surely, he was reaching experts as well as gaining an ever-widening audience with his speeches about terroir, passion and craft. Meanwhile, consumers were finding their way to the western corner of the country: they came from Kortrijk, from Tongeren, people drove – and are still driving – back and forth to buy a *côte à l’os* (large sirloin cut on the bone) from Dierendonck.

Hendrik: “Success also has a downside: you’re creating increasingly higher expectations. I want to keep rising to meet them. Colleagues tell me we are trendsetters, but I don’t like to hear that because I associate trends with something temporary. I don’t want this to be a passing fad. Colleagues in the trade are also starting to use my terminology – such as terroir. I see that some are offering better quality and a greater diversity of meat in their butcher’s shops. In the meantime, I have to keep going and keep innovating, in terms of technology, craftsmanship and range. I don’t want to get too big for my boots; I don’t want to become arrogant because great chefs come to our place. I admit I enjoy the appreciation, but sometimes I miss the groundedness of pure butcher’s work. Nothing is more fun after a busy period than joining the crew for work again at six in the morning. Carving meat again, boning a pork belly. It is pure Zen.”

¶ The Dierendonck butcher’s shop did not supply the restaurant world in the past. Raymond occasionally provided meat for a friend who owned a restaurant, but that was it. The customers who came to the shop were the most important. Until West Flemish Red beef came into the picture, discovered by Raymond and touted by his son on various platforms.

Hendrik: “This beef immediately piqued the interest of Kobe Desramaults, chef of In De Wulf. We got talking and that’s how I got to know David Martin from La Paix restaurant. Later, I got a call from Sergio Herman. He introduced himself in his inimitable style: ‘Are you gonna come over with some meat?’ Apparently his team had been following me for some time on Facebook. They had even sent people to the shop, mystery shoppers. At the time, I’d just opened a new shop in Nieuwpoort, bought a new van and put our new logo on it. So I got the van, packed it with meat, and drove to Sluis. ‘Show me your wares, let’s have a look,’ Sergio said. He couldn’t believe his eyes, the cornucopia I had on offer. We talked, tasted. I saw similarities between us. We had both taken over the business from a parent and implemented changes, we had grown, had persisted after hard work and through difficult periods, and had made that obstinate and unconventional choice for craftsmanship and quality. Meeting Sergio, working with him, brought about another breakthrough. The name Dierendonck was suddenly – literally – on the menu of the Oud Sluis. Suddenly everyone was calling us, other chefs and restaurateurs wanted a piece of the action. I sensed I had to be careful and not overdo it. I had once said I wouldn’t get into the hospitality sector. In the meantime, we do work with some hospitality ambassadors, but I must continue to cherish our daily customers. Marietje from around the corner, who comes to our shop get her steak, is part of the foundation of the success that led us to these star kitchens. I impress this upon our shop staff, who are at risk of becoming blasé about the fact that people visit us from far and wide to buy meat for up to 200 euros at a time. I say: don’t forget our roots, they are the heart of our business. The day you stop honouring the small customer, you lose control and feeling for your business. We must continue to honour traditions, to prepare fresh black pudding on Tuesdays, fresh white sausages on Wednesdays, and so forth. I want to stay humble. I have been on a quest, experimenting and refining the quality and expertise, I’ve made the entire loop to get back to where I started: the butcher becomes a butcher again, settled once again in his profession. Although the battle continues. Too many young people are

still finding out during their internships that not much is left of the real work. The meat comes in wrapped in a plastic vacuum pack, the sauces in separate bags. Pour them out into containers and place them in the display case and you're done. A butcher can start without an atelier – with a large cold room instead – and be buyer and seller in one. At ours, a cow arrives in quarters, we stand before it and discuss it: this piece is meant for that, we'll be doing this with that piece. Then the work in the atelier follows.

¶ “We also need the general public to be more involved in this story. People need to understand more about eating habits. You don't need to eat a kilo of ground beef every day. Eat less meat, but better meat is my motto, and also: bring those taste buds back to life. That's the nature of my quest, and that is why I want to allow the customer to see how we work. Everyone should be able to see that there is no cheating, there are no shortcuts. That the animals are being skinned and chopped, cleaned and boned and that we prepare our daily dishes ourselves. No substitutes, no tricks, it's all real – but almost raised to an art. And in the meantime you make your sacrifices and persevere, stubborn and driven.” 🐾





THE MOTHER, THE ART

EIGHT O’CLOCK, IN THE MORNING.

In the Dierendonck atelier, the meat stock bubbles softly on the stove and new potatoes are boiling in wide flat pans. Small pyramids of freshly cut stewing beef are arranged on the tables. This crew has already done two hours of work. Their fine products are placed in the window after inspection by Hendrik. He finishes the arrangement of the ‘sweet shop’ with the *pièces de résistance*: beef from the curing chamber. Then he has breakfast with his father. Sandwiches with pâté and sliced ham. They check the region and sports pages of their local newspapers amid mumbled exchanges. Raymond asks about Hendrik’s plans for the day, then stands up and puts on the apron with the logo of Dierendonck – a cow, what else? “And that second red?” Hendrik asks – “red” for the Flemish Red cattle. “It’s taken care of,” says Raymond and leaves.

¶ Hendrik beckons. “Come and look, yesterday a lot of beautiful things came in again.” Around the corner we enter the no-man’s land of the walk-in cold rooms. Hendrik pulls one of the fridge doors open. Inside, the quarters of beef are hanging side by side. “Smell this,” he says and sniffs the air himself too. “I smell the hay, and you?”

¶ There’s something about the way he looks at it, at the dead animal on a meat hook. As if it’s more than just meat, and the hook is more than a thick iron bracket carrying dead weight. As if it were a hook hoisting a different type of project, the creation of a resourceful innovator, an artist.

Hendrik: “Beauty is the first word that comes to mind when I look at these pieces of meat, and respect is the second. The farmer has done everything to ensure that these animals are raised well, to feed them and to provide them with the right environment. Then they were slaughtered, sacrificed as it were. When they are carried inside here, in quarters, I am grateful for the privilege of hanging them in my cold room. The beast has become meat, an array of colour, fat content and structure, but at the same time you can still feel the power somewhere of when the animal was still alive.”

¶ That morning we had heard Papa Raymond talk about his “own breeding” with maybe a little less emotion in his voice, but just as much passion. He told us how he bought 16 West Flemish Red cattle from an 80-year-old farmer, and now owns 20 cows of this old breed, some with a bloodline dating back 100 years. He keeps looking for the right stud with the right sperm, he told us with undiminished enthusiasm. Curious conversations to have on a morning; strange also how the Dierendoncks invariably use terms such as ‘creativity’ for their craft, while we’re talking about animals that, once fattened up, go to the slaughterhouse.

¶ “Hendrik takes more after his mama than me,” Raymond suddenly says. “Yes, that streak of creativity. Our other son, an architect, also got that from her. Alexander is a top-grade talent, but he doesn’t broadcast his story in public, he doesn’t really seek out attention. Hendrik has never had a problem with showcasing himself.”

Hendrik: “It’s been quite an exploration, but as time passed it has become a positive story, and no longer one of revenge. The need to overcompensate has run its course. The little guy is done with going all out to prove himself, that complex lies far behind me. Looking forwards instead of back, that’s what I’m doing. Of course, I carry my personal history with me, the influence of both the diligent father and the artistic mother, that double influx. Mama was a very important factor, much more than she suspects. Her taste was crucial, both in culinary terms, as well as in the sense of beauty. Still, my parents, as they sometimes say, ‘each have their child’. I followed in the footsteps of

the butcher, my brother followed the artistic mother. The work Alexander designs, invents and makes is focused on good taste and presentation, but above all the right proportions. For him, all concepts must be fulfilled perfectly, well put together, all dimensions have to be just right. And that's how I see it too. Sometimes it is about the details. Look at *Carcasse* to see how meticulous we are – the chairs, tables, glasses and cutlery. It shouldn't be a little bit perfect, but perfect in every way. 'What are you fussing about?', I sometimes hear people say. I couldn't do it any other way, we didn't learn any other way at home. In the past, the butchers made a little flyer showing their offerings for the holidays. We didn't. Mama designed a booklet, with a menu and beautiful stories. Mama decorated the shop, down to the last detail. There have never been plastic flowers here, never fake ones; always real, always fresh bouquets. 'If you can't have the real thing, better to have nothing,' she said. And that was perfectly matched with what Papa was putting in or taking out of the fridge. I look at our products like actual projects. Of course, I am not making art, but I do feel a kind of connection. Something is stirring in my head, it has to get out, I have to shape it. Fundamentally, it is about idealism, about what you believe in, and about emotion, of course."

¶ Hendrik beckons again and walks past the cold rooms, through the connecting hallway to *Carcasse* restaurant. In the middle of the shop stands the large curing chamber. Open it, put your head in and sniff. It has a certain aroma, you come to recognise it, you develop your sense of smell here, it's like a cross between hay and grass. Close the cupboard and stand in front of the glass, staring for minutes in silent awe at the meat that hangs there, in its various stages of curing, its many shades of red: vermilion, soft pink, cognac brown. The compositions are fabulous. It could be a work by Jan Fabre, or what the hell, Damien Hirst. But it also looks a bit like the paintings by that old master Joachim Beuckelaer.

¶ Hendrik guffaws: "Speaking about meat and art in the same sentence, it's a bit over the top, isn't it? I think people would say, 'That butcher, he's gone around the twist.' On the other hand, if you are talking about something that is beautiful as well as tasty, why should you not use

that word? Do you know what I find really spectacular. The head of the animal, once slaughtered, once the head is separated from its body. You can look at it in so many ways. As butchering waste product, or as something of value. You can put it on a platform, hang a cloth behind it and let the photographer take a photograph. We did that for this book. Stephan and I spent hours looking at a cow's head. First with the spotlights on it, which produced a raw image; then in the shadows, the head radiated power, but then give it a slight turn and suddenly it becomes a vulnerable, sacrificed beast. That feeling that you are master of this beast, but you also feel humble and grateful for what it gives you. That is why, as a butcher, I have to treat the whole animal with respect. Pig, lamb or cow. I have to bone it delicately, clean it, get rid of the sinews and, most importantly, not throw anything away. This is nature that I am working with. With my own two hands too. Butchery is hands-on work, hands that are swollen from the cold and muscled from the work, but never rough. Because they are working with a lot of natural grease, with moisturiser. (*smiles*) My wife says I have soft hands. Most butchers have soft hands. It's strange really, that the hands that chop and cut are so tender at the same time." 🐾

“...SHED FOR YOU
AND ALL PEOPLE...”

HENDRIK IS A BUTCHER,

not the one who does the slaughtering, the meat processing. Not a fan of slitting animals' throats, of killing animals. Is repression the reason? Does he dodge his head out of embarrassment, accepting this is the sacrifice that must be made, it's his work after all, his living, and for the sake of the customer? He shakes his head, no. It has to do with a sort of reverence. Those who slaughter often, he says, tend to get used to it after a while. And if there is one thing he wants to avoid at all costs, it is that it becomes a habit: that killing an animal is experienced as a repetitive act, as something almost businesslike. Hendrik did once do the slaughtering. When he was 18, at the butchers' school in Diksmuide.

Hendrik: “I was the age to want it. I wanted to satisfy my curiosity, to experience the action, so that I would be able to talk about it from my own experience later. Slaughter was a lesson too. How to prepare, how to cut, how to collect the blood, how to clean afterwards. What immediately interested me was the way the killing itself happened. I knew that a bad slaughter produced poorer quality meat. If the animal doesn't suffer, the meat is better. It has a lower pH-level than a traumatised animal. With a high pH, the meat retains more water and acquires a grey cast, which of course has consequences for the butcher and his customer. I can immediately tell how the animal was slaughtered by the structure and wetness of the meat. If

the flesh has a shine on it, if the meat gleams, the final stage was not good for the animal.”

¶ Slaughtering, killing an animal, is a matter of intense emotion in Hendrik's view. It involves 'making the transition', crossing that thin line between a living and dead animal. And that involves the human being who subjugates the animal.

Hendrik: “The law of the strongest. As a butcher you're also in charge of nature. I've always been highly aware of the fact that a living creature is being sacrificed. This is one of the reasons why I always insist on respect for the meat that ends up on our cutting tables after slaughter. It is not a thing, even if the meat becomes a product in your hands. Anyone who wants to have professional pride in their craft must complete the entire cycle. The killed animal, now made into meat, deserves respect. Also once it is boned, carved, skinned, trimmed or chopped, displayed in the counter, wrapped in paper and on its way home with the customer.

¶ The blood. That too is the butcher's material, his liquid asset. There is no meat without blood, in all its variations of redness, thickness, coagulation and appearance. Dark red and congealed, light coral or vermilion, smudges on the work apron, rivulets meandering over the knife, dried-up blood that crackles between the butcher's fingers. The smell also, that settles in the nose, that sweetish odour, different from animal to animal.

Hendrik: “Cow's blood smells kind of gloomy. The scent of pig's blood is more volatile. When I get fresh meat and hang it in the fridge, I can tell by the aroma what the animals were fed, grass or hay. I can smell whether they lived outside or inside. I smell nature in the meat, or I smell nothing. Plumped meat with water in it smells like nothing. Meat that comes from animals that have been in the cowshed all the time has a musty, dark flavour; well, in a word, it tastes of barn. Cattle who grazed outdoors confirm the cliché of 'happy cow, good meat'. Little lambs from the Pyrénées who frolicked in meadows at an elevation of 1,000 metres smell of liveliness and freshness. You can taste it. I dream of a shop where I

can do meat tastings, according to breed, animal and age. Where I can ask the customer about his or her taste preferences, as the sommelier does with wine, and together determine what will suit their taste buds best. When I tell my fellow butchers this with all of my typical enthusiasm, I get strange reactions. They think I'm pretentious. But really, oh, it just logically follows from what I'm working to achieve, my goal: that people awaken again from the dullness of their palate, that they learn to taste again. Flavour is the path through which emotions and memories are transmitted. What should we do with a next generation that has neglected its senses and thereby squandered some of its memory, history and emotions? (*falters*). Ah, those tears again, my soft heart. 'The emotional warrior', I was once called in an interview, and I think it's not far off the mark. Serving is also an important word. Giving people the fruits of what you've gathered, discovered and learned. It's about meat, and somehow that sounds trivial, while... it's about opposites: giving life after death, providing good food. It's about mortality and immortality."

¶ "In the light of eternity, what I do is extremely finite, and yet I want to have meant something. I am 47 years old, this is an important moment in my life. I feel a great restlessness as well as a need to finally find some peace. Seldom was I involved in a greater battle with myself, seldom was the energy so highly strung, the need to communicate so great. I spent a long time searching for seeds, preparing the soil and learning the sowing techniques. Now my quest is sprouting and growing and it's time to harvest. And enjoy, of course. The way you can enjoy a good piece of meat – *a goe stiksje vlêes*." 🍖

TERROIR

TO HENDRIK DIERENDONCK MEANS FLAVOUR AND VARIETY. IT'S WHAT DISTINGUISHES A LAMB IN THE PYRÉNÉES FROM A LAMB IN QUERCY OR A SALT-MARSH LAMB. IT'S THE FLAVOUR OF THE LANDSCAPE. WHAT YOU SEE WITH YOUR EYES, YOU TASTE IN YOUR MOUTH. IT'S NATURE.

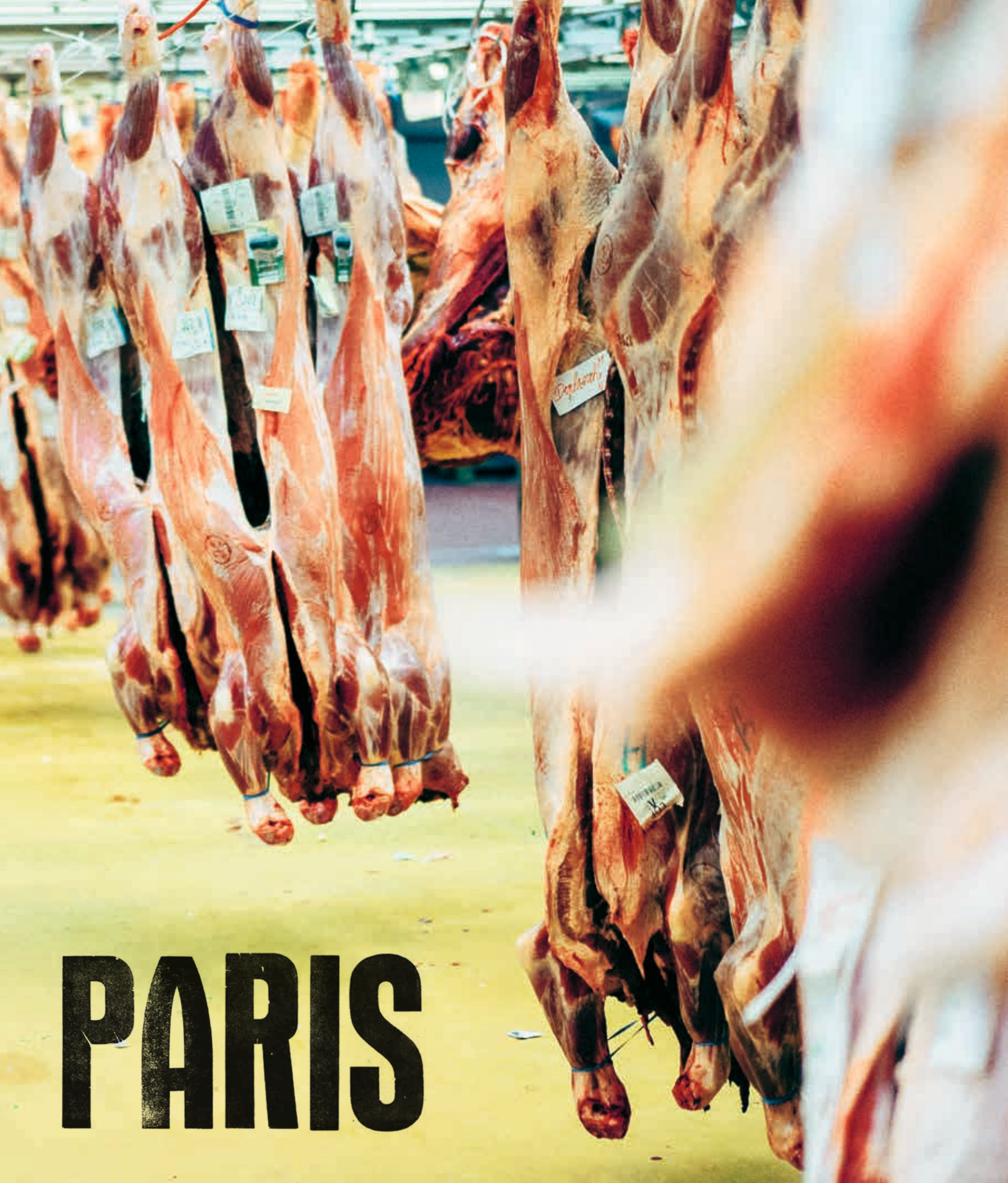
WE GO ON A ROAD TRIP TO TAKE AN INVENTORY OF DIFFERENT TERROIRS. FIRST RUNGIS, THE LARGEST WHOLESALE MARKET IN THE WORLD; THEN THE CORRÈZE, THE ULTIMATE LIVESTOCK FARMING REGION; AND THEN THE PYRÉNÉES, WHERE WE WANT TO LEARN EVERYTHING ABOUT FARMING MILK-FED LAMBS. WE ALSO TALK TO FARMERS IN NEVELE AND STEENVOORDE. AT HOME, IN BACHTEN DE KUPE, OUR WEST FLEMISH RED AWAITS US...







RUNGIS



PARIS

Tuesday 5pm – On the road

Lille, traffic jams. The landscape of northern France rolls by. The flowers of early May. Wheat and mustard fields, vast plains. Arras passes on our right. Johnny Cash's 'Jackson' plays in the background.

Hendrik says: "I want to make a book that tells the story of an evolving profession. The butcher was once an important figure in the neighbourhood, in his village. Many butchers have disappeared because the soul of the profession has become somewhat lost along the way. I don't know if you can speak of a revival now, but something's happening, with the rise of new-style butchers in the United States and England, and a handful of certified butchers in France. And something is also happening among the people, as awareness is growing that it is important and necessary to eat less meat – as you can see in the increasing number of vegans and vegetarians, for whom I have respect – and in the 'nose-to-tail' movement, a way of treating the animal that I have a keen interest in. I've wanted to become a butcher since I was a child. I want to practice this profession the way my father did, with my hands in the meat and my feet in the grasslands, but I want to respond to modern expectations and make use of the new opportunities of our time.

"We have knowledge at our disposal that previous generations did not. Anyone who loves the butcher's trade today needs to be present in their shop, of course, but also in their atelier, at the market, in the slaughterhouse, with the sellers, with the breeders... You have to be familiar with the herds, the breeds, the terroirs, and you have to share that knowledge with your customers. You can learn a lot from meeting people. You get to know the characteristic world of the livestock farmers, you meet dealers and restaurateurs. David Martin from La Paix restaurant was the first to have faith in me, and he encouraged me to believe in what I was doing. Through Sergio Herman I discovered guts and creativity: the idea that the sky's the limit. Kobe Desramaults has also been very important to me. Kobe heightened my awareness of the importance of terroir, of respect for life. But there are more. I learn something from people every day. That's the story that I would like to tell you, without forgetting the basics, of course, because it is that basis, the traditional element of the butcher's craft, that inspired me to be a butcher. There! I wanted to say that!"

Silence. 'Rocket Queen' by Guns N' Roses plays softly. A sign flits by the car window: Paris 180 km.

Tuesday 7pm

Black Sabbath. 'Iron Man'.

We revisit what Hendrik said about his father. That he was an old-school butcher, the embodiment of the traditional butcher's trade. It's in his blood. He's retired and could be taking it easy, but he still comes into the shop every day. He barely went to school and learned the craft with a butcher in the village, then with other butchers, in Antwerp and Brussels. He wanted to be able to do everything. Selecting a beautiful animal, carving it up, discussing with the customers, making his own pâtés and tripes. Loving what you do and being proud of it. "My father is old school. And I am also old school. And Tom here is old school too."

Tom gets up, cuts the dry sausage, slices the bread. He prepares the mustard and cracks open three bottles of beer.

Another 90 kilometres to Paris, a sign says.

8pm. Blue sky. First beers. Grant Lee Buffalo. 'Fuzzy'.

Wednesday 3.30am – Rungis parking lot

It's night. The van is standing in the parking lot of the meat hall. The alarm goes off. We've slept for two hours. The air is brisk. We splash some water on our faces and brush our teeth. It's actually quite chilly. Waning moon. Trucks coming and going. Doors slamming. We are in Rungis, the largest fresh produce market in the world. More than 12,000 people work here; 25,000 customers arrive every night. There are butchers, cheesemongers, fishmongers, poulterers, *affineurs*, the curious, cooks and sellers, all crowding around these exceptional products. Hendrik gets out of the car. He's wearing an immaculately clean white apron and a logo-bearing cap, the mandatory dress code. He gives us capes and plastic caps to wear. We look a bit silly.

Laughing all around.







PYRÉNÉES



PULLED PORK BURGER



11^H

1^P

Glaze

100 ml (3.5 fl oz) soy sauce
200 ml (7 fl oz) acacia honey
50 ml (1.7 fl oz) sushi vinegar
juice of 2 limes
10 ml (2 tsp) yuzu
1 lemongrass stalk
2 cloves of garlic
5 sprigs of thyme
a small piece of ginger
25 ml (0.9 fl oz) ginger syrup
3 star anise
50 g (1.8 oz) Sirop de Liège

60 g (2 oz) pulled pork of
Menapian pig
30 g (1 oz) glaze
1 small hamburger bun
2 skinned and deseeded tomatoes
a large pinch of salt
2 tsp of sugar
2 sprigs of thyme
2 cloves of garlic
1 tbsp olive oil
1 red onion
some rocket leaves

Petit basque cheese cream

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) petit basque cheese
1 litre (35 fl oz) milk
14 g (0.5 oz) kappa (Texturas)
4 tbsp good olive oil
salt

Place all the ingredients for the glaze in a saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for 2 hours.

Strain and reduce until the glaze becomes thick and syrupy.

Heat the meat in the glaze.

Place the tomatoes on a baking sheet lined with baking parchment. Sprinkle the salt, sugar, thyme, garlic and olive oil over the tomatoes and leave to dry out for 9 hours at 80°C (175°F).

Finely slice the red onion.

Arrange everything on a bun and garnish with the petit basque cheese cream and rocket leaves.

CHEESE CREAM (this is the basic recipe for all cheese creams)

Cut the cheese into small dice and bring to the boil with the milk and the kappa. Remember to stir well as the mixture can catch easily. Pour the liquid cream on to a sheet and let it set and harden (this should take about 10 minutes). Transfer the cheese to a mixer and mix until smooth. Add the olive oil and season to taste with salt.

SHORT RIBS OF MENAPIAN PIG



WITH SOUR CREAM AND CHICKPEAS

3^H

Place all the ingredients for the glaze in a saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for 2 hours.

Strain and reduce until the glaze becomes thick and syrupy.

Grill or fry the short ribs.

Mix the sour cream with the lime juice, olive oil and za'atar, and season with salt and pepper.

Glaze the short ribs and serve with the sour cream and chickpeas.

Garnish with the basil cress.

2^P

Glaze

100 ml (3.5 fl oz) soy sauce
200 ml (7 fl oz) acacia honey
50 ml (1.7 fl oz) sushi vinegar
juice of 2 limes
10 ml (2 tsp) yuzu
1 lemongrass stalk
2 cloves of garlic
5 sprigs of thyme
a small piece of ginger
25 ml (0.9 fl oz) ginger syrup
3 star anise
50 g (1.8 oz) Sirop de Liège

2 pre-cooked short ribs
300 g (10.5 oz) sour cream
juice of 1 lime
3 tbsp good olive oil
a large pinch of za'atar
salt and pepper
1 tin of chickpeas
basil cress





CRISPY PIG'S EARS



WITH HOT KETCHUP



6^H

6^P

4 pig's ears
fleur de sel
lemon zest

Stock for the pig's ears

2 onions
½ leek
2 celery stalks
12 peppercorns
a large pinch of salt
1 bulb of garlic
2 carrots
8 sprigs of thyme
3 bay leaves

Hot ketchup

1 kg (2 lb 4 oz) san marzano
tomatoes
250 g (9 oz) red onions
250 g (9 oz) dessert apples
22.5 g (0.8 oz) smoked salt
(Maldon)
250 g (9 oz) brown sugar
15 g (0.5 oz) smoked paprika
250 ml (9 fl oz) apple vinegar
100 ml (3.5 fl oz) apple juice

Cover the pig's ears and the ingredients for the stock with water, bring to the boil and simmer gently (for approximately 4 hours) until the ears are tender – test for tenderness with a knife.

Remove the ears from the stock and leave to cool for 2 hours. Cut into thin strips, about 0.5 cm (¼ in) thick, and fry at 180°C (350°F) until crispy. Be careful as pig's ears tend to spatter! Place the strips on kitchen paper and sprinkle with the fleur de sel and lemon zest.

Stew the tomatoes, onions, apples and salt in a large pan. Add the sugar and smoked paprika, continue to cook and then deglaze with the apple vinegar and apple juice. Simmer until all the ingredients are nicely cooked, mix well and strain through a fine sieve.

Serve the ears on baking parchment, with the hot ketchup on the side.







'LA FÊTE DU COCHON'



48^H

4^P

6 pork cheeks
2 black pudding sausages from your
butcher (approx. 400 g / 14 oz)
1 block of 400 g (14 oz) fat salted
bacon
2 litres (3½ pints) vegetable stock
(see p. 243)
acacia honey
farm butter
fresh thyme
pickled vegetables of your choice
(see p. 242)
balsamic vinegar
2 litres (3½ pints) water
144 g (5 oz) sodium nitrite

Make a light 6° Baumé brine with the water and sodium nitrite (see p. 243), then leave the pork cheeks to soak in the brine overnight.

Remove the pork cheeks from the brine and place in a cooking pot with the bacon. Cover with vegetable stock, bring to a boil and simmer for 3–4 hours on a low heat until the meat is completely tender.

Turn off the heat and let the meat steep in the stock overnight.

Remove the meat and cut the bacon into pieces.

Fry the black pudding in a knob of butter.

In another pan, fry the bacon and pork cheeks.

Add the honey and caramelize the bacon and cheeks.

Carve the pork cheeks and black pudding into slices.

Deglaze the pork cheek pan with a dash of balsamic vinegar and reduce slightly. If necessary, add some more honey to achieve the flavour you want.

Dress a plate with the pork cheeks, bacon and black pudding. Scatter the pickled vegetables and fresh thyme over the meat.

Garnish with some swirls of balsamic syrup.

“EATING LESS MEAT, BUT BETTER QUALITY: THAT IS THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFT BUTCHERY.”

— HENDRIK DIERENDONCK

“Hendrik Dierendonck has acquired a timeless mastery of butchery. He continues a multi-generational lineage with a genuine dedication to preserving the heritage of both craft and breed, while also inspiring current and future butchers through his innovation and mentorship. Hendrik’s humility and generosity are apparent in his boundless sharing of wisdom, and his smile and positivity spread an infectious joy that lifts everyone around him. Hendrik’s work in butchery forever inspires me, and I’m so grateful to call him a colleague and friend.”

— ADAM DANFORTH

“Long live butchers, for they are the emissaries of an ancient art. Today more than ever, they bear witness for the welfare of animals and show us the need to be responsible carnivores. Hendrik is a splendid example of this.”

— DARIO CECCHINI

HENDRIK AND HIS FATHER RAYMOND DIERENDONCK HAVE CREATED THE BENCHMARK FOR EVERYTHING TO DO WITH MEAT. THEY SUPPLY ONLY THE HIGHEST QUALITY PRODUCTS AND HAVE WON THE FOLLOWING OF BELGIUM’S TOP CHEFS.

HENDRIK IS ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ‘NOSE-TO-TAIL’ PHILOSOPHY, IN WHICH LITERALLY EVERY PART OF THE SLAUGHTERED ANIMAL IS USED. HE SPECIALISES IN THE PROCESSING AND MATURING OF EXCEPTIONAL MEAT FROM THE BEST BREEDS, INCLUDING WEST FLEMISH RED CATTLE.

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WITH TEXT BY HENDRIK DIERENDONCK, RENÉ SÉPUL AND MARIJKE LIBERT, AND SUPERB PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS SWEERTVAEGHER, PIET DE KERSGIETER AND STEPHAN VANFLETEREN.

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