

Case history of a centuries-old global brand

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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It was a particularly beautiful and warm sunny day about a month ago as I sat on my deck overlooking False Bay, having breakfast round about noonish and reading the label on an almost empty champagne bottle.

I marvelled at how, in days of yore, Catholic monks in France were so innovative about product research. They were dab hands at producing the most delectable liqueurs such as Benedictine and Chartreuse. And while the best known monk brand in the world, Dom Perignon, has been erroneously credited with developing that now very expensive bubbly of the same name, he did in fact achieve something a lot grander by inventing champagne itself.

The Italians have also invented some delicious liqueurs, such as my favourite, Frangelico.

But interestingly enough, English monks have also made a significant contribution to the culinary world. No, not a liqueur, wine or whisky because they realised that even in the middle ages they had no chance of competing with the Scots, Irish and Europeans.

Now, from here on this story could well be urban legend and complete fiction but I rather like to believe it anyway. Particularly as I must confess to making it up after noticing just how many cooking programmes there were on television these days.

All going on about growing, harvesting, shopping for, preparing, garnishing, serving and eating food. But not much about who invented so much of this stuff we trustingly swallow every day.

I'd like to know what was going through the mind of that fellow who first decided to milk a cow? "I'm just going to pull one of those long titty things and then drink whatever comes out..." And who in heaven's name thought of putting together on a plate, a chicken's progeny and a thinly sliced sliver of pig's backside, expecting one third of mankind to eat it before having woken up properly?

So these two monks walk into a...

But, to get back to my story about the English contribution to product development and the culinary arts.



"Oi, Percy, oi found this opt 't floor... what abaht popping it in in too?" "Aw, nay, Fred, thah might be too much, aye."

My musings started when I read the ingredients listed on a bottle of Lea & Perrins' "original and genuine" Worcestershire Sauce. It begged debate on how every single meal served in the UK for heaven knows how long, has not passed a single lip without the addition of this miracle concoction of vinegar, molasses, sugar, salt, anchovies, tamarinds, onions, garlic and a host of secret flavourings and spices.

Picture the scene. An olde English inn a couple of hundred years ago. Two novice monks travelling back to their monastery from a three-month retreat in the north, Fred Lea and Percy Perrins, pop in for a midday meal.

"Oi!" says Fred to the comely waitress, "call this boiled beef? Nay lass, 'tis putrefaction personified. Bring hither something to lay waste to this ghastly taste."

He tried some vinegar. Much too sour. His lips looked like a startled sea anemone...

"Ere Fred lad, bung on some of this molasses, that'll sweeten it up summat, said Perrins."

Still too tart, so he added a tablespoon of sugar. Then a pinch of salt for no reason other than it being so typically British. Didn't help.

But no potatsh or tomatsh

From the corner of the room a swarthy seaman from Lisbon said; "Ifa-you don't gotta no pawpsh, banansh or pineapsh try sardinsh...."

No fruit or sardines being available, Fred bunged in a mushed up anchovy. Still no joy.

The innkeeper brought out a little hessian bag of tamarind seeds he'd won off a Nigerian minstrel in the previous year's whist marathon. No one had any idea what they were but they went into the pot for the heck of it.

The *coup de grace* came quite predictably from a gnarled French hunchback alternately sipping mead at the bar and throwing up into a corner.

"Alors, messieurs. When we in la belle France try to eat sumzing zat is not yet dead, we add ze garlic.

So, in went a clove of garlic on the basis that if it worked on living organisms it would work on those long gone.

The innkeeper came back with an armful of sample flavourants and spices left by decades of travelling condiment salesmen and dumped the whole catastrophe into the mixture that was now looking like liquefied axle grease from a long distance hansom cab.

Fred Lea poured it over is over-boiled beef, hacked off a chunk and popped it in his mouth.

"Gad, Perrins," he cried, "I can't taste the meat at all anymore..."

And ever since then, millions of visiting gourmets have been eternally grateful.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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