

Patrik Johansson, the Butter Viking

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Ten years ago, the first episode of Eat This Podcast featured Ben Reade talking about some butter that he had buried in a Swedish bog, the better to understand the bog butter occasionally unearthed in Ireland (and elsewhere). The butter for that experiment was made by Patrik Johansson, using methods taught him by his grandmother, lightly churned with some modern food science. Whose idea was it to recreate bog butter?

Patrik Johansson: I think it was Ben Reade's idea, but I'm not sure. I think. But it was a long time ago. Ten years ago or something.

Jeremy: Absolutely.

Patrik: Yeah, but anyway, I mean, Ben, Ben was the one who did the scientific, historical stuff. I was only churning and digging. That was my part.

Jeremy: But what did you think of the bog butter? I mean, when you dug it up.

Patrik: Yeah, it's a very interesting flavour. Maybe, not very delicious, but very interesting. But then in Ireland, I tried a thousand year old bog butter as well. It was the same. It wasn't very delicious, but very, very interesting. Of course.

Jeremy: But I think you would find any kind of interesting butter, I think you would find very interesting.

Patrik: True. True that. I've eaten rotten butter. I've eaten well ... I've eaten so many funky butters. So you're right. Yeah.

Jeremy: Let's go back a bit to the beginning. How do you make butter and how does that differ from all the rest of the butter in the world?

Patrik: I make it the old traditional way. That is to say, I culture the cream first and then I churn it in a horizontal butter churn, slowly. It's not very unique, but when compared to industrial butters, they make it in a butter cannon, I think is the name. Their process takes like three seconds, whereas my process takes three four days and they

can't actually use cultured cream in in that kind of machine. So that's why they have to add an artificial butter flavouring.

Jeremy: Really, I didn't know that. There's butter diacetyl or whatever it's called ...

Patrik: Exactly. That's the one.

Jeremy: And that's that's in ordinary butter?

Patrik: In all of the bottles you can see on the market, Lurpak, the Arla, any of those really big brands. It's made from sweet cream, but then they add the diacetyl, etcetera, to to make it taste more like the butter we want.

Jeremy: So. Okay. Sweet cream, and you culture your cream. Is that like. I mean, I'm a bread maker and I use a natural ... Do you do you culture it with a pure culture or do you just use some of the old cream to start the new lot off?

Patrik: I can do that. But then eventually, you know, they kind of mutate and change characteristics. So I use between 7 and 12 different lactic acid bacteria depending on what the customer wants. It's a tricky field because ... Not very well researched either. Some of those lactic acid bacteria can work in unison, and have a nice cooperation, whereas some of them don't like each other, one another. And then they start this chemical warfare. The chemical warfare. It is what gives us the nice flavouring.

Jeremy: So the mix. The mix of different culturing bacteria affects the flavour of the butter?

Patrik: It does. And also, if you know where the optimum temperature is, like I do, I use it ... Well, a secret temperature curve in order for them to to give their best flavour, because the flavour does not only come from the chemical warfare, but is due to their metabolism as well.

Jeremy: Does what the cows eat? Does the cows' diet make much of a difference?

Patrik: Oh, yes, I know a farmer, he went over to beef cattle because on his grounds there were a massive invasion of, what do you call

that, wild garlic. And the cows just loved it and ate it. And the milk tasted of wild garlic, of course.

I tried not to ... Because it's a luxury, really, to be able to have your own cows and let them eat the best things. Whereas I've had maybe dairies in maybe seven different locations, now I try to work with ecologic, no organic, milk. That makes a lot of difference. I think I want my buddies the lactic acid bacteria to really thrive, and some of the farmers, all over the globe, they put chlorine in the milking tanks, which works for them because it kills off all the bacteria and they can continue to sell the milk to Arla and all the other big dairies. But my lactic acid bacteria, they do not thrive. Ends up totally disgusting butter if I work with that. So.

Jeremy: And how easy is it to make butter at home? I mean, could I make ... I've made butter accidentally when I was over whipping cream. But ...

Patrik: Exactly. If you're being a bit absent minded, just whisk some cream and then you end up with butter.

Jeremy: So you don't have to have all the culturing and everything?

Patrik: No, you don't have to. You can make butter from sweet cream. And then all the lactose will be present in the butter, of course. And it will have a sweeter taste to it. But you will not get the additional 150 taste components that you get from fermenting the cream.

Jeremy: And how. I mean, how did you get into butter making? I mean, it seems like, you know, a pretty a pretty small niche to get into.

Patrik: Yeah, it. Well, I was in IT. I made lots of very, too complicated IT systems that nobody actually used to their full extent, which is often the case. And I found it very boring, to be honest, after a couple of years. So then I wanted to make something very simple but very well made. So I started making sea salt by boiling down the ocean, so to speak. And it worked. But then I started making butter because my grandmother, she was a very small scale butter maker in the 40s, 50s, 60s. So she taught me, of course, how to make butter when she was alive. And that fitted well with my thinking of making something very, very simple, but make it in a good way.

Jeremy: So is your is your butter a continuation of your grandmother's butter, then?

Patrik: Yeah, in a way. But she didn't use commercial bacteria. I have to because of health and safety regulations. She used, for example, a wild carnivorous plant. She used that to culture the bowl before adding the cream. I mean, you can basically take a handful of grass and just smear the inside of the bowl and then you're set.

Jeremy: Yeah, I think I remember Ben saying that you filtered the either the milk or the cream through a little clump of grass.

Patrik: Yeah. That works like a charm because on the surface of any grass or leaf, you have between four, five, six different strains of lactic acid bacteria and they differ from field to field; terroir, if you will. But ... And of course, on the surface of human skin, you have the two main lactic acid bacteria to make butter, the *Lactobacillus cremoris* and the *Lactobacillus diacetylactis*, especially on the surface of female skin. That's why probably most dairy ... people working in dairies used to be only female.

Jeremy: I would have assumed it was just because the men made them do the work. But ...

Patrik: Exactly. That's probably why. But luckily, the female skin was ...

But also, I mean, most people don't realise, in the udder of the cow, there are no lactic acid bacteria. The milk in the udder is sterile. Otherwise they would be walking around with creme fraiche or, if they were galloping, they would end up with butter. So it's sterile. And most people who think that unpasteurised milk is very, very good for you, they don't realise that. Well, maybe it is, but the bacteria comes from the teat, the surface of the teat of the cow, the same way as we have lactic acid bacteria on our skin. Without it, I think we would die. It's a first line of defense against viruses, et cetera.

Jeremy: You make something, according to what I've read, you make something that you call virgin butter. What is that and how does that differ, for example, from the kind of the kind of butter your grandmother might have made?

Patrik: I mean, my grandmother, she made a functional butter, which was delicious. You could use it in baking, in frying and slathering it on

bread, because the fat percentage was 80, 82 or something, which is a legal requirement in order for it to be called butter, actually, in the EU, United States as well. I think anything below 80% will have to be called a spread or something like that.

Well, there was a sous chef, a Swedish sous chef that was going to work for this famous British chef in London. And I asked him, could you bring some butter to him? And then I sent it to him a couple of weeks later. And I was like sleepless, many nights. I wanted the butter to be very special and not just any ordinary butter. So then I came up with the idea of churning the butter in a special way at special temperature and stop just when the first butter grains are formed. Then it still holds the the buttermilk. Since the cream is cultured, of course the buttermilk is acidic, so you will have a butter with quite a lot of acidity in it. And salt, of course; 1.67% is my favourite, I think. But since, I mean ... If you ever clarify a butter, you will notice that the flavour of a clarified butter is not ... there's not a lot of flavour in it, which which is logical because all of the 150 taste flavour components in butter are mainly dispersed in the buttermilk.

Jeremy: Okay.

Patrik: So virgin butter has 40% fat. Or if I do it in the UK, 50% fat. And the rest of the butter is the cultured buttermilk. So it has more flavour of butter actually, than a normal butter, paired with the acidity and the salt and the fat. So it's a nice combination, I think.

Jeremy: But as you just said, you can't ... If you were going to sell it, you can't call it butter. You have to call it a spread.

Patrik: Yeah, but the thing is, I asked the health and safety inspector in on the Isle of Wight. I said, Well, I can't call it a virgin spread, can I? And then she ... no, we cannot call it a virgin spread. But the thing is, I am allowed to call it butter, but then I have to have a prefix in front of it, like Tivoli Circus butter or whatever, I think. Well, I haven't been prosecuted yet. Well, it may be an illegal butter.

Jeremy: You mentioned the Isle of Wight, and I do remember reading about you moving to the Isle of Wight. What what went wrong? You're not there any more. Did it ...

Patrik: Um. Well. To be honest, it went quite well, actually. But then the investors happened, I think. That's why I'm not doing the the

mistake again of having investors. They are not on the same planet. They ... I've had investors before and each time they want me to work with the cheaper cream and I do not work well under such conditions. I don't ... I don't accept it. I can't do that. I mean, it's against all the things I work with, because I do all the things by hand. When I churn, I'm awake like 24 hours. I work a lot, and I just can't do that with shitty cream, in order for them to gain maybe 4% extra money. No. No.

Jeremy: I think what I find most interesting, is your determination to remain small.

Patrik: Yeah. I mean, I've been approached by Arla. They wanted to ... At first, they threatened me.

Jeremy: Arla, by the way, is the fourth biggest dairy company in the world based in Denmark. They make Lurpak butter, among other brands. Thousands of tonnes of it a month.

Patrik: Then they wanted to buy the dairy. Like, in Sweden we had, in the 1920s, we had like 19,000 little dairies. In the 1980s, after Arla had bought them all up, we had 15. Only now we're about 100 or something like that. Coca Cola wanted me to move to to the US because they have the biggest organic dairy farm in the US now. But I couldn't see myself making butter for Coca-Cola. Apparently I'm a lousy, shitty businessman, but ... Well, that's how it is anyway.

Jeremy: So most of your butter is going to restaurants. Is all of it going to restaurants?

Patrik: Yes. Actually, yes. Especially the virgin butter, because it's a really lousy butter when in the hands of private consumers. Because no matter how long I explain to them that you cannot bake with it, you can't fry with it, et cetera, et cetera, it's only a table butter. But still, they come back and tell me, oh, it didn't work with baking. So I only work with professionals, actually. Yeah.

Jeremy: Do you have any thoughts about going beyond butter to other dairy products? I mean, are you interested in things like cheeses and yogurt and stuff like that?

Patrik: Yeah, I have done cheeses. Actually, I have a recipe. Nobody makes it. And if I'm going to make it, I want to do it on an open fire

with a copper kettle hanging on top of it. Really stupid and inefficient in every way. But it's been my dream actually. And when I've done it, it's super delicious.

Jeremy: Yeah.

Patrik: Yogurt — I made not zero per cent fat yogurt, which is quite popular, but the contrary. I made a 30 per cent fat yogurt, which is too delicious actually. So, I want to make stuff like that.

Jeremy: I mean, you mentioned the fat content and I'm guessing you ... I wonder, do you think butter is particularly — or butter fat — is particularly good for us or is it just not bad for us? Do you think it's actually beneficial?

Patrik: It is, it is beneficial. The days when I churn, mostly to 2 to 3 days a week, I only eat butter and that's when I feel best. Only butter, no bread, no nothing. Just butter. But it's an extreme case, I guess. But I mean, the human brain always needed fat. Maybe for some people it's bad. But for most people I think it's very beneficial.

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