

ONE BOTTLE:

The Billecart-Salmon Champagne Brut Rosé

by JOSHUA BAER

Shoes were the original cars. Rivers were the original maps. Small birds were the original songs. Children were the original hostages. Hands and teeth were the original weapons of mass destruction. Rain was the original religion.

Trees were the original architecture. Branches and leaves were the original mirrors. Gravity was the original staircase. Falling was the original flying dream. Landing on your feet was the original moment of clarity.

The mouth of the cave was the original frame. The sky at night was the original big idea. The sight of land was the original sigh of relief. Love was the original hypothesis, but love was also proof that the original hypothesis was flawed. Making love from sunset to sunrise was the original three-act play.

Jokes were the original old sayings. Dreams were the original myths. Hunters were the original chefs. Eating human flesh was the original religious experience.

Emptiness was the original form, and vice versa. The Big Bang was the original orgasm. Eyes were the original traps. Fear was the original form of aggressive behavior. The stars were the original free associations.

Bears were the original giants. The ocean was the original gene pool. Accidents were the original intelligent designs. The tides were the original regulatory agencies. Fishing boats were the original offshore platforms. Sails were the original leading indicators.

Fire was the original currency. Cave paintings were the original loan applications. Marriage was the original social contract. Memories were the original retirement plans.

Albrecht Dürer was the original Andy Warhol. Francisco Goya was the original Pablo Picasso. Nicolas Poussin was the original Paul Cezanne. Gustav Klimt was the original Jimi Hendrix. James Joyce was the original John Lennon, and John Lennon was the original Steve Jobs. In her song *Diamonds and Rust*, Joan Baez referred to Bob Dylan as “the original vagabond.”

Drawings were the original letters, letters were the original numbers, and numbers were the original abstract expressionist paintings. Looms were the original computers. Slavery was the original real estate. Fields, plows, silos, seeds, and irrigation ditches were the original assembly lines.

Beggars were the original priests. The Catholic Church was the original global corporation. Arrows were the original swords. Bethlehem was the original mayhem, the sword was the original guillotine, the guillotine was the original deadline, Paris was the original Jonestown, and Jonestown was the original Waco. Blood was the original Kool-Aid.

Liberty was the original promise. Lucifer was the original broken promise.

Shiva was the original Navi. Orpheus was the original Romeo. Breasts were the original family values. Symmetry was the original résumé. The sound of a woman’s laughter was the original vote of confidence. The womb was the original Garden of Eden. Birth was the original expulsion. Biting off more than you could chew was the original original sin.

The word “original” derives from the Latin *origo*, “beginning, source, birth.” The Latin verb *oriri*—“to rise”—is the root of words like “orchestra,” “orientation,” and “origination.” Because the earth turns from west to east, the sun appears to set in the west, pass underneath the

earth, and rise in the east. The “Orientals” invented writing, gunpowder, noodles, and feng shui. When you got lost, the first thing you did—after admitting that you were lost—was to get reoriented.

For years, the word “original” was an adjective people used to describe something fresh, innovative, novel, or unique. The opposite of original was “derivative”—from the Latin *derivare*, “to lead or draw off a stream of water from its source.” (In Latin, *de* means “from” and *rivus* means “stream.”)

During the 1950s and 1960s, the worst thing you could say about an artist was that his or her work was derivative. Pablo Picasso challenged that argument with his world-class adage: “Good artists borrow, great artists steal.” These days, people who love art understand that the definition of an artist is a person who is not afraid of being called derivative. The American artist Robert Motherwell put it this way: “Every intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is the real subject, of which everything he paints is both an homage and a critique....”

On Wall Street, derivatives are used to manage risk. To a trader, a derivative is, in theory, “...any agreement or contract that is not based on a real, or true, exchange... a financial instrument—or more simply, an agreement between two people or two parties—that has a value determined by the price of something else....” In practice, derivatives are futures and options, which are deals struck between two or more parties who see the opportunity for profit in agreeing to disagree. The federal government wants us to believe that derivatives are “risky,” and that people who trade derivatives are responsible for the fact that the prices of houses and the prices of stocks did not go up forever.

The truth is the bitter inverse of the government’s lie. We are all responsible for our collective belief in the absolute virtue of rising prices. We were wrong. We bit off more than we could chew. We were the original suckers who took the original sucker’s bet and were left holding the original bag. As James Grant, the editor of *Grant’s Interest Rate Observer*, has observed: “Gold was money. The dollar was the original derivative.”

Which brings us to the Billecart-Salmon Champagne Brut Rosé. In the glass, the Billecart-Salmon is a shy, unassuming pink. The color is a head fake. The bouquet is the first clue that there is more to this Brut Rosé than its color. On the palate, the Billecart-Salmon delivers layer upon layer of generosity. As you drink it, you find yourself simultaneously lost and found. Your sense of direction takes off in all directions. Where do you end, and where does the Champagne begin? And why are there no answers to these questions? Because Dom Pérignon was the original Albert Hoffman and Champagne was the original LSD.

Death was the original liberty. The reflection of the sky on the water at the break of day was the original work of art. Air was the original canvas. Shadows were the original colors. Light was the original paint. ♡

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