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Oyster Enterprise

**Boston Chef Jeremy Sewall
spotlights the ocean's bounties
with Island Creek Oyster Bar.**

BY PETER AGOSTINELLI, FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY JODI PUDGE,
CHEF & RESTAURANT PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL PIAZZA

Growing up in the northeastern United States, Jeremy Sewall lived within a regional backdrop of edible specialties: lobster and fish from neighboring waters; vegetables from his parents' garden; fresh lamb and other meats from a local purveyor.

If that setting sounds like an epicure's paradise, it's also what hooked Sewall on to the culinary arts. Today, he says it was simply how his family lived life.

"There was Wade's Butcher Shop owned by the Wade brothers – they had this amazing place," he recalls. "All the hunters would bring their deer there in the fall to be butchered. It was that type of place. You bought corn at the farm stand in the summer. You went and picked your own strawberries in the summer."

Meanwhile, his relatives in coastal Maine continued a generations-old fishing heritage. Sewall's childhood in the Hudson River Valley region of Upstate New York distilled a lively food culture – "although it wasn't the way it is now with farmers' markets and small farms," he says. "You never really heard the word 'artisan' back then. It was a lifestyle. It was how you ate and fed yourselves."

That lifestyle thrives today in Boston, where Sewall works as co-owner and executive chef of Island Creek Oyster Bar, a contemporary homage to the region's seafood heritage. *(continued on page 88)*



Grilled Oysters

WITH FENNEL & SAGE

SERVES 6 TO 8, MAKES 24 OYSTERS.

Perfect for cooler months, this recipe from Chef Jeremy Sewall incorporates fresh sage, fennel and apple for a clean take on grilled oysters. It yields six to eight appetizer portions or three to four servings as a main course.

INGREDIENTS:

- 24 oysters, preferably Island Creek (**CHEF'S TIP:** Freshness is key, so ask your fishmonger for the day's best local selection.)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 bulb fennel, cored, shoots removed, finely diced (**TIP:** Save fennel top for garnishes on salads and soups, or to flavor vegetable stocks.)
- 1 cup finely diced McIntosh apple
- Zest 1 lemon
- 2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 4 leaves fresh sage, finely chopped
- Sea salt and ground white pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS:

ONE: Shuck oysters, reserving natural juices and bottom shells. (**TIP:** To save time, ask your fishmonger to shuck oysters for you – just be sure to save the shell bottoms and juices.)

TWO: In a large sauté pan, heat oil on medium. Add fennel and sauté, stirring frequently, until soft and beginning to color. Add apple and sauté until beginning to soften, about 2 minutes.

THREE: Add oyster liquid and increase heat to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in lemon zest, juice and sage. Season with salt and pepper.

FOUR: Preheat grill to high. Carefully place oyster meat in reserved shell bottoms and top with fennel mixture. Transfer to grill, being careful not to spill liquid from shells. Grill until liquid begins to bubble and meat is warmed through. Serve immediately.

NUTRIENTS PER SERVING (4 OYSTERS):

CALORIES: 78, TOTAL FAT: 3 g, SAT. FAT: 1 g, CARBS: 9 g, FIBER: 2 g, SUGARS: 2 g, PROTEIN: 3 g, SODIUM: 140 mg, CHOLESTEROL: 14 mg

Your exclusive
recipe from Chef
Jeremy Sewall

Both the zest and
juices of fresh lemons
brighten the flavors
in this preparation.



Tips for the Home Cook

Jeremy Sewall, co-owner and executive chef of Island Creek Oyster Bar in Boston, offers his top tips for aspiring home cooks.

KNOW YOUR SEAFOOD. Being a smart consumer includes learning the species of fish that carry high levels of mercury caused by pollution. Sewall says tilefish, a common whitefish, often carries one of the highest mercury levels. **(NOTE:** Women who are pregnant or breast-feeding should be extra cautious in monitoring their mercury intake from foods.) Swordfish and certain types of tuna also carry high mercury counts, while oysters are among the seafood containing the least amount.

KEEP IT SIMPLE. No matter the preparation method, great seafood is ideal when close to its natural state. Trying to manipulate fish or shellfish to fit a recipe is a common error, Sewall says. Instead, garnish grilled or steamed fish with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice and herbs. Or make a simple mignonette. The traditional French condiment of fresh pepper, minced shallot and vinegar enhances the briny perfection of fresh oysters.

ONLINE RESOURCES ARE PURE GOLD, BUT NOTHING REPLACES PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. Sewall says trusted fishmongers and producers are as valuable for product details as they are for sustainability updates. "As a chef, the number one source for information I turn to is the fishermen. The oceans are so complex that even I can find it a lot to tackle. I feel responsible to the fishermen. The biggest factor to me is who caught the fish, when and how."

(continued from page 86) The restaurant serves in part as the dining extension of Island Creek Oysters, a Massachusetts producer of some of North America's finest fresh oysters and a champion of sustainable aquaculture development.

The restaurant

Island Creek Oyster Bar's guests can find nearly everything aquatic and appetizing. Besides showcasing pristine local oysters and other bivalve mollusks, Sewall turns to his cousin, lobsterman Mark Sewall, for fresh Atlantic lobsters caught outside

it off with – his father was a lobsterman who switched to growing oysters," Sewall says. "He's a great guy who has a ton of passion and commitment to what he was doing, and that was growing amazing oysters." Their energy matches the growth of the Island Creek Oysters' initiative, which includes a not-for-profit foundation that builds awareness of aquaculture farming as an approach to global food production needs, as well as its environment benefits. (Oysters are natural filters that break down algae blooms and nitrogen pockets in afflicted waters.)

"We recognize aquaculture as the next great food source."

Maine's York Harbor. Many other regional oysters and clams fill a raw bar menu along with Latin-influenced ceviche and *crudo*, a raw seafood preparation based on Italian simplicity. Local scallops and flounder, Rhode Island bluefish and striped bass caught off the Massachusetts coast are other options depending on the day.

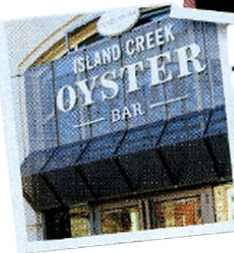
Such bounty is second nature for Sewall after years of cooking and leading professional kitchens. A graduate of The Culinary Institute of America's main campus in New York's Hudson River Valley, he cooked in the United States and Europe. While working as executive chef at The Lark Creek Inn in Larkspur, California, the James Beard Foundation recognized Sewall's work with a "Rising Star Chef" nomination in 2000. He later returned to the Northeast and opened the restaurant Lineage with his wife, Lisa, a former pastry chef at L'Espalier, a fine dining destination in Boston.

The 2010 launch of Island Creek Oyster Bar took its cue from Sewall's existing relationship with oyster farmer Skip Bennett, the founder of Island Creek Oysters. Opening an oyster bar in Boston's Kenmore Square seemed like a great fit for their relationship as well as Sewall's ocean-to-table philosophy. But how? For starters, the sea's riches are at Sewall's back door. Plus, his chef-producer bond with Bennett evolved from the moment they met. "He was a guy I instantly hit

"In the next 30 to 40 years, most people believe the demand for food will double," Bennett says. "We recognize aquaculture as the next great food source. With shellfish farming like the aquaculture I do, the next great part of that is the sustainability – the ability to endure. We're able to replant 'crops' for the next year, and it's very easy on the environment."

For Sewall, it's an evolution in food production that supports his commitment. "The idea of taking a single product – that I think still to this day is the premier oyster – and building a restaurant based on that idea of dedication to a product, the dedication to doing something that's really incredible and working really hard at it in a humble way... it's just one of the most appealing things I can think of ever as a chef," he says. ☺

Sewall runs the kitchens at Island Creek Oyster Bar and other Boston-area restaurants.



The restaurant showcases fresh Island Creek oysters and regional seafood.