

Wine Spectator

www.winespectator.com

New York's

DANNY MEYER

REDEFINING
FINE
DINING

NEW DINING IN
SAN FRANCISCO

SOUTH AFRICA'S
HIDDEN GEMS

LONG ISLAND
WINE COUNTRY

ITALIAN MAVERICKS

MAY 31, 2012
\$5.95 US



When Danny Meyer started in restaurants, he proved a natural at hospitality. But the world is filled with restaurateurs who are good at making their diners feel cared for. Meyer has successfully found a formula for reproducing that on a large scale.—COVER STORY



42 | The prince of New York dining



69 | South Africa's diversity

COVER STORY

42 | The Meyer Method New York restaurateur Danny Meyer places the diner front and center at his trendsetting destinations. From Union Square Cafe to Gramercy Tavern to Shake Shack and beyond—the story of one man's quest to achieve his vision of excellence • *Mitch Frank*

49 | New York Dining Menu A complete list of his Manhattan restaurants

56 | The Sizzle Behind Shake Shack How a unique take on hamburgers and fries grew a single hot dog cart into a chain with global aspirations

Features

TASTING REPORTS

69 | South Africa's Hidden Gems A bevy of delicious reds and whites awaits wine lovers with a sense of discovery • *James Molesworth*

103 | Austria's Twin Bill Riesling and Grüner Veltliner deliver firm structures and aging potential in 2010 • *Kim Marcus*

ENTERTAINING

61 | Celebrate, New England Style Bringing the feast home with the help of a Massachusetts oyster farm and tried-and-true family recipes • *Owen Dugan*

THE ENVIRONMENT

79 | Back to the Land in Italy Three artisanal vintners and their families carve out niches with overlooked grapes and diverse *terroirs* • *Robert Camuto*

TRAVEL

88 | Exploring Long Island A photo essay and guide to New York's gentle winemaking landscape • *Sara Matthews*



61 | New England's seafood bounty



88 | Long Island wine country



79 | Back to the future in Italy

“Wine is not a status symbol. It's not modern art. It's important that we drink it, we digest it, and that it becomes part of us.”

—WINEMAKER FRANCESCA SFONDRINI, ITALY'S BACK-TO-THE-LAND VINTNERS, PAGE 79



21 | What's new in San Francisco dining

Grapevine

- 13 | **News** The meteoric rise of Moscato
- 16 | **Business** FBI arrests “Dr. Conti”
- 19 | **People** Sommelier Jill Gubesch on wine and Mexican food • *Jennifer Fiedler*
- 21 | **Dining Out** San Francisco hot spots • *Harvey Steiman*
- 25 | **Cheese** Saxelby Cheesemongers' American touch • *Sam Gugino*
- 28 | **Spirits** Canadian revival • *Jack Bettridge*
- 31 | **Private Cellars** Digging deep in California • *Lizzie Munro*
- 34 | **Savvy Shopper** Washington reds, Australian whites and distinctive Loire Valley wines • *Bruce Sanderson*

Departments

- 7 | **This Issue** *Marvin R. Shanken*
- 10 | **Letters**
- 37 | **James Laube** New Zealand's rising star
- 40 | **Matt Kramer** Seriously unserious
- 140 | **A Perfect Match** Walter Bundy's Soft-Shell Crabs With Succotash and Viognier

Celebrate, NEW ENGLAND STYLE

Toast your family and friends with a Northeastern coastal feast ★ **BY OWEN DUGAN** ★ **PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLER+KELLER**

“Some of my fondest memories are of when family would come for the weekend, and Dad would bring way too many lobsters and steamers,” says Skip Bennett, owner of Island Creek Oysters, an oyster farm he created in Duxbury, Mass., on the coast about a 45-minute drive south of Boston, near Plymouth. Thanks to his company’s efficient mail-order arm, and with recipes compliments of the Boston restaurant in which Bennett is a partner, you can come close to duplicating those memories.



Eating local at Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, Mass. Above: Three generations of Bennetts, including ICO founder Skip (center, in white), with his Boston restaurant partners.



On the dock, the kitchen work is bare bones, but the oysters, which are available at some of the best restaurants in the country and via mail order, stand up to advanced recipes.

Recently, three generations of Bennetts, plus chef Jeremy Sewell and his family and restaurateur Garrett Harker (Skip's partners in a Boston restaurant) gathered on the dock to down some oysters and wine. The setup was pretty simple; like the end of a workday here, the idea is what you pull out of the water, you eat. Typically this means casual consumption of baskets of oysters, lobster and any fish that might have been caught. But they have more formal arrangements too, especially on their culling boat (nicknamed The Oysterplex), with tablecloths and lanterns.

It helps to find a spot as picturesque as Duxbury. This town has

mansions and working docks abutting each other on the waterfront, with a low-key Yankee vibe. Look across the water from town and you will see that the bay is formed by a spit of land extending into the ocean and turning south. At the southern tip is Skip Bennett's parents' summer cabin; his is nearby.

The Bennetts have deep roots here. Skip's father, Bill, can trace the family back to the Pilgrims, and in recent history they have run the local grocery, a tire store, even the post office. His mother, Nancy, recently celebrated her 50th class reunion of Duxbury High, with "about 500 oysters" for the 50 to 60 attendees. All

HOW TO OPEN AN OYSTER

Chris Sherman, Island Creek marketing director, breaks it down



1 With the oyster in your palm, curved shell down and pointed hinge end toward you, carefully and firmly slip the knife point into the hinge. Wiggle it to pry the shells apart.



2 Slide the blade across the inside of the flat top shell to separate it from the muscle. Remove the top shell and throw it in the ocean.



3 Carefully slide the knife between the oyster and the curved shell, to separate them, keeping the liquor. Eat.

seemingly have shared a love of the water. Bill points out that Skip had his own boat when he was 10 or 12, and lobster traps soon after. "Other kids played golf or went to the beach," Skip says. "I was always happiest on the water. I couldn't believe I could get paid to do this."

It almost did not work out that way. After college, Skip's attempt at farming clams failed after a significant investment of time and money. He decided to try oysters, and persisted despite the protests of everyone who knew the waters. Oysters are not native to the bay because the water is too cold for them to spawn there. But, Skip reasoned, that didn't mean oyster seed couldn't be imported and grown here (what's more, it means no down seasons while oysters are spawning and thus undesirable or unavailable). He found a partner in Christian Horne, who had seed and nowhere to raise it, and off they went. That was 17 years ago.

Bennett took all the help he could get. His mother did the books,

and he did many of the deliveries himself, and sometimes had to be reminded to invoice the customers. "One day he had more oysters than he could sell," recalls Bill. "He started calling all these chefs. That's when I knew he'd be OK."

Today, "all these chefs" includes some of the top restaurateurs in the United States, Thomas Keller among them (he insists on tiny oysters). Another restaurateur who came calling was Garrett Harker, partner to leading Boston chef Barbara Lynch in a number of projects, including B&G Oysters, an urbane riff on coastal luncheonettes.

Harker eventually struck out on his own, starting a hip brasserie called Eastern Standard in the Hotel Commonwealth on Kenmore Square. The place thrived, and another space in the building opened up. Harker had known the Bennetts and their product for years, loved their story, and had an idea. Why not make a restaurant that tells their story and serves their food? Island Creek Oyster Bar was born. He explains: "People are more savvy about where food comes from. The farmers and fishermen are more known. The thing about the Island Creek guys is, they're fun, and no one cares more. It doesn't hurt that the oysters might be the best in the country."

Follow Bennett family advice in one more regard: Talking about the best place to have a get-together Bill says, "My dad used to say 'Why the hell eat on the beach, with all that sand?'" Set up a table, cloth optional, call your family together and start eating.

Follow Bennett family advice in one more regard: Talking about the best place to have a get-together Bill says, "My dad used to say 'Why the hell eat on the beach, with all that sand?'" Set up a table, cloth optional, call your family together and start eating.

Recipes

Though there is nothing wrong with eating oysters straight out of the shell or dipping lobster in melted butter, ambitious cooks like to contribute a little more flavor. Chef and partner Jeremy Sewall of Island Creek Oyster Bar gave us two recipes that are casual enough for a crowd, but a little more sophisticated than the simplest options.

Grilled Oysters With Fennel and Sage has added herbal notes and considerable cream, making the seafood more luxurious and taking the wine match in another direction. Lobster Roll is a New England icon. Originally a repurposed leftover, it is now a destination dish. Sewall shared his grandmother's recipe. As he explains, "She was married to a lobsterman (my grandfather) for almost 50 years. Every house in Maine has a different recipe for this classic—my grandmother's remains the best in my eyes."

GRILLED ISLAND CREEK OYSTERS WITH FENNEL AND SAGE

24 Island Creek or other briny, buttery oysters
3 tablespoons butter
1 head of fennel, top and core removed, diced small
1/4 cup Pernod
1 cup heavy cream
Zest of 1 lemon
2 teaspoons lemon juice



4 sage leaves, chopped fine
Salt and white pepper

Shuck the oysters, carefully removing them from the shell and saving all the oyster liquor with them; also save the bottom shell. Melt the butter, add the fennel, and sauté over medium heat until the fennel begins to color lightly and become soft. Add the Pernod, and cook until only a tablespoon of liquid remains in the pan. Add the cream and the liquid from the oysters; continue to cook until reduced by half. Remove from the heat, and stir in the lemon zest, juice and sage. Season with salt and pepper.

Carefully place the oyster meat back in the shells, and spoon the fennel mixture over the top of each oyster. Place carefully on a grill, making sure the liquid does not spill out of the shell. Grill until the liquid begins to bubble and the oyster is warmed through, about 4 minutes. Serve immediately.

WINE MATCH:

**Schloss Gobelsburg Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein
Trocken Kamptal Reserve Lamm 2009**

Beverage director Tom Schlesinger-Guidelli describes this bottle as textbook. "Staying true to characteristics is part of being a good winemaker," he says. "In this case, it means herbal and sage in the wine. It keys into chef's use of herbs, which is not too strong, it kind of flickers."

ETHEL "BABE" SEWALL'S LOBSTER ROLL

2 lobsters, 1¼ pounds each, steamed
½ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup pickles, diced small
¼ cup celery, diced small
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon celery salt
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon white pepper
3 tablespoons butter
4 hot dog buns

Remove all meat from the lobster and dice into medium-size pieces. Mix the next 7 ingredients with the lobster. Reserve. In a nonstick pan or on a griddle, melt the butter. Lightly toast the hot dog buns on both sides. Fill the buns with lobster salad, and serve.



HOW TO GET IT

Island Creek Oysters ships mail-order, but to ensure quality, overnight priority shipping is required, and they deliver Tuesday to Friday only. Our visit found workers sorting and sizing oysters by hand, tapping pairs together to listen for bad ones, and bagging them for shipment within a few hours. Freshness is the next best thing to being there, and they claim delivery within 24 hours of the oysters leaving the water.

The 100-count bag (www.islandcreekoysters.com; \$150) is a good start for a party. That plus a couple of Island Creek knives (\$20). A picnic table and some cold wine gets people relaxed. The gloves (\$25) are highly recommended by Island Creek employees.

Island Creek Oyster Bar
500 Commonwealth Ave.,
Boston

Telephone
(617) 532-5300

Website
www.islandcreekoysterbar.com



WINE MATCH:

Nino Negri Terrazze Retiche di Sondrio White Ca' Brione 2009

Schlesinger-Guidelli recommends this wine pairing because, he notes, "Everybody says to serve white Burgundy with lobster. This has slightly oaked Chardonnay, and that lushness, but also a real freshness and acidity to cut through the rich lobster and the toasted, buttered roll."