

From Sea to Table Means Fresh is on the Menu

by Katherine Tsantiris



At The Oyster Club in Mystic, owner Dan Meiser has a central motto that underpins his restaurant's innovative use of local ingredients. "Our food has a story," he says. And it's true. Their food tells a holistic story of food production, from farm or sea to plate. Approximately 95% of their produce is sourced from within 50 miles of the restaurant. Executive chef, James Wayman, is known to forage for wild herbs and greens around Connecticut, and their seafood comes almost exclusively from the coast of Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Meiser and Wayman are pushing the boundaries of what is possible at a high-end restaurant by using whole animals and other unlikely ingredients as the star of their dishes. For example, chef Wayman created a dish showcasing sea robin, a species often referred to as a "trash fish" more commonly used for lobster bait. The story here is similar to his other menu options – a local and sustainably harvested meal prepared and presented in an eye-catching and mouth watering recipe.

The oysters and clams served at the restaurant's raw bar are all sourced from southern New England. Oysters – the restaurant's namesake – are always on the menu with four varieties to satisfy customer demand. The oysters are from nearby Noank, Fishers Island, Watch Hill and Ninigret Pond. Meiser says the



market is trending towards a smaller oyster with a higher price tag.

"That's something that Connecticut oyster producers are keenly aware of," says Tessa Getchis, Sea Grant aquaculture extension educator. "Connecticut's minimum oyster harvest size is three inches, and shellfish producers and lawmakers have discussed a reduction in the harvest size to reflect the change in consumer preferences."

Meiser works closely with his oyster and seafood suppliers in the area, and thus has an appreciation of the challenges that they face, such as barriers to entry into the oyster farming industry.

When asked about the future of shellfish production in Connecticut, Meiser said "I hope that Connecticut can one day get to where Rhode Island is now, realizing an exponential growth of small, sustainable farms with low to zero impact on the surrounding environment."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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RECIPE

Pop Pop's Oyster Stew

- 1 pint of fresh shucked oysters and all the juice
- 1 pint whole milk
- 1 pint heavy cream
- 3 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 tsp Old Bay seasoning
- 1/4 tsp celery seed
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a sauce pan, bring milk and cream up to simmer and reduce to keep from boiling. In a separate saucepan melt butter over medium heat and add Worcestershire, and seasonings. Add oysters and juice to pan with seasonings and carefully warm oysters just until the edges start to curl. Turn off heat and immediately spoon buttery oysters into warm serving bowls. Ladle warmed milk and cream over the top, serve immediately.