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Seasonal cook



A real pearler

When cooking with oysters, the trick is to keep it simple, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

n his excellent book The Food of Italy, the American journalist and writer Waverley Root tells the story of a restaurateur who worked in the Italian seaside town of Porto Garibaldi during World War II. He invented a dish called "oysters exarchate" and offered it exclusively to the occupying American soldiers.

Porto Garibaldi is in the province of Ferrara, which in Byzantine times was part of the area known as the Exarchate of Ravenna, the seat of power in Italy for the Holy Roman Empire. Hence the name of the dish.

When the town's locals found out how the dish

was made, they were appalled. For them, it was culinary blasphemy to cook oysters in milk, with cream, salt, pepper and spices. They confronted the restaurant's owner and forced him to remove it from the menu, making him promise never again "to mix holy water with the devil" - that is, to combine shellfish and cream.

These days in the area around Porto Garibaldi there are several versions of a dish similar to the baked oysters on this page.

If you must cook oysters, keep it simple. smanfredi@smh.com.au twitter.com/manfredistefano

OYSTERS BAKED IN THEIR SHELLS

36 fresh ovsters Coarse rock salt 2 tbsp finely chopped parsley 4 tbsp fine breadcrumbs 50ml extra virgin olive oil White pepper 4 lemon wedges

Shuck each oyster and discard the top shell (the lid). Carefully remove any shell from the liquor surrounding the ovster in the bottom shell (the cup). Using the shucking knife, dislodge the oyster from the cup. Turn the oyster so the plump part is on top. Place rock salt on an oven tray and arrange oysters on salt so they don't tip out their liquor. On each ovster sprinkle some parsley, breadcrumbs and olive oil. Don't add salt: the oysters should be salty enough. Sprinkle a little fine white pepper on each. Set oven to 200C and turn on top grill if available, to heat oysters from above. Once oven is at temperature bake oysters for 8-10 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges.

Serves 4 as a first course (pictured) Wine Catarratto or riesling

PACCHERI WITH OYSTERS, POTATO AND PESTO

Paccheri is a pasta shaped like large tubes. It is imported into Australia but if unavailable, substitute large macaroni,

24 oysters 150g potatoes Extra virgin olive oil 1 eschalot, minced 1 clove garlic, minced 3 cups basil leaves 50g pine nuts Salt 60g grated parmesan Pepper 400g paccheri

Remove oysters from their shells, saving any liquor. Place oysters in a bowl. Peel potatoes and dice into half-centimetre pieces. Place in a bowl with cold water for 5 minutes then drain and pat dry. Heat 4 thsp of olive oil in a braising pan large enough to hold all the pasta. Lightly fry eschalot and garlic for 30 seconds then add potatoes. Keep cooking and stirring until they are soft. Turn off heat. Place basil and pine nuts in a mortar (or a food processor) with a pinch of salt and pound (or pulse) to a paste, Add parmesan and enough olive oil to cover pesto. Add pepper to taste and mix well. Cook pasta in a large pot of salted water until al dente. Meanwhile, place braising pan with potatoes back on a moderate heat and add oysters, along with their liquor. Cook for only a minute and remove from heat. Drain pasta and mix well in braising pan with pesto. Serves 4 as a first course

Wine Vermentino or chenin blanc



QUAFFING

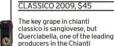
ROBERT OATLEY SIGNATURE SERIES MORNINGTON

PENINSULA PINOT NOIR 2010, \$24

There is a lot to like about this uncomplicated pinot noir especially the price. On the lighter side of mediumbodied, it is ultra-fresh with ripe tannins, plenty of spice and peppery nuances. With hints of red liquorice and luicy, sweet berry fruits, it has a bright acidity and needs to be enjoyed with something hearty, such as beef ragu. A really gluggable wine to drink now; t is not a keeper.



QUERCIABELLA CHIANTI



Classico region, also adds a little cabernet sauvignon. This softens the distinct tannins and rounds out the palate rather than adding any cabernet character. Allow it to breathe. There is lots to enjoy: sour cherry fruit melds with warm spices, including star anise. and a hint of mocha, It is clean, lively and savoury, with plenty of acidity to cut through roast pork. Also



CELEBRATING

VEUVE CLICQUOT VINTAGE ROSE 2004, \$140

