

 Seasonal cook

Photo: Steven Stewart


OYSTERS BAKED IN THEIR SHELLS

36 fresh oysters
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 oyster 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 oyster 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 tbsp 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

 Full bottle

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 medium-bodied, it is ultra-fresh with ripe tannins, plenty of spice and peppery nuances. With hints of red liquorice and juicy, 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; it is not a keeper.

TRYING

QUERCIBELLA CHIANTI CLASSICO 2009, \$45



The key grape in chianti classico is sangiovese, but Quercibella, one of the leading producers in the 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 delicious on its own.

CELEBRATING

VEUVE CLICQUOT VINTAGE ROSE 2004, \$140



Veuve Clicquot's rosés have never looked so good. While the non-vintage is super, this vintage is particularly focused. With plenty of lingering fine-bead bubbles and creaminess on the palate, it has a cherry-nougat lift. Vibrant and lively with lots of spice, fresh red-berry fruits and a lick of liquorice, it is superbly balanced with a long finish. A gorgeous champagne, it is perfect as an aperitif, on its own or with canapés.
Jane Faulkner

A real pearler

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

In 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@sm.com.au
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