

## Fruits of sea and vine make a lovely pair

by Jeff Wicklund

A friend recently gave me a book that was a joyous, chatty, freewheeling read about two subjects I find fascinating and that meld harmoniously with the world of wine.

The book is *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell* by Mark Kurlansky, and it's a compelling history of New York, told from the unique perspective of the city's connections to the once abundant, copiously consumed and now-eradicated Eastern oyster (the book is available at Village Books in Fairhaven).

What does that have to do with wine? Well, history and wine are definitely intertwined, and as for oysters, it seems those little bivalves pair pretty nicely with a multitude of wines, depending on their preparation.

I was first introduced to oysters as a kid, when our family would travel over to Hood Canal to visit friends. My dad's best friend, Art Waaga, was quite a character and would summon me out on the beach where he would declare with a shucking knife in hand, "This is the best breakfast you can have - it'll put hair on your chest," as he expertly dissected the little morsel that

looked more like a barnacle-encrusted rock than something edible. So, in keeping with my personal original oyster orientation and the inspiration garnered by Kurlansky's sparkling historical tales of oysters past, it seems like an appropriate opportunity to toss in my two cents (and get change) on the hotly-debated subject of the perfect wine to pair with freshly-shucked oysters.

But before I cross over into those swirling currents of debate, I must first offer up this disclaimer and friendly challenge. First, personal preference is just that, personal. And it isn't any more so than with wine, particularly when you add the component of food pairing. So this is just this cork dork's opinion and doesn't reflect that of this publication or its affiliates. Secondly, what's the best thing for a debate? A second opinion, or a third, fourth or fifth, etc. Let me know what you think, and we can revisit this debate in a future "shucking" installment of this oyster/wine conundrum.

Oysters have apparently always been linked with love since Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, sprang from the sea on an oyster shell and gave birth to Eros and the often misused word "aphrodisiac." (Yeah, Botticelli's famous painting shows her on a scallop shell, but oyster lovers know better). Given the euphoria that bubbles up with a flute of true French champagne, you would think that therein lies the solution to this curious equation. What is a more fitting union than euphoria and an aphrodisiac? Actually, it seems a bit redundant, and many times this euphoria can be tainted with the rising prices usually associated with a bottle of champagne.

Does a truly delicious, highly conducive oyster wine have to be expensive? The answer is a resounding no, and proof positive of this are the past winners of the annual Pacific Oyster Wine Competition sponsored by our neighbors at Taylor Shellfish Farms. The average price of a winning wine is around \$10. And that



makes slurping down these wonderful little miracles of nature much more palatable for the wallet.

A great quote on Taylor's Web site from Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* adds to the inspiration of oyster wine evaluation: "As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans."

Here are a few wines that have made me happy to pull their corks and make plans to shuck a companion:

### Domaine Pierre de la Grange 2004 Muscadet Sur Lie \$10.

A classic wine from Louis/Dressner Selections with a zippy freshness and bright grapefruit and lime with pronounced minerality and a long, generous finish. Many of the so-called experts say that with oysters, the only way is Muscadet. I just may concur.

### Geyser Peak Winery 2004 Sauvignon Blanc \$11.

Bright citrus and lemongrass leap from the glass and the tart grapefruit and melon flavors scream to have an oyster precede a gulp.

### Iris Hill 2004 Pinot Gris \$12.

A beautifully crafted Oregon Pinot Gris with perfect fruit-to-acid balance. White peach, melon and apricot aromas and flavors are fresh and very appealing.

Here are some more of my other favorite oyster sippers from all over the board stylistically:

Basa Rueda White \$9.

Lustau Fino Sherry \$17.

Dry Creek Vineyard 2005 Dry Chenin Blanc \$13.

Domaine du Salvard Cheverny 2004 Loire Valley White \$14.

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