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one, a wild get together with others or a read-a-book-at-home kind of night, closing with Stephen Colbert and a fine brandy, life is your oyster.

Cheers

First of all, New Year's requires bubbly. And champagne (sparkling wine officially from the Champagne province of France) is a match for darn near anything that touches the lips on this special night.

Washington State and Oregon now produce numerous "sparkling wines" that rank favorably with the wines of France — but don't expect a loyal Frenchman to endorse this opinion. Chateau St. Michelle is a fine example of a sparkling wine and an early competitor in the Northwest wine renaissance, where many others now compete. For example, Syncline and Treveri Cellars reap wonderful reviews and tastings in our vaulted wine producing state. But let's speak to a couple of old, and personal favorite, winemakers from Oregon: Elk Cove (La Boheme) and Sokol Blosser (Bluebird Cuvee). These two wineries were pioneers in the Willamette Valley. I've followed them for years and been abundantly pleased at the quality of these and many other Northwest wines.

Cocktails are a pleasant alternative to wine, but sobriety can fly away on a night centered around imbibing. Celebration is the name of the game, and Jan. 1 arrives steadfast whether we are ready or not. I like my liquor neat but can be converted by a hand-crafted cocktail. Sure, sometimes you can't beat a gin martini, plain and simple with 3 ounces of Grey Goose. Of course, there are dozens of holiday cocktails available on the internet. To mention a few: Confetti Champagne, Peppermint Bark Mimosas, Peppermintini or cranberry mule. Have fun, choose carefully and above all, be safe.

Chow

Let talk food or cuisine, depending, of course, on whether one is serving crab mac and Swedish meatballs or a Jacques Pepin and Salmon en Croute. You may choose small plates or appetizers. Or perhaps — and this is a favorite — oyster stew with spinach and pecans. Add a selection of mouth-watering cheeses and a fresh baguette. My partner Laurie just broiled a round of Brie cheese (top rind cut off) covered lightly with honey,



Colin Murphey

Crab mac and cheese is a crowd pleaser.



Collect or purchase oysters for your oyster stew.

a pinch chili mixed with a tablespoon of raw sugar and chopped pecans. C'est magnifique!

Oysters are winter fare, and January will blow long and cold at some point in this pivotal month. Oysters love cold water. They draw in rich phytoplankton and turn sweet and fat. Of course, fresh Willapa oysters (Why would you serve

anything else?) are rapturously sublime served raw with a Sauce Mignonette or with a horseradish cocktail sauce. Oysters in their shells, fully clothed and launched onto a grill, will pop open in a few minutes and delight with a natural nectar. A dab of drawn butter or hot sauce is pleasantly appropriate — the French kiss for oyster advocates.

If you're feeling expansive, a prime rib roast just might steal the show. One friend marinates his roast under a coating of gourmet salts and cracked pepper. He is known to poke slices of fresh garlic into the flesh and rub the meat with anchovy paste mixed with virgin olive oil. He lays a pan in the middle of the steel belly of his barbecue, replete with an inch of water, and surrounds the tray with mesquite charcoal. Keeping the heat below 300 degrees, he cooks the roast to about 135 degrees, pulls it and lets it rest for 20 minutes. Remember, while resting, the roast raises in temperature about 10 degrees, bringing the roast into a medium-rare category. It's one of the best bites ever, whether or not you trust in his anchovy addition.

Appetizers might run the gamut from crispy wontons to Cajun shrimp. Personally, I love a toasted slice of baguette with a wild mushroom (bruschetta or tuna tatar). As I mentioned earlier, the world is your oyster, and the night is long.



David Campiche

Creamy oyster stew, ready to go.

Oyster Stew

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 leeks (or onion), thinly sliced
- 4 diced cloves of fresh garlic
- 6 ounces pre-cooked or mashed potatoes
- 1 quart homemade chicken (or veggie) stock
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 cup finely chopped spinach leaves
- 1 cup chopped pecans, sautéed
- 16 fresh oysters
- Fresh grated nutmeg
- Sea salt to taste
- Splash of hot sauce
- Optional: 1 tablespoon of brandy with each serving
- Preparation:

Sauté leeks and garlic in butter or virgin olive oil until translucent. Dry roast the pecans and set aside. Stir in the mashed potatoes slowly. Add the stock and bring up the temperature to about 180 degrees. With an immersion blender, blend until smooth. Add spinach and cream. Season. Bring to a near boil. Now, with the heat turned off, add the oysters and let them poach for a few minutes. Reheat if necessary but do not boil! Top with pecans and brandy and serve immediately. Break out the champagne!