

# Oysters with friends

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

For several days the weather remained glorious. Folks gathered and talked of an early spring, of seeds and planting in the garden. My wife, Laurie, and I drove to Cannon Beach to visit with friends.

On came the rain, pushed by hard wind and dashing expectations of a pleasant morning walk, but we remained optimistic, finding beauty in the many shades of gray and silver.

The day before this sojourn, under a blue sapphire sky, I extricated 18 oysters out of the gumbo mud from the Nahcotta Tidelands Interpretive Site on the Long Beach Peninsula. Opened them on the spot — no easy accomplishment, rinsed them and placed them in a glass jar. That next day I shared them with our friends. I've written about this opportunity to help yourself to 18 oysters. The shells must remain on the beds for propagation.

A fresh Willapa Bay oyster is a rare treat, particularly in the winter and spring.

But herein lies several benefits of hard weather: Four friends huddled inside, prepared and ate simple, wonderful food — soup, salad, homemade wheat bread with Brie cheese, and the oysters, accompanied by a dry, crisp pinot gris, the perfect match for raw oysters. Laurie baked two loaves of sourdough wheat bread from a recipe she found by Michael Pollan — generally an inspiration. We concocted a simple tomato soup and threw together a salad. Very little is better. So blow winds, huff and puff. We are safe and content in our wooden house with a fire on the hearth and lovely friends with whom to share a meal.

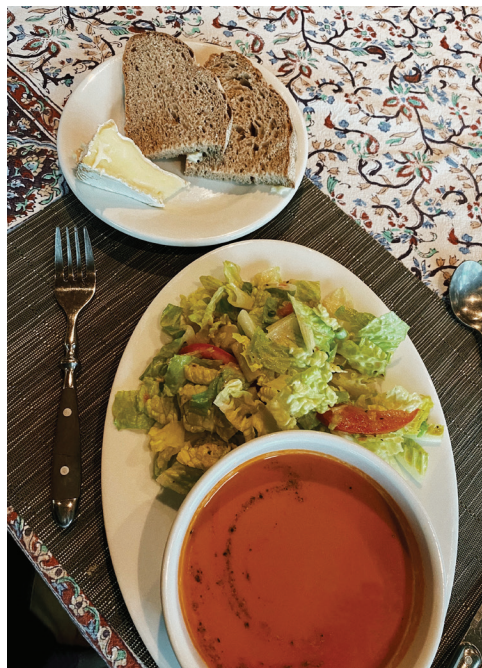
## Spicy Mignonette

### Ingredients

- ¼ cup Balsamic vinegar
- Salt or soy sauce to taste
- ¼ cup of Japanese rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh horseradish
- 1 teaspoon coarsely ground black peppercorns
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped shallots or red onions, minced
- ½ teaspoon of red chili flakes or a pinch of chipotle or ground Hatch chilis

### Directions

Mix ingredients in a small bowl. Place each of the raw oysters in a separate oyster shell — we keep a bag full of clean and scrubbed shells in our pantry. Pour the



Photos by David Campiche

## A delicious winter recipe for tomato soup.

horseradish mixture over the oysters and slurp away.

## Tomato Soup

### Ingredients

- One onion, small diced
- Four garlic cloves, fine minced
- Two stalks of celery, fine sliced
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Four ripe tomatoes, diced or hand-crushed
- One roasted red pepper, peeled and chopped
- 4 cups of homemade chicken or vegetarian stock
- 2 tablespoons of fresh basil, fine chopped
- 1 tablespoon of Balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon of red chili flakes
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- Dash of salt and pepper to taste

### Preparation

Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil until translucent. Continue with the celery. Add the crushed tomatoes and the roasted and peeled pepper. You can substitute the fresh tomatoes with a 16-ounce can of crushed tomatoes or use both. Marry in the stock (homemade makes a great difference and carries no sodium), vinegar, chili flakes (to your taste) and Balsamic. Salt and sugar, again, to taste. Using either an immersion



ABOVE: Oyster flats at the Nahcotta Tidelands Interpretive Site. RIGHT: A delicious dish prepared with fresh, raw Willapa Bay oysters.



blender or a standard blender, swirl away until the soup is smooth and semi-thick. Bring to full heat and serve. At the last minute, garnish with chopped basil.

A dollop of creme fraiche adds a bit of richness.

Even better, some crumbled blue cheese will inspire any critic.