



Winter's Catch

IN MARSHALL, OYSTERS ARE IT. by stephen barrett

THE SIGHT OF BOATMEN IN BRIGHT RUBBER WADERS GOING out to harvest oysters is as common as the morning fog in the waterfront hamlet of Marshall. Oysters have been commercially cultivated in Tomales Bay for almost a century now, and they're a part of everyday life. A local is just as likely to arrive at a dinner party bearing a bucket of oysters as a bottle of wine. And where else can bandits make newspaper headlines for getting pulled over with a carful of stolen shellfish?

But the thick, deep-shelled oysters that we've come to associate with the West Coast are actually imports from the East. In the 1930s, overharvesting up and down the coast almost killed off the barely-a-bite-sized Olympia oyster, the only oyster native to Tomales Bay. A fast-growing Japanese species that we now know as the Pacific was introduced in its place. But Tomales Bay farmers haven't stopped there; they farm everything from Atlantic oysters to the elegant Kumamotos so popular on restaurant menus today.

Maybe it was fate. Tiny and delicate, Olympias would fall right through a grill. And in Marshall—summer or winter—barbecuing oysters is the cooking method of choice. That's about all that's agreed upon, though. Sauces range from the mango-jalapeño concoction found at the Tomales Bay Oyster Company to Hog Island Oyster Company's "hogwash," a concoction of rice vinegar, lime juice, cilantro, and chilies. At the Marshall Store, they stir up a heady cocktail sauce spiked with chipotle peppers.

Of course, some prefer to go raw, and winter is the peak season to enjoy oysters on the half shell. In the summer, they may be spawning (which makes for an edible but milky oyster).

Right now they're at their plumpest and sweetest.

So get yourself to Marshall now. It's a beautiful drive, and the oysters are as fresh as they get. Bring your friends and have lunch along the water; the oyster companies provide shucking tools and a grill and let you have at it. Or take a cooler and bring them home. And if you can't make the trip, wherever you are, Hog Island's catering service will bring the barbecue and the oysters straight to you.

**HOG ISLAND
OYSTER COMPANY**
20215 Hwy. 1,
(415) 663-9218

**THE MARSHALL
STORE**
19225 Hwy. 1,
(415) 663-1339

**TOMALES BAY
OYSTER COMPANY**
15479 Hwy. 1,
(415) 663-1242