



FOOD ORGANISATION OF DENMARK

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### For mollusk Lovers:

*Writing: Kasper Fogh Hansen*

## The best oysters in the world

Oysters tell the tale of delicate wet areas and natural diversity. The small mollusks have always been surrounded by myths and magic. Casanova allegedly ate 50 oysters every day, naturally served by some dazzling beauty: It is the food of lovers, sucking the essence out of life. It has been claimed to be an aphrodisiac, which science can't confirm, but a young couple sharing a stable of oysters have an undoubtedly erotic quality. Maybe because since antiquity oysters have been the delicacy reserved for special celebration and most dear guests. Julius Caesar was rumored to have invaded Britain in search of its oysters: In Denmark, where possibly the best oysters in the world live in a protected natural reserve, the king would ultimately install capital punishment for oyster thieves, keeping the delicacy for his own tables.

There is a little journey in every oyster. Once you open and smell them there is a fresh breeze on your face from the sea and the wild. The Romans brought the flat shelled oysters from the Atlantic region of Europe back to Italy packed with in ice, snow or in barrels with sea water. Oysters are woven into the cultural fabric of Europe as the essence of fine foods.

In North Jutland a sound called Limfjorden is home to the largest remaining wild oyster bed of the endangered original European oyster. The waters they live in are practically the northern border of the European

oyster's natural habitat. It's often too cold for the oysters to spawn, and the population is very volatile being depleted in cold winters. "The oysters are practically living on a razor's edge, several cold winters will kill large parts of the population. But they have much better bite, than regular oysters - they are simply more meaty. You haven't really tried oysters until you've had this" he says. He being head chef Boris Buono of Copenhagen's oldest and most prestigious fish restaurant "Krogs" lying on the canal in Copenhagen where in old days the fishermen's wives from the northern coast of Copenhagen stood wrapped in shawls and sold their husbands catch of the day. He is passionately in love with the classic, flat



*The flat wonder: The original European oyster from Limfjorden Sound in Northern Denmark, a protected and endangered delicacy. Photo: Jes Larsen*

shelled European oyster. Oysters are a tale of exclusivity, of the fresh pure taste of the sea, of lovers and aphrodisiacs – and also of a fragile environment.

### ***Oyster fact:***

*Native Americans ate oysters 6,000-8,000 years ago, often smoking them over their campfires.*

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Boris is one of a young generation of chefs that have drawn the gastronomic community to Copenhagen, being a veteran of the young and uber-creative chefs that eventually started a Nordic revolution in top gastronomy around the restaurant Noma, several times winning the award of best restaurant in the world. He is of a generation that threw out the chemists of the modern cuisine, and replaced their approach with botany and zoology, demanding that nature, not the lab, should be the foundation of cooking – and that natural diversity should be displayed in the food culture. Bringing attention to the special oysters is a part of a new generation of chefs also communicating on biodiversity and the need to protect the original species. He participates on oyster safaris and has recently started planting out oysters in Copenhagen harbor, where he hopes a new oyster bed will create awareness on the need for clean waters, as the animal also filter an amazing 15 liters of water per hour, being a part of a new urban *oystertecture* (oysters + architecture), that will help keep the harbor clean.

*European oysters prepared camp side with different herbal oils and wild herbs and flowers oyster safari, celebrating the opening of the oyster season in mid-october at Limfjorden Sound in the north of Denmark. Photo Kasper Fogh Hansen*



#### **Transgender in the animal world**

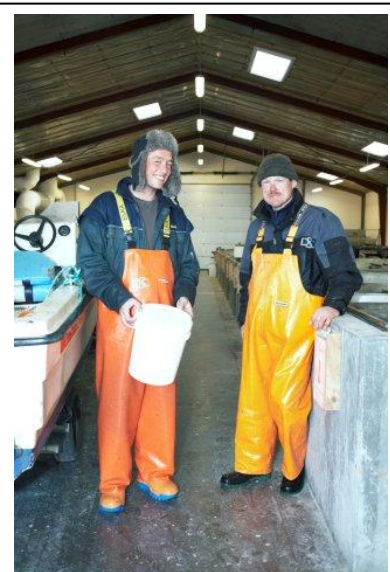
*Ostrea edulis is a protandric hermaphrodite, changing sexes generally twice during a single season. Oysters function as males early in the spawning season and later change to females and vice versa. The flat oyster is usually male in the fall following its settlement.*

#### **Best oyster in the world?**

Oysters from the cold waters of North Jutland in the far corner of Denmark – named the “Limfjords-oyster” have always been considered a great delicacy. Once they were completely monopolized by the king, and kept exclusively for the royal tables, threatening capital punishment to those

trying to get a hold of the precious animals. When Boris Buono and others claim, that these oysters are the best in the world, it is because of climate and living conditions, as well as the special species: The colder the water, the slower the growth of the animal, the more concentrated the flavor of the meat. In the north of Jutland, in Limfjorden, the largest natural concentration of the endangered original flat shelled European oyster, *Ostrea Edulis* – “the edible oyster”, is to be found. Also the feed and salt content is particular to these oysters.

Soren Mattesen, director of Vilsund, the largest producer of the Limfjords-oyster explains about the oysters, that fetch the highest prices of any oysters on the international market: ”In the sound of Northern Jutland the waters are a combination of fresh water running into the fjord from the North of Jutland, and an inflow from the North Sea. This creates flowing waters, rich on nutrients, still with the freshness of the



*Oyster fishers in North Jutland. Cold waters guarantee intense flavor – and tough working conditions. Photo Jenny Nordquist*



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salty Atlantic water and protected still from invasive species and they remain disease free.”

“The low salt content of the water also allows a more refined, some say nutty, taste, not overly dominated by the salty-iodine flavors of open sea oysters,” Soren Mattesen explains.

In his kitchen Boris uses the oysters for small gastronomic excursions into forest and fields, preparing the animals with wild herbs, yoghurts and mineral flavored vegetables. “Because they are so different and more subtle, they’re also great for pairing in many different ways, to mere? they’re like a journey to sea and shore and we can make so much more out of them, than just serving them with something very acidic like

vinegars or lemon juice. You don’t need that for these oysters”, he explains. The best spot in his restaurant is reserved for an old map of the Sound Limfjorden with hand drawn markings of the original oyster banks.

### ***7000 years of oyster parties***

*Vast amounts of oyster shells were piled up around the living sites of the hunter-gatherers of the Stone Age in Denmark 5200-4200 BC. Oysters were a considerable part of the diet for Stone Age man's food, at the kitchen midden oysters made up a little more than 30 % of the diet of the prehistoric tribes living by the sea in northern Europe.*

*Oysters are a part of the human evolutionary tale, and the oyster laid nutritionally foundation for the development of contemporary human brain and body.*

”They are exquisite little creatures, these oysters from Jutland are also one of the only strains of the original European oyster that are free from disease and are used to replenish the depleted and endangered rearing grounds in the rest of Europe, but the harvest is kept under strict control to preserve this unique animal”.

Søren Mattesen explains referring to the protected “Natura 2000”-habitat of Limfjorden, a European Union special natural reserve. The oysters are carefully monitored, and the shell life is protected from over fishing in the way, that annual licenses are only given if

the stock can withstand the depletion.

The stock greatly varies, for example this year, very little will be allowed for fishing, since Denmark have had cold winters, and short summers – conditions where the oysters do not spawn. The stock has been depleted and the allowed harvest is reduced by 70% to only 450 tons. There is a much bigger demand than the sound can meet. But in the rest of Europe overfishing is one of the reasons that this animal is in so drastic decline.” Naturally we consider the fishing that we do a part of the natural cycle, and we want to maintain and protect the wild oyster beds, ” Søren Mattesen explains trying to make the point that appreciating the rare oysters can be a way of telling a story of natural preservation. ”I think that if you know and love this little animal, if you appreciate nature’s riches, you would also be a supporter of protecting this great and very delicate nature that is home to the oysters and other shell life of Limfjorden,” he says.



*Boris Buono inhaling oysters. Photo Jenny Nordquist.*



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*Oyster safari in the North Sea – with all imaginable trimmings. Photo Jenny Nordquist.*



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## OYSTER TALES & FACTS

### The Danish Oyster week – Oyster safaris open the season

FOOD - the Food Organisation of Denmark arranged the first Oysterweek in October 2011, celebrating the opening of the oyster season, when the waters get cold enough to eat oysters right out of the sea. The Oysterweek were started to promote and celebrate a fantastic creature that also tells the story of natural protection and the preservation of original species. More than 20 restaurants all over Denmark serve oyster meals, FOOD has planted an experimental oyster bed in the harbor of Copenhagen, and young people tour the city on bicycles sharing oysters on urban oyster safaris. FOOD hopes pride and joy will lead to the protection and celebration of our special animal and create eco-consciousness among more consumers – in Denmark and abroad.



*Oyster safaris at the Danish oyster week in mid-October – oyster aficionados venture to Limfjorden Sound and the Wadden Sea to collect wild oysters. Photo Jenny Nordquist*



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### **Walk on the sea: Oyster safaris to the Wadden Sea**

Along the coasts of Europe the pacific, or regular oyster, is spreading. In the great wet lands of the north sea, where tide will leave large oyster banks exposed from the water, there is guided tours where oyster freaks can eat their heart out, picking up incredibly large oysters in what seems unlimited numbers. The oyster have no other natural enemies in the habitat than frost, the millions of migrating birds can't penetrate the shells of this invasive, but delicious, species of oyster. Bring a knife, a bottle of champagne, some lemons and contact the Wadden Sea Centre for a guided trip: [www.vadehavsentret.dk](http://www.vadehavsentret.dk) – due to the changing tides it is recommended that you don't just walk out into the sea by yourself.



*Walking on the sea. Photo: Kasper Fogh Hansen*



## Oyster Guide: The five popular oysters

Oysters are a general term for bivalve molluscs, which live in salty and brackish water areas. The Limfjord is home to the native European oyster (*Ostrea edulis*). In Britain they are known as Whitstable Oysters, while in France call them Belon. There are more than 400 species of oysters.

In recent years, most oysters eaten in Europe have been Pacific Oysters (*Crassostrea gigas*), which is mostly produced in France and imported from there. While Pacific oysters are shell-shaped and deep, the Limfjord oysters is almost round and relatively flat. The Limfjord oyster is much more meaty and distinctive in flavor than its more salty French cousin.

### ***Pacific Oyster: Crassostrea gigas (C. gigas)***

Common names: Pacific oyster, Japanese oyster, creuse (France)

Introduced to the Pacific Coast of the United States from Asia in the early 1900s and the French coast in the 1970s, *C. gigas* is the most common farm-raised oyster all over the world, more than 75 % of oysters in Europe are pacific oysters from different rearing grounds, with different characteristics and price levels. They are now an invasive species covering much of the sea floor in many low-water area of Europe lying like concrete on the sea floor, impenetrable to other lifeforms. Photo (by *Jenny Nordquist*) is from the North Sea where the pacific oyster is a



newcomer.

### **European Oyster: *Ostrea edulis (O. edulis)***

Common names: flat oyster, Belon

This is the oyster of the Roman orgy and the French Renaissance. The shallow, round shell resembles a dinner plate, hence the name. The flavor is the boldest in the oyster world, with strong marine components and an intense mineral aftertaste. After centuries of overfishing and the ravages of oyster diseases, *O. edulis* is on the verge of disappearing. It is the largest and arguably most delicious oyster. *Photo Jes Larsen*



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### **Atlantic oyster: *Crassostrea virginica* (*C. virginica*)**

Common names: Eastern oyster, Atlantic oyster, Gulf oyster, Blue Point, Malpeque

This is the great American oyster, the species that occurs naturally from Canada down the East Coast to New York and Chesapeake Bay and all the way across the Gulf.

### **Kumamoto: *Crassostrea sikamea* (*C. sikamea*)**

Common names: Kumamoto

This oversized thimble of an oyster is a wonderful Japanese animal. They have a subtler, more refined flavor than Olympia and Pacific oysters and their shells hold considerably more meat - a real plus for seafood connoisseurs.

### **Olympia Oyster: *Ostrea conchaphila* (*O. conchaphila*) or *Ostrea lurida* (*O. lurida*)**

Common names: Olympia oyster, Oly, tiny Pacific oyster

The tiny Olympia is the indigenous oyster of the Pacific Northwest America. Like the European flat, it is a member of the genus *Ostrea*. The fishery collapsed in the late 1800s, but the Olympia oyster has been revived in recent years thanks to the efforts of dedicated oystermen and environmentalists.



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## New year - new oysters?

**Boris Buono** is a veteran of the breakthrough years at Noma, currently ranked no. 1 restaurant in the world. Boris is now the caretaker of Copenhagen's oldest and most prestigious fish restaurant, which he has given new life. He is an oyster fanatic, in love with the original European oyster. In his restaurant an old map is hanging in the middle of the room, with every oyster bank in the north of Jutland painted in by hand. Gastronomically he is exploring many new ways of eating oysters, trying to both keep it simple, and yet find new ways of enjoying oysters. Here is four of Boris' new ways of serving oysters – maybe for new years?



*Boris Buono – in front in white – with his staff in the door of Denmark's oldest seafood restaurant Krogens featuring many varieties of oysters. Photo: Irina Boersma*



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### **Boris Buono & 4 new ways of oysters**

(If you can't find original European flat shelled oysters, use the normal ones – it will work just fine)

#### **OYSTER A LA KROGS**

4 Danish Limfjords-oysters (the same as Belon/Whitstable oysters)

2 cl good quality dill snaps or pure eau de vie

1 apple

1 spoon rapeseed oil

1 lemon

Fresh dill

Open the oysters carefully with an oyster knife, and free them from the shell. Mix the rapeseed oil and snaps, and apply freshly squeezed lemon juice to the marinade according to taste. Let the oysters marinade in the sauce for two hours. Just before serving, cut the apple in small dices and pluck the dill. The oysters are placed back in their shells with a large tea spoon of the marinade and small apple dices and dill on top.



*Limfjord-oyster with dill snaps, herbs and rapeseed oil*



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## GRAND OYSTER BAR RECIPE

### INGREDIENTS

4 Danish Limfjords-oysters or Belon/Whitstable oysters

100 gr. parsley

2 sheets of gelatin

1 gr. Lecithin

20 gr. water cress

1 shallot onion

Blanch the parsley and blend it to a puré with 2 dl of water. Soak the gelatin sheets and melt them in a hot water bath. Mix the gelatin into the parsley purée and pass it through a sieve, leaving you a fine, green juice.

Open the oysters carefully with an oyster knife and free them from the shell. Keep the oysters and the oyster water apart. Clean the shells and fill it with the parsley gelatin and leave them in the fridge for about an hour. Wash and pluck the water cress to smaller pieces and cut the onion to tiny rings. Heat up the oyster water and the oysters in a small pan, poach them and remove the pan of the fire when the water starts boiling. Put the poached oysters on top of the cold parsley jelly and decorate with onion rings and water cress. Add the lecithin to the warm oyster water and stir it until it foams. Put the foam on top of the oysters just before serving the dish.



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*Boris and the variation on oysters. Photo Kasper Fogh Hansen*



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## OYSTER SAFARI

– For eating oysters straight out of the sea

### INGREDIENTS

4 Danish Limfjords Oysters (Belon/Whitstable Oysters)

40 gr. mild smoked fresh cheese or a mild, fresh goat cream cheese

2 pieces of radish

40 gr. of cucumber

40 gr. of cream

Fresh dill

Cut the radish into thin slices, the cucumber into small dices and pluck the dill to smaller pieces. Mix the cream cheese and cream and stir it up to a light creamy consistency. Add a bit of salt and lemon according to taste. Open the oysters carefully with an oyster knife, free the oysters from the shell and clean the shells. Put the oyster juice in a small pan and poach the oysters in their own simmering water. Take the pan off the fire just before reaching the boiling point. Serve the oyster in the shell. Top it up with the cream and decorate the dish with radish, cucumber and dill.

### **Krogs Fiskerestaurant (Krogs Fish Restaurant)**

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### **Why oysters are so good for your brain - and actually makes you smarter**

Your brain basically is made up with a lot of neuron wiring, and all wiring needs to be coated - in the brain Omega 3 fats are insulating those wires and Oysters are very rich in Omega 3 fatty acids. Scientist believes that the seafood based diet of early man developed the human brain to what it is today. Oysters and other marine life simply is better food for thought. Some claim a seafood and oyster diet will increase your intelligence and learning abilities if introduced in childhood. Others say oysters can slow down dementia or alzheimers. Eating oysters may also keep your brain from deteriorating as you grow older.

Oysters are a lean source of protein, In fact 6 oysters contain one third of your recommended daily intake of the really healthy Omega 3 fatty acids. Because they are rich in zinc as well as iron, eating oysters keeps your mind sharp and increase your ability to recall information easily. Zinc and iron have been linked to the brain's ability to stay focused and remember information. A lack of zinc and iron can result in memory lapses, poor concentration, and of course other ailments throughout the



body.

*From the cold and windy sea – photo by Jenny Nordquist*