

# Romancing the Foam No. 122

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It is sometime in June in the mid-80s. Bubba is the best sailor I know, and he is sharing ownership on a sailboat docked in Bayfield, Wisconsin. Dave is a salesman and he can talk to anybody about anything. Dave's friend Todd is a US Marshall and when Dave's conversation wears Bubba and I out, Todd will carry the ball and keep the conversation going. I am big into homebrewing at the time and I have brought along several cases of beer with names like Hammerhead Ale, Dead Pidgeon Porter, Sailor's Steam Ale and 35L – as much beer as I can fit into my Renault Le Car and still have room for a gym bag with rain gear, a sweater, a life jacket, wool socks and a few other essentials. Someone else brought bottle rockets. We spend our days either in the bars and restaurants of Bayfield and Madeline Island or sailing the Apostle Islands and drinking beer. We spend our evenings in our slip, drinking beer and talking. Our slip is near the east end of the Bayfield Dock which is conveniently located within walking distance of anything in town worth walking to and has restrooms and showers for sailors at the end of the dock. Across the street from the dock is the Bayfield Police Station.

One evening Bubba, Dave and Todd are drinking beer and playing cards in the cabin and when something significant happens or someone feels like it, they shoot a bottle rocket or two off the stern. All three of them smoke and it is a mild, beautiful, cloudless, moonless night with stars sticking out of the sky like mini-marshmallows. I'm sitting on the deck. On the way back from the restroom I run into a lady on the dock by our slip trying to get Bubba, Dave and Todd's attention. I ask her "Are you here



complaining about the noise?" She says "yes." I tell her that I am also here to complain about the noise and that I know the guys so I will talk to them. She thanks me and leaves. I yell down into the cabin to quiet down a little, people are getting upset and hand me another beer. About fifteen minutes the lady returns with the Sheriff and announces: "I have the Sheriff!" I reply: "I'll see your Sheriff and raise you a US Marshall" and turn and yell to the cabin "Todd get out here." The Sheriff is actually a deputy and he has been stationed at the Police Station at the end of the dock. Todd shows him his badge and they get into a long discussion and we invite the Deputy in for a beer. He can't come now but he does return when his shift ends and has a couple. He also suggests that we not shoot bottle rockets off across

the street from the police station. After the lady storms off in disgust, Dave looks at me and says "You out-badged her."

I thought of "out-badging" when a Doctor last August put me on a diet that would cause a fasting monk to weep. In particular, it excluded gluten and dairy products. I will say straight off that I find most gluten free versions of products that normally have gluten are inedible as are most lactose free dairy products. So how do I out-badgify this guy? Oysters, cider, sake, and mead for starters. No lactose or gluten anywhere.



Barron Points are from Washington State. I bought half a dozen in mid-August after reading that the admonition to avoid oysters in months without an "r" in the spelling is bunk and after hearing about my new diet from my doctor. They are intertidal beach cultivated Pacific Oysters (*Crassostrea gigas*). They are initially raised in bags in where the fresh waters of the Little Skookum Inlet wash into the nutrient rich waters of Puget Sounds' Little Totton Inlet and then they are transferred to the beach to toughen up for the last six months before they are harvested. This strengthens the shell and firms up the meat. Little Skookum Inlet's Fresh Waters reduce the oyster's salinity and sweeten up the meat.

Barron Points are average size, tear drop shaped with a barnacle encrusted algae covered cap and a decent cup that has a slight polish due to its getting beat up on an intertidal beach by Totten inlet's 14 foot tides.

They smell like a tidal pool - but then any oyster worth eating will smell like a tidal pool. Oysters are filter feeders and in the wild an oyster spends its life in one spot and an adult oyster - according to the

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - can filter the phytoplankton out of 50 gallons of sea water a day. It smells like a tidal pool with some green vegetable thrown in and a dash of mushroom and a hint of Brie. The oyster body fills up the shell, leaving room for just enough liquor to season the meat.



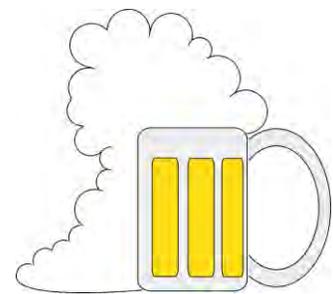
I am eating these with a Pipeworks Brewing Company 27 Lives, a hoppy Belgian Tripel. OK – the beer has plenty of gluten but I wanted to see how it goes with the oyster as a baseline. The oyster liquor is a delicious, mildly salty broth. The oyster blows me away - it tastes like Brie, with a taste of the sea thrown in along with some mushroom. The oyster is buttery and creamy and the taste of Brie hangs in your mouth. The beer's yeast, hops and fruit flavors go well with the Oyster's Brie, mushroom and salt. While the beer's carbonation provides some cleansing, enough salt and Brie remain to meld nicely with the beer's fruit and bitterness to make a long, flavorful lingering finish. Pipeworks Brewing 27 Lives is a safe bet with any oyster, but it works especially well with the Barron Points. The Barron Points are a good bet for anyone the least bit squeamish about eating oysters. The texture is meaty and excellent – not membranous, stringy, gristly or mushy. I rate Barron Points 86.

A month later I revisit the Barron Points with a bottle of Tozai Living Jewel Sake and the Sake's melon goes very well with the oyster's brie and salt flavors and the Sake brings out the sweetness that shows up mid-palate in the oyster. This batch of Barron Points are a little fuller bodied and bigger and the sake also brings out some cucumber in the oyster and a hint of sardine. The pairing of the Pipeworks 27 Lives and the Tozai Living Jewel Sake are different and bring out different flavors in the oyster, but both are very good.



Wellfleet Oysters are Atlantic oysters (*Crassostrea Virginica*) available from September through July. They grow wild and are beach and bottom cultured in the estuaries of Wellfleet Harbor halfway up the

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arm of Massachusetts' Cape Cod. The harbor bottom is clean pebbled sand with seaweed. Tides, averaging 12 feet rush into Wellfleet harbor twice a day bathing the oysters in nutrients while exposing the oysters to air during low tides. The waters in Wellfleet Harbor and its estuaries are colder than

those farther south, slowing down the oysters' growth, causing the oysters to store more glycogen, producing a sweeter flavor. Wellfleet Harbor, has few freshwater sources allowing it to maintain a salt content around 2.8% producing a sharper, cleaner flavor. Wellfleets are a mouthful, growing to 3" within two to three years.

The shells are a little brittle, averaging 3" with cup sizes ranging from medium deep to deep. The flesh is very light brown to sand colored and the gills are dark brown to black. The polished brown to polished green cups look lightly tumbled with worn, smoothed down ridges. The caps are light brown with a dark green to almost black wash around the edges. The meat fills 85% of the cup with the liquor filling 15%.



The liquor is briny and musky with a tidal estuary smell while the meat smells like ocean sea spray touched by seaweed and with a few whiffs becomes intensely tidal pool. The oysters are potato chip plus salty with some beef broth and a mild sweetness in the middle. The Wellfleets are firm and full and the abductor crunches like a pickled gherkin and has a sweet taste. I am drinking some Cider House 12 Sparkling Dry Cider and have a wedge of Humboldt Fog cheese. Humboldt Fog is a soft, ripe goat cheese. Goat's milk has less lactose than cow's milk and generally the aging and ripening of cheeses reduces the level of lactose. The cider cleans the oyster's flavors out and the oysters' saltiness pulls out the cider's apple flavors. The cider's tannins, tartness and dryness play very well with the Wellfleets' salt, umami and light sweetness and the cider brings out melon in the oyster while the oysters' meaty flavors highlight the cider's apple. The Humboldt Fog is creamy, lemony and tart and works well with both the Wellfleets' salt and umami and the Cider House 12's dryness, tartness, and tannins. The cheese also helps find the oysters' melon and cucumber.

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The cider and cheese are a good strong pairing for the Wellfleets. Belgian Ales and Belgian IPAs, German Helles and Czech Pilsners would also pair well. Any lighter mead would work well and a sake like Mura Mura Premium Sake Junmai Ginjo would suit Wellfleets fine. The Wellfleets are iconic and a no-brainer to order if you see them on a menu. Their texture and flavors make them an easy oyster for first-time oyster eaters. I rate them 88.



Kumamoto Oysters (*Crassostrea sikamea*) originated in Japan's Ariake Bay in the Saga Prefecture but pollution has made them nearly extinct in their area of origin. After World War II the Washington Department of Fisheries imported Japanese seed and planted it in Washington, Oregon and Hawaii. They are now found in Puget Sound's Oakland Bay, California's Humboldt Bay and Baja Mexico. I am eating the Oakland Bay Kumamoto's. They are cultivated by the rack and bag method.

These are small - 2" - 3" in diameter with most in the 2" - 2 1/2" range and they are nearly round with deep ridged cups ranging from bone with green algae highlights to almost all algae green with some bone poking through. The caps are brown to dark green and almost black. The liquor has an almost neutral aroma with traces of sea weed while the meats smell like mild seaweed lightly seasoned with white pepper. It tastes fruity like lightly salted sweet melon joined by cucumber over a backdrop of umami. Brininess is medium low, sweetness is medium plus, and minerality medium low. It has a clean, firm, crisp texture - no gristly membrane here. If you are new to oysters Kumamotos are a good place to start. Likewise, if you are reluctant to start with a mouth filling Wellfleet, Kumamoto's small size increases their approachability.

I am washing my Kumamoto's (aka Kumies) down with a bottle of Kevin Meintsma's Sangiovese Carmenere Pymment (mead brewed with grape juice). Kevin is a much-rewarded home brewer and his pymment is deep, complex with well-developed flavors and it marries perfectly with the Kumies. I can imagine drinking Kevin's pymment with a plate of melon, crackers, assorted fruit and some cheese and the Kumies have about two thirds of the bases covered. The mild salt, the sweetness and the alcohol all work very well together. If you don't know Kevin or can't talk him out of a bottle of his pymment, wash your Kummies down with Polish Mazurski Tojniak Honey Wine (mead), White Winter Winery Raspberry Mead, Milk and Honey's Alchemy Ice Cider, Traditional Ciderworks Pommean Barrel Aged Apple Wine, a Belgian Dubbel, fruit Lambic or a German Bock. For a Sake, try Dewazakura Dewasansan Green Ridge. I rate the oysters 92.



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Out-badging my doctor's austere diet opened the door to the world of meads, ciders and sakes and gave me an excuse to revisit the world of oysters. My selection of oysters includes one example of the three kinds normally found in the US. I have liked most Atlantic Oysters from Massachusetts north. They are usually bigger and saltier than the other two. Some of the flavors developed by the Pacific Oysters in Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia blow me away – how can an animal filtering 50 gallons of water a day end up tasting like Brie while one grown a few hundred feet away tastes different. I have had Kumamotos from both Puget Sound's Oakland Bay and California's Humboldt Bay. While I like the Oakland Bay Kumamotos a little better they are both good. As for pairing beer, sake, cider or mead with oysters, nothing was outrageously bad. A few things did not work as well as others and a few pairings were a match made in heaven. Except for the beer, everything this month is gluten free and most of the stuff is lactose free. The bottom line: the doctor can be out badged - gluten and lactose free doesn't have to be boring and can be fun.

