

Cancupiscent!

“Wanna go to dinner?”

“Yeah—where?”

“Brewer’s dinner, Fort George.”

“Well, I’m not much of a beer drinker, but I’m game.”

We arrive. The menu: five courses of oysters and stout. Well, ok, the dessert doesn’t include shellfish, but *four* courses of oysters. *Oysters*? Those squishy shellfish, if you have read my last “Food Love” offering, you’ll realize I don’t relish. But one must cultivate an open mind, and as a food columnist, a willing palate. And of all the beers I do like to drink, stouts are my favorite—easy enough to wash those slippery shellfish down.

Fort George Brewery offers a brewer’s dinner pretty much once a month. Each dinner focuses on a specific beer and is paired with food. We were seated family style and immediately plied with our first stout as soon as our bums hit the bench: the Murky Pearl, a stout crafted by the Fort George using a 200-year old recipe for inspiration. Jack Harris gave us an intro to the beer, and Andrew Wiegardt, of Wiegardt Brothers oyster farm in Willapa Bay (a family operation since 1864) braved the rowdy crowd to describe our first course—a trio of raw oysters on the half shell. Ahh, there they were, elegantly presented, and slippery-shiny as all get out. I didn’t really know how to eat them, but watched those around me so as not to appear too out of my depth. The first, a small Kumamoto, was wonderfully salty and fresh. The Eagle Rock was subtle, doing nothing for my palate, but the Barron Point was delicious—like a mouthful of fresh cucumber and melon. Fantastic; I so enjoy a completely new taste sensation!

Andy described how the small native oysters of this region, the Olympia, are all but gone, although attempts are being made to revive them in the Puget Sound area. The oysters that are farmed locally in Willapa Bay are originally from Japan, part of a larger family of Pacific oysters. Our fresh, clean waters make oysters safe to eat raw, and 30% of oysters consumed in the U.S. are from the Northwest.

Microgreens with balsamic vinaigrette and tempura-battered Willapa Bay extra-small oysters appeared next. Microgreens must be the latest thing in stylish salad—new to this humble diner, the mix was indeed tiny, just past the sprouting stage and similar to mesclun in color and taste. And those oysters—high class little poppers goin’ down so easy! Our beer was Oskar Blues Ten Fidy Imperial stout, the favorite of many at my table. This is a wow of a beer—I won’t embarrass myself with poetic descriptions, just get on down to the Brewery and try some.

The oyster & asparagus bisque didn't light my fire, though the North Coast Brewery's Old Rasputin Imperial stout was my favorite of the evening. By this time I was on tiny taster glasses, the better to describe this meal to you, dear reader, though my compatriots were moving on to the loud and jolly stage. As we waited for the main course to appear, a scrutiny of the Ten Fidy can (though it is available on tap this month) revealed some fun graphics and new words. I asked my date, then my friend across from me, and then her husband and so on around the table to define the word I'd never seen before: *concupiscent*. Brains boggled, we scanned the enormous dictionary kept on a shelf near the loo. No joy. A flurry of iPhone and Blackberry checking revealed the definition of *concupiscent* to mean lustful or passionate! How clever of those word-and-beer-smithing Ten Fidy boys, and how appropriate for oyster eating!

The main was oysters Rockefeller traditionally served on a bed of coarse salt with lemon. Yum! I eagerly ate every one. The Deschutes stout—Abyss—was as good as you'd expect from that favorite Oregon brewery. Jack let us in on a craft technique used for this beer: the barrels are rolled out and left in the central Oregon sun so that the beer expands into the wood to absorb the oak and bourbon cask flavors. By this juncture a good time was definitely being had by all.

Dessert was a chocolate volcano cake served with the FG's Coffee Girl stout—a double local bang for your buck. Dee-lish all around!

The next brewer's dinner is April, and will feature home brewers. Those of you fermenting *su casa* can bring samples to the FG by the last Friday of March—but call them to be sure of that date; I was marinated in stout by the time this announcement came along. The dinner was fun, chef Dana Macauley did a fine job, and the community style seating proved congenial. My one wish would be for any speakers—in our case Andy and Jack—to use microphones. Or perhaps the pub could be closed to those of us partaking in the dinner. Part of the dinner pricing includes the “story” aspect of the meal, and it would have been nice to hear more than thirty percent of it. Even if you are not a hard core beer drinker, this is a great way to enjoy the company of friends and celebrate the truly local phenom of the Fort George Brewery. I think they do an oyster dinner every year—keep your eye out for this pearl of a culinary experience!