

The World Is Your Oyster...

So Treat Yourself to Henlopen City Oyster House

Henlopen City Oyster House on Rehoboth's Wilmington Avenue serves up the best oyster sampler outside of a cozy oyster house in Boston called Neptune Oyster. Oysters are available during Happy Hour from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., lunch from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m., and dinner starting at 5 p.m. Of course, there are a myriad of other options – from a seafood chowder to a New England lobster roll – but my “pearl” of wisdom is to indulge in the freshly shucked mollusks.

Vincent and I went for lunch in conjunction with the Women and the Law Retreat. While there is a no reservation policy, seating was no problem on a blustery afternoon in early March. Our meal inspired a review; yet a review requires more than oysters, a salad, a sandwich, and bubbly. Because we're not locals, we would not return before this article's deadline. But Rehoboth residents, foodies, and attorneys – Carolyn McNeice and Jerry Capone – surely could – and did. Hence, the joint authorship of this piece.

Notes from Carolyn and Jerry...

Henlopen City Oyster House is one of the most popular eateries in Rehoboth. Because it's difficult to find a seat any time of year, we went early on a cold, rainy night. There were plenty of open seats, and the staff members were happy to give their two cents regarding our selections.

We started with a large sampler of eight oyster varieties – two of each. Oysters reflect the taste of the waters in which they are found (known as “merroir”), and there is no better way to experience the full extent of tastes than this generous oyster selection. They came from both the East and West Coast as well as Canada. The H.C.O.H. Salts, considered the “house oysters”, come from southern Virginia. They were fresh yet mild, lacking any brine. We recommend the briny ones like Blish Points from Barnstable, Massachusetts, and Eel Lakes from Nova Scotia. Both were an ideal combination of size and flavor. The small jewels of the plate were the Deer Creeks from Hood Canal, Washington. The largest were the Copps Island from Norwalk Islands, Connecticut. These had a mild, salty flavor and fleshy texture – they would be great for frying.

Next up was an order of fried smelts, which were underwhelming. We expected them to be dusted in seasoned flour and flash fried. Instead, they were butterflied, coated in a too-thick coating of cornmeal, and overcooked. These are small fish, and they lost what little heft they had in the butterflying process.

The third course was a beet salad with greens and feta. The large portion would have been better as a luncheon salad, and the pickled radishes and balsamic dressing overwhelmed the mild beets. A lighter, slightly sweet grapefruit vinaigrette would have been a better pairing accompaniment. For an entrée, we split the Maryland Fluke Milanese. It was a surprisingly thick piece, fleshy and delicious, yet a touch overdone. It was lightly topped with a sprinkling of breadcrumbs and served over perfectly cooked rapini and a purée of sunchoke and leeks – also delicious.

As a wine pairing, we enjoyed a Gaec de Brangers Menetou Salon Blanc from the Loire Valley. Quite good – mild and dry. We dove into the banana, raisin bread pudding dessert. Though tasty, it was far too dense. Lucky for us, it was accompanied by a scoop of vanilla ice cream from Hopkins Dairy, a local farm.



Notes from Susan and Vincent...

We concur on the oysters. Briny, plump oysters are far superior to small, mild ones. So, the Copps Island and Blish Points were the stars of the sampler. Picture this... each oyster a mini infinity pool, each shell filled to the brim with “oyster liquor.” How refreshing! The Jean-Charles Boisset French Brut was a perfectly crisp and celebratory accompaniment.

For our lunch's main courses, we selected the Caesar of chopped romaine, sourdough croutons, and white anchovies. The salad greens were fresh, the dressing light, and the anchovies plump. From the sandwich options, we chose the decadent Lobster Reuben. Its filling – lobster salad, coleslaw, and Gruyère – on grilled rye was the ideal comfort food on a damp winter day.

All four of us agree that for lunch or dinner Henlopen City Oyster House should be a destination, not just during months containing “r,” but all year round. 🍷



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