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Consider The Oyster



Synopsis

M.F.K. Fisher, whom John Updike has called our "poet of the appetites," here pays tribute to that most delicate and enigmatic of foods--the oyster. As she tells of oysters found in stews, in soups, roasted, baked, fried, prepared *À la Rockefeller* or *au naturel*--and of the pearls sometimes found therein--Fisher describes her mother's joy at encountering oyster loaf in a girls' dorm in the 1890's, recalls her own initiation into the "strange cold succulence" of raw oysters as a young woman in Marseille and Dijon, and explores both the bivalve's famed aphrodisiac properties and its equally notorious gut-wrenching powers. Plumbing the "dreadful but exciting" life of the oyster, Fisher invites readers to share in the comforts and delights that this delicate edible evokes, and enchants us along the way with her characteristically wise and witty prose.

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Customer Reviews

I am not a great fan of oysters, but I am a very great fan of M.F.K. Fischer, and she makes an extraordinarily convincing case for the humble bivalve. In her sensuous, intelligent, witty and charming prose, she tells tales and relates recipes and historical trivia that will have even the most hardened anti-oyster reader craving the savor of oyster stew, or good old-fashioned oyster stuffing, or hang-town fry. This is a perfect paean to a food men of almost every culture have enjoyed throughout history. Whether you like the things or not, you will love this delicious, funny, warm book--and you, like me, may decide to give oysters another chance!

This work is a beautiful piece of food writing. Fisher tells delightful tales of the oyster, both from a natural history and culinary history perspective. Integrated in to these stories are a fair mix of recipes and pieces of food advice. Embedded in all of this is a delightful sense of whimsy, which makes the reader think that while oysters are serious food, there is no reason to be completely serious about food. It had me craving oysters from page one, and it is now a goal of mine to make Oyster stew this year. Some of the other recipes seem a bit silly, but I'll try one of those at least.

MFK Fisher is like the Bach of authors. I bought this book because I love oysters, but after reading this book I was transported to a time and place to an atmosphere of life that doesn't seem to exist anymore. And I became enamored with the author. It is hard to describe her work. Every word seems perfectly placed, like a musical note. This book is like a masterpiece in writing. I love oysters even more because of it. I have tried the recipes listed, and they have turned out incredible. The oyster stew was fantastic. There is a recipe for Ramos' Gin Fizz, a drink I have never heard of. I researched it, and the drink was invented in the early 19th century!! It doesn't give the recipe for the drink which is a shame, but I did find the recipe on line and I did try it. It was very good. There is a sense of food archeology with the book, as if you are Indiana Jones discovering a lost city. You must read it to understand what I'm saying. Every time I read this book, I feel transported in time to a happier place, where food was better. I feel like I'm tagging along with Fisher discovering hidden treasures of restaurants in remote locals. Pick up this book if you love oysters, also pick it up if you love great writing by a great author.

This slim volume was given to me by a friend who knows of my great culinary passion for oysters. I had never heard of Fisher, was surprised that such a book existed, thanked him and then sat down to read it that evening. A couple of hours later I was a devoted M.F.K. Fisher fan. In an age where pleasure seems to be so complicated and few people can or are willing stop and smell the roses as they say, Fisher's analysis of the oyster is incredibly refreshing. It is a short, poetic reflection on the beauty of the oyster: from its remarkable biology and presence on Earth to simple recipes from her childhood. This is a truly joyous book that is essentially about the need for appreciation of the beauty, especially the simple beauty, to be found in life. Amidst the confusion of the modern world and the turmoil of the average man's life this book is a pause, a meditation, a prayer if you will to Nature and God, in whatever form He takes in your life. Needless to say, one need not like oysters to appreciate this book. I would be hard pressed to come up with a better way to spend a few dollars.

M.F.K. Fisher wrote this conversational treatise -if that is not a contradiction in terms- about oysters in 1941. But its inviting tone, good humor, and charming anecdotes have not diminished. Fisher was adventurous and uninhibited in her enjoyment of food, and her admiration for the oyster is infectious. She explains the life cycle of the oyster poetically and sympathetically before proceeding to discuss diverse aspects of oyster cuisine, including a chapter on oyster stew and another on oyster soup (not to be confused!), bad oysters, oysters as flavoring, parasites and pearls, and various ways to prepare oysters, with recipes, of course. There are about 25 recipes in "Consider the Oyster" from the mundane to the eccentric, some that were quaintly outdated at the time of writing and some that were very fashionable. Fisher has found a recipe for Oyster Loaf comparable to one from her mother's schooldays in the 1890s. She also unearthed a recipe for homemade Butter Crackers from the same era, which might be an improvement over modern "oyster crackers". There are recipes for oysters grilled, roasted, fried, and baked, Oysters Rockefeller, oyster stuffing, oyster catsup, and Hang Town Fry, which is fried oysters in an egg pancake. Some are curiosities, others inspiration to the adventurous cook. The prose is witty, literate, and friendly. M.F.K. Fisher was a talented essayist who didn't take herself too seriously. She regales the reader with stories, opinions, trivia, and lore as if we were favorite guests at her dinner table. Her humor and genuineness are always entertaining and enjoyable. Although some of the references are dated, they are no less interesting for their age. "Consider the Oyster" is a lot of fun for oyster lovers, short, easy to digest (as they say), and evidence of just how modern and how traditional oysters can be.

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