

BOMBSHELL & SHELLFISH

Event unites oysters and wine in a successful marriage

BY HANNAH BURKE | PHOTOS BY ANDREW WARDLOW

ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING aspects of a Lifestyle Membership with The Clubs by JOE is exclusive access to the WaterSound Beach Club, an elegant oasis that hugs the shore. In addition to tennis courts, secluded beach access and a 7,000-square-foot pool that zig-zags around the deck, Members also enjoy local delicacies from the club's full-service restaurant and bar.

Though this little slice of paradise is frequently filled with sunbathers, swimmers and gourmards, it also plays host to weekly, Members-only events. One such gathering in September married the salty piquancy of Panacea Oysters to the sweet bouquets of Farmer's Daughter wines in a complimentary strolling reception.

As guests descended the grand staircase to the base of the Beach Club, they were greeted by the music of Ben Friedman,

Rob Olin's cage-raised oysters are free of sediment, uniform in size and shape and are cultivated to be the world's best. Opposite page: For Renee Moss, who founded Farmer's Daughter Wines with her husband, Clayton, the WaterSound Beach Club was the bomb(shell).



FARMER'S DAUGHTER VINEYARD

Farmer's Daughter wines, winners of the Best of Class award at the 2017 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, are quickly becoming a national success despite humble beginnings in the rural town of Thomasville, Georgia.

Founders Clayton Moss and wife, Renee, decided to take a gamble on grapes and launch their business in 2015. As a third-generation farmer, Clayton already knew how to grow cotton and peanuts, and was looking to diversify his land. Utilizing what he learned in agricultural economics courses in grad school, he landed on the idea of growing French-American hybrid grapes. While surrounding vineyards only grow Muscadines, the unique hybrids are what distinguishes the vineyard and gives each wine its distinctive essence.

From fermentation to the ornamental bottling process, everything is performed in-house. The Moss's devotion to cultivating the best wines, along with a little help from the farmer's daughter herself, Charlie, are what packs so much passion and flavor into each sip.

With harmonious, redolent bodies, their seven "fruit-forward" wines are ideal for sipping by the beach.

a Santa Rosa Beach singer and songwriter. His acoustic guitar and dulcet vocals were like a siren's song, beckoning visitors to an extravagant spread of spirits and canapés. With Renee Moss, owner of Farmer's Daughter Vineyards, filling glasses on one side, and Rob Olin, CEO of Panacea Oyster Co-op, shucking oysters on the other, it was difficult to decide where to land first.

Some headed for middle ground, a decadent station of hors d'oeuvres prepared by WaterSound Beach Club's former Executive Chef, Brad Dees.

"Tonight, my culinary team and I prepared an arrangement of imported and domestic cheeses, Italian meats, artisan breads, fruit and crostini that you can embellish with fig jam and local honey," Dees explained. "At the Beach Club, we normally focus on a Southern-coastal cuisine. Things like grouper sandwiches — which are a big deal here on the Emerald Coast — fried shrimp and ahi tuna bowls are dishes our guests really love."

The wine and oysters event, however, was a special occasion.



As guests followed their noses to Moss's aromatic wine station, they learned the event doubled as a sneak preview of the winery's newest offering, Bombshell. Moss felt the serenity of the seaside Beach Club would make the perfect venue for debuting a wine described as "dry and smooth, with passion fruit, honey and flirtations of citrus."

"Tonight, Bombshell will be the belle of the ball," Moss said. "This is our second vintage and it hasn't even been opened yet. We won't be releasing it until next month in our hometown of Thomasville, Georgia, so this is a special treat that happens to pair perfectly with oysters."

Aside from the headliner, guests imbibed Troublemaker and Hellraiser white wines, Heartbreaker, Daredevil and Knockout reds, and Bro's Cider, a wine-based hard cider with notes of apple.

Glass in hand, Moss pointed the way to Olin's oyster corner, where deft, fast-working shuckers lined a bed of ice with succulent shellfish. Adjacent was a table of horseradish, Tabasco and mouthwatering mignonette sauces for enhancing mollusks over saltines. Olin will tell you that there is no need to doctor his oysters, which he finds are best when slurped straight from the shell. His face lit up as guests indulged, each pleasantly surprised at the briny, but fresh, sweet flavor of the oysters.

"That flavor comes from our location near Wakulla Springs, the largest freshwater spring in the world," Olin told the crowd. Picking up a cage in which his oysters are grown, he added, "These hang four inches above the waterline at low-tide. They come out of the



Participants in an oyster-and-wine soiree at the WaterSound Beach Club sipped, slurped and sampled offerings while enjoying the music of Ben Friedman.



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PANACEA OYSTER CO-OP

Panacea Oyster Co-op’s oysters just may be the best in the world.

Cultivated in waters that adjoin the millions of acres of wilderness in the Saint Marks National Wildlife Refuge and Apalachicola National Forest, Panacea oysters are the products of a pristine environment.

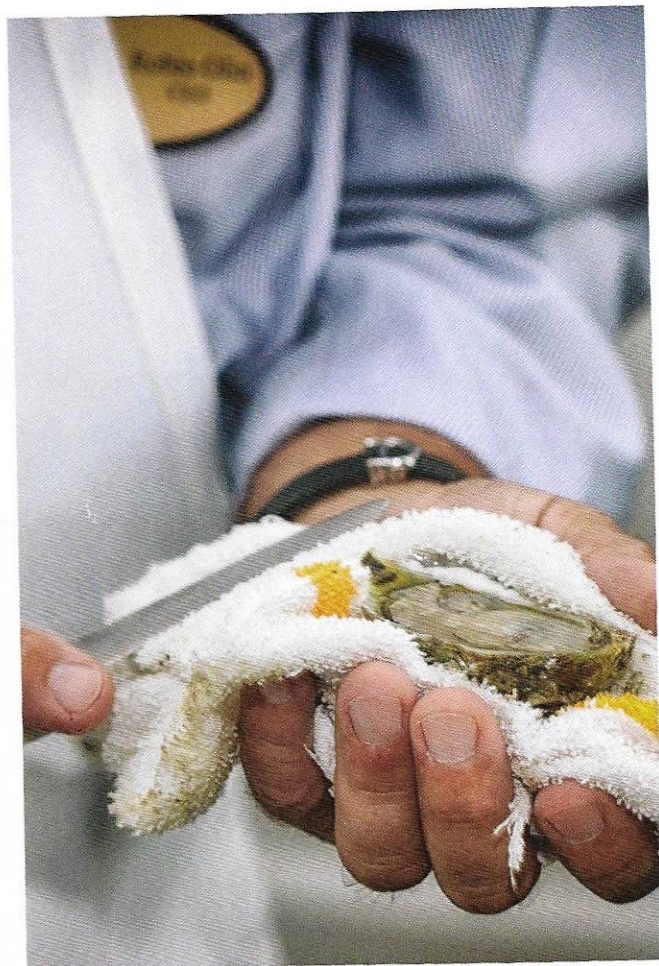
Worldwide, some 85-90% of naturally occurring oyster beds have disappeared

due to human activity and other factors. Gone with the oysters, themselves, are the water-filtering services they perform. In 2015, environmental institutes, universities, investors and oyster “ranchers” banded together in an effort to enhance water quality off Wakulla County. In that regard, oysters would be the workhorses. A single oyster filters 50 gallons of water a day. Add thousands of

them to rows and rows of floating cages, and the impact is significant.

So, why do we eat them if they’re so vital to the water’s purity?

“Every time you eat one of our oysters, you save the bay because we’re going to put two more back in to replace it,” says Panacea Oysters Co-Op CEO Rob Olin. “I like to say the age of taking is over and the age of making is here.”



Farmer's Daughter wines featured a fine bouquet, and the shellfish from the Panacea Oyster Co-op smelled almost as sweet.



water two times a day, both exercising the oyster and de-fouling the algae that accumulates around the cage. Our other cages float on the surface and we turn those once a week. Either way, none of our oysters ever touch the bottom, and that's why they taste so clean. No sediment, no grit."

A skeptical, but daring Club Member, Barry Greer, decided to test the "straight from the shell" method and emitted "mm's" and "ooh's."

"Absolutely the best oyster I have ever had," Greer declared. "I can't describe the flavor. You just taste the oyster a lot more than you do at local establishments."

Andrew Czarnecki, Managing Director of Resorts, rushed back to Moss to praise her palatable Bombshell after sampling the oysters.

"Outstanding," enthused Czarnecki. "The oysters were very clean, but add in the crisp, soft finish of the vintage and it's phenomenal."

With the space's warm, yellow hanging lanterns, tables dressed with

tea lights and a vibrant setting sun, the Beach Club was aglow. The crowd basked in the ambience, assembling to listen to brief histories of the Panacea Oyster Co-op and Farmer's Daughter Vineyard while indulging in the products firsthand. Hands shot up, inquiring where the newfound delicacies could be purchased. Having pleased their audience, Olin and Moss would be the talk of the town for days to come.

John and Sharon Michalik were mightily impressed. They had been Clubs by Joe Members for just two weeks, and this was their first event.

"We couldn't be happier since joining," John Michalik said. "I've been over to play golf a few times at Shark's Tooth and we've had a delicious dinner here at the Club. Going forward, we're very excited for more nights like this."

Looking around the room, the Michaliks were just two of about 50 members who were delighted by a special gathering of friends and family that brought about sated appetites and smiling faces. *J*