

# The World Of Oysters

In France it is illegal to sell an oyster which has not been opened to order. Think about that for a minute and what it could possibly mean. The oyster is a living thing, clinging to rocks in its secure rock-like shell as the ocean tides surge and retreat. Once collected from its natural home or oyster farm frames it is still a living thing, able to withstand the wide temperature ranges it is normally exposed to during changes in sea level. Kept unopened and cool the oyster is in a natural package ready to be immediately enjoyed in the numerous simple brasseries around Paris. When freshly shucked you not only get a plump fresh oyster but the salty taste of the sea. In contrast, oysters here are sold opened in trays of a dozen, the ocean juices long washed away and the oyster sagging, drying out and long dead. The question then arises how long has it been dead? Do I trust this establishment not to keep opened oysters for too long? The opened oyster now must be kept fridge cold to prevent further degradation and the risks of eating a bad one and getting sick is higher. There is now also a need for dressings to improve flavour. The simple enjoyment of a fresh oyster tasting of the sea is lost. Restaurants here really need to up their game and open oysters to order. Some good establishments clearly do and that's why we pay \$4 a pop for the privilege. At 1980's legendary North Melbourne restaurant, Jean Jacques, a squeeze of lemon juice would cause the oyster to retract to the acid. At how many places can you see that degree of freshness? When one oyster bar opened to much fanfare in Melbourne a few years ago oysters were not opened in front of the customer, instead trays of opened oysters arrived on a trolley from some other food preparation location, totally defeating the purpose of an oyster bar. A cocktail bar would not operate this way; customers expect the bartender to mix and shake and create something wonderful.

While choosing your restaurant carefully is an option, what can you do about this state of affairs at home? Simple. Ask for unopened oysters at fish markets, invest in an oyster knife and start getting some opening practice. Check out youtube for instruction. It is really not that hard, my teenage nephews mastered it after a couple of goes; not a bad thing to add to their life skills set.

[Oysters Australia](#) recommends: *From their harvest date, unopened Sydney Rock Oysters should be kept close to 20°C for up to 14 days and unopened Pacific Oysters at 5°C for up to 7 days. So that they can breathe and keep cool, wrap or cover oysters in a damp cloth. Storing in plastic, in water or on ice will kill them!* This is a good guide but their youtube demo suggests storing live oysters in the fridge. This is fine for Pacific Oysters but Sydney Rocks, which like warmer waters, a cool place like the laundry is a much better choice. Once opened eat them straight away.

For the best oysters I recommend heading to our local farmers markets and chat to [John The Oyster Bloke](#) and get a net or two of his beautifully sweet Sydney Rock Oysters. To see which markets he will attend check his facebook page.



After a few goes at opening your own the world is your oyster. The phrase *the world is my oyster* actually comes from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Falstaff says, *I will not lend thee a penny*. To which Pistol replies, *Why then the world's mine oyster, Which I with sword will open*. We use the phrase to mean that there are opportunities and rewards to enjoy, not with the brute force of the sword, as suggested by Pistol, but with a little application (of a small oyster knife). Enjoy.

