

# Prawns in Coconut Crepes

In Melbourne we are easing into home entertaining again and while some folks may still be a little unsure there is always the outside or the dining with opened doors option now that the weather has warmed up. Here's a Vietnamese dish that evokes glorious, sunny summer meals in the garden or on the terrace. The addition of turmeric to the coconut crepes gives them a lovely golden hue while a punchy nuoc cham chilli sauce gives the prawns some zing. Pair this dish with a Gewürztraminer; the slight sweetness works extremely well.

In Vietnam a very crispy crepe is preferred for this dish and is best achieved using rice flour. If you want a slightly softer, easily folded crepe you can use half rice flour, half plain flour instead. This recipe is enough for 4 people, two crepes per person, each filled with 3 large prawns.

## Nuoc Cham

- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup warm water
- 2 long red chillies
- 1 dried red chilli
- 25 g coriander roots
- small clove garlic
- 2 tbs lime juice

Dissolve the sugar in the warm water. Scrape clean the coriander roots with a sharp knife and roughly chop. Add the coriander, chillies and garlic to a blender and blitz. Add

remaining ingredients and combine. Store the sauce in a glass jar with lid. This can be made a day or so in advance and stored in the fridge for up to a week.

## Coconut Crepes

makes 8

- 200 g rice flour
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp ground tumeric
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup water
- peanut oil

Mix the turmeric and salt through the flour in a mixing bowl. Add the egg and coconut milk into a well in the centre and gradually work it into the flour with a whisk. Once combined gradually whisk in enough of the water to form a thin batter. Cook the crepes on a lightly oiled small crepe pan, adding just enough to leave lacey edges. Cover the cooked crepes with a clean tea towel until ready to assemble.

## For the Filling

- 24 large green prawns, shelled and cleaned
- peanut oil
- 1 tbs sesames seeds

- 2 tsp soy sauce
- sliced cucumber, radish or other spring vegetable
- mint, coriander and basil leaves

Cook the prawns in a hot fry pan with a little peanut oil. Once the prawns just begin to become opaque add the sesame seeds and toss around the prawns for a minute to toast the seeds and allow them to adhere to the prawns. Add the soy sauce and stir until prawns are well coated. Remove from heat.

## **To Assemble**

Fill one half of each crepe with some vegetables and herbs and then top with 3 prawns, drizzle with a little nuoc cham. Fold over the crepe and serve with remaining nuoc cham in a little serving bowl with spoon.



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## **East33 Oysters To Your Door**

Stuck in Melbourne dreaming of the sparkling blue waters of the East coast of Australia and a plate of oysters and glass of verve clicquot? East33 can deliver on two of your dreams, a plate of Sydney rock oysters and champagne but the sparkling blue waters will have to remain a memory, although Melbourne has it own sparkling sunshine at the moment. East33 is delivering shucked and unshucked Sydney rocks from various oyster farms along the coast with differing flavour profiles for you to choose or tasting packs to do your own direct comparison. For a special treat take a holiday at home on your

sunny balcony or in the garden; they promise next day delivery, except Sundays (how does the song go?). Enjoy.

East33 collection of Sydney Rock Oysters – order online, become a regular oyster subscriber.

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## 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.

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# Spanish Mackerel with Sicilian Flavours

Spanish mackerel is a cheap and sustainably wild-caught fish that is overlooked in preference for the ubiquitous farmed salmon; this is unfortunate as you can create a wonderful fish dinner for half the price and with a bit of a flavour hit. Spanish mackerel is an oily fish that is best when cooked with robust and citrusy flavours and this version based on a Sicilian dish works a treat. Traditionally fresh tomatoes are added but I have substituted orange juice and white wine for some acidity instead. I think the orange, along with the fresh bay leaves, adds some beautiful perfumed aromatics which I am sure you will enjoy. Serve with roasted potato slices and a green salad.

- 2 Spanish mackerel cutlets
- 1 tbs pine nuts
- olive oil
- salt
- 1 small onion, finely sliced
- 8 parsley stalks without the leaves, finely sliced
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tbs salted capers, rinsed
- 1 tbs green olives, de-seeded and chopped
- 1 tbs currents

- juice of 1 orange
- 1/2 glass white wine
- 3 fresh bay leaves
- a few thin strips of orange rind for garnish

Salt the mackerel cutlets. Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a fry pan over medium heat. Brown the Spanish mackerel cutlets for one minute on each side. Remove from the pan and set aside. Add the pine nuts to the pan and colour to a light golden brown, remove them to a saucer and set aside. Gently sauté the sliced onion and parsley stalks until the onion is soft and golden. Add the garlic, capers, currents, olives and bay leaves and sauté for a few minutes. Add the wine and orange juice and stir to reduce the sauce slightly. Return the fish and cook on medium heat for approximately 3 minutes a side, until just cooked. Remove the fish to a serving plate and reduce the sauce further, if necessary, to a syrupy consistency and spoon over the fish. Garnish with a few orange strips.

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## **The Salty Allure Of Ortiz Anchovies**

I was recently asked by someone opening a wine bar business what my favorite snack to have with a drink was. Olives, fried stuffed olives, guacamole, hummus, prosciutto with melon, oysters, pan con tomate, really good bread and EV00, liptauer,

padron peppers all rushed through my head but much to their surprise I settled on anchovies on toast. No ordinary, hairy, cooking anchovies I said. I mean a tin of Spanish Ortiz anchovies, filleted and packed in olive oil by hand, each fillet immaculately silky smooth with a slight rosy blush and anchovy infused olive oil to mop up after all the fishies are gone. I still got a blank look but I guess one has to be introduced to them in the right situation when even supposed anchovy haters might come around to the idea. I enjoyed Ortiz anchovies at Cumulus Inc. where Andrew McConnell serves them in the tin with bread toasted over a gas flame giving it a dapple of black charring. The combination of salty fish and bitterness from the slightly burnt bread was nothing short of miraculous. I pictured the chefs getting together after service, huddled around the stove, eating this with a few beers and then deciding it was too good not to put it on the menu. Reality is, it is a typical drinks food of Spanish tapas bars. Paired with wine, manzanilla or beer it really hits the spot and a tin is something you can always rustle up from the pantry at last minutes notice, provided you have some bread to toast. It's the informality of it that I really love, served on a wooden board or just huddled around the stove with mates late at night. Lately I've been enjoying them with King Pippin apple cider, the slight sweetness and funky barnyard overtones marrying well with the salty hit. Ortiz's anchovies are expensive, expect to pay around \$18 for a 47.5 gram tin, but it is worth looking around because you can occasionally find them a little cheaper, in which case I would stock up. A few other gourmet brands are popping up at fishmongers and food stores around Melbourne commanding even higher prices but if all this seems too extreme to you for just a bar snack there are two brands that are a fraction of these prices and also quite good quality; Cuca anchovies in olive oil from Spain and the Italian Rizzoli brand can be found in supermarkets and delis for around \$5.

The best quality things are still done with care by hand not

machine. Think wine, tea and asparagus. Each have there own techniques and demands. Filleting and packing Ortiz anchovies is truly a labour of love, so enjoy them.

Find Ortiz anchovies at Meatsmith, Simon Johnson and select supermarkets.

Just for fun.