



THE ANSONIA NOTEBOOK

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Notes from Harpswell, No. 14

After a long winter and a slow-starting spring, Harpswell is finally preparing for summer. We're not working as hard as France's vigneronns right now, but here too there are things that need to be done to get the growing season properly underway.

Harpswell's 9-12 foot tides mean that docks need floats and connecting ramps. Winter ice poses a threat to these, so docks get hauled out of the water every fall, along with all the boats. This whole process needs to be reversed before lobstering, oystering, and other joys of the Maine summer can get going again. (Our dockless winter state is the reason we haven't tried farming kelp -- winter is its growing season and without a boat in the water, we're limited to the kelp we can forage. We got our boat into the water this year around the first of May.

A few weeks ago we raised our oyster cages from their winter home on the floor of Harpswell Sound. Oysters go dormant when the ocean temperature drops into the thirties, so while they're not growing much it is standard practice to sink them to the bottom to keep winter ice from moving them down the coast. You have to keep them out of the mud, though -- that can suffocate them. The pontoons that float the cages in the growing season double as legs in winter -- we flood them, invert the cage units, and carefully lower them to the bottom, trying to make sure that the cages themselves stay out of the mud. There's always a moment of suspense as each cage is lifted and we learn whether there have been significant losses from the mud. We're pleased to report that winter losses were minimal this year.

We raise Eastern oysters, *crassostrea virginica*, the species that once filled the estuaries up and down the east coast, and still predominates from the Canadian maritimes to the Gulf of Mexico. Though the species is the same, the time to market varies greatly, affected most strongly by water temperature. Oysters from Maine's cold waters need about three years to reach market size, while those from the Chesapeake need only one. And local conditions affect taste in a variety of subtle ways; for example the more fresh water flowing through an estuary the less briny the oysters raised there.

Our oldest batch is entering its third year now, so we have more than a thousand oysters ready to open. We are counting on a steady supply of halfshells, stews, and other molluscan delights throughout the summer.

– MW



JUNE: IN THE VINES

Accolage: *vignerons* tie this year's branches (called *cordons*) to the horizontal wires. This is labor intensive and done almost entirely by hand; one winemaker in April told us this was his vineyard team's least favorite job all year.

Floraison (flowering): in Burgundy the vines have begun to produce flowers. This marks the beginning of the approximately 100 day maturation cycle of the grapes. Strong storms and hail at this time of year can damage the flowers and affect the yields. Flowering now suggests the 2019 harvest will take place around the middle of September.

JUNE: WAREHOUSE TASTING NOTES

Tasting notes from Saturday tastings at the Newton Warehouse

Collet Chablis 1er cru "Vaillons" 2017: "gorgeous and rich with depth and elegance. There's citrus peel and apricot in the mouth with a long finish." – IW [↗](#)

Mersiol Pinot Noir 2017: "pure glou-glou... raspberry core... delightful." – IW [↗](#)

Bardoux Champagne NV: "just the right combination of doughiness and fruit; like a subtle peach dessert baked with puff-pastry and a hint of butter and cream. Pure sophistication." – TW [↗](#)



Vaudesir & Valmur: neighboring Grand Crus in Chablis, Burgundy



UPDATES

- It's oyster season at the house in Maine (r-months be damned). We're particularly enjoying the Muscadets from Martin-Luneau – there's a savory, crushed-seashell essence that makes them perfect for a briny oyster.
- We celebrated my birthday this month with a plate (or two) of ribs and a 1999 Hermitage from Chapoutier. For some reason they're not looking for a new importer (?), and this was the last bottle in the cellar, but it was a delight anyway: pure Northern Rhône smokiness, with notes of tar, earth, iodine, stones, and general funk.
- We've finally chased down a price list from an exciting Burgundian source this spring. We discovered this terrific new producer in a Beaune restaurant in April; they've got very limited exposure, and lots of exciting wines from Puligny, Meursault, Pommard, and more. If all goes well we'll include them in the July Futures (release date July 7).

–TW



JUNE: RECOMMENDATIONS

RECIPE: *Cacio e Pepe with Arugula & Lemon* [↗](#)

Perhaps not the classic recipe, but this is summery and delicious. Make sure to use bucatini for the nice chewy texture; pair with a White Burgundy from Gérard Thomas, Bourgogne or St-Aubin.

BOOK: *The Sommelier's Atlas of Taste* [↗](#)

Rajat Parr's most recent book provides an excellent briefing on the characters of Europe's greatest appellations. Burgundy and the rest of France form the primary content, but there are excellent sections on Italy, Spain, Germany, and Austria as well.