

# 'The Shell Game' at Johnny's Oyster Bar

**By Leigh Cort**  
Special to The Recorder

When I perused the daily board at Johnny's Oyster Bar about Copps Island, Blue Point and Louisiana oysters being served atop the cool white marble bar, I knew that something delicious was happening on the second floor above Meehan's Irish Pub.

One of St. Augustine's secret dining spots for romance and unobstructed waterfront view, the seascape of Matanzas Bay with Atlantic breezes stole my heart. I quickly realized there was no better way to beat the heat this season than by climbing to the rooftop verandah above the Pub and sliding down a freshly shucked oyster or savoring one of the dozen preparations by Chef Paul Bonnano and the culinary team. Prominently located on the corner of Hypolita and Avenida Menendez, Meehan's and The Backyard have been uber popular for years... Now it's Johnny's turn.

To oyster lovers, nothing is more enticing than a platter of freshly shucked oysters with the ritual presentation of a few accessories — cocktail sauce, horseradish, mignonette sauce, lemon wedges and

crackers.

Sitting indoors surrounded by Irish inspired memorabilia or out in the open air, the bartenders, servers and oyster shucking experts confidently guide you through the menu. Each day at Johnny's Oyster Bar brings an exciting array of the freshest bounty of oysters emanating from anywhere in the Continental US and Canada.

By chance, the evening's three options, all from the clean cold waters of New England's Long Island Sound, included: the Copps Island mollusks (succulent and juicy); the Blue Points (full and meaty, named for Blue Point, Long Island) and the large popular Louisiana variety (tasting delicious on the half shell and perfect when chilled and salty with a shot of Tabasco).

Johnny's Oyster Bar is the realization of John Meehan's dream of creating a setting where he could share his passion for the oyster and the ocean. Like wine, oysters draw their distinctive flavors from their environment with at least 300 unique dazzling varieties. Yes, the oyster bar has been around awhile but the oyster's newfound popularity and year-round accessibility have inspired Chef Kris and Chef Paul to take them to a new level of creative preparation.

There are many seafood dishes on the rooftop menu like Stoned Tuna, Shrimp Flatbread, Baked Clams and Bouillabaisse. Chef Bonnano's Bouillabaisse can't be described in humble words and his specialty Italian-style with red sauce enhanced with capers, garlic, onions, tomatoes and cilantro



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The restaurant has shuckers on hand to serve up fresh oysters with cocktail sauce, horseradish, mignonette sauce, lemon wedges and crackers.



The view from Johnny's Oyster Bar.



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Chef Bonnano's Bouillabaisse is Italian-style with red sauce enhanced with capers, garlic, onions, tomatoes and cilantro.

is what guests dream about. Oysters Meehan (roasted with clarified garlic herb butter topped with parmesan), Oysters Pico (served chilled with Pico de Gallo and chopped baby cilantro) and Oysters Johnny (baked with rich shrimp and mushroom sauce) are irresistibly a few headliners in the oyster bar show.

With a colorfully stocked bar that boasts as many Irish whiskies as in Dublin, Ireland and at least 50 choices of beer, you might consider easing into the feast with a hand-crafted cocktail. Galway Races is cooling (Jameson Irish whiskey, muddled lemon, lime, mint and simply syrup topped with ginger beer). For martini lovers, indulge in the Dirty Pearl (Belvedere Vodka shaken to perfection

with a touch of fresh oyster brine).

The Grand Central Oyster Bar in New York City, opened in 1913, is hosting "Oyster Frenzy" this season. In St. Augustine, the landmark structure was built in the same era of 1917. Johnny's Oyster Bar offers an ocean's bounty of delicious eating served with their own brand of American history. Step back in time, enjoy the hustle-bustle at Johnny's bar and let the old-school oyster adventure begin.

Visit [www.MeehansIrishPub.com](http://www.MeehansIrishPub.com) for more!

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