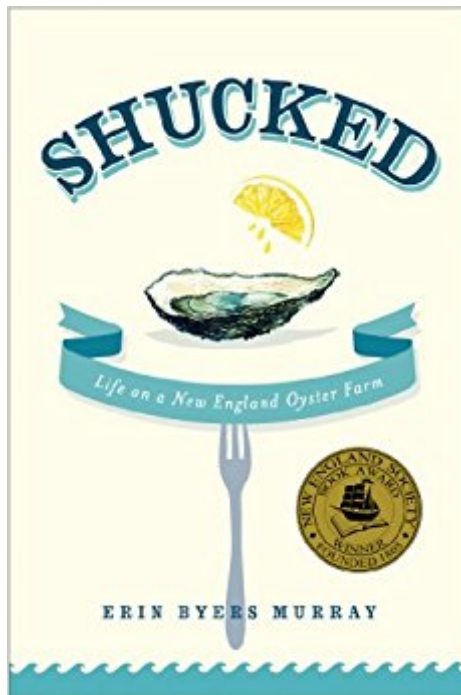




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# Shucked: Life On A New England Oyster Farm



## Synopsis

Bill Buford's *Heat* meets Phoebe Damrosch's *Service Included* in this unique blend of personal narrative, food miscellany, and history. In March of 2009, Erin Byers Murray ditched her pampered city girl lifestyle and convinced the rowdy and mostly male crew at Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, Massachusetts, to let a completely unprepared, aquaculture-illiterate food and lifestyle writer work for them for 12 months to learn the business of oysters. *SHUCKED* is part love letter, part memoir and part documentary about the world's most beloved bivalves. An in-depth look at the work that goes into getting oysters from farm to table, *SHUCKED* shows Erin's full-circle journey through the modern day oyster farming process and tells a dynamic story about the people who grow our food, and the cutting-edge community of weathered New England oyster farmers who are defying convention and looking ahead. The narrative also interweaves Erin's personal story—the tale of how a technology-obsessed workaholic learns to slow life down a little bit and starts to enjoy getting her hands dirty (and cold). This is a book for oyster lovers everywhere, but also a great read for locavores and foodies in general.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“While most books about oysters tell people what they want to hear, *Shucked* tells it like it is: the frigid winter days on the water with hands like popsicles, the backbreaking work, the anxiety of nurturing thousands of dollars' worth of oyster seed, the hard-partying nights. Erin Byers Murray captures the seasonal rhythms of the New England coast and the romance of one exceptional company's efforts to coax great food from the sea. You'll never take an oyster for granted

again. — Rowan Jacobsen, author of *A Geography of Oysters* — “Part adventure, part memoir, part culinary awakening, Erin Byers Murray’s rite of passage from novice to connoisseur takes us on a behind-the-scenes tour of the world of the oyster. On the way, she gives us pearls of wisdom and wit—both served up on the half shell. Cocktail sauce is optional but don’t miss this book. — Christopher White, author of *Skipjack: The Story of America’s Last Sailing Oystermen* — “Part of the book’s charm is following Murray through the process of becoming aware of her surroundings in working directly with an edible product. Readers who enjoy Linda Greenlaw’s writing...will appreciate Murray’s offering of just enough information to allow them to become knowledgeable in all things oyster without overdoing it. ...Murray’s portrayal of her personal response to life’s changes and challenges will hold readers’ interest. An entertaining and informative firsthand experience of the locavore movement. — Library Journal — “Murray’s own love of food and food writing informs the narrative, and she skillfully dramatizes the scenes of summertime sowing and depicts her many colorful co-workers. Murray eschews poetic waxing on her subject and focuses closely on the action and the hard, hard work of farming, closing each chapter with a broad range of oyster recipes. — Publishers Weekly — “...a new understanding of locavorism and an appreciation for tradition. — The Sacramento Bee

ERIN BYERS MURRAY is a Boston area journalist, specializing in food and wine writing. Most recently, she was the Boston editor for DailyCandy.com. Her work has been published in the Boston Globe, Food and Wine, Boston Magazine, Bon Appetit, and many more.

This book begins with what it says it is going to cover, a woman decides to chuck her fairly shallow (by her own account) life as an entertainment blogger where she basically tells hipsters what to like and where to go, with little critical assessment needed, and instead see what it takes to work on an oyster farm on the Mass coast for a year. Her account is fun, realistic of the work involved and interesting. And though she is not an oyster expert, some good information comes through in a way that is engaging. I have given it three stars to reflect that for a little over half of the book it is definitely worth a read. And I would recommend it even if you are planning to just read the first half. But only three stars here is for a reason. About 2/3s way through she basically reverts to writing about all her encounters with the “fabulous” elite of celebrity chefs and restaurateurs. At this point she simply gushes over her subjects and her being included in whatever scene she is lucky enough to be part of. We get to read breathless lines like: “...a very special appearance from super chef

Daniel Boulud, who, during one of his swings through the party, jumped behind the raw bar to shuck oysters with us....Boulud was a party animal whose presence ... turned the crowd from vaguely entertained to hog wild."or"By now I was fully enamored of his style of cooking; by opening a Latin-inspired restaurant he'd completely stolen my heart."I mean, really?At that point it will occur to you that perhaps you have picked up a different book for your read on the train to work; what happened to the book about working on an oyster farm? How did we get back to this pampered woman, when she was beginning to show such promise as a serious person? I can't answer that, but I hope she can really learn to stop writing as if she is on the staff of Boston Magazine. There is potential there.

What a great first effort for the author. Island Creek is one of my favorite oyster bars. This is a quick and easy read for people that have little interest in oysters. If you have some interest, this is a must read. This book takes you literally from spat to table. I loved it, and I even went and planted oysters on my property on the Chesapeake. If you live where you can plant oysters, go clean up your bay or river and get back a culinary treasure. Skip through the parts where the author whines about her situation and enjoy a great story about some great watermen.

Early on in Erin Byers Murray's *Shucked*, her eminently readable account of the 18 months she spent getting her hands dirty at a Massachusetts oyster farm, she contends that oysters are best served naked with just a little bit of lemon. You might say the same about Murray's writing style, which is as raw as a bivalve on the half shell, with just enough tartness to keep it from becoming overly deep or self-absorbed.I expected to learn a lot about what it takes to get an oyster from tide to plate, and I wasn't disappointed--Murray's funny and thoroughly unglamorous view of the mucky tides and chilly days out on the oyster float have given me a whole new appreciation for just how much work goes into that satisfying slurp. What I didn't expect was how personal this book would be--the author opens up about her own difficulties and triumphs adjusting to life exposed to the elements, her conflicts and confederacies with the rowdy mostly-male crew of the oyster growers, and the strain her new life put on her marriage with disarming honesty and humor, making the reader ask him or herself what s/he'd do to follow a crazy dream in order to concoct a new definition of happiness.My one criticism is that there wasn't enough about the history and lore of oysters (I could be wrong, but I don't think the word "aphrodisiac" is even mentioned!) Towards the end, Murray writes about an oyster primer she made for the staff of the new Island Creek Oyster Bar the company opened, and I found myself wishing she'd included part of it in the book itself. Maybe it

could be an appendix in the paperback! But bottom line: if you care about oysters, or just about stories of personal transformation, you'll find yourself flying through the pages of this book. And maybe even wishing you could throw on some waders and join the harvest on the next low tide.

I've eaten oysters many times over the years but never realized how much work was entailed in getting them from "seed" to final product. Being from the area it was easy for me to visualize the Duxbury harbor. The author goes into a detailed explanation of how hard the work is and the difficult battles with weather, tides, seasonal changes, etc. The periodic recipes are interesting and will prompt you to try them out. I also enjoyed the cooking descriptions and visits to other customer restaurants. All in all, an enjoyable and easy read.

It's an interesting book overall. Do you remember Diane Chambers from Cheers? It reads as if it were written in her voice. It also goes to physical descriptions of her co-workers to the point of stalking.

Honest, engrossing read... wonderful to learn the backstory of Island Creek oysters recently relished in Seattle (thanks to The Walrus and Carpenter hosting Boston Chef Jeremy Sewall)! This frontline account opens my eyes to the many ways oysters are farmed in this country, thus producing the wide range in flavor profiles. Now I'm itching to read everything that's been written on oysters! And it goes without saying, also itching to sample the fruits of each merroir producing these luscious fleshy pearls! The author also went on to co-author with Chef Jeremy "The New England Kitchen", published just recently.

such a tremendous book: fully educational and riveting both. i have gifted to 3 chef friends.

Very happy. Would definitely buy from them again

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