

AW SHUCKS!

Writer DAVID FREEDENBERG calls upon a **FLOATING RAW BAR** that serves oysters the way nature intended.

THE TINY ISLAND of Cuttyhunk lies at the southern tip of the Elizabeth Islands chain, stretching southwest into the Rhode Island Sound from the bottom of Cape Cod. Here, Seth and Dorothy Garfield have pioneered a unique way of serving one of New England's most delectable sea creatures: the raw oyster. "Cuttyhunk" is a rough translation of the Algonquin word for "land's end," and, indeed, the mostly uninhabited rocky outpost has the distinct feel of the edge of civilization. But the serene harbor is host to dozens of sailboats and fishing vessels during the non-ice months. Although it is just 14 miles from the mainland, weary fishermen and pleasure boaters alike throw anchor here to escape busier destinations like Woods Hole and Martha's Vineyard.

Most small boats are often stocked with no more than cans of beans and hunks of salami, so even a hint of the gourmet triggers most sailors' appetites. Thankfully, roaming the Cuttyhunk harbor every evening is a motorized dinghy known as the Cuttyhunk Shellfish Farms Harbor Raw Bar. This floating oasis of ice and shellfish can be radioed for on VHF Channel 72, ordered at the shack on the Fisherman's Dock, or simply shouted at from across the water.

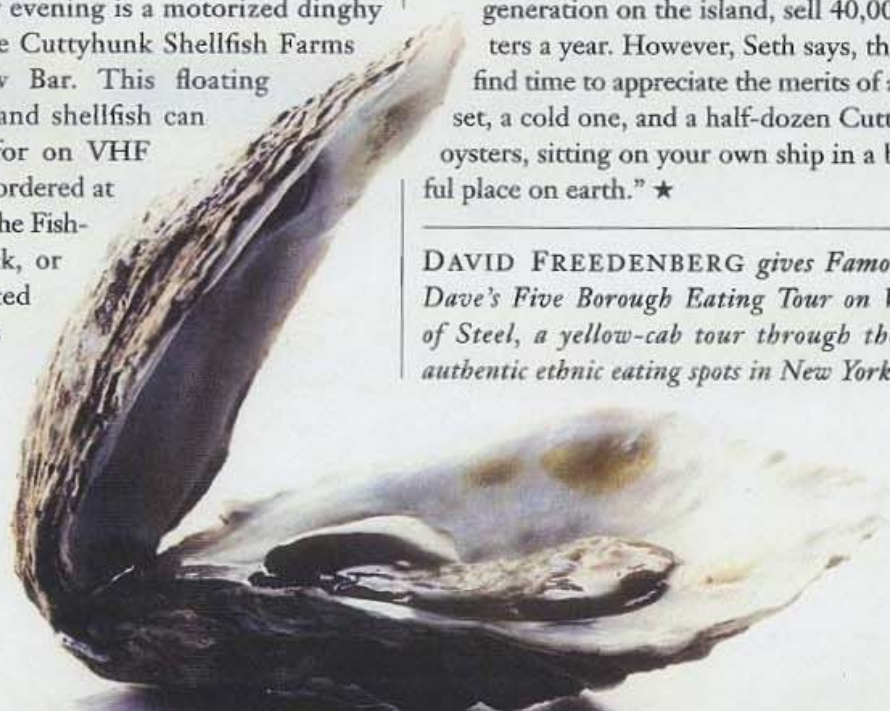
When beckoned, the Harbor Raw Bar pulls alongside its customer's boat and serves up its bounty at a fair price. Along with Cuttyhunk oysters raised in the West End Pond on the island, Harbor Raw Bar sells clams on the half-shell, crab spread, stuffed quahogs, shrimp cocktails, and even hot clam chowder.

The Cuttyhunk oysters, plucked from the water just two to three hours earlier and served with a fresh lemon to twist, are heavenly. When dining aboard, the raw oysters are not only as fresh as they come, but an anchored sailboat listing softly with the evening tides is the ideal locale for a truly pleasurable oyster-eating experience. Each half-shell can be loudly

slurped clean in private yet sophisticated confines. And the empty shells can be casually chucked overboard to be naturally recycled at the bottom of the sea.

Cuttyhunk Shellfish Farms, founded in 1981, also offers catering services and wholesale distribution. The Garfields, now in their fourth generation on the island, sell 40,000 oysters a year. However, Seth says, they still find time to appreciate the merits of a "sunset, a cold one, and a half-dozen Cuttyhunk oysters, sitting on your own ship in a beautiful place on earth." ★

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[EPITOME]

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