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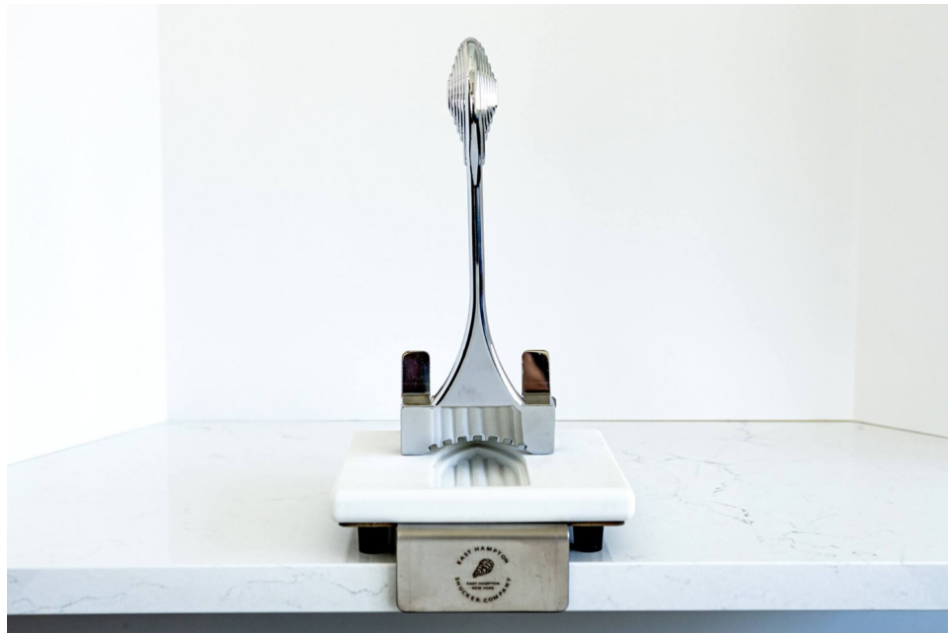
Intelligence

Could this new shucker change the way we open oysters?

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By James Wright

New Yorker's oyster shucker could help prevent injuries and improve service presentation



New York oyster farmer John Nicholas believes oysters are perfect, they just need to be opened properly. So he invented what he says is the world's best oyster shucker. Courtesy image.

Some tools, even really old ones, might never be improved upon or even need to be. The hammer has effectively pounded nails for centuries. And the shoestring has faced many challengers but remains undefeated (nice try, Velcro).

But the oyster opener? A pointed but semi-dull blade, with a towel or maybe a protective glove? That can certainly be improved upon. That's what John Nicholas believes. The oyster enthusiast and a small-scale oyster farmer in East Hampton, New York, also believes that he has succeeded in inventing such a device.

Aside from preventing painful puncture injuries while opening oysters, the big worry for Nicholas as an oyster farmer and lover of the product was that poor shucking quality and poor plate presentations could sully the product's reputation – without better experiences, the oyster industry might not fully capitalize on its current wave of popularity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nicholas devised countless prototype oyster openers (many currently cluttering his basement) along the way to developing the **East Hampton Shucker** (<https://www.easthamptonshucker.com/>), a table- or counter-mounted device that Nicholas says is not only safer for the shucker but better for the overall presentation, which he feels is lacking in restaurant service, even in places that focus on seafood.



(<https://aceaquatec.com/aquaculture-products/grow/a-biomass>).

Even the best professional oyster shuckers fail to consistently produce a shell-fragment-free oyster or to cut the adductor muscle properly and do so without puncturing the oyster itself. But most importantly, many fail to keep all that delicious liquor inside.

“The whole presentation is poor in many places,” he told the *Advocate*. “The real strength of our product is the shucker device holds it down and you use a sharper, more efficiently shaped knife. That’s the key to opening oysters. Because when your hand’s not down there, you’re not worried about the shell cracking and the knife going right into your hand. It allows you to apply more force.”

“And hey, you’re not really experiencing the oyster experience unless you taste the oyster liquor inside.”



We built this city on oyster shells

When Seattle decided to rebuild the seawall separating its waterfront from Puget Sound, it turned to a bivalve byproduct for a unique, environmentally friendly material for a hospitable marine habitat. The city wanted its design and materials as pragmatic and beneficial for its underwater residents as for those using the parks, paths and services above ground.



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His fascination – no, obsession – with oysters goes back a long way, but the idea to start an oyster tool business started a few years ago when one of his nephews wanted to not only try one but to open it himself. Nicholas taught him how, in the traditional, hand-held style.

“At that point, I realized that your hand does not need to be there. This is a very stupid idea, you know? I mean, it’s very dangerous! I needed to take the [second] hand out of the equation. That was the starting point,” he said. “I then bought every product out there – and every one of them had your hand near the oyster. But it was really about enjoying oysters at home. They’re like hell to open.”

Nicholas, whose own supply from his new oyster farm won’t be available until the end of 2024, is serious about selling the oyster experience along with the product itself. Slurping freshly shucked shellfish is the best way, in his eyes. He has nothing good to say about “reconstituted” oyster sales, a

practice in which oysters are shucked at a store and placed into a container and customers are provided the empty shells to eat them out of. "It's awful," he says, but admits that some retail stores do a lot of business this way.

The intellectual property that Nicholas invested in the East Hampton and other shucker models (46 patents in all) is so important to him that he entrusted his manufacturer suppliers only to work on one part of the tool, not the entire kit. He assembles the final product, made with stainless steel, at his home on Long Island, New York.

The product just hit the market this summer, and East Hampton Shucker Company has sold a "couple hundred" units so far, including numerous restaurants on Long Island, where the oyster culture is booming. Restaurants that currently don't sell oysters might want to after seeing how easy and efficient the East Hampton is, says Nicholas. It sells for U.S. \$175 on his website, which just launched this summer. Strangely, some of the restaurants that do a lot of oyster service might be tougher sells, he admits.

"You know, these professional shuckers, they don't like me," he says. "Because we're like the Kryptonite to their skill set. We're making it way too easy for them and they want it hard because of job security."

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