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How to Pair Oysters and Cocktails

Step aside, Champagne – there’s a better pairing for your oyster happy hour.

By [Lucy Simon](#) | Updated on July 28, 2023



PHOTO: MATT TAYLOR-GROSS

We’ve heard it before, oysters always go with [Champagne](#). It’s a classic combination, and for good reason – oysters are salty and briny, while Champagne packs a good bit of acid and, in some cases, a touch of fruity flavor. But at Maison Premiere in Brooklyn, New York, oysters and cocktails take center stage together.

Ordering oysters can feel overwhelming; You’ll get a list of names and species from a variety of locations that doesn’t tell you all too much about what the oyster might taste like. For example, the Eastern oyster is fleshy, medium in size with a lovely salty flavor, whereas ones from the Pacific grow quite large with more mellow notes of cucumber or melon. Suffice to say, no one pairing will fit every oyster. Ask a server, bartender, or oyster shucker for help, or if you’re at home, give one oyster a quick taste then choose your cocktail accordingly.

Oyster, cocktails, and New York City

Maison Premiere’s obsession with oysters is just one small part of a centuries long history of oyster culture in New York. “Oysters describe our world – and Maison Premiere – in a unique way,” write Joshua Boissy, Krystof Zizka, and Jordan Mackay in *The Maison Premiere Almanac*. Despite their modern day reputation for murkiness, New York’s harbors have been a hotbed for oysters throughout history; New York was home to the Eastern Oyster, also known as the Atlantic Oyster, which the team at Maison Premiere prizes. “The flavor of the Eastern at its best epitomizes what we love: briny and mineral, brisk and bracing.” It’s no surprise that a mineral-driven, salty oyster pairs well with one of New York’s most beloved cocktails, a backbone to the drinking culture of the city, the salty Dirty Martini.

Why do cocktails pair so well with oysters?

When you order oysters at a restaurant, they typically come with at least one of three things: a slice of lemon, cocktail sauce, and a vinegar-based mignonette. Oysters are great on their own, but they benefit from these seasonings. Cocktails can do the same thing – a bit of lemon juice in the [Arnaud’s French 75](#) adds brightness to nutty oysters, a clean [Martini](#) breaks through rich sweetness, and an [absinthe](#)-laden [Chrysanthemum cocktail](#) adds herbaceous notes to a salty oyster. “Oysters are so complex on their own,” advises William Elliot, bar director at Maison Premiere. “A simple cocktail with just a few ingredients will make for a great pairing.

01 Arnaud’s French 75



PHOTO: MATT TAYLOR-GROSS

This is the original [French 75](#) made with more subtle, slightly sweet Cognac instead of gin. With a touch of lemon and Champagne, pair this cocktail with nutty and mineral-driven oysters from the west coast like Hood Canal oysters from Washington state. The [Cognac](#) in the cocktail matches an almost [sherry](#)-like savoriness in the oysters.

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02 Classic Martini



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At Maison Premiere, their signature Martini is all about precision – the components, how cold they are, how the lemon twist is expressed over the drink – all elements lead to the most perfect rendition of the classic cocktail, with the presentation to match. The best companion to a Martini (besides another one ordered and on the way) is a salty, flavorful oyster like Sand Dune oysters from Prince Edward Island, which have an almost vegetal salinity and buttery, savory finish. The clean, citrusy notes in the cocktail counter the herbaceous and sweet quality of the oysters.

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03 Chrysanthemum Cocktail

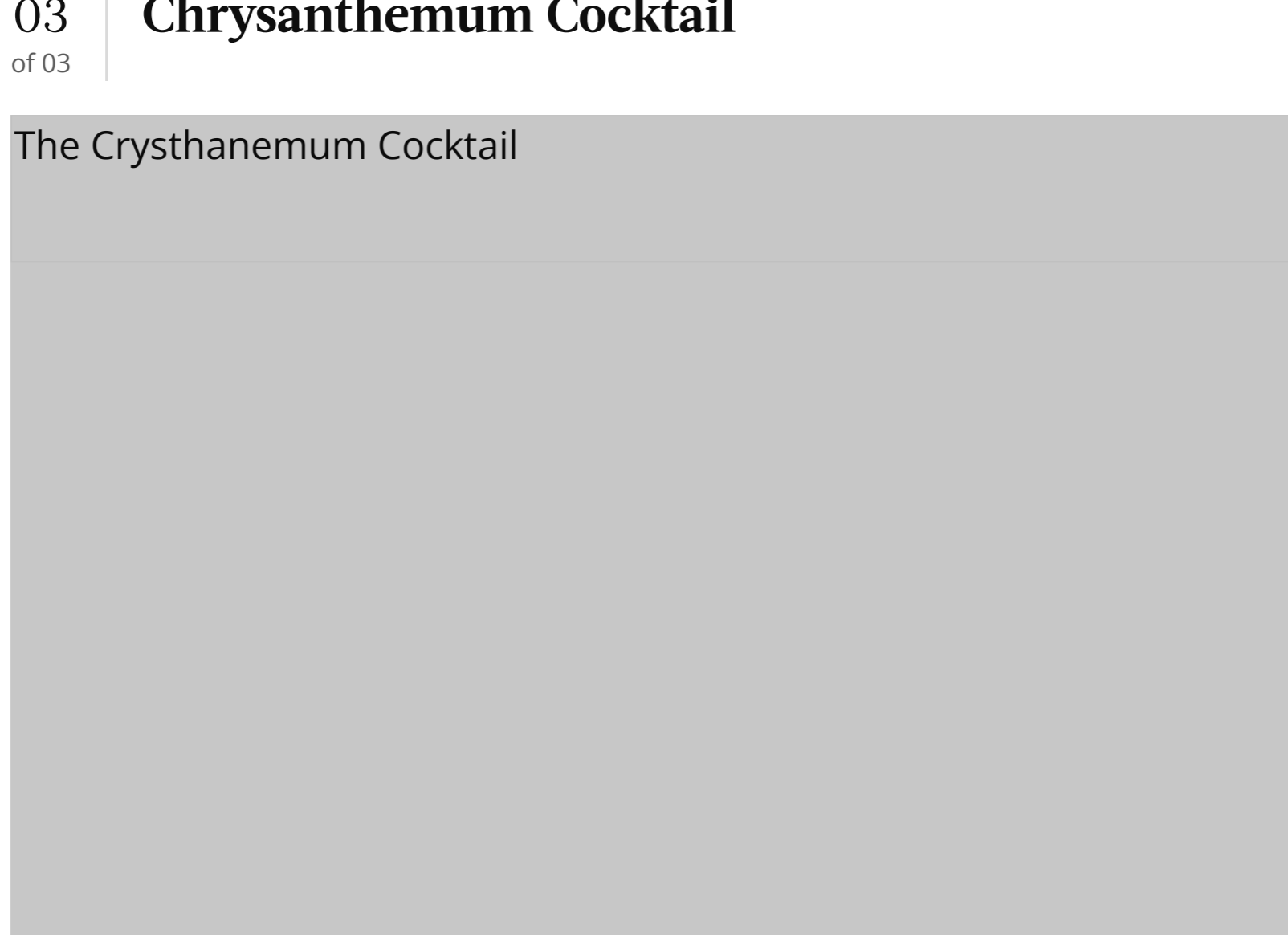


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The Chrysanthemum cocktail is all about getting to know absinthe without any of the burn from its very high alcohol content. It calls for sweeter blanc [vermouth](#) which accentuates the herbal notes from the absinthe. Drink this alongside briny and plump oysters from Duxbury, Massachusetts. They have lovely brothy salinity with a touch of sweetness – the salt brightens the cocktail and the sweetness helps blend the flavor of the oyster with that of the cocktail.

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