

The Boston Globe

GETTING SALTY

Wellfleet's Alex Hay has been in the seafood business since he was a teenager

By [Kara Baskin](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated August 4, 2026, 5:30 a.m.



Alex Hay

Wednesday, Aug. 5 is National Oyster Day. What better time to chat with Wellfleet's Alex Hay, 47, who runs [The Wicked Oyster](#), Wicked Provisions, and Wellfleet Shellfish Company?

As a 15-year-old, he opened Mac's Seafood on the Wellfleet Pier; these days, he works with the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association and the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association. We talked about the proper way to eat an oyster, the pleasures of the area during wintertime, his most-missed Cape restaurant, and his disdain for fake cheese.

Where did National Oyster Day originate?

I'm not sure. I sit on the board of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association. I don't know if this is 100 percent true, but, at one point, I know they were lobbying for a bit more recognition. There's a national day for everything now. But it's good timing, because it's right when farmed oysters really come on in the season, and stock is heavy.

We're trying to get more young people to eat oysters, which they are. We're trying to basically jump on that trend, push harder, and get oysters back to where they were 100 years ago, when the average American was eating some ridiculous number like the Europeans do.

Speaking of young people: How did you open a business at 15? I can barely get my teenager out of bed.

I started a fish market with my brother when I was 15, and he was 19. That fish market turned into several restaurants, wholesalers, caterers. That was Mac's Seafood Company, which I sold to my brother, but I kept Wellfleet Shellfish, which is a wholesaler that specializes in primarily oysters, lobsters, clams. Three years ago, I bought Wicked Oyster.

In my years of running those markets and restaurants, I was always basically the buyer and the fish-cutter. I dealt with all the vendors, so I developed really close relationships with farmers. I understood how to farm oysters, how wild fishing worked.

I grew up summering down here. We were industrious kids for sure. We had a relationship with a family that owned the Harbor Freeze in Wellfleet. I was probably 12, under the table, working in the front part of the building, and there was a fish market in the back, and pretty campy. This was '93 or '94. And my brother got a job in the fish market, and then the next summer the lease came up. The [owner] didn't want to do it again, and he said, "Hey, you want to do this?"

We scrounged a little bit of cash together from family members and put enough in to kind of redo a little bit, and we sold some fish. Then we took over the front part, which was a clam shack. Cooking fish was part of our tradition growing up in Truro. My grandfather would teach us how to fish. He was a surgeon, so he was meticulous with his tools.

By the time it was time to go to college, I was contemplating not going. But I graduated from St. Lawrence University with a philosophy degree.



Aug. 5 is National Oyster Day HANDOUT

What's changed in the world of oyster-eating?

You'd have to check, but in the late 1800s, in New York City, for example, there were oyster vendors on every corner, selling them for a penny apiece. What I think changed is supply. They just got overfished. Supply plummeted.

In the last 20 years, we've seen a tenfold [increase] in production, if not more, definitely in Massachusetts and up and down the East Coast. We're seeing that resurgence.

At my own restaurant, we do a happy hour. We're not quite doing a buck-a-shuck, but it's pretty close to that, and it gets people in. They're eating oysters, and they're drinking beer, and they're having a good time. It's an affordable, fun thing to do, and you move product.

Why oysters? Why not, I don't know, lobsters?

They're an eco service. They're filtering up to 50 gallons of water a day per oyster. They're eating excessive nutrients in the water, so they're filtering that water, keeping it clean. They're a perfect food source, a clean protein, great sources of vitamins and minerals, and they're providing the economy with jobs that are clean.

We're not talking about living in the city, either. We're living on the Outer Cape, raising families, providing for the economy, with a product where a lot of it stays local.

Let's talk about what the Cape Cod restaurant scene is like in the winter versus summer.

We're open year-round. We pull a lot of people from Provincetown to Dennis. We're fairly lucky. We have a very cozy restaurant. We're trying to increase that draw. We're trying to get more people to come out on a regular basis. I think we'll make a few changes to make it a little bit more approachable, putting some high tops in our porch area and maybe putting a TV back in there for the winter.

It's really about being a community anchor, somewhere where you can always rely on it being open. You meet friends, get a drink, get a bite to eat. There wasn't even a restaurant open in Wellfleet on certain days of the week, and I thought that was unacceptable. The ones that weren't open would close down for several months, even though they have year-round liquor licenses.

We're just trying to survive, and it's tough.

How do you find staff?

It's a challenge. I thought it was going to be a little bit easier in the winter. Finding servers is fairly easy. The kitchen staff's a little bit more of a challenge because we're trying to dovetail into the crazy summer season where we need to basically double our staff volume. But you need to have this core group, and you don't want to burn out the core group, either.

We've had a couple people move back, who went off and worked in the city and come back. Maybe they're getting married, or they're trying to settle down, have kids. We try to provide that opportunity — letting people work five days and not seven days. We're going to culinary schools, we're going to job fairs, trying to pull people out of cities. You've got to turn over every rock you can.

What's the Cape like in January? Who's your customer base?

More or less anyone who walks in the door, we know. It's reflective of the Outer Cape demographics. The majority of those folks are 60 to 80. There are some younger kids out here. We're trying to draw them in a little bit more in the winter. We do see them, but not as much as we do in the summer.

Basically, in the summer, everyone's coming out and they want to party. If it's older people, their family's here, so they're bringing their kids in.

How has the Cape changed over the years, good and bad?

It's tough to say what's good and what's bad, but I will say that we've definitely become more mainstream, definitely the Outer Cape. You go somewhere in the world, and you'll see someone with a Beachcomber sweatshirt.

You know, my brother and I were founding members of the OysterFest, and it's funny because when we first started that, the goal was to kind of extend the season a little bit. There was a lot of resistance in town to that, and at the time, I didn't really understand why. Now, I totally get it: All right, you guys have had your fun. Go home, because this is where we live.

We saw this as an opportunity to provide a service in this town, which I think we did with our restaurants early on. I think we helped grow this town to where it is now, whether you love it or hate it. But it has provided a ton of jobs. It's brought a tremendous amount of tax income to this town, but again, it's definitely changed the town.

The Cape in general is a relatively very small spot, and as Metro Boston grows, they're all coming here. This is where everyone goes. It's starting to be the Hamptons. Some of it is ridiculous. What we don't like to see are houses being bought and then torn down. These giant houses are coming up here, and I'm not in favor of that.

Another reason I bought the Wicked is because it's one of the oldest buildings in town. It's from 1750, maybe earlier, and respecting the historical resonance of these places is near and dear to me.

Where did you love to eat on the Cape growing up?

There was this place called Uncle Frank's, which was this little doughnut shop. It was right next to the pier, run by this guy who unfortunately died in a tragic accident in the late '90s, something like that. He's pouring coffee out of a coffee pot, counter service, bringing in doughnuts, making egg sandwiches in a toaster. I wouldn't say it was a culinary masterpiece. It was about the ambiance. You knew everyone there. And there used to be a place, The Busted Shutter, up in Truro, which was just a fried clam shack, basically. And Jack's Gas. It used to sell frozen Milky Ways.

I miss my grandmother's strawberry rhubarb pie and her bluefish that we just caught. There was a great place in Provincetown called Café Edwige. That was my date spot.

Where will we find you eating with your family now?

I go to Sal's Place quite a bit when out with friends. And the Squealing Pig is a great bar. You can get a good burger and a beer. That's in Provincetown as well. And Chach is another place in Provincetown, a breakfast and brunch place. I would probably say that's one of the best places I've eaten around here in a long time. That's legit.

What's the biggest misconception about the Cape?

You know, when people ask me: What do you do in the winter? Well, I have a family, I put [my kids] on a school bus every day, and we try to survive. We go to work every day. The biggest misconception is that it just shuts down, and we lock ourselves in our house for six months, and no one does anything.

Wellfleet is a very special place. We are very thankful to live where we live. It's 80 percent national park. There are trails that aren't marked, and we ride bikes, we walk, we go on hikes, and it's amazing. A ton of people come in the winter, too, because of the beauty of that isolation and starkness.

What food do you hate?

I am not a big bitter person. Endive: I really can't stand it. I wish I did like that stuff, but I really don't. And I hate processed food. Americans are used to that, and that's kind of the standard. When we try to use amazing products, sometimes they can't even tell the difference, and it's very frustrating.

For example?

Yellow cheese.

I was just talking to a friend the other day about how much we love Ro-Tel and Velveeta. But I understand and respect your opinion.

I just think that there's such a good, simple alternative, which is real cheese. It doesn't cost that much more.

What's the right way to eat an oyster?

Eat one plain first, and then put something on it. And, if you do put something on it, you don't need very much of it. A drop of anything is going to change the profile dramatically. You'll never taste the crazy notes, grassiness and the brininess and the creaminess if you put [too much] on it.

Interview was edited and condensed.
