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SPRING AWAKENING



WITH BICOASTAL CRUSTACEANS AND CATCHES, CLARK'S
OYSTER BAR MAKES A SPLASH IN MONTECITO

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34.2° N / 199.4° W

If your sailor (and foodie) instincts serve you right, you'll find yourself at these coordinates—also known as Clark's Oyster Bar. Bringing the "coast" to Coast Village Road, Clark's fourth location is the first to grace the West Coast—blending the best of California, its countrywide predecessors, and beyond.

Though my vessel is my Volkswagen and my crew is my best friend, we're lucky enough to arrive at the oceanic establishment. While it's January in Santa Barbara, I feel transported to a sparkling summer's day on the Mediterranean Sea. Ornate cerulean tiles and bold golden accents pop from the walls, illuminating the Jeff Shelton designed space. The hostess—and the fish in the tank behind her—welcome us in, and our typical Wednesday is now an occasion in this nautical nook.

Clark's boasts a seamless indoor-outdoor dining experience true to the spirit of Santa Barbara living. We instinctively opt to sit outside to enjoy the gorgeous afternoon—we'll sit inside when we come back for dinner. Yes, I've already decided I'll be back. Basking in the sun and toasting our drinks—a refreshing glass of Sancerre and quenching cucumber, citrus, and mint Ceybon Spritz—we watch the day-to-day happenings of Coast Village Road.

As we people-watch, a tall, easygoing man approaches our table. He introduces himself as Larry McGuire, one of the partners of MML Hospitality, overseeing Clark's locations in Austin, Aspen, and Houston. While I'm sure he's a busy man, he slows time and brings sincerity to his brief moment with us. He and the entire staff embody the Southern hospitality of Clark's predecessors, and their warmth is truly a testament to the chain's ability to adapt to any city while staying true to its origins.



MUSSELS & CLAMS IN
WHITE WINE & FINE HERBS

As Larry returns to his post, our server presents us with Clark's Oyster Bar's namesake oysters. At her recommendation, we decided to try the Honey Drop and Beau Soleil, both small-to-medium oysters hailing from Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. Clark's offers plenty of enticing land-fare, but it just felt *right* to dive headfirst into the seafood offerings.

Resting on a bed of crisp ice and served with horseradish, cocktail sauce, mignonette, and lemon, my best friend a (self-proclaimed) seafood connoisseur takes the lead and concocts the perfect bite—or slurp, rather (while oysters are a delicacy, they aren't elegant!). I follow and am pleasantly surprised at the refreshing combination of briny, sweet, and savory flavors, and the Honey Drop has converted me into an oyster fan. However, I may be an even bigger fan of the homemade sourdough, which they ferment for three days to create the perfect pillowy loaf.

Branching out from bread, our table's next catch is the Oak Grilled Spanish Octopus. This dish is our unexpected star of the day, and surprisingly as tasty as it is beautifully plated atop Fresno chiles and olives. The maroon tentacles are perfectly smoky and chewy, and there isn't a drop left of the spicy bay leaf aioli that complements the charred cephalopod. Even better, torn sourdough croutons provide the perfect crunch (and excuse for me to keep eating Clark's beloved bread).

Our not-so-light lunch is complete after the Lobster Roll, a Clark's and East Coast lunchtime favorite. The elevated sandwich consists of succulent lobster resting on a bed of crisp Bibb lettuce and a buttery roll, alongside a mountain of fries that seem to defy physics with how thin and light they are. Somehow, Clark's fresh and quality ingredients make eating a substantial dish feel like a breath of fresh air.

We linger on our way out, soaking in the details, admiring the seaside mural, gleaming bar, and vintage photos while planning our orders for our next visit. Once again, Clark's has left us feeling the best of the easygoing West Coast, the nautical charm of the East Coast, and the comfort of Southern hospitality. With oceanic offerings perfect for any newcomers testing the waters, and delicious enough for any seafood savant, Clark's is truly a catch for Montecito.*

“Somehow, Clark's *fresh and quality ingredients* make eating a substantial dish feel like *a breath of fresh air.*”

