

# All in the Family

Executive Chef James Overbaugh turns a fascination with the familiar into extraordinary fare. BY LISA MATTE



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New England may be known as a bastion of Yankee tradition, but James Overbaugh's family didn't let that stand in the way of their quest to discover the flavors of the world.

"My earliest inspirational memory is of my grandfather cooking Chinese food in an old and battered metal wok; keep in mind that my grandfather was of English descent and a tried-and-true New Englander," recalls Overbaugh, executive chef at The Peninsula Beverly Hills. "I remember being fascinated and thrilled by the experience of flavors."

"He was very experimental, a trait I believe I inherited from him," says Overbaugh. "By the way, I still have and use the wok."

Overbaugh, who began cooking in hotel kitchens at the age of 15, says his culinary style has evolved constantly in the intervening years.

"When I first started, I was focused on trying new ingredients," he says. "While I still uncover new ingredients, I'm far more focused now on finding new ways to make familiar ingredients exciting."

The award-winning chef, who puts his philosophy to the plate at The Peninsula Beverly Hills, agreed to share a couple of his favorite recipes.

## OYSTERS OVERBAUGH — SPICY BAKED OYSTERS WITH HORSE-RADISH-PARSNIP PURÉE AND SPINACH-LEMON CREAM Serves 6

Hamma Hamma oysters are named for Washington's Hamma Hamma River that drains from the eastern flanks of the Olympic Mountains into Hood Canal, a saltwater fjord that forms an arm of Puget Sound. Its clean, cold waters give the oysters a distinctive briny flavor, firm meat and mild finish.

### For the oysters:

24 Hamma Hamma oysters

Wash and shuck oysters. Return to shells. Reserve until ready to plate.

### For the horseradish-parsnip purée:

1 pound parsnips, peeled and chopped

Whole milk, to cover parsnips

1 shallot, diced

2 black peppercorns

1 bay leaf

½ cup fresh horseradish

½ cup sour cream

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

Salt and pepper, to taste

Place the parsnips in a saucepot and cover with whole milk. Make a sachet by combining the diced shallot, peppercorns and bay leaf in a cheesecloth bag. Place the sachet in the saucepot with the parsnips and milk. Simmer until the parsnips are very tender. Remove the sachet and drain. Put the cooked parsnips in a blender and add the horseradish, sour cream and lemon zest. Purée until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper; place in blast chiller.

### For the spinach-lemon cream:

1 shallot, sliced

1 clove garlic, minced

1 tablespoon butter

¼ cup white wine

½ cup cream

½ pound spinach

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Salt and pepper, to taste

In a saucepan, sweat the shallot and garlic in butter until they are tender. Deglaze with the white wine. Reduce until the liquid evaporates; add cream. Bring the mixture to a simmer. Pack the spinach and lemon juice into a blender. Pour the hot cream mixture over the spinach. Purée until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Strain and chill until ready to plate.

**For the lemon-Tabasco sauce:**

- ¼ cup oyster liqueur*
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice*
- ¼ cup Tabasco*

Combine all ingredients and reserve until ready to plate.

**For the panko crust:**

- 2 cups panko breadcrumbs*
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese*

Combine the breadcrumbs and cheese in a food processor and grind until the mixture becomes a fine powder.

**For the rock salt garnish (not to be eaten):**

- 2 quarts rock salt*
- 20 pieces star anise*
- ½ cup pink peppercorns*
- 1 cup fancy pickling spice*

Combine all ingredients and reserve until ready to plate.

**PRESENTATION:** Place small amount of parsnip purée in bottom of each oyster shell and top with oyster meat. Top with spinach-lemon cream and bake at 450 degrees for 12–15 minutes. Remove from oven and top the oysters with panko crust. Place the oyster in a salamander until golden brown. Just before serving, drizzle with lemon-Tabasco sauce. Sprinkle the rock salt garnish on each of 6 plates. Place 4 oysters on each plate.

## **TRUFFLE MACARONI AND CHEESE WITH BLACK TRUFFLES, HEN OF THE WOODS MUSHROOMS AND PARMIGIANO-REGGIANO**

*Serves 6*

This new version of mac 'n' cheese is made with hen of the woods mushrooms. Also known as maitake mushrooms, they are a dark brownish-gray with rich flavor. The name is said to come from the fact that their shape vaguely resembles the tail feathers of a hen.

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil*
- 2 tablespoons Plugrá butter*
- 8 hen of the woods mushrooms*



- ¼ cup minced garlic*
- ¼ cup minced shallots*
- 1 cup white wine*
- 1 cup chicken stock*
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme*
- 3 cups heavy cream*
- 4 cups cooked elbow macaroni*
- 1 ounce summer truffles, sliced*
- 2 cups Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese*
- 4 tablespoons truffle oil*
- 4 tablespoons chives, chopped*
- Fleur de Sel*

Combine olive oil and butter in a sauté pan. Add the mushrooms, garlic and shallots; sweat until tender. Deglaze with white wine; add chicken stock and thyme. Add cream to make a sauce. Blanch the macaroni and toss it into the cream-based sauce. Finish with truffles, freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (reserving some for garnish) and truffle oil. Season to taste. Garnish with chopped chives, grated Parmigiano-Reggiano and Fleur de Sel. ■■■

**THE PENINSULA  
BEVERLY HILLS**

9882 S. Santa Monica Blvd.  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
tel 310 551 2888

[peninsula.com](http://peninsula.com)