playful, to engage our culinary imaginations, and to craft our own variations. *Wild Flavors* is imbued with a sense of generosity that includes readers in an intimate conversation with kindred spirits and invites us to share in the simple pleasures of gardening, harvesting, food preparation, and shared meals.

—Gregory Gould, Albuquerque, NM

**Oyster Culture**

Gwendolyn Meyer and Doreen Schmid

Petaluma, CA: Cameron + Company, 2011 144 pp. Illustrations. $19.95 (paperback)

A collaborative effort between photographer Gwendolyn Meyers and writer/curator Doreen Schmid, *Oyster Culture* is a kind of love letter to California’s Tomales Bay region and the briny bivalves that flourish there. Rather than an early blushone romance, however, the book reflects a mature and abiding love for this rugged, beautiful place and the cuisine it inspires. Both Meyers and Schmid are longtime California residents, and their intimate sense of Northern California permeates the book. While ultimately a coffee table book (with scant text scattered among pages of photographs and recipes), *Oyster Culture* accomplishes what it sets out to do: It captures a moment in time within a unique food industry.

The book begins with a primer on the history of oyster farming in the region, which began in the San Francisco Bay in the nineteenth century. The industry relocated north once mud runoff from gold mining had smothered the oyster beds and trains appeared to transport the shellfish out of the otherwise remote coastal area of Tomales. The book also touches on a more recent history through its timeline of proposed developments in West Marin and the conservation movement that first took shape in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Oyster Culture* also provides readers with an up-close look at modern oyster production. Every one of these bivalves starts its life in warm laboratories before entering the chilly bay waters as “oyster seed.” From that point of origin, Schmid and Meyer illustrate the lifecycle of the shellfish and detail the approaches that the area oyster farms take. Tomales Bay Oyster Company uses a bottom bag method, for instance, while the popular Hog Island grows their oysters in bags.

*Oyster Culture* was published before the much-contested decision by the National Park Service not to renew the lease for the 100-year-old Drakes Bay Oyster Company’s in 2012. Taken after the fact, the book may serve as an accidental elegy to the company and its important role in the estuary.

Beyond its researched account of the industry and its methods, *Oyster Culture* is also a book of lyrical reflection on this raw food. “Eating a fresh oyster is like tasting the entire ocean,” Schmid writes at one point. But the phrase also hints at two larger principles: oysters, as filter feeders, are necessary to clean the waters they inhabit and are, moreover, a keystone species in a rapidly shifting marine environment.

On one of *Oyster Culture’s* last pages, Schmid describes for her readers the dangers oyster farmers face as increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere enters the oceans, as marine waters grow more acidic, and as oyster shells thus fail to develop properly. She writes: “Shellfish have survived for millions of years by adapting to environmental changes but may not be able to do so quickly enough this time. This does not bode well for the entire food chain, as shellfish are a primary food source linking fish, whales, seabirds, and humans” (p.139).

This dark side of the oyster’s story is folded in to what is otherwise a celebration of the mollusk and the aquatic and culinary cultures it inspires. Although it is clear that exploring this element further would have meant a very different book, its brief appearance adds an element of urgency to *Oyster Culture*. Ultimately, the book implores readers to seize the day (and the oyster), while we can.

—Twilight Greenaway

**From the Jewish Heartland: Two Centuries of Midwest Foodways**

Ellen F. Steinberg and Jack H. Prost


*From the Jewish Heartland* tells a history of Jews in the American Midwest through the food that they grew, cooked, sold, ate, and wrote about. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the authors explore “the state, shape, change, and evolution of Midwestern Jewish cuisine through time.” As in other frontier Jewish communities, Jews in the Midwest in the early nineteenth century struggled to locate kosher food on their journeys westward, and the book details the meagre choices they faced: to carry their own food, to hope for food they could gather or purchase along the way, or to stop at the few kosher hotels or boarding houses that sprang up along the most popular routes. As Jews began to create small frontier communities in the Midwest, they first searched for a rabbi and second for a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) so that they could be guaranteed a steady source of kosher meat. Delving into


engaging in current conversations about Jews and food in America. Finally, aside from including local ingredients here and there, it is difficult to determine what exactly is distinctive about Midwestern Jewish cuisine. The majority of it resembles the foods eaten by Jewish immigrants across America. In sum, From the Jewish Heartland offers some interesting details and engaging stories about the foodways of Midwestern Jews, but unfortunately does not embed these within a larger argument about the importance of this narrative for American Jewish or American food history.

—Andrea Most, Department of English, University of Toronto

A Year in the Village of Eternity: The Lifestyle of Longevity in Campodimele, Italy
Tracey Lawson
New York: Bloomsbury, 2011 374 pp. Illustrations. $30.00 (cloth)

Tracey Lawson’s contribution to the burgeoning genre of pack-up-your-life-and-move memoir is fueled not by a failed romance or a sobering health scare, but by her avowed interest in understanding “the role of food as preventative medicine” (p.6). The result is a loving, if not probing, conflation of three years’ observation of the rhythms of the slow food lifestyle in a small mountaintop comune perched halfway between Rome and Naples—a place of fewer than seven hundred inhabitants that styles itself Il Paese della Longevità (“The Village of Longevity”).

The residents of Campodimele enjoy remarkable life expectancies: roughly one-sixth of Campomelani are older than seventy-five, and they can on average look to live past ninety-five. (This is a place where even the bread does not go stale for a week!) Lawson explores little of the science behind the hyper-Mediterranean diet, but the virtues of leguminous proteins, antioxidant rich vegetables, olive oil, and red wine are perhaps, at this point, sufficiently self-evident. Instead, the episodic approach of her narrative—a chapter for each month—emphasizes the “value of living a seasonal life” (p.12), and centers around highlights of the harvest: olives, artichokes, amarena cherries, scalogni shallots, strawberry grapes.

The Campomelani are committed locavores: most residents grow—or forage—the bulk of their own food, from the obvious (tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant) to, given the small scale of production, the surprising (olives to press into their own oil, wheat to grind into their own pasta flour). When Lawson asks one woman what foods she has to buy, the reply...