



FRIED GARLIC



IQF OYSTERS

# Hornbill Asian Market

By Danny Fairchild

An Asian grocery is a darned handy thing to have in a community, the reason for which should be obvious: Not only is Asia an entire friggin' continent on the face of the earth, it's the LARGEST friggin' continent on the face of the earth! If you have to pick ONE continent on which to devote an entire grocery store to, it has to be Asia or you're messing up. And just to be clear because geography is

not one of our cultural strong suits: India is part of Asia. Oh, yeah. So listen up.

Here in Dubuque, we're lucky enough to have Hornbill Asian Market. (Hold for applause)

When I'm going grocery shopping (like REALLY grocery shopping not just "Oh, we need milk. Anything else you can think of off the top of your head before I run?"), Hornbill is the stop that I look forward to most. Because it makes it fun. It makes it a game of, "Ooooh! What could I do with that!" Or, "Ooooh! I didn't know that existed. That solves literally all my problems. No, seriously. ALL my problems, both personal and peripheral, including body odor because I want to smell like THIS now." And plus there's staples that are just better to get there. When COVID had us thinking post-apocalyptically, my stockpile of rice and beans came from Hornbill Asian Market. By the way, anybody got a good mung bean recipe?

I love Hornbill Asian Market, and I'd like to share that love with you by giving you my TOP FIVE things I like to get at Hornbill.

Not included in this list, but you need to know: They have all your Asian candy needs covered, and if you watch their social media accounts, you can get in on live blue crabs. I've never been able to thread that needle, but someday...

## 1. Soup Dumplings

If you've never experienced soup dumplings, prepare for a paradigm shift. They look like innocent little steamed dumplings. Aww, how cute. Almost a shame to eat. Maybe a little droopy around the edges like it's filled with a rich, savory gingerly broth. But that can't possibly be. But then you bite into them and suddenly your tongue is flooded with a rich, savory, gingerly broth. Followed by the filling getting all up in the mix. We're talking chicken. Or we're talking pork. You pretty much HAVE

to use those soup spoons you find at Asian restaurants to eat them cleanly. Luckily, Hornbill reasonably sells them, AND I have other uses for them. Stay tuned.

These frozen soup dumplings certainly aren't a replacement for the bundled treasures of flavor that made you mavens fall in love with soup dumplings, wherever you first got them, but it scratches the itch. It gets that monkey off your back for a while.

## 2. Fried Garlic and/or Shallots

You know those crispy fried onions that disappear off the grocery shelves once it's time to make green bean casserole? What if I told you that you live in a world... in a community... where you could get that same crispy fried taste and texture... in garlic form? Or in shallot form? Other forms too, but these are the ones I ALWAYS have on hand. I know it's sacrilege to screw with the canonical recipe for green bean casserole, but friends, if



RED BOAT SALT

you want to just knock the dust off that ol' relic, then adding a few crispy shallots and/or garlic is the perfect way to do that. I'm not saying I've done that, mind you. I certainly didn't add some shallots to the top of the green bean casserole I was charged with making for Thanksgiving. Absolutely not. Some things are sacred. BUT! If a world exists where that did happen, I can confidently say nobody complained.

Of course, the most major implication is with salads. I can't think of a green salad that wouldn't be improved by sprinkling fried garlic and/or shallots on it like bacon bits. They've made me eat more green salads. Which means they've likely saved my life. They could save yours, too.

### 3. IQF Oysters

IQF, if you don't know, stands for "Individual Quick Freezing." They individually freeze things super fast to retain freshness so you don't have to chisel them apart.

The five-pound bag of chicken breasts you find wherever chicken is sold? IQF, baby.

Did you know they sold individually quick frozen oysters? I didn't. Not until Hornbill came into my life and changed it for the better. Let's think this through. IQF retains as much freshness as possible. So much so that I probably prefer IQF seafood to fresh seafood. We live in and around Dubuque, friends. Frozen fresh is honestly nearly as good as fresh and certainly fresher than the fresh we get around here and I'll brook no argument.

Afraid of shucking oysters? Worry not. They're already shucked. No shell at all. But what about the liqueur, you ask? What of the luscious liquid that comes with housing one of those flavorful bastards right down the gullet? Would you believe that the liqueur is frozen right along with the oysters? True story. So here's what I do:

I take the stainless steel Asian-style soup spoons that Hornbill sells and use

THOSE as the half-shell for my oysters. They survive the broiler easily, which is how I like to cook them, and that liqueur has a "shell" to reserve it. My son and I house at least six oysters a piece on a semi-regular basis. Because they also happen to be cheaper than any other place around here that even sells oysters.

Consider how this changes oyster stew. You HAVE to be careful cooking oyster stew otherwise the milk curdles and separates and becomes something no one wants. These beauties are essentially oyster ice cubes, liqueur and all. Stew getting too hot? Add more oysters. Yes, oysters. The very thing oyster stew needs to be called oyster stew.

### 4. Paratha

You love the flatbread known as naan, yes? Of course you do. South Asia knows their flatbreads! So versatile. You can even make a personal pizza on one. Do it. DO IT!

But naan is not my favorite South Asian flatbread. That honor goes to paratha, and you can buy some frozen and ready for the skillet. To be fair, you can also get all the naan you want at Hornbill, but this isn't about you. This is about me. And I want paratha.

How to describe a paratha? It's like a pinwheel of fried bread. It's made by rolling out the dough and then rolling it up kind of like a cinnamon roll, but then squishing it and rolling it flat. Then you cook it in a skillet until both sides are golden brown. The result is a foldable-yet-flaky flatbread that just kind of pulls apart from the outside in. It's so satisfying to pull it apart and eat it with your favorite Indian dish. Nom. Your cast iron skillet is perfect for this frozen version. You definitely don't need anything nonstick.

### 5. Red Boat Salt

If you've followed this far, then you certainly deserve to know about this beauty of an ingredient. Red Boat is probably the most popular brand of fish sauce and, in my opinion, for good reason. Nothing adds a punch... a freaking haymaker of umami flavor like fish sauce. It's made from anchovies, and therefore, the saltiness is MSG all the way. But last I knew, that whole MSG scare was sensationalized and completely wrong, so calm down.

But with Red Boat salt, you can add that umami salty flavor without adding more liquid to a recipe. Let me tell you a story.

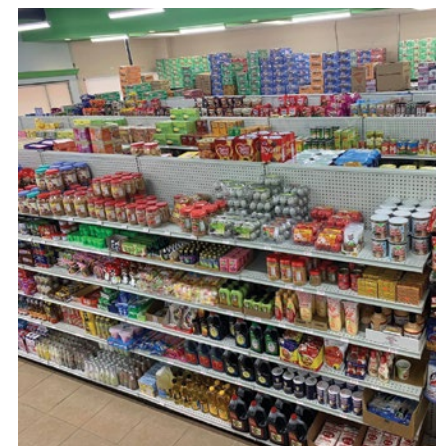
One night, I was sitting at home with some wavy potato chips but no chip dip in which to dip my chips. Sad, right? In this situation, I usually just mix taco seasoning with sour cream and go to town. But I suddenly had a thought. "Taco seasoning is a strong flavor. French onion is a strong flavor. What I'm looking for here... stick

with me on this, Fairchild, is a strong flavor, preferably one that is salty as all hell."

Then I remembered: Red Boat salt.

I started quite gingerly. Honestly, one jar or Red Boat salt might just be a lifetime supply. Maybe a half-teaspoon to a quarter-cup of sour cream. I recommend you start there. Look, this isn't a dialed-in recipe, this is the start of a revolution. Start with that much then add more Red Boat to taste. Don't overdo it. It's easy to overdo. Got a lime? Throw some lime zest into the mix. Got garam masala? Do it. Again, I have not dialed in this South Asian inspired potato chip dip recipe. But I have a proof of concept. No go forth.

So there you have it! Hornbill Asian Market is a wonderful place and deserves to be a stop on your shopping excursions. Every time I go there, I discover something else I have to try. Wanna try quail? You can get it at Hornbill. Want to cook a whole octopus? Hornbill's there. Want just about any kind of Asian noodle you can think of? Hornbill, fools. Hornbill. ■



### Hornbill Asian Market

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[HORNBILLONLINESTORE.COM](http://HORNBILLONLINESTORE.COM)

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