

HOLIDAY DOUBLE ISSUE

Southern Living®

DECEMBER 2023

A Christmas To Remember

195 Recipes and Ideas for a Joyful Season



The Southern Living Redbird Cake
PLUS
A Story by Fannie Flagg

P.130



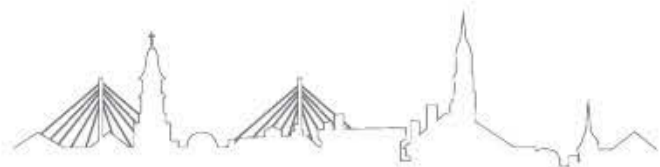
How To Holiday Like a Southerner

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Decking the Halls With Magnolia

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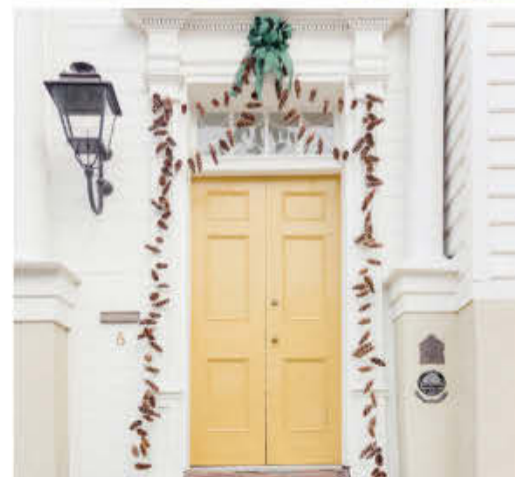
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 My Norwegian Holiday

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SATURDAY 12/9
 Christmas on Cherry Lane

SUNDAY 12/10
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FRIDAY 12/15
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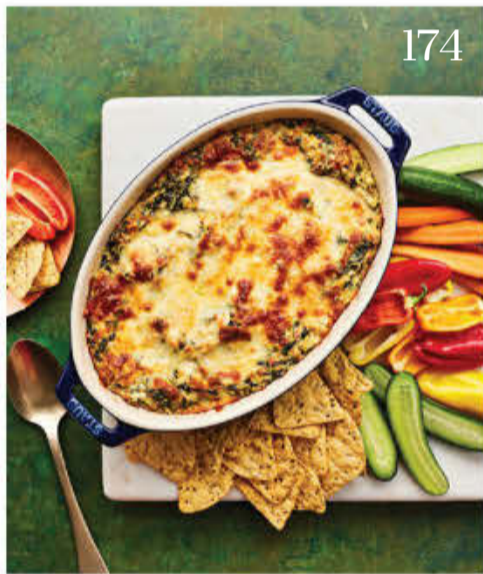
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A Letter From the Grinch

Trying not to sweat the small stuff



Phoebe
decorating
our tree
last year

JUST THE OTHER DAY, I suggested stringing Christmas lights on the Japanese maple in our front yard this year. My daughter, Phoebe, shot back, “Wow, such a festive idea coming from the Grinch.”

I’m not sure how I earned that moniker, but I suppose I do get a little cranky when it comes to certain holiday traditions—the rising cost of Christmas trees, the strands of bulbs that always short out, the stress of travel plans. I start hearing “Carol of the Bells” during commercials and feel like a panic attack is coming on. I also get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of decorations and other paraphernalia crammed into our basement storage room. My wife, Susan, doesn’t like to throw things away, so we have boxes stuffed with wrapping paper and bows, bins with more ornaments than we could ever use, and several Christmas tree

stands (okay, those are my fault) plus wreaths, candles, bowls, picture frames, and a nutcracker figurine for almost every room in the house.

There’s an intense annual debate about when to drag out all this stuff. If it were up to Phoebe, we’d have the whole house decorated the day after Thanksgiving. One reason she calls me the Grinch is that I insist on waiting a week or two. I need a break after Turkey Day and want the temperature to drop a few degrees (sometimes a fruitless hope in Alabama). We usually buy our tree from some North Carolina growers who come to town with a truckload of Fraser firs, and I love wandering the fragrant rows on a cool night when you can feel Christmas around the corner. Of course, this approach occasionally backfires. Last year, when we showed up at the lot on December 6, they were almost sold out, so we ended up with the skinniest little Charlie Brown tree you’ve ever seen. As I wrote the farmer a big check, he told me that the natural-looking ones are very much in vogue—but Phoebe was not impressed.

This holiday season, I intend to make it up to her. Despite my reluctance to start decorating when we’re still eating turkey sandwiches, I’m going to find the biggest tree I can squeeze through the front door. If the night follows tradition, Susan will tell me to keep adding lights until every square inch is ablaze. We’ll haul up half a dozen plastic bins from the basement, put on *A Motown Christmas*, set up a ladder in the living room, and try to hang every ornament we have (some of which date back to the seventies). I probably won’t get around to dressing up that Japanese maple, but a Grinch can only do so much. Merry Christmas.

Sid Evans, Editor in Chief
sid@southernliving.com



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Over the years, I’ve heard from a lot of readers who discovered *Southern Living* thanks to receiving it as a present. “My mother gives it to me every Christmas,” they’ll tell me, or “I’ll never forget when my aunt got me a subscription.” I’m biased, of course, but what better way is there to share your love of the South? We hope you’ll treat a friend or family member to a full year of *Southern Living* for 90% off the newsstand price. \$7; southernliving.com/share



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This season, the editors from *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Southern Living*, *Real Simple*, *The Spruce*, *MyDomaine* and *Martha Stewart* are coming together for an immersive experience that will bring the best of our holiday expertise to life. Whether you're looking to spice up the festivities through unique recipes, deck the halls like a pro, or find the perfect gift for everyone on your list, our first-ever **Virtual Holiday Home** has something in store for you.

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Southern Living

REAL SIMPLE

the
spruce

MYDOMAINE

martha
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WHAT WE'RE LOVING,
SHARING, AND CELEBRATING

In Season



FAMILY TRADITIONS

The Memory Maker

Craig Melvin's mom on lights, trees, and mac and cheese

PROP STYLING: BUFFY HARGETT MILLER; HAIR AND MAKEUP: MARY BETH WETZEL



CRAIG MELVIN got his love for Christmas from his mother. “When we were growing up, my mom did everything to make the holidays extra special for us, and I’ve been trying to do the same for my own kids,” says the *Today* show anchor; journalist; and Columbia, South Carolina, native. Betty Jo Melvin makes a ritual of decorating her home every year, starting on the day after Thanksgiving “and not a minute after,” she adds. Bowls filled with fruits, nuts, and peppermints are set on tabletops, and red and pink poinsettias are displayed throughout every room, a festive touch she learned from her own mother. But the shining stars are the two artificial trees wrapped in strands of clear twinkling lights, one trimmed with an assortment of homemade and vintage baubles, the other adorned with her beloved collection of angel ornaments. “The trees have always been an elaborate production. Mom would leave them up until April if she could,” says Craig. Betty Jo doesn’t disagree: “I would keep them up forever. There’s something about those trees that brings me a sense of peace.”

Betty Jo was born in Cayce, South Carolina. By the time she turned 10, her family had moved across the river to Columbia, and she has called it home ever since. She’s the eldest of four children, the first in her family to graduate college, a retired teacher, an avid cook and baker, and the

memory maker for her two sons, Craig and Ryan. “When I was a kid, I was lucky to have aunts, uncles, cousins, and my two grandmothers all around us in Columbia,” says Craig. “We could bounce from house to house and celebrate with everyone. That’s what makes Christmastime so unforgettable for me. It was magical.”

And it wouldn’t be Christmas—or any Melvin gathering—without Betty Jo’s famous macaroni and cheese (recipe at right). “Mom’s mac and cheese is the official family side dish. If someone can’t attend a get-together, they’ll call ahead to request a plate be set aside,” says Craig. Like many Southern recipes, this classic was passed down from her own mother, Florence, who would prepare it every Sunday when Betty Jo was younger. Over the years, she has put her own signature spin on the decadent side by adding more types of cheeses than the original, and she admits it’s definitely a crowd-pleaser. “I always get in trouble if there’s not enough!” says Betty Jo, laughing.

The holidays look a little different these days for Craig, who now resides in Connecticut with his wife, Lindsay Czarniak, and their two children (Delano, 9, and Sybil, 7), but they always try to make it to Columbia to visit family and friends, catch the Lights at Riverbanks Zoo, and create new traditions in his hometown. No matter where they’re celebrating on December 25, you can count on seeing Betty Jo’s macaroni and cheese on the table.

“Mom’s mac and cheese is the official family side dish.”

Betty Jo Melvin’s Macaroni and Cheese

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 10 MIN.

SERVES 10

- 6 Tbsp. butter, cubed, plus more for baking dish
- 12 oz. uncooked elbow macaroni (about 3 cups)
- 1 (12-oz.) can evaporated milk
- 1 cup plus 2 Tbsp. whole milk
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1½ oz. processed cheese (such as Velveeta), cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 11½ oz. pre-shredded sharp Cheddar cheese (about 3 cups), divided
- 4½ oz. pre-shredded mild Cheddar cheese (about 1½ cups), divided

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Grease a 13- x 9-inch baking dish with butter, and set aside.
2. Prepare macaroni according to package directions for al dente. Drain and transfer to a large bowl.
3. Stir butter into hot macaroni until melted. Stir in evaporated milk, whole milk, and eggs until well combined. Fold in processed cheese, salt, pepper, 2 ½ cups of the sharp Cheddar, and 1 cup of the mild Cheddar.
4. Transfer macaroni mixture to prepared baking dish. Sprinkle evenly with remaining ½ cup each sharp Cheddar and mild Cheddar.
5. Bake, uncovered, in preheated oven until golden and bubbly, 45 to 50 minutes. Serve immediately.

Rethink Your Scheme

A zingy burst of blue freshens up the traditional red-and-green palette.



ALL SET

Down to the Details

Houston designer Jessica Pearsall brings top-notch cheer to a trio of well-dressed tables

“WHENEVER WE HAD people over, I would always make a point of creating a beautiful atmosphere,” says Jessica Pearsall of her early forays into hosting. “I wanted everyone to feel like they had an experience when they came to my house.” An interior designer by trade, she realized quickly that she had a gift for setting a spectacular table and that others were interested in learning how to do the same. So she launched Ivory and Noire, an online entertaining resource that also offers in-person workshops.

Pearsall’s guiding ethos is simple: Pay attention to the small

stuff. “Besides your effort to make your home look nice, it’s all the little additions, like the posy of flowers on a plate or a handwritten place card, that help it feel very personal,” she says. “Those are what make people think, ‘Wow. She considered everything and really cares about me!’ ” There’s no better time for these details than during the holidays, notes the entertaining pro. “They give us the opportunity to connect and come together.” Here, Pearsall applies her thoughtful approach to the season, arranging three tablescapes that’ll appeal to any kind of host.



SPIN UP A CLASSIC

“I love to use a mix of old and new pieces,” says the designer of her formula for place settings. She started with a D’Ascoli tablecloth from The Avenue by Lyndsey Zorich. “It feels Christmassy but could be used any time of year,” she notes. Taking cues from its cheery blue stripes, she selected Herend dessert plates and vintage milk glass goblets. Tortoiseshell flatware, wicker place mats, and rattan-wrapped tumblers keep the display approachable. “It’s about adding whimsy to something that could have been stuffy,” she says.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Name cards (with calligraphy by J.Noel Design) and berry sprigs secured to napkins with luxe velvet ribbon make the table feel celebratory.

Credits: Dinner plate; pickardchina.com. Place mat; cabana magazine.com. Vintage goblet; ruedeflorence design.etsy.com



THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Gold party crackers double as place cards, inviting guests to find their seats and have some fun. Rather than penning each name, Pearsall ordered wooden cutouts from Post-Studio Projects and attached one for every setting.

Credits: Charger; replacements.com. Dinner plate; arteitalica.com. Napkin; joanna.buchanan.com. Monogram; inspiringembroidery.etsy.com

ETHEREAL WHITES

The host leaned into a blend of textures to liven up this monochromatic palette, which finds its anchor in a block-printed white-and-gold tablecloth from Katherine Young Home. “I wanted to create a sense of softness,” notes Pearsall, who topped each feathered place mat with a duo of white plates featuring lacelike designs and an embroidered napkin tied with satin ribbon. The delicate flowers (including anemones, tulips, and paperwhites) underscore the setting’s sweetness, preventing the white-on-white scheme from feeling stark or cold.



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Cruise Guide

ARTFUL AND COLLECTED

For this setting, Pearsall reimagined old-faithful holiday reds, layering in bold linens and gold elements for a sparkling scene that steers clear of candy cane cuteness. She wrapped the table in Schumacher's Castanet Embroidery fabric and echoed its handmade feel with wooden chargers that she painted herself. "If you can't find something that's exactly what you want but can get close, don't be afraid to tweak it," says the designer. Indian metal cups, dainty French glassware, and a vibrant arrangement of citrus, cut amaryllis, cappuccino roses, and textured greenery round out the artisan-inspired look.



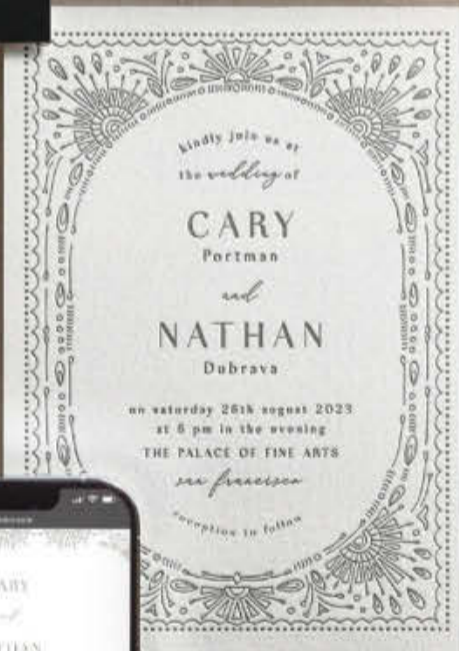
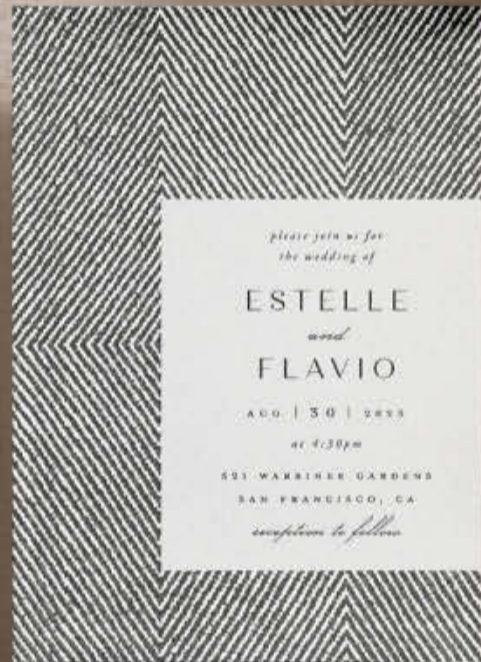
THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Instead of waiting until people are leaving to give out favors, Pearsall sets a small gift box at each spot. With sprigs of greenery and glitzy ribbons, these presents are part of the decor.

Credits: Dinner plate; mottahedeh.com. Salad plate; ballarddesigns.com. Napkin; shoppcb.com. lifestyle.com

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RECIPES: TRICIA MANZANERO STUEDEMAN; FOOD STYLING: CHELSEA ZIMMER; PROP STYLING: KATHLEEN VARNER

Satsuma
Upside-Down
Cake,
page 24

from page 23

Satsuma Upside-Down Cake

Baking spray

- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup granulated sugar, divided
- 8 medium satsumas, divided
- 2 cups bleached cake flour (such as Swans Down)
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- ⅔ cup whole buttermilk, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature, beaten
- ⅓ cup canola oil
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- Whipped cream (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9- x 2-inch round cake pan with baking spray. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper; coat parchment paper evenly with melted butter and ¼ cup of the granulated sugar.

2. Grate zest from satsumas to yield 1 teaspoon; place zest in a large bowl. Peel 6 satsumas, and cut crosswise into ⅜-inch-thick slices; pat slices dry with paper towels. Arrange slices, cut sides down, in prepared pan, covering bottom of pan in a single, even layer and trimming slices as needed to fit.

3. Add flour, brown sugar, baking powder, salt, cloves, and remaining ¾ cup granulated sugar to large bowl with

satsuma zest, whisking until combined and no sugar clumps remain. Juice remaining 2 satsumas to yield ⅓ cup. Whisk in buttermilk, eggs, juice, oil, and vanilla just until combined. Spread batter evenly over satsumas in pan.

4. Bake in preheated oven until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean and cake starts to pull away from sides of pan, 38 to 42 minutes. Let cool in pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Run a knife around edge of cake to loosen; invert onto a serving plate. Serve warm or at room temperature. Top slices with whipped cream, if desired.

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 15 MIN. - SERVES 8 TO 10

GET CREATIVE WITH CITRUS

Take advantage of these sweet Southern gems before their season draws to a close. Add satsuma segments to grain or vegetable salads for a pop of color (they're lovely with bitter greens like radicchio and endive), or blend them into fruit smoothies. You can also roast satsuma halves alongside ham, pork chops, or chicken and then squeeze them over the meat before serving for a bright finish.



Satsuma Paloma

Stir together 4 tsp. granulated sugar, 1 Tbsp. kosher salt, and ½ tsp. chile powder on a small plate. Squeeze juice of 1 satsuma into a small bowl. Dip rim of a glass in juice and then in sugar mixture. Fill glass two-thirds full with ice. Fill a cocktail shaker two-thirds full with ice; add ¼ cup blanco tequila, ¼ cup fresh satsuma juice, 1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice, and 1 Tbsp. light agave nectar. Cover and shake vigorously until chilled, 15 to 30 seconds. Strain into prepared glass, and top with 2 Tbsp. grapefruit-flavored sparkling water. Garnish drink with a satsuma slice.

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 10 MIN. - SERVES 1

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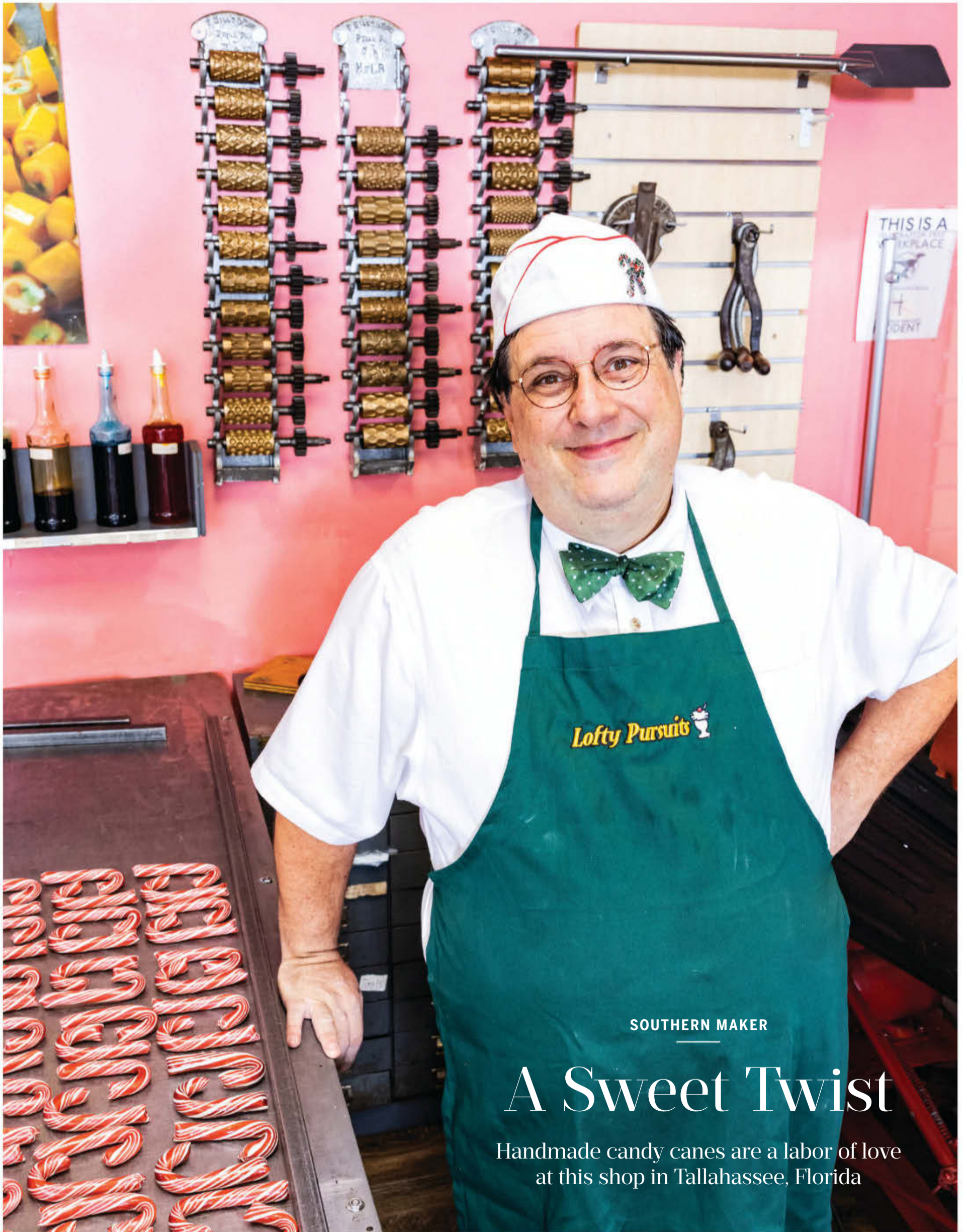
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SOUTHERN MAKER

A Sweet Twist

Handmade candy canes are a labor of love
at this shop in Tallahassee, Florida

G

REGORY COHEN finds himself in an elite group: He is one of the few candymakers across the country who still make their treats by hand. At this time of year, candy canes are the stars of the show. Cohen and his team churn out over 20,000 each holiday season at Lofty Pursuits, his toy shop and old-fashioned soda fountain in Tallahassee that's celebrating its 30th anniversary.

Thirteen years ago, Cohen was inspired by the rock candy that was common in England in the late-1800s and began making hard candies with images in the centers using a cooling table from 1891. He has gone on to acquire a large collection of vintage equipment and considers himself a caretaker of these machines.



Crafting Canes
(Clockwise from left) Owner Gregory Cohen keeps the old methods alive. Treats are made by hand at every step. Classic peppermint is always a big hit.



Lofty Pursuits begins making candy canes around Thanksgiving each year. Every batch, which yields about 300 pieces and weighs nearly 25 pounds, takes approximately two hours from start to finish, including pulling and layering the hot, malleable sugar by hand before rolling and cutting it. Cohen uses a pair of scissors from Ernest Wright, a company that has been hand-crafting shears in Sheffield, England, since 1902. The hardening sugar is then carefully twisted into oversize cane shapes. Once packaged, they're ready to be eaten.

Although his confections are traditional in their production and appearance, they go well beyond the typical peppermint kind. In a Willy Wonka-like fashion, Cohen's pigmented treats come in a wide variety of flavors to please his patrons' palates, like tutti-frutti, cherry, blackberry, spearmint, root beer, blue raspberry, cinnamon, chocolate orange, and citrus mix. He follows customary practices, so the eggnog version features garnet and gold hues, which also happen to be a certain local university's school colors.

When asked what led him to these creations, Cohen says it was "sort of expected" after he developed his image candy, and he appreciates the history of this Christmas standby.

"The Swedish version, called polkagris, dates back to 1859. 'Gris' was slang for candy, and 'polka' referred to the style of dancing, which was pretty popular at the time," says Cohen. "I love the name and that previous makers thought the stripes looked like two people twirling around together."

One thing is for certain: Cohen's imaginative flavors and his old-school process are Christmas traditions worth keeping.

Around Town

Tallahassee has embraced the holiday spirit for centuries. Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto and members of his expedition are believed to have held a Christmas Mass on the site of their winter encampment in the Apalachee capital of Anhaica (in the location of present-day Tallahassee) in 1539. Today, there are plenty of celebrations throughout the city, including a brilliant array of more than 250,000 lights at Dorothy B. Owen Park and family-friendly festivities at Tallahassee Nurseries. The creative window display at Hearth and Soul boutique is always worth a visit. Inside, the store is designed like a home, with a beautifully curated collection of gifts, clothing, furniture, kitchenware, and books.





Let the Good Times Roll

Senior Test Kitchen Pro IVY ODOM bakes up savory pinwheels for breakfast

BY IVY ODOM

GROWING UP, we always had Christmas breakfast at my Nana and Papa's house, and it was an elaborate Southern affair. Nana pulled out her Franciscan Ivy china and coordinating green glassware a week before, gave it all a good polish, and set up everything on a festive tablecloth in the dining room. On the morning of our gathering, while her grandchildren were up early opening presents at their own houses, Nana was hard at work in the kitchen. Her menu was extensive: biscuits *and* yeast rolls, patty *and* link sausages, bacon *and* fried cube steak (with gravy), rice *and* grits—she wanted to make sure everyone had their favorites. Now that these cooking duties have been passed on to my mama and me, we keep most of Nana's menu the same—she'd have a fit if we didn't. But every year, I try to add my own spin on her classics, like a new biscuit recipe, a special gravy, or these Pimiento Cheese Sausage Rolls. Whether you serve them with a pretty fruit salad on your best china or eat them straight from the pan, consider them a hug from my little corner of the South.

Pimiento Cheese Sausage Rolls

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, PLUS 40 MIN. STANDING

SERVES 12

- 1 lb. fresh pizza dough
- 12 oz. hot ground pork sausage
- 4 oz. sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup), plus more for sprinkling
- 4 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 (7-oz.) jar diced pimientos, drained
- 1 Tbsp. grated sweet onion
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- All-purpose flour, for work surface
- Chopped fresh chives, for garnish

1. Let dough stand, covered, at room temperature, until no longer cold to the touch, about

30 minutes. Meanwhile, place sausage, Cheddar, cream cheese, pimientos, onion, and garlic powder in a large bowl. Using your hands or a rubber spatula, mix together until well combined. Cover and chill until ready to use.

2. Preheat oven to 375°F. Roll out dough on a lightly floured work surface, and gently stretch into a 16- x 12-inch rectangle. Using an offset spatula or your hands, spread sausage mixture evenly over dough rectangle, leaving a ½-inch border on each long edge of dough and spreading mixture out fully to shorter edges of dough. Starting with 1 long edge, roll up dough, jelly roll style, to create a log.

Using a serrated knife, cut log crosswise evenly into 12 (about 1 ¼-inch-wide) slices.

3. Lightly grease a 7- x 11-inch ceramic or glass baking dish with cooking spray. Arrange rolls in prepared dish in 4 rows of 3. Sprinkle tops of rolls with desired amount of Cheddar; cover with aluminum foil.

4. Bake in preheated oven for 20 minutes. Remove foil, and continue baking until tops of rolls are golden brown and a thermometer inserted into the thickest portion of the sausage mixture registers 165°F, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven, and let stand 10 minutes. Garnish with chives and serve, or store, covered, in refrigerator up to 3 days.

HOST WITH THE MOST
Things to try when company's coming



ENTERTAINING PICK

These Festive Word Linen Coasters from Georgia-based Dot & Army are a sweet addition to any winter soiree. Embroidered in red or green, they're perfect for cocktail hour or dinnertime. \$26/set of four; dotandarmy.com

PREPPING POINTER

When working with ready-made pizza dough, the temperature matters. Before you begin rolling and stretching it out, let it rest on the counter until it comes to room temperature. This helps it hold its shape without shrinking back.



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WHAT'S IN STORE

Add Some Sparkle

Break out the baubles and toppers—it's time to trim the tree

FINISH IT OFF

- (1) Small Star Bright Tree Topper, \$169; [balsamhill.com](https://www.balsamhill.com) (2) Large Bethlehem Star Beaded Tree Topper, \$129; [balsamhill.com](https://www.balsamhill.com)
(3) Tinsel Star Tree Topper, \$20; [johnderian.com](https://www.johnderian.com) (4) Large 5 Point Star Tree Topper in Antique Gold, \$44; [johnderian.com](https://www.johnderian.com)
(5) Woven Rope Star Tree Topper, \$30; [brookeandlou.com](https://www.brookeandlou.com) (6) Brass Angel Tree Topper, \$60; [crateandbarrel.com](https://www.crateandbarrel.com)
(7) Small Silver Tree Topper, \$35; [johnderian.com](https://www.johnderian.com)



FILL YOUR BRANCHES

(8) Christmas Pickle, \$27; vesselstudio.net (9) Icicle Winter White Ornament Set, \$99/set of 12; balsamhill.com (10) Glass Plume Ornament, \$25 each; lucysmarket.com (11) BH Essentials Mini Mercury Glass Ornament Sets, \$119/set of 24; balsamhill.com (12 & 13) Garden Tomato Ornament, \$14, Nutcracker General Ornament, \$20; oldworldchristmas.com (14) Red Candy Cane Ornament, \$38; johnderian.com (15) Glittered Pinecone Multi Brown Ornament Set, \$32/set of three; brookeandlou.com (16) Retro Bird Ornaments with Tags, \$98/set of five; housesandparties.com

LET'S CELEBRATE

Wrapped With Care

New Orleans designer
Julie Neill spreads joy with
her daughter—and a few
splashes of paint



STYLING: PAGE MULLINS

FOR JULIE NEILL and her daughter, Isabelle, things kick into high gear the day after Thanksgiving. As in many homes, the tree goes up and ornaments are hung, but for this duo, Christmas also means breaking out the paintbrushes. Five years ago, the bespoke-lighting designer decided to make her own gift wrap rather than relying on store-bought stuff. She found that people loved her handiwork as much as the presents inside. “No one was tearing into their packages,” recalls Neill. “They opened each with care so they could take the paper home. Many even framed it like artwork.” Enamored with her mom’s creations, Isabelle requested to make them together the next year. “It’s become our little tradition,” says Neill. “Each time, the design has its own personality. We just have fun and see where the colors take us.”

TOAST TO THE HOSTS
Julie Neill (below left) with her daughter, Isabelle, and her dog, Jack, at home in New Orleans



Create Your Own

Start by rolling out white butcher paper (found at any crafts store) as long as your work surface allows. (Neill suggests positioning a drop cloth or another covering underneath to protect your table or floor.) Cut the section you plan on using, and set aside the remaining paper. “Mix paint with a little bit of water on a palette; then let your brush go on an adventure,” she says. “We don’t take it too seriously and just drip and fling the paint, allowing the water to make movement happen.” Repeat with as many lengths of paper as desired, allowing each to dry before rolling it up. “Don’t worry if the painted sheets look wrinkly. As they dry, they’ll smooth out,” she adds.



Make It a Party

While the home is twirled up for the holidays, Neill and her daughter host an event where they invite friends to share a meal and use the special paper to wrap their own presents. “We always have a tasty menu that Isabelle and I work on together,” says Neill. “We arrange the table with beautiful flowers [in vessels made by Lisa Alpaugh of LiBird Studio], which bring life to the room.”



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James Hardie



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Show Some Character

“When you give someone a gift with a handmade covering, you’re offering them a piece of your heart,” says Neill, who suggests embellishing the wrap to reflect your style. For a more whimsical look, mist the paint while it’s still wet with a spray bottle or lift and tilt the paper to allow the colors to travel around. “This helps it disperse across the page and marbleize,” she says. Once it’s dry, you can use colored pencils to layer in details like swirls and stars or get fancy with gold foil, metallic paint, or glitter.

Focus on the Small Things

“We always like to have a little something unexpected—a decorative twist,” says the designer. Vintage-fabric stockings made by Rebecca Vizard serve as favors at each of the seats. Retro Italian alabaster fruits add a made-you-look wink to the table, while pink accents deliver extra cheer to the celebratory setting. “We want the house to feel festive but don’t stick to the usual red and green,” explains Neill, who also claims a zingy lime shade as her signature Christmas color.



Display Family Treasures

They also look forward to trimming the tree together. “Isabelle and I love reminiscing about the memories of our ornaments as we pull them out of their boxes,” says Neill, who inherited an assortment from her grandparents. One year, a fallen tree resulted in broken baubles, including a favorite mandolin-shaped one. Isabelle gifted her mom a replacement, which sparked another shared tradition of selecting vintage instrument-themed pieces to add to their collection.



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STYLING: MARY BETH WETZEL



2



3



4



5



WE TEST FOR THE BEST
 Every product branded with our Tried & True logo has received the highest marks from the professionals in The *Southern Living* Test Lab. Our goal is to help you make smarter, more reliable purchases in every area of your life—starting with the kitchen. For this process, we rounded up 22 stand mixers and put them through a series of trials in our lab. We mixed up whipped cream, cookie dough, and whole wheat bread dough and then washed each model to observe not only performance but also ease of cleanup. Hover your phone's camera over the smart code above to learn more about how we test and recommend products.

(1) Best Overall: This is for that family member who tackles a variety of projects but doesn't need a commercial-style appliance. The Bakery Chef, \$400; breville.com **(2) Best Compact:** Measuring 8 inches wide and 12 inches tall, this model can fit in most tight spaces. Throughout our testing, the motor did not seem overworked and the bowl was large enough for one batch of each item. KitchenAid Artisan Mini 3.5 Quart Tilt-Head Stand Mixer, \$380; amazon.com **(3) Best Budget:** Testers found that the powerful 660-watt motor coupled with the six-speed gearshift could handle most small to medium tasks, and with a weight of less than 12 pounds, it's easy to move around the kitchen. Aucma Stand Mixer, \$160; amazon.com **(4) Best for Bread Making:** For the go-to party host, this model is worth the investment, but be sure their cabinets can accommodate the 17-inch height. KitchenAid Professional 600 Series 10 Speed 6 Qt. Stand Mixer, \$550; wayfair.com **(5) Most Versatile:** Yes, it has a hefty price tag, but it comes with a roller, dough knife, scraper, dough hook, dust cover lid, multi-wire balloon whisks, and single-wire cookie whisks, making it a multitasking machine. Ankarsrum Stainless Steel Original 7 Liter Stand Mixer, \$750; amazon.com

CENTER: COURTESY BREVILLE; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY KITCHENAID; COURTESY AMAZON; COURTESY KITCHENAID



GUEST-READY UPDATES

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At Home

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Little Wonders

Good cheer abounds
in Nicklaus and
Sid Williams-Heath's
Gulf Breeze,
Florida, cottage
BY ANNA PRICE OLSON

Gifts are wrapped using materials like a hoop cheese box (at right) from Sid's family business, Williams Brothers General Store, in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

STYLING: CHRISTINA WRESSELL



A Well-Loved Tree

“We’ve had some Christmases when we didn’t use a single ornament,” says Nicklaus. But when the duo moved into this house and had more space for storing decorations, they embraced heirlooms, specifically the collection of Lenox ornaments that Nicklaus’ grandmother has been gifting him since birth. He says that this year, they also borrowed her classic white candles for another “layer of nostalgia” on the tree. “It’s been so special creating our own traditions as a family,” he says.



**HEN NICKLAUS AND SID**

W

Williams-Heath moved to Nicklaus' hometown of Gulf Breeze, Florida, they built their house with holiday hosting in mind. In fact, their first Christmas party, an

annual caroling gathering that doubles as Sid's birthday bash, took place in the studs of the home before it was even finished.

"All we had was the fireplace, so I just set up a Champagne bar and we put out some benches," Nicklaus recalls. "That, to me, was the first breath of fresh air that gave this house life."

They worked with architectural designer Robert V. McCown, builder Kevin Russell, and designer Nicholas Pica on the process, which took 16 months from start to finish, but their dream of a "distinctly Southern" home was in the works for far longer than that. Over time, the Williams-Heaths drew inspiration from their travels, including Christmas vacations spent at The Inn at Serenbe in Georgia, Montage Palmetto Bluff in South Carolina, and Alys Beach in Florida, where they were married in 2017.

Every element was meticulously selected, and it was no fluke that the first party was held around the fireplace that has become the centerpiece of the couple's finished home. "Our design was all about porches and entertaining," says Nicklaus. "The whole house was based around the fireplace."

Each December, their handiwork is on display, with lights shining through the exterior's 8-foot-tall windows to showcase every detail. The Lowcountry-style porch is wrapped in a glowing garland and decked with wreaths on every window. Inside, hand-stitched linen stockings hang from the mantel, carols are sung at the Steinway piano in the corner, and an imperfect Christmas tree is adorned with Lenox ornaments in the dining room. These are all things Sid and Nicklaus envisioned from the start.

However, despite drawing plans around their original dreams, the Williams-Heaths are already shaking things up. To their surprise, they've become a "taxidermy home," with deer antlers hung on the walls year-round. Pheasant feathers and magnolia branches spring from arrangements, and their tree has moved locations.

"The house is new; we're only two Christmases in at this point," says Nicklaus. "There are certain things that we know will always be there, but even through the month of December, we're not finished decorating until Christmas Day. It's always changing."



Natural Instincts

Living in New York City and Savannah before moving to the Panhandle, the couple were accustomed to decorating small spaces, so they were forced to focus on the basics. For them, this meant prioritizing the items that brought them the most joy. “The new house was like a blank canvas for us to explore what really comes to life,” Nicklaus says. “For me, it’s all about bringing in natural elements that we already have and expanding upon that, so we’re simplifying Christmas.”



Woven place mats and cloth napkins bring texture to the table, where each spot is set with an ornament on its place card.

Main Attraction

The focal point in the home is the living room fireplace. “I want our guests, and even us, to be able to walk in and just see the greenery, white lights, pine cones, and stockings,” Nicklaus says of the mantel’s decor. Although the house is a new build, the couple envisioned a columnar fireplace that appeared as if it had been there for years, so they had a mason throw and break the bricks to make it feel as original as possible.



Nicklaus bakes cookies every Christmas. Much like the home's aesthetic, the treats are done in neutral colors. "He uses only green and white M&M's," says Sid.



Grand Gesture

The kitchen is the first thing you see upon entering the house, so the couple calls it the greeting point. During the holiday season, the stove is often topped with a fragrant simmer pot, but Sid admits, "Just as many cocktails come out of the kitchen as meals." Nicklaus' favorite beverage is an old-fashioned, while Sid prefers something bubbly.



Cocktails Around Every Corner

The couple believes each room deserves a special element, whether it's a gingerbread house on a table, a massive 5-foot wreath on a porch, or a tiny tree on a desk. They also create serving stations throughout. "We'll set up bars in outdoor spaces and all over the house," says Sid. "We'll put Champagne in the courtyard and sometimes have a bar on the screened porch. People can travel with a sip!"

All-Season Entertaining

The home is 2,800 square feet, but that size doubles thanks to the courtyard, screened porch, and front overhang. “It’s perfect for us. We entertain all the time, and the vision has always been that each room should have outdoor access to help [with the traffic flow],” Nicklaus explains. Living in Florida, they are able to utilize the exterior space year-round, but when the fire is on, so is the air conditioner. “The AC may be our best decoration,” he jokes.



Musical Memories

Nicklaus is a gifted pianist and is known to lead a chorus of partygoers in celebratory tunes on the Steinway. He even breaks out his old childhood carol book and displays it on the piano for the duration of the season. When he’s not playing, his go-to music to pipe through the house is Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton’s *Once Upon a Christmas*.



Signature Gift

Every year, the couple makes DIY “simmer kits” to hand out as party favors and neighborhood presents. Each of the bundles includes an orange from Sid’s dad’s store plus cranberries, rosemary, and tree clippings along with a recipe card for friends and family to save. “We started with 10 and now make over 100 every year,” says Sid.

Sentimental Greeting

Sid put a four-poster bed in the guest suite (below) specifically so he could drape garland around it this time of year. Visitors are welcomed with a note, a small gift, and what he calls “the full experience of Christmas,” as the greenery is bound to shed during a good night’s sleep. The couple often shares an article about the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree in New York City. “Not only does it give our guests a smile, but every time I look at it, it reminds me of where we began,” Nicklaus says of the clipping.



Nicklaus has an assortment of Byers’ Choice Carolers (shown above on the nightstand) that he began collecting during his dental residency in New York. “Love them or hate them—they’re going to start a conversation,” he says.



Subtle Points

“There was not a feather in the house that I didn’t help pick out. But during the grand reveal, I discovered that Nicklaus had gotten a lady to calligraph our wedding vows for art over the nightstands,” says Sid of the primary bedroom (above). Their bath is the only place in the home with tongue-and-groove walls. “Nicklaus wanted it to feel very old-world, like your great-grandmother’s house,” he notes.





PET FRIENDLY

Think Twice

After Dallas designer Jean Liu added a second dog to her family, she doubled down on a few key details

A Great Room for All

“This is really the heart of the house and a space where people always gather, so Comet and Bear are invited in too,” says Liu.

FOR DECORATOR JEAN LIU, planning homes that also accommodate animals goes beyond the obvious solutions like performance fabrics. “Good interiors start with getting the big moves right, such as the color palette, the scale and proportion of the furniture, and the layout of each room,” says Liu. “But in my opinion, great design happens when consideration for the smaller details takes place.” This means permanent pet-related belongings, including dog beds and gates, should complement the overall aesthetic.

First, consider food and water bowls and any other items that are used daily. If you plan to keep them out at all times, select under-the-radar pieces that won’t become unwanted focal points. In her home, Liu opted for stainless steel bowls with an acrylic stand from WunderPets & Co. “You look at them and clearly know we have pets, but I like them because they go with everything else and don’t jump out at you,” says the designer. She also notes the importance of having a specific spot where accessories are stored—especially if you can discreetly conceal plush toys and the like. “We have a leather box that sits under a pine table in our hallway. My dogs, Comet and Bear, love to stand over there and wait for me to get a ball out,” she says.

Bringing Bear (in her arms at left) into the mix as a puppy also reinforced the need to have areas where the family’s furry friends are free to roam. “In those particular spaces, we have the mentality that they’re allowed to be on the furniture, which is why we have a slipcovered couch,” says Liu.



**CATS LOSE
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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

A Special Place

Designer Maggie Dillon dials up the fun year-round in her young family's 1939 Raleigh, North Carolina, house

BY BETSY CRIBB WATSON



GLAD TIDINGS
The Dillons' pup, May (a mini Australian Labradoodle), is always ready to greet their visitors.

STYLING: ALYA HAMEEDI



MAKE IT MERRY

Leave no surface untrimmed. Even the mirror (by Fleur X Riley Sheehey) is wrapped in greenery.



PLAY WITH SCALE AND PATTERN

Dillon leaned into the house's historic character from the jump, covering the entry in a large-scale acanthus-leaf wallpaper by Soane Britain. "It almost looks like it could have been here forever, which I like," she says. To keep the style from skewing frumpy, she balanced it with a smaller-print leopard runner on the stairs. "It hides dirt, and it's very durable," notes Dillon. A fringed tablecloth in Abraham Moon & Sons' Glen Coe plaid dresses the custom table.

MAGGIE DILLON and her husband, Alex, had been house hunting in Raleigh, North Carolina, for a number of months before realizing that their dream first home was already in the family. "We bought it from my cousin and his wife," says Dillon, who grew up in the area. "They had lived here with their son for 20 years. His wife was also raised here, and it was very sentimental and special to her. She wanted to make sure a builder wasn't going to come in and bulldoze the whole thing."

An interior designer by trade, Dillon took a lighter hand in making the 1939 brick house their own, keeping the exterior the

same, save for a coat of gray paint (Farrow & Ball Hardwick White, No. 5) on the front door to match the shutters. Inside, they knocked out a few walls downstairs to expand the kitchen's footprint and connect it to the family room. "People have different opinions about open floor plans, but it's what was going to work for us," says Dillon, whose son, Jack, is always on the move. One casualty of the new space? "We lost our formal dining room, which was the toughest pill for me to swallow," she admits.

She's likely the only one to notice its absence, though, because sincere hospitality spills out of every nook and cranny of the home, wrapping guests in friendly colors and whimsical prints from the moment they walk through the door.

BE A LITTLE MORE FLEXIBLE

Because the family room is open to the kitchen and dining areas, Dillon kept things equally light and airy here, painting it Farrow & Ball's Setting Plaster (No. 231, at 50%). "The hard part with open-concept plans is how to give each space its own personality," she explains. "I wanted there to be a subtle difference in the paint but nothing that was too much of a contrast." Function was the name of the game with new bookshelves and built-ins for displaying Dillon's glassware collection and storing Jack's toys.



WRAP THINGS UP

Dillon committed to an all-in color scheme, channeling the home's rich cranberry hues in her gift paper and ribbon selections.

INSIST ON COMFORT FOR A CREW

Two Coley Home sofas wrapped in an olive performance velvet make for easy entertaining, as do a pair of ottomans (covered in Zak+Fox's Zoa print) that play double duty as seating when needed. "I have a lot of pieces that can float," says Dillon. "We have our family over as much as possible, and I want them to be able to pull up a perch."



GO BIG ON GREENERY
Hang a few small wreaths on interior windows for a festive pop.

FOCUS ON THE FINISHES

To prevent the renovated kitchen from feeling at odds with the old house, Dillon added worn-in textures, like soapstone countertops and fixtures in unlacquered brass. “It’s a living finish, so it ages with time and use. It’s a bit elevated,” she explains of the brass type. She took the same approach with all of the room’s softer elements, incorporating durable textiles, like a thick-weave Romo fabric on the Doorman barstools and a pair of vintage Oushak runners. “They’ve been walked on and messed up and add personality,” says Dillon. “You can’t really see spills on them either.”

BRING FORMALITY TO UNEXPECTED PLACES

With no traditional dining room, the designer made the most of the eat-in space located adjacent to the kitchen, nipping breakfast-room vibes in the bud with a dressy Mastercraft table she found on Chairish. “We refinished the floors during the renovation, and they have a rich tone, so I knew I didn’t want a heavy-looking dining set,” she says. Instead, she went “leggy and light,” surrounding the table with antique caned-back chairs and hanging a vintage Murano chandelier. Her choices highlight the area’s bay window and don’t distract from it.

SEE THE LIGHT

Use tall tapers to add height to the tablescape without blocking the view.





WORK WITH A ROOM'S QUIRKS

"The fireplace isn't centered in the living area, which is a little challenging from a design perspective," says Dillon. Rather than fighting the asymmetrical layout with dueling sofas, she embraced its cozy possibilities, positioning a vintage Milo Baughman two-piece sectional (upholstered in Andrew Martin's Friendly Folk in Happy Blue) in front of the fireplace and hanging a sculptural light fixture overhead. While moody color rules the room, with Schumacher's Haruki Sisal in Mauve covering the walls and Benjamin Moore's Ruby Dusk (1267) coating the trim, the designer opted to keep the ceiling white. "It's only 8 feet high, so I didn't want to draw attention to that with a bold hue," she says.



ZEST UP DECOR

For a fragrant mantel finish, bake citrus slices low and slow in the oven and string them together with twine (and an occasional dab of hot glue).

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DON'T FORGET THE GUEST ROOM

Because this bedroom is located right at the top of the stairs and hosts a rotating cast of family and friends who come to town, the designer considered every hospitable detail. “In guest rooms and nurseries, you can get away with just about anything, you know? I wanted ours to be fully functional and done up to the max,” she says. For Dillon, that meant Ottoline’s Tulips in Blue on the walls, Tulu Textiles’ Stella print on the Euro shams, and Georges’ raffia chandelier above.



CREATE A LINGERING SPOT

A riotously colorful wallpaper (Happy Menocal in collaboration with Schumacher) set the tone for the nursery and inspired Dillon’s other palette picks, from the paprika-hued Highland House glider to the olive green crib and dresser from Crate and Barrel. “I can’t speak for all new mothers, but you tend to spend a lot of time in the nursery, so I kept that in mind,” says Dillon. “It gives me joy when I sit in that chair with him.”



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THE GRUMPY GARDENER



“Wow! There really is a Santa Claus!”

BY STEVE BENDER

DEAR GRUMPY

I want to give my husband a very special gift he would never expect for Christmas this year, and I thought of a partridge in a pear tree. What do you think? Can they be shipped to our house?

—SANDY

No offense, but this is quite possibly the worst present ever. For one thing, you can't order just one egg or chick. They're mailed inside boxes in multiples of 12, which I find both cruel

and annoying. Who wants to have a dozen baby partridges scooting under the washing machine or swimming around in the toilet on Christmas Day? The same thing goes for turtledoves and French hens. And then you would probably receive a Bradford pear tree, which has flowers that smell like week-old fish! Take my advice: Buy him five golden kegs. Hubby will be over the moon.

The Big Chill

I live where it just about never freezes, but of course it did this year, and my gardenias and other shrubs are looking completely dead. Do you think there is any chance they'll make it? Should I prune off the brown foliage now?

—HEATHER

Lots of plants can take a deep freeze if given time to prepare and harden off. But when the mercury drops by 40 degrees in 24 hours, they're caught flat-footed. Ice forms inside plant cells and bursts them. It's tempting to respond right away, but wait until spring to see if any new growth starts. That's when you'll know if just parts of the bushes are dead, if they were killed to the ground and are coming back from the roots, or if they're goners. Remove all dead stuff then.

Crepe Murder

I've been trying to kill a crepe myrtle tree that I cut down because it was planted too close to my deck. Despite dousing the roots with strong vinegar and covering the soil with cardboard and old magazines, shoots keep coming up.

—LIN

I sure hope you didn't use old *Southern Living* issues! When you cut down a big crepe myrtle, the roots send up shoots for years. One way to stop this is to make a fresh cut on the stump and apply BioAdvanced Brush Killer Plus Concentrate according to label directions. You can also use a product called



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Ask the Grump! No question goes unanswered on his Facebook page: [facebook.com/slgrumpygardener](https://www.facebook.com/slgrumpygardener).

Sucker Punch, which prevents growth for six months.

Healing Trees

A tree person just came out and cut some large limbs from my Shumard red oak. He did not cover the wounds with any sealer. Should I go get some?

—KELLY

Not unless you want to waste hard-earned money. Pruning sealer does absolutely no good. It doesn't help wounds heal faster or keep out invading insects and fungi. If the pruner did a good job and the tree is healthy, it'll do fine on its own.

Too Many Shrooms!

I live in San Antonio and have mushrooms popping up all over the yard. What should I do?

—JUDY

Wait until it's five o'clock somewhere, and an answer might come to you. In the meantime, take solace in knowing that mushrooms are part of the natural world and perform a vital function in breaking down organic matter in the soil and recycling its nutrients for the benefit of us all. There's nothing you can do about them anyway.

Bunny Business

I read that Irish Spring soap repels deer. It also keeps away rabbits.

—MARIANNE

No wonder I don't have any bunny friends hopping around!



Moth Orchid

Grumpy's exotic plant bloomed again. It's a Christmas miracle!

For years, I've trashed orchids as hard to grow because after I bought them in bloom, they would never flower again. And it wasn't because I didn't water them with a melting ice cube, which I will never do because it just sounds weird. Then, in a moment of weakness, I bought a beautiful coral moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) at Costco. It put on a show for two months. It also came with these directions: Give it

bright, indirect light; temps between 65 and 85 degrees; and a shot glass of water every week. I did, and gloriosky, it's going to bloom again! Unless, of course, I do something foolish like filling the glass with bourbon.

—Steve Bender



GRUMPY'S GRIPE of the month

BACK IN THE 1800S when I started working at *Southern Living*, our editor had a rule about the winter issues: We must never show any photos of snow. You see, that looks cold and...Northern. Therefore, the South must appear balmy on our pages all year—Christmas, New Year's, Groundhog Day, National Cabbage Day—all perfect times for reclining on the beach sipping a margarita. But though snow is frigid, at least it's pretty. We rarely get any in Birmingham. Instead, we get chilly rain, leaden skies, brown lawns, and no sun for weeks. Guess that's why Grumpy's favorite Christmas carol starts like this: "Hello, darkness, my old friend..."

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St. Jude patient **Yates**,
blood cancer,
pictured with his parents

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stjude.org

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ADVENTURES IN
TRAVEL AND CULTURE

The South

Texas Treasure

This showstopping 50-foot tree at the city's arboretum is covered in more than 42,000 lights.

HOLIDAY TRAVEL

Bright Lights, Big City

Dallas offers glitz and glamour year-round, but now is when it really shines

BY ANNA PRICE OLSON





Winter Wonderland

(From top) The Dallas Arboretum comes alive with glowing lights. It features a Christmas Village that's captivating for kids. Bird Bakery crafts festive cookies.



IN MOST PLACES, you can easily find the heart of holiday celebrations. In Asheville, North Carolina, it's at Biltmore; in San Antonio, it's at the River Walk. In smaller places, such as my hometown of Thomasville, Georgia, everyone knows to go downtown for parades, decorated store windows, and shopping. In Dallas, however, Christmas is everywhere you turn.

Because of its size and metropolitan makeup, there are seemingly endless ways to ring in the season, from taking in a massive tree in East Dallas to experiencing The Adolphus Hotel's legendary downtown parade to all of the decked-out parks, stores, and restaurants in between. It's dazzling—and sometimes dizzying—but I learned that if you organize your days by neighborhood, you can experience nearly everything the city has to offer.

START AT THE Arboretum

Whether you're traveling with friends, family, or solo, the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden is a must-see. Locals refer to this 66-acre showplace as the city's "crown jewel" because it is, in true Dallas fashion, flashy. Decorated with over 1 million LED lights, a 50-foot-tall Christmas tree, and a



All the Trimmings
 (From top) The Adolphus Hotel turns The French Room bar into the Cocoa Lounge. A 25-foot-tall fir tree sparkles at the grand entrance.

quaint German village, it will quickly put you in an enchanted state of mind.

The arboretum's 12 Days of Christmas outdoor exhibit is made up of 25-foot-tall glowing glass gazebos that look like snow globes come to life. Each depicts a scene from the classic carol—4 calling birds, 9 ladies dancing, 12 drummers drumming—with detailed figurines that twirl, float, spin, and look real thanks to costumes and sets designed by The Dallas Opera. The installation is a ¾-mile loop, so grab a cup of hot cocoa from one of the many drink carts—adults can add a generous pour of Baileys to theirs—and enjoy the view.

The path is well lit and walkable with magnolia trees wrapped in twinkling lights and Christmas music playing throughout. On my most recent trip, I watched kids dance and sing along to the tunes—that is, when they weren't left speechless by the magic of it all.

At the end of the exhibit is the Christmas Village, a cluster of 12 chalets that children can go inside and explore on their own. Volunteer vendors act as pretend shopkeepers, handing out candy and baked goods and helping them mail letters to Santa at the post office. There is also a scavenger hunt map for animals hidden

in the small buildings' facades. (And if you're not traveling with youngsters, the nearby biergarten is worth a stop.) Don't miss the arboretum's newest addition, a spectacular tree that glows to the beat of music and overlooks White Rock Lake and the lights of Dallas.

DISCOVER TRADITIONS

Downtown

Just 6 miles from there, you'll find The Adolphus Hotel, which many people call the "capital of Christmas." Inside the 22-story Beaux Arts-style structure built in 1912 is an impressive 25-foot-tall balsam fir surrounded by gifts wrapped in Stetson hat



While downtown, check out a screening of a classic holiday film—like *Elf*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, or *A Charlie Brown Christmas*—at The Majestic Theatre. Or visit the flagship Neiman Marcus, where you can experience the store's famous buffet (advance reservations required) in The Zodiac restaurant, let the kids visit Santa, and pose for a photo in front of the Baccarat-embellished tree.

WINDOW-SHOP IN

Highland Park Village

For fashion lovers, no trip is complete without a stop in Highland Park Village. The open-air retail-and-dining center is best known for its designer storefronts—such as Ralph Lauren, Carolina Herrera, Dior, and Hermès—but you can enjoy the views without buying a thing. The brick-paved area, which was named a National Historic Landmark in 2000, is festooned with more than 1.5 million lights that turn on just before sundown.

Admire designs by Texans at La Vie Style House, Lela Rose, and Lele Sadoughi. St. Michael's Woman's Exchange, a Dallas institution that has been in the same location for over six decades, is a non-profit boutique selling gifts, coffee-table books, and entertaining essentials to benefit those in need. If you work up an appetite while you browse, Honor Bar, Mi Cocina, and Bird Bakery are all good spots for grabbing quick bites. After dark, reserve a patio table at Fachini for a bird's-eye view of the lights—and don't miss chef Julian



Local Happenings

(From top) Watch a favorite Christmas movie at The Majestic Theatre. Indulge in seasonal specialty drinks like the peppermint martini at Hudson House. Highland Park Village, a historic shopping destination, shines with elaborate decorations and window displays.



and boot boxes. The hotel has a rich history, including hosting Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1991, but it's best known for founding the Christmas parade in 1988.

At the annual event (this year's takes place on Saturday, December 2), more than 450,000 spectators flood the streets to officially kick off the season. At the end of the parade, pastry chefs from The French Room, the hotel's restaurant, come out on the balcony in their toques for a show that rivals a coronation or royal wedding. No matter the date, The French Room is a destination of its own for afternoon tea. (Reservations for holiday dining open the first Tuesday of October, so be sure to mark your calendar for next year.) Other notable favorites at the hotel include the Cocoa Lounge hot chocolate bar and the rooftop patio, where eggnog is served fireside in mini cabanas around the pool.

See, Snack, and Shop
 (Clockwise from left) Singing and dancing polar bears put on a show at Saint Ann Restaurant & Bar. Have afternoon tea at The French Room. The Toy Maven is packed with thoughtful stocking stuffers.



Barsotti's 100-layer lasagna. Whatever you decide to do in Highland Park Village, stick around for the lights. Book a ride with Threejays Carriages for a horse-drawn guided tour, or drive through the neighborhood to see the stately homes all dressed up.

ENJOY A MEAL IN
Harwood

For a dining experience as memorable as the food itself, head to the Harwood District in Uptown. A relatively new development surrounding the Rolex Building, this walkable 19-block area is home to 13 restaurants, including the indoor-outdoor Dolce Riviera,

the British pub Harwood Arms, and Poco Fiasco (a martini bar meets pizza parlor). Visit Mercat Bistro for French cuisine and an atmosphere that rivals the menu, with small tables nestled inside a wonderland of enormous flocked trees that are so grand I almost didn't believe they were real. (They were.) Or treat the kids by reserving a table at Saint Ann Restaurant & Bar for a "musical performance" by animatronic polar bears playing instruments. Afterward, you can stop by Marie Gabrielle Restaurant & Gardens to see the biggest tree in Uptown—it's 80 feet tall and adorned

with 3,000 ornaments and 10,000 lights.

SHOP LIKE A LOCAL IN
Park Cities

For a break from the crowds, drive to Park Cities to check out some under-the-radar spots in the retail centers along Lovers Lane. The Toy Maven on Lovers, one of three locations of the store, is brimming with Hot Wheels, Lego blocks, wooden stick horses, and kid-size cowboy hats. The Sample House is a one-stop shop for gift wrap and presents like scented candles and dish towels. A few doors down, Interabang Books is stocked with current

bestsellers alongside Texas-inspired reads for all ages. Also in this area is the original Hudson House restaurant, which is lined with garlands of ornaments along the ceiling. Settle into a cozy leather booth for a cheeseburger and an ice-cold Stone Fruit Martini, which has notes of peach, orange, and cranberry. (Martinis, and oysters, are cheaper during happy hour.) For a quieter option, go to Rise, an intimate French restaurant serving

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Festive Feasting

(From top) Hudson House, a popular spot for burgers and happy hour, adorns its ceiling with lights and shiny ornaments. No trip to Texas would be complete without at least one barbecue meal, like this meaty spread from Smoky Rose in East Dallas.

sweet and savory soufflés. Don't miss out on the Marshmallow Soup, which has a tomato-carrot base topped with goat cheese marshmallows, and order the raspberry soufflé for dessert. Grab a table on the patio to hear carols sung in French on the overhead speakers.

The beauty of December in Dallas is that, while it may be impossible to see everything the city has to offer in a single long weekend, there's always next year and plenty of new traditions still left to be discovered.



“My cats absolutely loved this food!”
-Krystal*

“They went crazy for it! Highly recommend!”
-Aleae*

Best Places To Stay

From family-friendly hotels to buzzy boutique spots, there's a great choice for every type of traveler

Thompson Dallas

For those who prefer a trendier place, check into this downtown newcomer that was the first Thompson hotel in Texas. During the 12 Days of Thompson, they have a gift market in the lobby and offer unique programming such as a “Dallas Cowboys Holiday Brunch.”

Hôtel Swexan

Opened in June 2023, Harwood's first hotel is ideally suited for couples or friends who are looking for boutique service, cool restaurant concepts, and stylish interior design.

Omni Dallas Hotel

Located downtown, this spacious 1,001-room spot is an affordable pick that's also kid approved and convenient to the interstate.

Hilton Anatole

While it doesn't offer walkable access to local attractions, the amenities still make it a good option for families during this busy time of year.

The Adolphus Hotel

This iconic location books up seasonally, so we recommend reserving your room now for next December.



“My cat has a new favorite food”
-Nicole*

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LONG WEEKEND

A Biltmore Christmas Story

A wintertime visit to “America’s Largest
Home” will transport you to the Gilded Age

BY HALLIE MILSTEIN



T

HE SHUTTLE to Biltmore House isn't for the faint of heart. As we cruise through the vast estate in the North Carolina mountains, there are several sharp turns along a narrow dirt road that is far better suited for horse-drawn carriages than for the white bus in which we're currently riding. Yet the butterflies swirling in my stomach aren't due to fear but anticipation.

A few rows behind me sits a group of girlfriends who refuse to believe this is my first visit to Biltmore. They return every year to see the home in all its holiday finery. They're sure that I'll be doing the same soon enough. Then, through the shuttle window, the 175,000-square-foot French chateau-style mansion comes into view.

As I enter Biltmore House, the outside world floats away. On the pristine lawn, hundreds of tourists congregate, shuttles

zoom in and out through the ornate gates, and the 780-foot-long facade beckons visitors through the doors. Inside, it's every bit as grand as the exterior. Asheville's unseasonably warm December weather and my own 21st-century concerns feel miles away from the Gilded Age winter wonderland surrounding me.

People flock to Biltmore Estate year-round. The 8,000-acre property features opulent gardens; a winery; shops; and several places to stay, including the 210-room inn. But the real gem here is Biltmore House, which is also the main draw at Christmas. This former residence of George Vanderbilt is immaculately preserved and attracts more than 1 million visitors annually, but this season is one of the best times to go. Not only are the decorations spectacular, but you also get to experience what holidays were once like for one of America's wealthiest and most prominent families.

LOOKING BACK

On Christmas Eve in 1895, Biltmore Estate's substantial doors opened to guests for the first time when Vanderbilt welcomed 27 family members and a host of friends to celebrate the season. His new home wasn't quite as grand as it appears today because it was still missing some of the finishing touches.



SOAKING UP THE SPLENDOR
(From left) Marvel at the ornate mantels in Biltmore House. Order a smoked old-fashioned at The Inn on Biltmore Estate.



the banquet hall,” marvels Henry. “Doing it now with a whole team—it’s live streamed so that everyone can see—takes so many people and so much coordination. It makes you wonder, ‘How did they do it almost 130 years ago?’ But they did.”

That year, in addition to the opulent affair for friends and family, Vanderbilt started the tradition of throwing a party for the hundreds—now thousands—of employees working on the property. After George married Edith Vanderbilt in 1898, she quickly assumed hosting duties, even personally presenting all of her employees’ children with gifts.

“We have an oral history from a girl named Eugenia who was given paper dolls,” says Henry. “She told Mrs. Vanderbilt, ‘I don’t like paper dolls.’ She wanted one of the ornaments on the tree, so Mrs. Vanderbilt had one of the butlers take down all of the balls, and she passed them out to the children.”

PUTTING ON THE RITZ

During the holidays, there are two ways to experience Biltmore House—a daytime or an evening tour. Once the sun goes down, the property is lit with glowing candles, another touch that harkens back to a bygone era.

On a self-guided listening tour, I roam through each room, taking in the elaborate displays, which range from mantels draped with greenery, light-reflecting ribbons, and baubles to the more subtle touches like the miniature evergreen trees placed in

While the magnate’s visitors stayed in extravagant suites, Vanderbilt moved into the Bachelors’ Wing since his own bedroom was still not ready. In any case, this would be the first of many over-the-top gatherings held at the house.

Biltmore curator of interpretation Lauren Henry is able to paint a picture of those first Christmases spent in Asheville by combining the accounts from various people in attendance. Here, the centerpiece was—and still is—an impressive 30- to 40-foot Fraser fir standing in the banquet hall. They covered it with lights and ornaments and stuck presents in the branches rather than just underneath the tree. The tradition of displaying this gigantic fir is the only element of Biltmore House’s early holiday decor that curators are certain of.

“To this day, I have no idea how they got the tree up to

ELEGANT EXPERIENCE
(From top) Distinctive eateries include The Dining Room. Try the surf and turf with filet mignon. You can linger by a towering tree beneath the 70-foot-high ceiling in Biltmore House’s banquet hall and imagine all the elaborate meals this space has hosted.



George and Edith's separate bedrooms. Live string music sets the mood as I peek behind the scenes into the living spaces and kitchen pantries, admire a set of original paintings by Monet, and venture into the cozy library—which today's staff agrees was George's favorite room, complete with 22,000 volumes and a not-so-secret passageway. It becomes clear to me why people return to the estate; there is just so much to see.

In the dazzling banquet hall, the main tree is designed to resemble those used for Vanderbilt-era Christmases, but it is accompanied by

modern adaptations and solutions. Floral manager Elizabeth Borchers says that to compensate for limited access to electrical outlets needed to illuminate the tree, the team craftily strings a power cord through a second-story window.

Biltmore's team of designers also takes great care in preserving the homeowner's brand of Gilded Age glamour. Usually, they select a theme and thoughtfully plan every

GOOD TIDINGS

(From left) Few corners of the expansive property are as inviting as the main house's library. No tour would be complete without a pour at the Wine Bar.



**SHIMMERING SCENES**

(From left) Don't miss the winter garden with its intricate ceiling. The rooms of Biltmore take on a glow during the holidays with dozens of Christmas trees throughout the house.



inch to how they imagine the Vanderbilts preferred it. (The theme during my visit is “designer’s choice.”) Each room is informed by stories pulled from the Vanderbilt archives. The second-floor living hall speaks to Edith’s childhood Christmases, while the morning salon is centered around the historic ceiling drapery.

Under the watchful eye of Todd Roy, Biltmore’s conservatory horticulturist, the estate teems with hundreds of brilliant blooming poinsettias from nearby Shelby, North Carolina, as well as

dozens of wreaths made with materials grown on-site. Any additional greenery and branches are cut and collected from across the vast property and incorporated into the decor. “That’s what really makes our arrangements stand apart,” says Borchers. “It’s what George would have done.”

Borchers and her team take great pride in being part of preserving memories and traditions, always carefully considering how the Vanderbilts themselves wanted their home to be. “The priority is authenticity,”

she says, “and we take that very seriously.”

PLANNING AHEAD

With this Biltmore holiday season in full swing until January 7, designers are already thinking of themes for 2024. In March, they’ll lay out all of the ornaments on the floor to take stock and reimagine next year’s possibilities. Then from there, the rooms will be divvied up among the designers who

will get to work. They brainstorm, curate, and—come September—implement their ideas. Throughout the process, Biltmore doesn’t close to the public, so if you visit during the pre-season, you can beat the crowds and also witness the transformation happening and the majestic trees being raised. Then, in November 2024, the age-old magic will roar to life all over again, just as the Vanderbilts would have wanted.

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Where To Stay

The Inn on Biltmore Estate

For the complete Christmas experience, the inn is the best place to be. This resort has earned its four-star designation with luxurious amenities, stunning views of the property, abundant decorations, and handy shuttles that take guests to Biltmore House and Antler Hill Village.

Village Hotel

Conveniently located in nearby Antler Hill Village, this charming stay is the most affordable option on the property. However, it always fills up fast for the holiday season, so secure your booking early.

Cottages on Biltmore Estate

Biltmore's newest and most exclusive accommodation choices are private historic cottages that have been recently restored with full kitchens, living rooms, and multiple bedrooms to suit larger parties and families.



Off-Property Options

If you decide to spend the night in the surrounding Asheville area rather than on the estate, you can purchase day tickets to Biltmore, which is a few miles from downtown. You'll find a variety of lodging choices, ranging from bed-and-breakfasts to hotels to resorts.



SUGAR AND SPICE (Clockwise from far left) Garlands adorn the entrance. Gingerbread houses delight all ages. Dessert is a must in The Dining Room.

to feed birds of prey). Don't miss out on a tasting of Biltmore wines or a trip to the verdant winter conservatory.

Where To Eat

Head to **Antler Hill Village**, and make a reservation at **Bistro** for European-inspired fare cooked with estate-raised ingredients, go to **Cedric's Tavern** (named after the Vanderbilts' Saint Bernard) for classic pub eats, or visit **The Smokehouse Food Truck** for Carolina-style barbecue. Wash it all down with a swig

from a bottle of regional-favorite Cheerwine purchased from **The Creamery** next door. Finish things off by making s'mores at a nearby firepit.

What To Do

Book a revitalizing treatment at the spa, or sign up for outdoor excursions like a horse-drawn carriage ride, hiking, biking, or falconry (an educational seminar during which a veteran hawk trainer will teach you

Where To Shop

Regular Biltmore visitors know to look out for a Christmas pop-up that emerges every year in a new location. Also go to Antler Hill Village, where there are four different shops filled with souvenirs. Closer to the mansion, you'll find stores showcasing toys, Gilded Age gifts, collectible books, garden accessories, and sweets to help you commemorate your unforgettable trip.



Let's Get Away!

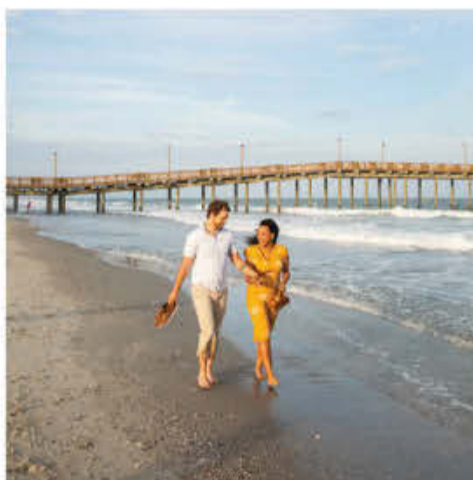
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GOOD LIFE ALL THE WAY
Mississippi-born icon Jimmy Buffett (pictured on his catamaran *Last Mango*) was a lifelong surfer, fisherman, and conservationist.

IN MEMORIAM

Sail On, Jimmy

On September 1, 2023, the world lost more than a legendary Southern musician

BY MARSHALL CHAPMAN



PERFECT HARMONY

Chapman joined Buffett's Coral Reefer Band in 1987 to play rhythm guitar and sing background vocals. At left, the musicians embark on the summer tour. Below, Buffett and Chapman perform in concert together.



WHEN I SAW that first text saying that Jimmy Buffett had died, I couldn't believe my eyes. Yes, I knew that he'd been having health issues, but death? Jimmy Buffett? No way. Now that I have had some time to reflect, it seems as if more than a man is gone. Something like an entire season. Summer, for instance.

For nearly a half century of summers, Jimmy Buffett faithfully toured America with his Coral Reefer Band, playing to an ever-increasing throng of devoted followers known as Parrot Heads. I've always said that, unlike most performers' fans, Jimmy's "breed in the off-season," producing Parakeet Heads who then grow up to be Parrot Heads.

In the summer of 1987, I was privileged to be a member of the band, playing rhythm guitar and singing background vocals. Since I was also a songwriter, Jimmy would have me take center stage while he took a break in the middle of the show. What that meant was that I got to sing two of my songs backed by his world-class musicians including Michael Utley ("Mister Utley") on keyboards; Tim Drummond on bass; and the Memphis Horns, featuring Andrew Love on sax and Wayne Jackson on trumpet.

I first heard about Jimmy in the summer of 1973. I was in Atlanta when a photographer friend gave me a promotional copy of *A White Sport Coat and A Pink Crustacean*.

"Here," he said, handing me the LP. "I think you might like this. It's a little bit different." I was just starting to write music myself, and the album captured my attention so much that I learned every song on it.

Two years later, I would meet Jimmy for the first time in Austin, Texas. He had just played a club called Castle Creek, accompanied only by a guitarist he kept introducing as Marvin Gardens. After his show, a bunch of us retired to a nearby spot where a local pickup band was playing Texas two-step music. Jimmy was splayed out in an easy chair nursing a longneck beer when his manager introduced us. Not knowing what else to say, I asked him to dance. "No way, man," he said, his eyes big as saucers. "You're way too tall."

Ironically, 10 years later, Jimmy would ask me to dance. We were at Sound Stage Studios in Nashville, listening to a playback of his *Last Mango in Paris* album. When my song "Perfect Partner" came on, he started waltzing me around the console room, dipping me all the way to the floor and back at one point.

People often ask me what Jimmy Buffett was like, and this is what my patented answer will always be: He was one-third poet/musician, one-third P.T. Barnum, and one-third Huey Long. But he was much more than that. He was a generous and loyal family man, friend, and employer. It was always easy to surrender whenever I found myself in his inner circle. It was like he had this big pot of gumbo going, and sometimes it was just plain fun to be an ingredient.

Sail on, my friend.

Southerners of the Year

The trailblazers supporting and preserving our region's people, places, and traditions

BY REBECCA ANGEL BAER AND MEGHAN OVERDEEP



Quilting Circle

Loretta Pettway Bennett shares the story of Alabama's legendary quilters and continues their work.

a dozen museums and galleries around the world. But what she's proudest of is her work with FQB Legacy, a nonprofit that's dedicated to bringing attention to the original members and artists—innovative and resilient women like her mom, grandmothers, aunts, and neighbors.

MENDING HISTORY

Loretta Pettway Bennett

FREEDOM QUILTING BEE LEGACY
Alberta, Alabama
fqblegacy.org

Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy board member Loretta Pettway Bennett was just 6 years old when the original Freedom Quilting Bee (FQB) collective was formed in 1966 in rural Alberta, Alabama. She says by that point, she was already stitching together “whatever little scraps of fabric” she could find. “The women were always sewing something,” Bennett recalls of her childhood in nearby Gee’s Bend (also known as Boykin). “It has always been a part of my life.”

The collective was also where Bennett’s mother, Qunnie, had her first paying job.

When the FQB was founded in the sixties, Black people in Alberta and Gee’s Bend were being fired and evicted for registering to vote. Civil rights activists helped the local women use the vibrant blankets that they had already been making for generations as a way to support themselves. With money soon rolling in from clients like Saks Fifth Avenue and Sears, the FQB gave them the ability to provide for their families, install plumbing in their homes, and even go to college.

The organization officially closed in 2011, and as the building crumbled, so did the tradition of quilting. Though it lived on through some of the older residents, the memory of the women who made history with needles and thread was fading.

Bennett still sews every day, and her quilts have been displayed in more than

FQB Legacy was established in 2021 with the goal of repairing the original building and transforming it into an educational destination. It reopened as a museum in October of 2022. The organization hosts sewing classes and events aimed at remembering the past while creating new opportunities for the future. “[Quilting] is an inheritance that we were given,” Bennett says. “We need to continue the tradition of sewing and making things with our hands. Most people don’t have wealth or jewelry to pass on, but at least we have a craft.”

In the process, FQB Legacy is helping bring the community back together, much like creating a quilt. “I hope, more than anything, that it gives them something to be proud of,” Bennett explains. “They come from a rich legacy.”

—Meghan Overdeep

INSPIRING YOUTH

Vanderbilt University Athletics

Nashville, Tennessee
vucommadores.com

IN THE SHADOW of Vanderbilt University sits Nashville's Eakin Elementary School. "You can literally see the athletic facilities from our library window," says executive principal Eric Hartfelder. "When there are football games, we have parking at our school."

Yet Eakin has a relationship with Vanderbilt that extends beyond proximity. Last year, Hartfelder noticed that kids were showing up late in the mornings, so he began enticing them with the opportunity to spend time with Vanderbilt's famous baseball players before the first bell.

Hartfelder says that having the athletes there waiting with smiles and high fives has transformed mornings at the school. "Kids are helping push their parents out the door," he notes. "The day begins with a fun interaction that makes them feel important. We provide more than an education; we provide a childhood. That all starts with getting everyone into school early, excited, and ready to learn."

Women's basketball guard and Nashville native Jordyn Cambridge spends an hour or two each week at Eakin. When possible, she and her teammates will join in pickup games during PE. "It gets competitive," she says, laughing. Cambridge, a former member of the All-SEC Defensive Team, loves being a role model. "I want them to follow after me, do things better than me, and become whoever they want to be when they grow up," she says.

Hartfelder feels similarly. "I want our students to see people doing great things so they know they can too," he says.

—Meghan Overdeep



Helping Kids Flourish
(From left) In Nashville, Vanderbilt University's athletes support a local elementary school and get students excited about learning. Katie Stagliano was just a third grader when she dreamed up her gardening nonprofit for young people.

GROWING A MOVEMENT

Katie Stagliano

KATIE'S KROPS
Summerville, South Carolina
katieskrops.com

Katie Stagliano found her calling at 9 years old when her third-grade teacher sent her home with a seedling for the backyard. Her tiny plant grew into a 40-pound cabbage. "I was shocked because I didn't know they could get that big. But I realized that this one was far too large for my family to eat," she says. Every night, her father would remind them just how lucky they were to sit down to a healthy dinner when some people were not able to.

"That's how I got the idea that changed my life forever," she says. "I donated my cabbage to a soup kitchen to help feed those who might not otherwise have a meal." The director of the kitchen invited her to serve her cabbage in a soup with ham and rice. Stagliano remembers how surprised

she was to see how many families just like hers were waiting in line for a meal. Because that one vegetable served 275 guests, she thought, "How many people could a garden feed?"

With the support of her parents, she launched Katie's Krops. The idea took off when her school gave her a plot of land the size of a football field. Soon, the whole student body was involved. Katie's Krops became an official nonprofit, and her message began to spread. Kids across the country reached out wanting to start their own gardens, so the organization began offering funding and support to Katie's Krops Growers between the ages of 7 and 16.

Today, at 25 years old, Stagliano is at the helm of a project that includes 100 gardens in 33 states. Collectively, Katie's Krops has donated around 600,000 pounds of produce—with no plans of slowing down. Stagliano says, "I would love to reach all 50 states and eventually expand internationally."

—Rebecca Angel Baer

COMFORTING COMMUNITIES

Stan Hays

OPERATION BBQ RELIEF

Kansas City, Missouri

operationbbqrelief.org

IN 2011, Stan Hays had a nine-to-five job with an insurance company and participated in barbecue competitions on

the weekends. But on May 22 of that year, everything changed. An EF5 tornado struck Joplin, Missouri, just a few hours from his home in the Kansas City area. Hays and his family were watching the coverage on TV in horror as the tornado, which measured up to a mile wide, tore apart buildings and toppled trees in a 6-mile stretch of town. "I just remember how helpless I felt," Hays says.

The next morning, as he headed off to work, his wife said something that would forever alter their lives. "She told me, 'You should really go get the barbecue guys that you compete against and cook for the community of Joplin,'" Hays recalls. He had made it only about 3 miles into his commute when he called his barbecue mentor Jeff Stith. Together, they reached out to a group of their fellow competitors to ask if they wanted to join forces and use the power of 'cue for good.

That afternoon, Hays loaded up his gear and headed to Joplin. Just two days after the tornado struck, pitmasters from nine states joined him to feed those who had been affected. In 13 days, they served more than 120,000 meals, and Operation BBQ Relief (OBR) was born. In 2018, the nonprofit became Hays' full-time job.

Over the past 12 years, Hays and his team have shown up in the wake of all kinds of disasters—tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, explosions—and set up their smokers to feed those in need. To date, OBR has provided over 10 million meals. Hays says, "At the end of the day, it's about comfort food. From the smells to the camaraderie, barbecue serves as a reminder that good times will happen again."

—Rebecca Angel Baer



PROTECTING NATURE

Meg Puckett

COROLLA WILD HORSE FUND

Corolla, North Carolina

corollawildhorses.com

As the herd manager for the Corolla Wild Horse Fund (CWHF), Meg Puckett is the face of the most famous herd on the Outer Banks. It's a big job. Since 2016, she's been on call 24-7, though she says she loves every "sweaty, heartbreaking" moment of it. The Banker mustangs have become her life, and working with them means so much to her that she sometimes struggles to speak about it without crying.

Preserving these treasured animals amid an endless stream of tourists is a complicated dance. Puckett likes to say that "it takes a village," but it

Taking Care

(From left) Pitmaster Stan Hays provides disaster relief in the form of barbecue. North Carolina's wild horses are being saved thanks to Meg Puckett.

also takes education, which is where Facebook comes in. She uses CWHF's page to provide an unfiltered look at all that goes into caring for the more than 100 wild horses as well as the struggles they face on a daily basis. It's not always pretty, but that is often the point.

Puckett considers the fund's ongoing program with the Equus Survival Trust to be her greatest accomplishment on behalf of the herd. CWHF collects DNA to be processed and analyzed to better understand the breed and its 500-year history. They've even mapped out family trees and, with help from NC State University, started a sperm bank.

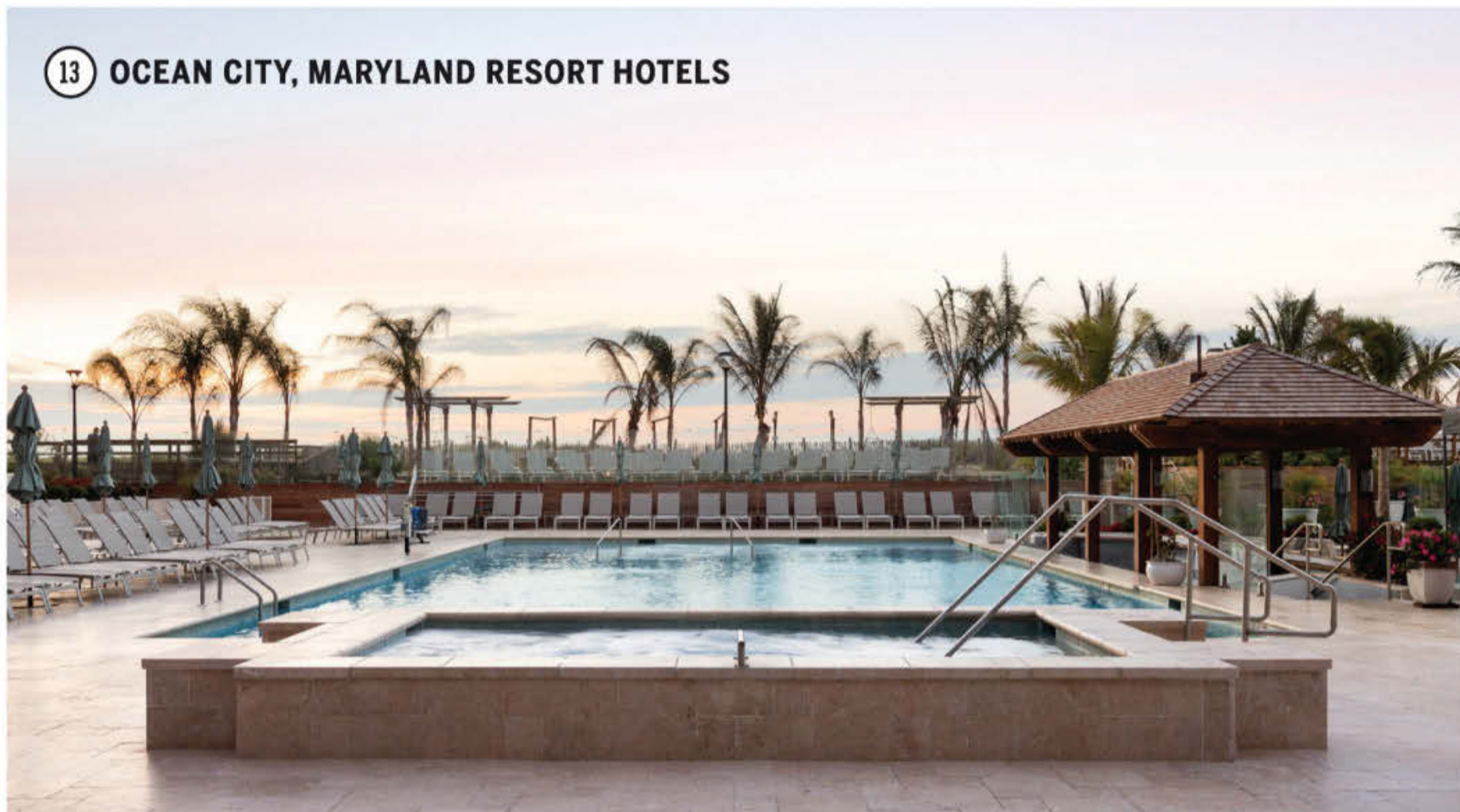
In just a few years, this research has elevated the work of CWHF in the eyes of the scientific community. As Puckett puts it, these animals have always been special, but now there's proof. With this data, CWHF can accomplish its goals of maintaining the mustangs' natural environment and keeping them wild. Puckett says, "The research has established them as an endangered breed worth saving."

—Meghan Overdeep

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Plan a Drop-In Gathering

Get everyone in the spirit with easy starters and a special house drink

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG DUPREE
RECIPES BY JASMINE SMITH

Ambrosia Party Punch

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 10 MIN.

SERVES 12

- 4 cups orange juice
- 3 cups chilled coconut water (such as Vita Coco)
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups chilled pineapple juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup syrup from maraschino cherries (from 1 [10-oz.] jar), plus cherries for garnish
- 1 small lemon, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 small orange, thinly sliced crosswise
- Fresh mint leaves

- 1 (750-milliliter) bottle chilled sparkling rosé or 3 (11 $\frac{1}{2}$ -oz.) cans sparkling-lemon beverage (such as Sanpellegrino)

1. Stir together orange juice, coconut water, pineapple juice, and syrup in a punch bowl or large pitcher. Garnish with lemon and orange slices, cherries, and mint leaves.

2. Pour about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup punch into each cup; top with about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sparkling rosé or sparkling-lemon beverage.



FINISHING TOUCH

To add extra flavor, swap out the poppy seeds for everything-bagel seasoning.

FANCY PIGS IN BLANKETS
p. 91



**TWO-LAYER
PIMENTO-
AND-CHEESE
DIP WITH
SMOKED
ALMONDS**
p. 91



**PERFECTLY
SPICY
PEPPER-JELLY
MEATBALLS**
p. 91



**CORNBREAD
CROSTINI**
p. 91



Fancy Pigs in Blankets

ACTIVE 35 MIN. - TOTAL 50 MIN.

MAKES 40

- 2 frozen puff pastry sheets, thawed (from 1 [17.3-oz.] pkg.)
All-purpose flour, for work surface
 - 1 (1-lb.) pkg. hickory-smoked sausage (such as Conecuh), halved lengthwise and cut into 2-inch pieces (about 40 pieces)
 - 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
 - 2 Tbsp. poppy seeds
 - 1/2 cup mayonnaise
 - 1/4 cup sour cream
 - 3 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
 - 3 Tbsp. honey
 - 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
 - Chopped fresh chives
1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside.
 2. Unfold 1 pastry sheet on a lightly floured surface; roll into a 15- x 10-inch rectangle. Prick all over with a fork; cut into 20 (2 1/2-inch) squares. Repeat with remaining pastry.
 3. Place 1 sausage piece diagonally in center of 1 pastry square. Fold 1 corner over sausage piece, tightly tucking corner under sausage. Fold opposite corner over sausage, overlapping pastry and tucking corner under bottom side. Transfer to 1 prepared baking sheet. Repeat with remaining pastry squares and sausage, spacing 1 inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Brush with egg; sprinkle evenly with poppy seeds. Chill for 15 minutes.
 4. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, stir together mayonnaise, sour cream, mustard, honey, and salt until well combined. Chill sauce until ready to serve.
 5. Bake pastries in preheated oven until golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Serve with sauce, and garnish with chives.

Cornbread Crostini

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS

SERVES 12

- 1/4 cup vegetable oil, divided
- 2 cups self-rising yellow cornmeal mix
- 1/4 cup cooked and crumbled bacon (3 slices)
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 cup whole buttermilk
- 4 oz. smoked Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)
- 1/2 cup canned collard greens, drained (such as Glory Foods)
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/2 cup butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Add 2 tablespoons of the oil to a 10-inch cast-iron skillet; place in oven to preheat.
2. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, stir together cornmeal mix, bacon, black pepper, cayenne, buttermilk, Cheddar, collard greens, eggs, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil until combined.
3. Carefully remove hot skillet from oven. Immediately add cornmeal mixture to skillet; do not stir. Bake in preheated oven until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Immediately invert cornbread onto a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 300°F.
4. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper, and set aside. Cut cornbread in half to create 2 half-moons. Cut crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick slices; place on prepared baking sheets. Brush both sides of slices with melted butter. Bake, turning halfway through cook time, until crispy, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool 10 minutes; serve warm.

Two-Layer Pimiento-and-Cheese Dip with Smoked Almonds

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 15 MIN.

SERVES 12

- 8 oz. sharp white Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 2 cups)
- 4 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 7/8 tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 3/4 cup half-and-half
- 3 (4-oz.) jars sliced pimientos, drained and patted dry
- 1 (1 1/2-oz.) sourdough bread slice, torn and lightly toasted (about 1 cup torn)
- 1/4 cup chopped smoked almonds, plus more for garnish
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 1/2 tsp. red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Torn fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
- Smoked paprika, for garnish
- For serving: endive leaves, baby heirloom carrots, and Cornbread Crostini (recipe at left)

1. Add Cheddar, cream cheese, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and cayenne to a food processor bowl; process until crumbly, 30 seconds, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Add half-and-half; process until smooth, about 1 minute. Transfer to a medium serving bowl; set aside. Let stand at room temperature while preparing pimiento sauce.
2. Wipe processor bowl clean. Add

pimientos, bread, almonds, garlic, vinegar, and remaining 1/8 teaspoon salt to processor bowl; process until finely chopped, about 30 seconds, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. With processor running, gradually pour olive oil through food chute, and process until smooth, about 1 minute.

3. Top Cheddar mixture in bowl with pimiento sauce. Garnish with additional chopped almonds, parsley, and smoked paprika. Serve with endive, carrots, and Cornbread Crostini.

Perfectly Spicy Pepper-Jelly Meatballs

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 3 HOURS, 40 MIN.

SERVES 10 TO 12

- 2 lb. 85/15 lean ground beef
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 2/3 cup dry breadcrumbs
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper, divided
- 2 (13-oz.) jars red pepper jelly (such as Stonewall Kitchen)
- 1/2 cup bottled chili sauce (such as Heinz)
- 1/2 cup bottled barbecue sauce (such as Sweet Baby Ray's)
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1/4 cup finely chopped Peppadew peppers (from 5 peppers)
- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line 2 large rimmed baking sheets with aluminum foil. Lightly coat an 8-quart slow cooker with cooking spray; set aside.
2. In a large bowl, stir together ground beef, eggs, breadcrumbs, Worcestershire sauce, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, and 1/4 teaspoon of the black pepper. Mix thoroughly. Shape into 34 meatballs (about 2 tablespoons each). Arrange on prepared baking sheets.
3. Bake in preheated oven until a thermometer inserted in center registers 160°F, about 14 minutes. Remove from oven; transfer meatballs to prepared slow cooker, discarding any liquid from baking sheets.
4. Whisk together red pepper jelly, chili sauce, barbecue sauce, Dijon mustard, cayenne, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper in a medium bowl. Pour mixture over meatballs in slow cooker; toss to coat. Cover and cook on LOW, stirring halfway through cook time, until sauce thickens, 3 to 4 hours. Transfer meatballs to a platter; top with Peppadew peppers, parsley, and any remaining sauce.



**SOUTHERN
CRACKLIN'
PORK ROAST
WITH LEMONY
HERB SAUCE**

Feast With Your Family

A delicious (and doable)
meal to wow a crowd

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG DUPREE
RECIPES BY ANNA THEOKTISTO

Southern Cracklin' Pork Roast with Lemony Herb Sauce

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 10 MIN. - TOTAL 6 HOURS,
15 MIN., PLUS 12 HOURS CHILLING

SERVES 12

- 1 (8- to 10-lb.) pork belly with skin
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 medium-size yellow onion, chopped (1½ cups)
- 8 cups chopped fresh collard greens (from 1 [12-oz.] bunch)
- 1 Tbsp. fennel seeds
- 4 Tbsp., plus 1 tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus more for serving
- 12 garlic cloves, minced (about ¼ cup)
- 2 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary (from 4 [6-inch] sprigs)
- 4 tsp. finely grated lemon zest (from 2 lemons), plus lemon wedges for serving
- 1 Tbsp. black pepper
- Lemony Herb Sauce (recipe, page 94)



**TWICE-BAKED
DUCHESSE POTATOES**
p. 94

**ROASTED
BROCCOLINI
WITH PECANS
AND LEMON**
p. 94

1. Place pork, skin side down, on a work surface. Using a sharp knife, score meat in a crosshatch pattern, about 1 inch deep x 2 inches wide. Starting with one short side, roll pork into a tight spiral; cut a shallow line in skin to mark where it overlaps. Unroll spiral; turn pork skin side up. Using shallow line as a guide, slice to remove skin from portion of pork that will be inside the roll. (Any skin left inside roll will not get crispy.) Carefully score remaining skin in a cross-hatch pattern, about ¼ inch deep x 1 inch wide. Turn pork skin side down; set aside.

2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-

high. Add onion; cook, stirring often, until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add collard greens, fennel seeds, and 1 teaspoon of the salt; cook, stirring often, until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat; let cool, uncovered, 10 minutes.

3. With skin side down, sprinkle pork belly evenly with parsley, minced garlic, rosemary, lemon zest, black pepper, collard greens mixture, and remaining 4

tablespoons salt; pat mixture into pork. Starting with the shorter, skin-removed side, reroll pork belly into a tight spiral (skin-removed side should be on the interior of the spiral). Tie spiral tightly in 1-inch intervals with kitchen twine. Place in a roasting pan fitted with a rack, and chill, uncovered, 12 hours.

4. Preheat oven to 275°F. Bake until a thermometer inserted into thickest portion of pork registers 160°F, 4 to 6 hours. Remove from oven, and increase oven temperature

to 500°F. Bake until skin is crispy and deeply browned, about 25 minutes, basting with drippings during last 10 minutes of cook time. Remove from oven, and let rest 30 minutes. Slice with a serrated knife; discard twine. Serve with Lemony Herb Sauce, fresh parsley, and lemon wedges.

Lemony Herb Sauce

ACTIVE 5 MIN. - TOTAL 5 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

Stir together 3 cups chopped **fresh flat-leaf parsley**, 1½ tsp. **kosher salt**, ¾ tsp. **grated garlic**, 1 tsp. **lemon zest**, 6 Tbsp. **lemon juice**, and ½ tsp. **black pepper** in a medium bowl. Stir in ¾ cup **extra-virgin olive oil** until combined. Serve immediately, or store, covered, in refrigerator up to 2 days. Let come to room temperature and stir to recombine before serving.

Roasted Broccolini with Pecans and Lemon

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 25 MIN.

SERVES 12

- 2 large lemons, divided
- 4 bunches fresh Broccolini (about 2½ lb. total), trimmed
- 8 garlic cloves, smashed and divided
- 6 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- ½ tsp. black pepper, divided
- 1 cup coarsely chopped pecan halves

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Thinly slice 1 of the lemons. Halve any large stalks of Broccolini. Toss together half of the lemon slices, half of the Broccolini, 4 of the garlic cloves, 3 tablespoons of the olive oil, 1¼ teaspoons of the salt, and ¼ teaspoon of the black pepper on a rimmed baking sheet until combined. Repeat with remaining lemon slices, Broccolini, garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper on another rimmed baking sheet.

2. Bake in preheated oven until Broccolini begins to brown on 1 side, about 8 minutes. Sprinkle both pans evenly with pecans. Bake, stirring halfway through cook time, until pecans are toasted and Broccolini is tender and browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a platter; finely zest remaining lemon over Broccolini mixture.

Twice-Baked Duchesse Potatoes

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 50 MIN.

MAKES 12

- 9 large russet potatoes, scrubbed
- ¾ cup unsalted butter

- 4 garlic cloves (about 1 Tbsp.)
- ½ cup whole milk
- 3½ oz. Parmesan cheese, grated (about 1 cup)
- 5½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper, plus more for garnish
- 6 large egg yolks
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Flaky sea salt

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Place potatoes directly on oven rack, and bake until fork-tender, about 1 hour. Remove from oven, and let stand at room temperature until cool enough to handle, about 15 minutes. (Potatoes should still be hot.)
2. Meanwhile, melt butter in a small saucepan over medium. Add garlic, and cook, stirring often, until aromatic, about 2 minutes. Stir in milk, and cook until just warm, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat, and keep warm.
3. Cut potatoes in half lengthwise. Scoop out cooked potato from halves, leaving

about ⅛ inch potato flesh on skin; place remaining cooked potato in a large bowl. Reserve 12 potato skins, and set aside. (Discard any remaining potato skins.)

4. Using a whisk or potato masher, whisk or mash cooked potatoes until smooth with no lumps, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir warm milk mixture, Parmesan, salt, and black pepper into potato mixture. Using a whisk, vigorously beat egg yolks, 1 at a time, into potato mixture until combined, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.
5. Brush outsides of reserved potato skins with oil, and place on a large rimmed baking sheet. Working in batches, transfer potato mixture to a piping bag fitted with a large open star tip. Pipe potato mixture into prepared potato skins in a decorative pattern, if desired.
6. Bake in preheated oven until piped potato mixture is lightly browned on top, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven; garnish with black pepper, parsley, and flaky sea salt.

BRING OUT THE SILVER

A little polish for the table

BEFORE THE MEAL

Give your sterling a wash with dish soap and hot water; avoid citrus-based detergents, as these can affect the finish. Dry the pieces completely with something other than terry cloth, which can leave tiny water spots that turn black when dry. “I’m a big fan of 100%-cotton floursack towels, as they’re super absorbent,” says Beth Walker, co-owner of Gryphon Estate Silver in Bakersville, North Carolina. Heavy tarnish calls for a specialty polish. Walker prefers Hagerty Silver Foam.

AFTER THE PARTY

Place dirty items in a sink with hot, soapy water to soak off the food, and then hand-wash. Running silver through the dishwasher isn’t a total no-no, says Walker. Just don’t let it touch your stainless pieces, and stick to hand-washing knives—their hollow handles are subject to splitting down the seams. Store the clean, dry items in a cabinet with anti-tarnish strips or in silver cloth bags. (“They’re magical, wonderful, and actually live up to the hype,” says the expert.)

A CASE FOR EVERYDAY USE

Eating with your silver flatware regularly, rather than storing it away, helps keep tarnish at bay, Walker notes. Don’t wait for holidays or a special occasion. “I enjoy my sterling whether I’m eating off paper plates, my usual dinnerware, or my grandma’s china,” she says. “What’s the point of having it if we never pull it out? I love to get creative, like using sugar bowls for flowers and former cigarette urns for cheese straws. That way, they’re not languishing in a cupboard somewhere.”



**THE BEST
SANDWICH EVER**

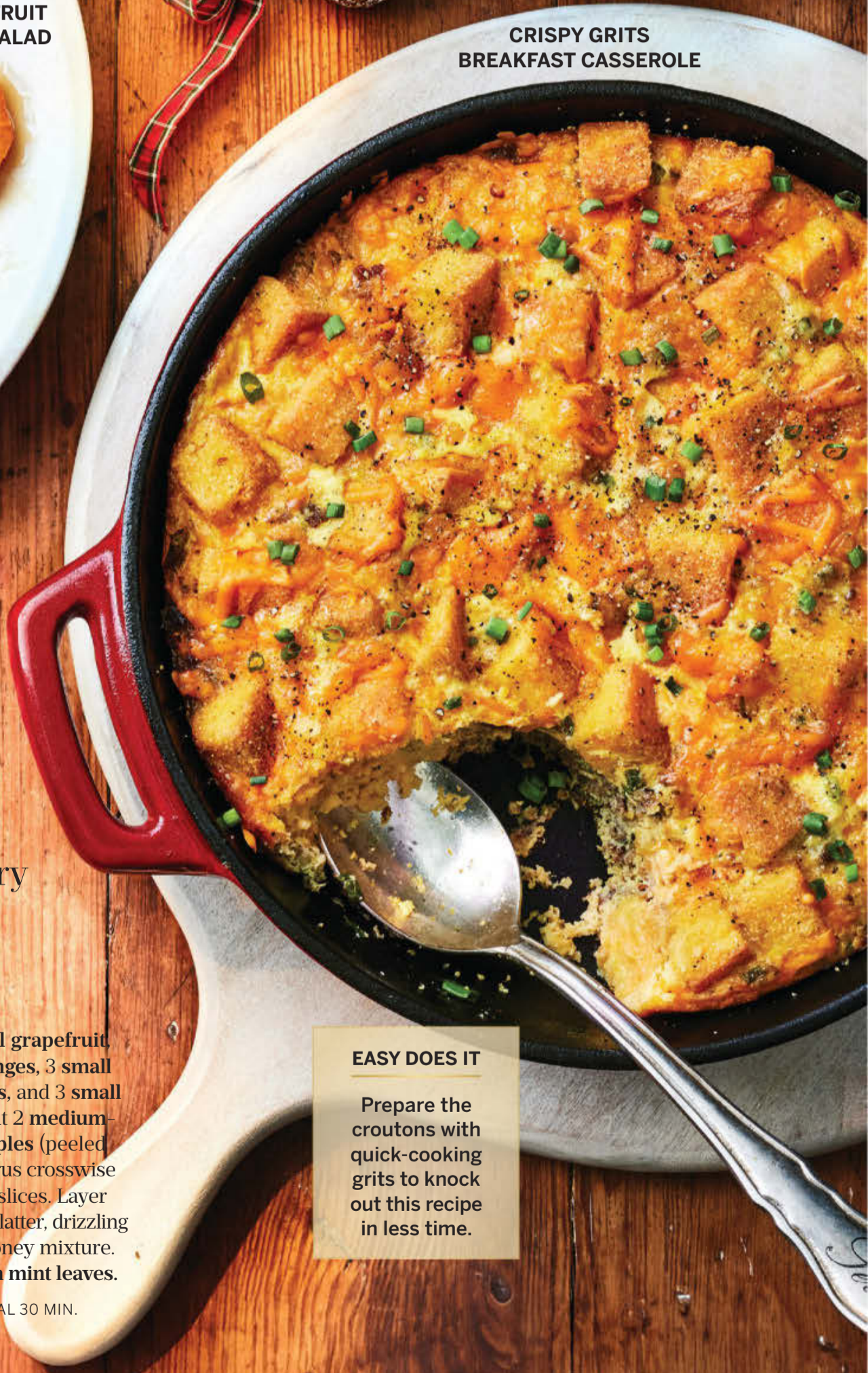
If you're lucky enough to have leftovers, stir Lemony Herb Sauce into mayonnaise, spread that on a split ciabatta roll, and add a slice of Southern Cracklin' Pork Roast and a handful of peppery arugula.



FIVE
GOLDEN
RINGS
FRUIT
SALAD



CRISPY GRITS
BREAKFAST CASSEROLE



Fix a Big, Beautiful Breakfast

Make-ahead recipes for a very merry morning

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG DUPREE
RECIPES BY JASMINE SMITH

Five Golden Rings Fruit Salad

Heat $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey in a saucepan over medium-low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until honey deepens in color, about 8 minutes. Add 1 cup apple cider vinegar, and cook, swirling pan occasionally, until sauce has thickened slightly, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground ginger and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt. Cover and set

aside. Peel 2 small grapefruit, 3 small navel oranges, 3 small Cara Cara oranges, and 3 small blood oranges. Cut 2 medium-size fresh pineapples (peeled and cored) and citrus crosswise into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Layer fruit on a serving platter, drizzling each layer with honey mixture. Garnish with fresh mint leaves.

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 30 MIN.
SERVES 10

EASY DOES IT

Prepare the croutons with quick-cooking grits to knock out this recipe in less time.

Crispy Grits Breakfast Casserole

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR

SERVES 10

- 1 lb. hot ground pork sausage (such as Jimmy Dean)
- 1 cup chopped scallions (from 1 bunch), plus more for garnish
- 12 large eggs
- 1 cup whole milk
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- Crispy Grits Croutons (recipe follows)
- 4 oz. sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Heat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-high. Add ground sausage; cook, stirring often, until crumbled and browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Stir in scallions; cook, stirring often, until aromatic, about 1 minute. Remove from heat; transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Wipe skillet clean.

2. Whisk together eggs, milk, kosher salt, and black pepper in a large bowl. Fold in sausage mixture until fully combined. Arrange Crispy Grits Croutons in 2 layers in cast-iron skillet. Pour egg mixture evenly over croutons, and sprinkle evenly with Cheddar cheese. Cover and chill overnight, if desired.

3. Bake in preheated oven until set and golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. Garnish with scallions, and serve warm.

Crispy Grits Croutons

ACTIVE 1 HOUR - TOTAL 2 HOURS, PLUS 1 HOUR CHILLING

MAKES ABOUT 7 CUPS

- 1 Tbsp., plus 1½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 2 cups uncooked yellow stone-ground grits (such as McEwen & Sons)
- 4 oz. sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)
- ½ cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 tsp. ground black pepper, divided
- 1½ cups plain yellow cornmeal

1. Line a 13- x 9-inch baking pan with plastic wrap, leaving a 2-inch overhang on short sides; set aside. In a large saucepan, bring 7 cups water and 1 tablespoon of the salt to a boil over medium-high. Add grits, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, until grits are very thick and tender, about 30 minutes.

2. Remove grits from heat, and let stand 5

minutes. Stir in Cheddar cheese, cream, butter, and ½ teaspoon of the pepper until smooth, about 1 minute. Spread grits in an even layer in prepared baking pan. Chill, uncovered, until grits are firm, at least 1 hour or up to 3 days.

3. Preheat oven to 425°F. Line 2 large rimmed baking sheets with aluminum foil, coat lightly with cooking spray, and set aside. Invert chilled grits onto a cutting board. Discard plastic wrap, and cut grits

into 1-inch cubes. Combine yellow cornmeal and remaining 1½ teaspoons salt and 1½ teaspoons pepper in a shallow dish. Dredge grit cubes in cornmeal mixture, shaking off excess. Place on prepared pans, and lightly coat with cooking spray.

4. Bake in preheated oven until golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Let cool completely. If desired, store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 2 days.

TAKE A SHORTCUT

Three spins on refrigerated cinnamon rolls



Eggnog-Spiced Rolls

Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat 2 (9-inch) round cake pans with cooking spray. Whisk together 2 cups whipping cream, 1 tsp. vanilla, and ½ tsp. nutmeg in a bowl until combined; set aside. Whisk together 1 cup brown sugar, ½ cup melted butter, 1½ tsp. cinnamon, and ½ tsp. nutmeg in another bowl until well combined; set aside. Separate 2 (17½-oz.) cans jumbo cinnamon roll dough into 10 rolls. Divide between prepared pans. Pour cream mixture around rolls. Spread about 1½ tablespoons sugar mixture over each roll. Cover pans with aluminum foil. Bake 35 minutes. Uncover and continue baking until tops are browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool slightly in pans, about 10 minutes.

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 5 MIN. - MAKES 10

Cinnamon-Pecan Twists

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment. Combine ½ cup brown sugar and 1 tsp. cinnamon in a bowl. Place ½ cup finely chopped pecans in another bowl. Separate 1 (17½-oz.) can jumbo cinnamon roll dough into 5 rolls; unroll into long strips. Halve strips lengthwise; cut each half into 4 (4½-inch-long) pieces. Brush tops with ¼ cup melted butter. Press tops of 20 pieces into sugar mixture and remaining tops into pecans. Twist 1 of each piece together; pinch ends to seal. Place twists on pans; bake 14 minutes. Whisk together 1 cup powdered sugar, 4 oz. softened cream cheese, 1 tsp. vanilla, and ¼ cup milk until smooth. Serve with twists.

ACTIVE 45 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 5 MIN. - MAKES 20

Orange-Roll Muffins

Preheat oven to 375°F. Coat 10 cups of a 12-cup muffin tray with baking spray. Stir together ½ cup plus 2 Tbsp. orange marmalade and 2 Tbsp. grated orange zest in a small bowl. Separate 2 (17½-oz.) cans jumbo cinnamon roll dough into 10 rolls. Unroll into long strips; spread each with 2 teaspoons of marmalade mixture. Add 1 dough strip to each cup, marmalade side in, starting at the rim and spiraling inward. Repeat with remaining strips. Brush tops evenly with ¼ cup melted butter. Bake until browned, 15 to 18 minutes. Whisk together 1½ cups powdered sugar, 2 tablespoons orange juice, and 2½ tablespoons marmalade mixture in a bowl. Drizzle over rolls.

ACTIVE 40 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 5 MIN. - MAKES 10

Thank Your Host

Small-batch goods that
taste homemade

BY BETSY CRIBB WATSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBBIE CAPONETTO



1. Green Hill cheese, \$15; sweetgrassdairy.com
Add a slice of South Georgia to their charcuterie board. This double-cream wheel from Thomasville's Sweet Grass Dairy goes especially well with fruit preserves and a glass of bubbly.

2. St. Augustine Style Hot Sauce, \$20/set of two; zabssauce.com
Introduce them to the sweet

sizzle of Florida-grown datil peppers with a bottle that zings up leftovers with just one shake. Plus, it's sold in a pack of two: one for them and another for you.

3. Plum & Rose jam and Strawberry Chipotle & Fig jam, \$15 each; tradestjamco.com

Originally made in chef Ashley Rouse's Charlotte kitchen, these unexpected flavor profiles are ones you

will reach for long after breakfast. Slather them on grilled cheeses, or stir them into glazes and marinades.

4. Original Chai Concentrate, \$18; sachaiteachcompany.com
Treat early risers (and late-night elves) to a comforting drink made with a concentrate from Birmingham-based Sachai Tea Co. It's crafted with black tea sourced from India and a blend of spices.

5. Original Hot Mustard, \$12; truesgourmet.com
For years, Mary Clayton Carl's family recipe sneakily improved her dishes, from salmon to sliders. Now the Alabama native is finally sharing this saucy secret with the rest of us.

6. Taste Salt & Pepper Peanuts, \$10; taste.online
A deliciously easy way to keep peckish guests happy between meals, these well-seasoned Virginia legumes bring extra pep to snack time.



7. Large Cheese Biscuit Tube, \$20; annescharlestoncheesebiscuits.com
 Made by Charleston, South Carolina, locals Anne Hutson and her daughter Sallie Hutson Price, these crispy bites with a little heat will give your mama's cheese straws a run for their money. On the off chance that

there are any left over, they'll freeze well too.

8. Ramp Salt, from \$7; jqdappalachianmercantile.com
 Elevate their spice rack with salt that's handcrafted by seventh-generation makers and features wild onions

that are native to the Appalachian Mountains.

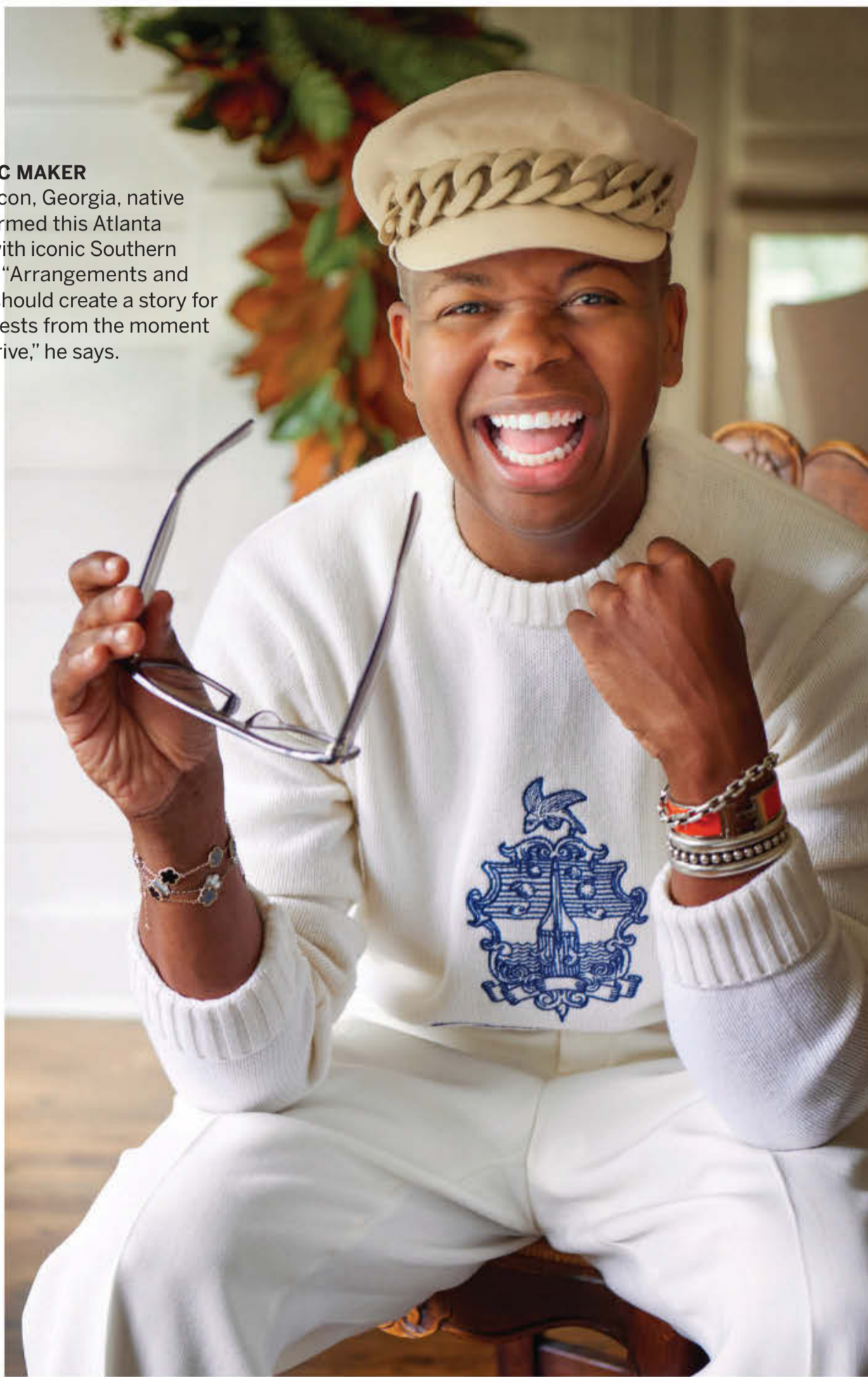
9. Bourbon Caramel Sauce, \$11; poppyandpeep.com
 Nashville father-daughter chocolatiers Mark and Evane Stoner concocted this scrumptious drizzle, which

will zhuzh up desserts with a swirl of bourbon and vanilla.

10. Jalapeño Hex Simple Syrup and Rosemary Thyme Simple Syrup, \$22 each; grisgriscocktailmagic.com
 Pour a splash of herby heat into cocktails with these New Orleans-inspired bar essentials, which are great in dressings and marinades too.

A MAGIC MAKER

The Macon, Georgia, native transformed this Atlanta home with iconic Southern foliage. “Arrangements and florals should create a story for your guests from the moment they arrive,” he says.



ON THE PORCH

Floral designer Canaan Marshall went all out for the front door, and though it looks impressive, the garland and wreath are made from things most Southerners can find in their yards—or right next door. “Be kind to your neighbors,” Marshall advises. Long cedar branches serve as the foundation for the garland, which he crafted by tying stems of magnolia leaves and holly sprigs to the limbs with florist wire. For the wreath, the designer started with a form he found at a local crafts store and then wired on the same materials, plus spray-painted magnolia leaves, dried sago palms, and hydrangeas, until it felt full and complete. “Even when you think it’s enough, it’s not!” declares Marshall.

Dazzle With Magnolia

Canaan Marshall swears his mood-boosting displays are easier than they look

BY BETSY CRIBB WATSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN WOODCOCK





IN THE KITCHEN

“Everyone congregates in here, so you need to have something extra special,” says Marshall, who chose a wide footed bowl for his display. He anchored the arrangement in florist foam by inserting greenery (including magnolia and banana leaves, holly sprigs, pandanus palms, and cedar).

From there, he mixed in blooms in deep reds and rich pinks, like ranunculus, dahlias, mums, roses, and dendrobium orchids, cutting them at varying heights for visibility. Referencing the flowers, Marshall says, “All those girls want to come to the party. Let them show off!”



OVER THE MANTEL

For the grand garland above the fireplace, Marshall laid dozens of magnolia stems flat and in one direction and then wired them together, tucking in sprigs of gold tip cedar and pine throughout to add textural interest. “This will dry well and should last around four weeks,” notes the pro. He amped up the color by setting containers on either side of the mantel, filling them with red and pink blossoms and greenery (like in the kitchen) as well as long stems of dried, spray-painted hydrangeas, banana leaves, and sago palms for height and drama. “I wanted those to create the moment,” he says.



BESIDE THE BED

“You should always have a fresh arrangement on the nightstand,” says Marshall, who used a tall pedestal bowl and a piece of florist foam to secure a mix of flowers, cedar, and magnolia leaves. The carnations are elevated and feel right at home thanks to his careful handling. “Pull the middle out, and they look like ranunculus or roses,” he notes. Although Marshall is often in the “bigger is better” camp, he advises tempering the scale of bedside bouquets. “You don’t want guests to wake up scared,” he warns.

Treat Guests the Best

Pro moves for
an inviting space

Include Surprises

Dallas designer Javier Burkle sets up a miniature artificial tree for festive flair. “I love leaving a present wrapped under it,” says Burkle. “Little touches like an unexpected gift and a welcome package in the bath—think extra toiletries, a nice bar of soap, and a few water bottles—help friends and family feel truly special.”

Consider Visitors of All Ages

Beyond a fresh duvet and a nightstand outfitted with the essentials, Maddy Howey, cofounder of the bedding line Pippen House, also equips the space with her youngest guests in mind. “For those with children, I offer a portable crib, a baby monitor, a sleep sack, a lovey, and a few books,” she says.

Provide Plenty of Options

“I like to give people control over their environment,” says Atlanta interior designer Jessica Davis of Atelier Davis. “I have a bowl of disposable earplugs at the ready and a sound machine just in case. Pillows with different levels of firmness also help them feel comfortable.”



Focus on the Details

“A bloom-filled bud vase and snacks plated on a piece of Christmas china will put visitors at ease and get them in the holiday spirit,” says Atlanta decorator Mallory Mathison Glenn, who pulled together the charming room pictured above.

Make It Personal

“I have to give my sister Alexandra credit for this touch. Frame a picture of yourself with your guests, and put it in their room,” notes Annemarie Dillard Jazic, a vice president at Dillard’s. “Nothing feels more welcoming than seeing that thoughtful detail.”

Stock the Shelf

“I’ve always felt that a curated selection of books is nice to provide for anyone staying overnight in case they forget their own, want to wind down for the evening, or are adjusting to a time change,” suggests Andrea Marino Taylor, a Dallas-based designer.

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PRETTY IN PINK

“For my husband’s entire childhood, the hotel was yellow, until one day we came and she was pink,” says Sarah Wetenhall. “Later, when we bought it, one of the first questions he asked was, ‘Is she going to stay pink?’ ”

DECK



THE PALMS

For over 75 years, The Colony Hotel
has been putting on a holiday spectacular

BY CAMERON BEALL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARMEL BRANTLEY STYLING BY PAGE MULLINS

A Christmas tree covered in seashells. Tropical cocktails by the pool. Columns swathed in greenery and twinkling lights. White sand underfoot.

It's the holidays (and high season) at The Colony Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida. Before even stepping through the grand front doors just a block off Worth Avenue, you sense the merriment in the air—though it's around 80 degrees. Longtime guest Susan Harrison says of the hotel, "There is always a warmth you feel when you walk in, and it's beautiful all year. But at Christmas, it really puts on its finery."

The Colony, which first opened its doors in 1947, has seen it all, from a once-brown facade and emerald green carpeting to the Kennedys and cabaret. While the exterior is now painted Colony Pink (a custom shade by Farrow & Ball that inspired its nickname, Pink Paradise), you'll still find an eclectic mix of hotel visitors and live music. The original owners intended for it to be a place for their houseguests to stay and for the community to gather year-round, and its mission as the "local's hotel" remains the same today in many ways. "To me, The Colony represents the best of Palm Beach. It's comfortable yet elevated, and while many things have changed, it has just gotten better at what it always was," says Harrison.

For Sarah and Andrew Wetenhall, who bought The Colony in December 2016, their history and memories with the hotel long predate their ownership. "My family has been involved with The Colony since 1970, when my father-in-law purchased it and kept an apartment there until his passing even after he wasn't in ownership," says Sarah. "My husband grew up coming here, so when we met, it immediately became a fixture of my life." What started at the behest of her father-in-law, who wanted the historic landmark back in the family, has become a personal mission:

to maintain The Colony's traditional elements while adding modern touches and unexpected moments.

As the second generation of the family in ownership, the Wetenhalls are intentional about upholding the legacy they're a part

of and fondly refer to the building as "she." Sarah says, "We are stewards of something larger than us—she came before and will live after. We are just a small part of The Colony's story; she belongs to the community, to Palm Beach."





HANDLED WITH CARE

“In so many ways, the island is a mythical place.

It’s curated and well thought out yet fun and whimsical, which is what we want the hotel to be,” says Sarah.



FUN FOR ALL AGES
The excitement isn't limited to inside the hotel. Just around the corner, the Worth Avenue tree-lighting ceremony kicks off the season followed by carols and milk and cookies on the front steps of the Pink Paradise.

COAT OF MANY COLORS

Depending on the time of day, the pink shifts, reflecting all the shades found in a flamingo's wing. "She's been many colors in her life and will probably be many more, but for now, she's our Pink Paradise," says Sarah.



BEND TRADITIONS... JUST A BIT

Much like Palm Beach, a small town with a big personality, the hotel with 93 rooms and villas strikes a balance between the past and present. Working alongside Mimi Maddock McMakin (the principal designer and founder of Kemble Interiors) as well as with the Historical Society of Palm Beach County and the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, the new owners took great care to preserve the history and memories within. Starting with the ballroom and ending with the guest spaces, they tackled one area at a time. “Throughout the renovation, we were mindful to retain the essence of The Colony Hotel,” says McMakin. “The layout has pretty much stayed the same. We just modernized it so it’s comfortable for discerning guests but still lets them feel as if they’ve been transported back to the forties. We’re using rattan, cane, wicker, and pretty florals endemic to the relaxed style of Palm Beach.”

A big part of Sarah’s vision for the future of The Colony was transforming the lobby (a space visitors must pass through to get anywhere in the hotel) into an inviting living room. Instead of just serving as a place to check in and out, it’s a spot to gather, see friends, and have a cocktail or coffee. On most evenings, you’ll find a guitarist playing live music, continuing a tradition that stems from the big band era when there was dancing during dinner. But visually, this grand welcome begins with the custom hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper that carries you throughout the hotel so you feel as though you’re living in its heart at all times.

GET INSPIRED BY OLD FLORIDA

“Here in Palm Beach, there is no shortage of inspiration. You just have to open your eyes and take a walk,” recalls Sarah of how the wallpaper got started. “I love learning

about history to gain a sense of place, so I began going through archival photos, which is where I found a picture of the original lobby.” The Colony first opened with black terrazzo floors, which were reinstalled, and had a small mural behind the front desk titled *The Early Days in Palm Beach*. Sarah says, “That’s when it clicked, and I had a vision of a floor-to-ceiling scene that’s representative of the whole island.”

The elaborate design makes you pause to take in every detail. The pink back-

ground is full of native plants, flamingos and cougars wearing jewelry, parrots with nests of Easter eggs, fish with wings, monkeys (inspired by Johnnie Brown, the hotel’s mascot), and local architecture—from trellis gates and fountains around town to the iconic Worth Avenue clock tower. Hidden within the flora and fauna are nods to the Wetenhall family. “We had the pleasure of sneaking in little secrets that are special to us—the anniversary date for my husband and me; the year the hotel was built; my father-in-law with his pets; and our dog, Palmer,” she says.

Sprinkled throughout the cheerful building, you’ll also find a sea grape motif,

A PLACE FOR ALL
You’ll likely see Palmer (below), the Wetenhalls’ Cavalier King Charles Spaniel who’s named after the island, roaming around the pet-friendly establishment that opens its doors to both people and their dogs.



MONKEY BUSINESS

The Colony's official mascot, a monkey named Johnnie Brown, is shown in this wallpaper. He was a former pet of the late Addison Mizner, an architect who greatly influenced the look of Palm Beach.



which was based on a drawing by Zinnia, one of McMakin's grandchildren. "Sea grapes are native to the island, and you see them everywhere, so that really spoke to The Colony's singular past in a special way," explains Sarah.

DELIGHT IN THE DETAILS

Thoughtful attention also extends to the outdoor spaces. The Kemble team of Cece Bowman and Mackenzie Hodgson found one-of-a-kind vintage ceramic garden seats, with designs including a stack of books and an elephant, to use in lieu of traditional end tables by the lounge chairs around the pool. "One of the success stories of this hotel is that Sarah shares special items with her guests, which makes The Colony unique and takes away the feeling of a commercial space," says McMakin.

The pool, which is shaped like the state of Florida, hasn't changed since the early days, but the outdoor dining space has been reinvented a bit. At the end of 2019, Swifty's, a legendary New York City restaurant known for its famous clientele, came to The Colony as a pop-up. When the hotel reopened at the end of 2020, the eatery moved outside. These areas have always had a casual, European-style atmosphere. You'll likely encounter sunbathers and swimmers alongside people eating meals, and no one bats an eye. "It gives the flavor that you are a guest at a private home enjoying a party," says McMakin.

MAKE IT BEACHY AND BRIGHT

Something's always happening at "the club without dues," whether it's family-friendly Monday-night trivia, Sunday-night bingo, or a DJ set by the pool. But December is when the celebrations kick into high gear and the decor is on full display. "The power of Palm Beach at Christmas is not something to be messed with," says Sarah, who hasn't missed one at The Colony since 1999.

While there's always been a beautiful tree, don't expect to find the classic red and green. Instead, the hotel partnered with

designer Aerin Lauder to create a brand-new look for the season. Drawing inspiration from the surrounding environment, Lauder says she worked with "a refreshing color palette to fit the atmosphere and add a lively holiday spirit." The tree is adorned with playful accents, including real and ceramic shells, coral fans, ceramic birds, and glass ornaments, plus a seashell topper and a palm-embroidered tree skirt and garland.

The main attraction is the living room's spectacular 12-foot-tall tree, but subtle trimmings are woven throughout—garland-wrapped columns, oversize wreaths on the larger-than-life front doors, sparkling ornaments illuminating Swifty's hanging garden, and palm trees twirled up with shimmering lights. "There's no shortage of celebrations here. This place makes you feel like it's your second home from the moment you arrive," says Harrison.



SEASIDE SPARKLE

Lauder's tree-trimming tips

PICK A PALETTE

"From the beautiful shade of pink painted on the exterior to the lobby's de Gournay wallpaper, everywhere you look there are touches of color and tropical accents, so I wanted the tree to reflect that."

BRANCH OUT

"I'm always inspired by nature, and I felt like there was something really magical about having a tree with real elements, so there are starfish and a combination of found and ceramic shells plus coral fans, bird ornaments, and glass balls in green and coral shades."

TELL A TALE

"My favorite trees always have a story. They should be filled with layers of memories and meaningful objects."

BY THE NUMBERS

Lauder's team dressed the property—from palm trees to columns—with 15,000 feet of lights and 10,000 feet of garlands.

Over 30 dozen ornaments, primarily from Aerin and D.Stevens, accent the lobby tree.





WHITE CHRISTMAS
BÛCHE DE NOËL

recipe, page 120

NOT SO VANILLA

EVER IN THE BACKGROUND, THIS HUMBLE PANTRY STAPLE TAKES CENTER STAGE IN THESE SHOWSTOPPING WINTER DESSERTS



RECIPES BY ALANA AL-HATLANI AND JOSH MILLER PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR PROTASIO
PROP STYLING BY CHRISTINA BROCKMAN FOOD STYLING BY CHELSEA ZIMMER

Folks tease me when I tell them my favorite ice-cream flavor is vanilla.

Let them laugh—those hecklers don't know what they're taking for granted. Second in scarcity and price only to saffron, vanilla "beans" are the fruit of an orchid that is meticulously cultivated in just a few places on the planet. Pollinated, picked, and smoothed by hand, these precious beans are cured up to 90 days before being transformed into the tiny bottles of extract that nearly every Southerner has tucked away in their cupboard.

Frequently imitated, pure vanilla's nuanced aroma is the sum of hundreds of compounds that mingle, mature, and intensify as the pods age and are exposed to light, heat, and pressure. All of these act in concert, yielding a singular ingredient with surprising depth. A sensitive nose and a trained palate can savor the multitude of notes that compose the symphony that is vanilla—floral, fruity, buttery, woody, and smoky, to name a few.

Flashier ingredients often upstage this humble standby, but it deserves to be celebrated on its own. We've taken four fundamental recipes—custard, cake, meringue, and buttercream—and combined them to create dramatic desserts that allow this flavor to shine. One glimpse (and hopefully a taste) and you'll never call vanilla "boring" again.

—Josh Miller



↓
**LET IT SNOW
PAVLOVA**

—
recipe, page 120

— ↓ —
**TRIPLE-
VANILLA
TRIFLE**

—
recipe, page 120



White Christmas Bûche de Noël

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 15 MIN. - TOTAL
2 HOURS, 15 MIN., PLUS 4 HOURS
COOLING AND CHILLING

SERVES 12 TO 16

Vanilla Chiffon Cake
(recipe below, at right),
freshly baked and still hot

- 2 Tbsp. powdered sugar,
plus more for garnish
- 1½ cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 Tbsp. vanilla bean paste or
4 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1 cup Ultimate Vanilla Custard
(recipe, page 121)
- Vanilla Syrup (recipe follows)
- Essential Vanilla Buttercream
(recipe, page 121)
- Vanilla Bean Meringue
Mushrooms Variation
(recipe, page 121)
- Rosemary sprigs, for garnish

1. Quickly loosen Vanilla Chiffon Cake edges in baking pan with a butter knife, and dust top with powdered sugar. Place a clean kitchen towel on cake. Place a large wire rack or rimless baking sheet on top of towel; carefully flip to invert cake. Lift off baking pan, and gently peel off parchment from cake. Working from 1 long edge, carefully roll up cake and towel together, jelly roll style, into a log. Place log, seam side down, on wire rack. Let cool completely, about 1 hour.
2. Beat cream, vanilla bean paste, and granulated sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until medium peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Gently fold in Ultimate Vanilla Custard until combined.
3. Carefully unroll cake log. Remove towel, and brush cake evenly with Vanilla Syrup.
4. Spread whipped cream mixture evenly over cake; reroll cake, without towel, into a log. Place, seam side down, on a platter. If desired, diagonally cut 1 (5-inch) piece off 1 end; position alongside cake log as a branch. Frost as desired with Essential Vanilla Buttercream, reserving ¼ cup for decorating. Using tines of a fork, create a

barklike texture in buttercream. Loosely cover cake with plastic wrap; chill at least 3 hours or up to 24 hours.

5. Remove from refrigerator; let come to room temperature, about 1 hour. Decorate cake and platter, adhering meringue mushrooms with reserved buttercream; garnish with rosemary and powdered sugar.

Vanilla Syrup

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 40 MIN.

MAKES ⅓ CUP

Cook ¼ cup granulated sugar and ¼ cup water in a small saucepan over medium-high, stirring often, until mixture boils and sugar dissolves. Pour mixture into a small heatproof bowl; whisk in ½ tsp. vanilla bean paste or extract until well combined. Chill about 30 minutes. Use immediately, or store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 week.

Let It Snow Pavlova

ACTIVE 40 MIN. - TOTAL 40 MIN.

SERVES 12 TO 16

- 1¼ cups heavy whipping cream
- ¾ tsp. vanilla bean paste or
2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¾ tsp. granulated sugar
- Vanilla Bean Meringues
(recipe, page 121)
- ⅔ cups Ultimate Vanilla
Custard (recipe, page 121)
- Powdered sugar, for garnish

1. Beat cream, vanilla bean paste, and granulated sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until medium-stiff peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Set aside.
2. Place the 9-inch Vanilla Bean Meringue on a platter. Spread evenly with about 1 cup custard. Top with about 1 cup whipped cream. Repeat layering process with 7-inch, 5-inch, and 3-inch meringues; custard; and whipped cream, reducing

custard and whipped cream by about ¼ cup or more per layer as needed. Top with 1-inch meringue cone. Garnish with powdered sugar.

Triple-Vanilla Trifle

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 20 MIN.,
PLUS 2 HOURS CHILLING

SERVES 14 TO 16

Vanilla Chiffon Cake
Trifle Variation (recipe at
bottom right)

- 3 cups heavy whipping cream
- 3 Tbsp. vanilla bean paste or
1½ Tbsp. vanilla extract
- 3 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- Ultimate Vanilla Custard
(recipe, page 121)
- Vanilla Bean Meringue
Mushrooms Variation
(recipe, page 121), roughly
crushed (optional)

1. Cut cake into 1½-inch cubes (to yield 10 cups); set aside.
2. Beat cream, vanilla bean paste, and granulated sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until medium peaks form, 3 to 4 minutes. Set aside.
3. Spoon one-third of the custard (about 1⅓ cups) into bottom of a 14-cup trifle dish or bowl. Top with one-third of the cake cubes (about 3⅓ cups). Reserve 3 cups of the whipped cream for topping the trifle; top the cake-cube layer with half of the remaining whipped cream (about 1⅓ cups). Repeat layers twice, omitting final whipped cream layer. Cover and chill at least 2 hours or up to 12 hours.
4. Just before serving, uncover and top with reserved whipped cream and crushed meringue mushrooms, if using.

Vanilla Chiffon Cake

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 40 MIN.

MAKES 1 (17½- X 12½-INCH) CAKE

- 5 large eggs, separated
- ¼ tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 cup granulated sugar, divided
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 2 tsp. vanilla bean paste or
vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup all-purpose flour

- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat a 17½- x 12½-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray; line with parchment paper, and recoat with cooking spray. Set aside.
2. Beat egg whites and cream of tartar with a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment on medium speed until foamy, 1 to 2 minutes. Increase mixer speed to high; gradually add ½ cup of the sugar, beating until stiff, glossy peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes total. Transfer mixture to a medium bowl; set aside. (Do not wipe mixer bowl or whisk attachment clean.)
3. Add egg yolks, vegetable oil, vanilla bean paste, vanilla extract, and remaining ½ cup sugar to mixer bowl; beat with whisk attachment on medium-high speed until pale yellow, about 3 minutes. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt in a medium bowl. Reduce mixer speed to low; gradually add flour mixture, beating just until combined, about 1 minute. Gradually and gently fold in egg white mixture just until combined.
4. Pour batter into prepared baking sheet; using an offset spatula, gently and evenly spread batter to edges. Bake in preheated oven until center of cake springs back when pressed, about 12 minutes. Remove from oven. If making the White Christmas Bûche de Noël, proceed with Step 1 of that recipe (at top left) immediately, while cake is still hot.

Vanilla Chiffon Cake Trifle Variation

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 45 MIN.,
PLUS 1 HOUR COOLING

MAKES 1 (13- X 9-INCH) CAKE

In Step 1, preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a 13- x 9-inch metal baking pan with cooking spray; line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on long edges, and recoat with cooking spray. Set aside. Proceed with Steps 2





and 3 as directed. In Step 4, pour batter into prepared pan; gently and evenly spread batter to edges. Bake until center of cake springs back when pressed, 15 to 17 minutes. Remove from oven. Let cool completely on a wire rack, about 1 hour. Use immediately; store, covered, at room temperature up to 1 day; or freeze up to 1 month.

Ultimate Vanilla Custard

ACTIVE 25 MIN. - TOTAL 25 MIN., PLUS 2 HOURS CHILLING

MAKES 4 CUPS

- 9 large egg yolks
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 vanilla bean pod
- 3 cups whole milk
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

1. Whisk together egg yolks, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a medium-size heatproof bowl until smooth. Set aside.
2. Halve vanilla bean pod lengthwise. Using the back of a paring knife, scrape seeds from pod halves into a medium saucepan; add scraped pod halves and milk. Bring to a simmer over medium, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.
3. Gradually ladle half of hot milk mixture into yolk mixture, whisking constantly. Return egg yolk mixture to remaining milk mixture in saucepan. Cook over medium, whisking constantly, until mixture boils and thickens, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in butter and vanilla extract until combined. Pour through a fine mesh strainer into a large heatproof bowl. Remove and discard vanilla pod halves. Cover custard with plastic wrap pressed directly onto surface. Chill until cold, about 2 hours. Store, with plastic wrap

still pressed against surface, in refrigerator up to 3 days.

Essential Vanilla Buttercream

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 15 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. vanilla bean paste or 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups powdered sugar
- 2 Tbsp. whole milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt

Beat butter and vanilla in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Gradually beat in powdered sugar $\frac{1}{2}$ cup at a time. Add milk and salt; beat until smooth, about 1 minute. Use immediately, or store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 week. (If chilled, let buttercream come to room temperature and whip again with an electric mixer just before using.)

Vanilla Bean Meringues

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 30 MIN., PLUS 3 HOURS COOLING

MAKES 5 MERINGUES OF SPECIFIED SIZES

- 9 large egg whites, at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. cream of tartar
- Pinch of kosher salt
- $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups granulated sugar
- 2 Tbsp. vanilla bean paste or 1 Tbsp. vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 250°F with racks in top third and lower third positions. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside.
2. Beat egg whites, cream of tartar, and salt with a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment on medium-high speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase mixer speed to high, and gradually stream in sugar. Beat until stiff peaks form, 8 to 10 minutes. (Mixture should be glossy, and sugar should be completely dissolved.) Beat in vanilla until combined.
3. Using a pencil, trace 1 (9-inch) circle and 1 (5-inch) circle on 1

prepared baking sheet. Trace 1 (7-inch), 1 (3-inch), and 1 (1-inch) circle on remaining parchment sheets to face pencil side down. Spread or pipe meringue within traced circles in an even layer about 1 inch thick (for the 1-inch circle, pipe or dollop the meringue into a cone shape).

4. Bake in preheated oven until meringues are a pale off-white color and firm to the touch, about 2 hours. Turn off oven; let meringues cool, undisturbed, in oven until completely dry and crisp, at least 3 hours or up to 12 hours. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and store at room temperature up to 1 day.

Vanilla Bean Meringue Mushrooms Variation

ACTIVE 40 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 40 MIN., PLUS 3 HOURS COOLING

MAKES ABOUT 20 MERINGUE MUSHROOMS

Proceed through Step 2 of Vanilla Bean Meringues as directed, reducing ingredient amounts to 3 large egg whites, a pinch of cream of tartar, a pinch of kosher salt, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar, and 2 tsp. vanilla bean paste (or 1 tsp. vanilla extract). Omit Step 3. To form the mushroom caps, dollop meringue mixture to form 2-inch rounds spaced $\frac{3}{4}$ inch apart on prepared baking sheets. To form the mushroom stems, pipe meringue into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-wide cones spaced $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart. (You will have about 20 rounds and 20 cones total.) Proceed with Step 4 as directed. Once meringues are completely dry and crisp, assemble mushrooms. Using a small, sharp knife, pierce a small hole in bottom of 1 mushroom cap. Using a small spoon, place a dab of **Essential Vanilla Buttercream** (recipe above, at left) into hole in bottom of mushroom cap. Gently press the pointed end of 1 mushroom stem into hole. Repeat process with remaining caps, stems, and buttercream.

TASTING NOTES

Three different ways to enjoy vanilla

EXTRACT

Pure extracts use alcohol to draw out the taste from vanilla beans, without added sugar or artificial colors and flavors. Make it at home by soaking a few beans in vodka or bourbon. You can substitute a tablespoon of extract for one vanilla bean in most recipes.

BEANS

When purchasing vanilla beans, look for pods that are pliable and shiny—indicators that they're fresh. To access the seeds inside the pod, split the bean lengthwise with a paring knife and then scrape the cut halves with the back of the knife to release the seeds and pulp. Save the spent pods for making your own extract.

PASTE

While the pods can dry out and lose potency, vanilla bean paste can be stored in the pantry up to three years and provides the same concentrated flavor and beautiful black specks. Consisting of vanilla bean seeds, extract, and a thickener, it can be swapped for the same amount of extract in most recipes.





Almost-Neutral Ground

With a handsome pair of emerald green armchairs and paprika-hued throw pillows on the sofa, the living room feels inherently festive. To keep it from skewing Christmassy year-round, the designer balanced the color pairing with grass cloth wallpaper on the paneling and the backs of the bookshelves and a coat of Benjamin Moore's Morning Dew (OC-140) on the millwork.





Amanda
Simmons

Jewel- Box Dream House

Bring on the charm! A Houston home is colorfully reimagined by designer Amanda Simmons



Open Invitation

An Alexandre Vossion rock crystal chandelier lights up the grand entry, which is swathed from top to bottom in Benjamin Moore's White Dove (OC-17) for an airy welcome. Simmons added unexpected punches by covering a pair of small ottomans in Schumacher's Anshun fabric and lacquering the banister in Benjamin Moore's Basking Ridge Beige (1158). The pops of pink earn extra attention thanks to a fresh cedar garland that's accented with luxe ribbons.



Gather Around

At Prichard's request, Simmons used de Gournay hand-painted wallpaper to create an inviting wine lounge. While she's enjoying it in her own space now, Prichard has long-term plans for the paper. "I hope to one day make panels out of it to pass down to my daughters, nieces, and nephews," she says. The millwork, ceiling, and trim in Farrow & Ball's Light Blue (No. 22) provide a soft, soothing contrast to the shimmer of the gilded design.



WHEN SHALLA PRICHARD and her husband began renovating their newly purchased forever place in a storybook Houston neighborhood, decorating it with pass-down-worthy pieces was a top priority. "With our two girls approaching their teens at the time, we saw this house as an opportunity to create heirlooms and memories—and a chance to take more design risks and use less kid-friendly fabrics," she says with a laugh.

A referral from her best friend led Prichard to enlist local designer Amanda Simmons to bring all of this to life. Their vision also called for incorporating nods to the homeowner's Persian

heritage. "My husband, Christopher, is a native Texan, but I'm a first-generation American," says Prichard. "I came to Texas by way of England, where I was born. My Persian parents were unable to return home to Iran due to the Iranian Revolution."

Simmons delivered with fanciful patterns and rich colors, transforming the house into an oversize jewel box. The designer says this is a testament to her clients. "If you combine trust, taste, and a willingness to take risks, magic happens," she explains.

When it came time to bring in the holiday spirit, Simmons' primary goal was to complement the year-round decor. Saturated tones of pinks were pulled from the existing palette for ribbons, ornaments, and other details. The result? Dressed-up spaces that prove trimmings shouldn't be limited to red and green.



Freshen Up

Nearly every room was completely overhauled with the exception of the kitchen. “It was in great shape and just needed a refresh,” notes Simmons. A coat of paint (Benjamin Moore’s White Dove, OC-17), unlacquered brass hardware, Charles Edwards pendant lighting, Carrara marble countertops, and a custom brass-and-zinc range hood enhanced the existing cabinetry and footprint. Square boxwood wreaths sourced from Craftex, the designer’s go-to for holiday decor in Houston, hang from the windows, offering a subtle and stylish nod to the time of year.



Something Blue

Although the tablescape isn’t set in a traditional colorway, the gold accents and dishes of ribbon candy in complementary shades make it feel appropriately seasonal and fun. Blue taper candles in varying heights are placed along the high-gloss table, which was intentionally left uncovered to reflect light from the chandelier. Kim Seybert ombré silk napkins and napkin rings, as well as fresh-cut lisianthus blooms, tie it all together.



Artful Inspiration

A painting from Prichard's collection guided the design of the dining room. "A trick of the trade is to pull a color from art or wallpaper as a starting point," advises Simmons, who leaned into the piece's bright orange hues to inform the fabric selections on the window treatments and the backs of the chairs. Farrow & Ball's Hague Blue (No. 30) wraps the walls and trim in warm elegance, and the showstopping chandelier (one of the only fixtures from the previous homeowners that the Prichards decided to keep) shines light on the Jan Showers table. Pattern play adds another layer of excitement to the entertaining space; custom shades on The Urban Electric Co. sconces match the drapes, which are fashioned from Travers' St. Croix fabric.



The Prichards with their dog, Honey, by the teal-painted front door (Benjamin Moore's Newburg Green, HC-158)



◆ ◆ ◆ ◆
Best Seat
in the House

"I am a huge reader; it's a passion I share with my mother and daughters. This is a favorite room because we can all gather and dive headfirst into great books," Prichard says of the library. It helps that the space itself feels transportive. "This entire area, even the surrounding millwork, was planned around an Hermès scarf featuring Persian architecture that was purchased years ago," says Simmons, who displayed it in an acrylic shadow box with a custom Ann-Morris picture light overhead. Houston-based furniture builder The Joseph Company crafted the nook's perfect-for-cozying-up chaise, which is wrapped in Clarence House's Cartagena fabric. The Murano glass chandelier pours light onto a Carlo Scarpa table that was found at W. Gardner, Ltd., antiques store in Houston.





Wintry Hues

An Hermès wallpaper under threat of discontinuation became the inspiration for the pool bath, which was built in partnership with local Crossroads Construction. “We got our hands on it in the nick of time,” says Simmons of the near miss. Custom sconces by The Urban Electric Co. were fabricated to match the blue Jaclo faucet and towel ring, while spriggy branches and metallic ornaments deliver extra flair.



A REDBIRD CHRISTMAS

Best-selling author FANNIE FLAGG shares a heartwarming story from one unforgettable December



THE REDBIRD CAKE

recipe, page 134



TEXT BY FANNIE FLAGG RECIPE BY TRICIA MANZANERO STUEDEMAN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR PROTASIO
PROP STYLING BY LYDIA PURSELL FOOD STYLING BY TORIE COX

W

WHEN I WAS A CHILD living in South Alabama, my mother had a sweet friend named Frances Cleverdon, who resided on an oak-lined street in the little town of Magnolia Springs. I loved joining Mom on visits to “Miss Frances” in her beautiful old home on the river. Magnolia Springs was a true nature’s paradise, with so many varieties of birds and other wildlife. It was such fun to be there, especially around Christmastime when Miss Frances would dress up as Mrs. Claus and hand out toys and sacks of delicious homegrown pecans. Even after we moved up to Birmingham, my mother would plan a trip or two every year to see Miss Frances.

There’s a particular winter I want to tell you about—it was not a good one for me. I was grown-up and living and working in New York City, which is a long way from Alabama. My mother had passed away only a few months earlier, and I had become increasingly unhappy in my career. I was feeling rather lost. Needless to say, when the holiday season rolled around, I was certainly not in a joyful mood.

Then one afternoon, quite out of the blue, the phone rang. It was Miss Frances calling to invite me to spend Christmas with her in Alabama. “You need to come home, honey,” she said. And so I did. Although I had not seen her for years, I figured it would be better than moping around my lonely apartment. I managed to get a few days off from work and headed down to Magnolia Springs. It was a long and exhausting trip. When I finally arrived, it was well after ten o’clock

on Christmas Eve night. She and I caught up for a while, but she could see I was tired. After a cup of hot chocolate, she showed me to the guest bedroom where my mother and I had stayed so many times before—the one with the pretty view of the backyard, all the way down to the river. But as I closed the curtains that night, the winter trees—their bare black branches blowing in the wind—looked as sad and bleak as I felt. I crawled into the big feather bed with a heavy heart, wondering why I had even bothered to make the trip. This was going to be a very sad Christmas, no matter where I was.

Early the next morning, I heard a gentle knock on my door. A smiling Miss Frances entered with a warm mug of coffee and set it on my nightstand. She walked over to the window, threw open the curtains, and announced, “Honey, I have a surprise for you. Come see!” Even though it was the last thing I wanted to do, I forced myself to get up and look out. What a spectacular sight. The dark, dreary yard had turned into a living holiday card. The sky was filled with big, fluffy, swirling snowflakes, and flocks of redbirds were soaring above the ground all the way down to the water.

I hardly had time to catch my breath when, all at once, a streak of crimson shot straight up in the air. A huge redbird landed right on the windowsill. He cocked his head, looked me right in the eye, and began jumping up and down as if to say, “Get up! Come outside and play.” He then flew back down to join his friends below. I was suddenly wide-awake. “Wow! Did you see that?” I asked. Miss Frances laughed and said, “Yes, I did. You know, your mother loved redbirds.”

“I remember,” I replied. “She always said they were her favorites. I wish she

were here with us to see them.”

Then Miss Frances asked me something I’ve never forgotten. She smiled and responded, “Well, honey, how do you know she’s not?”

I spent the next few days sitting outside on her back porch, listening to the happy chirps of those beautiful creatures. They were just so fun to watch. Reminiscent of tiny clowns, they charmed me with their little black masks. Bright, cheery redbirds were everywhere that year. Even as we walked over to the Community Hall for the Christmas Day celebration, they seemed to fly along the street with us.

Looking back now, I can truthfully say that when I left Magnolia Springs that holiday, the deep grief I had arrived with had disappeared. Someone or something must have known that trip was exactly what I needed.

I later learned that in many cultures across the world, going back thousands of years, a redbird sighting is believed to have a special meaning.

Early European settlers in America called them cardinals and said they were angels or spirits sent from Heaven as a sign of hope and comfort. Others view them as a visit from a departed loved one, sent as a reminder that you are not alone. I’ve even heard that some think they are a sign of good luck for the coming year.

Of course, we are all free to believe what we want. But for me, I will always think that seeing a redbird in December is nature’s way of saying “Merry Christmas,” straight from Heaven.



BIRDS OF A FEATHER
Fannie Flagg (left)
with Miss Frances

“I WILL ALWAYS THINK THAT SEEING
A REDBIRD IN DECEMBER IS NATURE’S
WAY OF SAYING ‘MERRY CHRISTMAS,’
STRAIGHT FROM HEAVEN.”



The Redbird Cake

Inspired by our perennially popular Hummingbird Cake, this festive twist is spruced up with maraschino cherries and a comforting blend of warm baking spices. The redbird cookies add a nostalgically sweet finishing touch.

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 35 MIN., PLUS 3 HOURS, 10 MIN. CHILLING

SERVES 10

CAKE LAYERS

- Baking spray
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 1¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- ½ tsp. ground allspice
- 1 (8-oz.) can crushed pineapple in juice
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1¼ cups canola oil
- ⅔ cup mashed ripe bananas (from 2 medium bananas)
- ½ cup whole buttermilk, at room temperature
- 3 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 2 tsp. vanilla bean paste or extract
- 1 (16-oz.) jar stemless maraschino cherries,

- drained, finely chopped, and patted dry (about ¾ cup)
- ⅔ cup finely chopped toasted pecans

FROSTING

- 2 (8-oz.) pkg. cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 (32-oz.) pkg. powdered sugar
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla bean paste or extract

DECORATIONS

- Garnishes: Rosemary sprigs, sage sprigs, fresh bay leaves, and cinnamon sticks
- Marzipan Pinecones (recipe follows)
- Frosted Redbird Cookies (recipe, page 135)
- Powdered sugar (optional)

1. Prepare the Cake Layers: Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat 3 (8-inch) round cake pans with baking spray; line bottoms using parchment paper. Set aside.
2. Whisk together flour, salt, cinnamon, baking soda, ginger, and allspice in a large bowl until well combined; set aside. Pour pineapple through a fine mesh strainer set over a large bowl, and press solids to extract juice. Transfer pineapple to a cutting

board, and finely chop. Add pineapple to strained juice in bowl. Whisk in eggs, granulated sugar, oil, bananas, buttermilk, melted butter, and vanilla until well combined. Add pineapple mixture to flour mixture; whisk until nearly combined. Fold in cherries and pecans.

3. Divide batter evenly among prepared pans (about 2 ⅔ cups per pan). Gently tap bottoms of pans on a countertop a few times to remove air bubbles.
4. Bake in preheated oven until a wooden pick inserted in centers of Cake Layers comes out clean, 22 to 25 minutes. Let cool in pans on wire racks 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and transfer, parchment side down, to wire racks; let cool completely, 2 hours, 30 minutes to 3 hours.

5. Prepare the Frosting: Beat cream cheese, softened butter, salt, ginger, and cinnamon with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on medium-low speed until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Reduce mixer speed to low, and gradually add powdered sugar, beating until combined after each addition. Add vanilla, and increase mixer speed to medium-high; beat until fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes.

6. Using a serrated knife, trim domed tops of Cake Layers; discard trimmings. Remove and discard parchment paper. Place 1 layer, trimmed side up, on a cake plate, and spread top with 1 ¼ cups Frosting. Top with second layer, trimmed side up, and spread with

1 ¼ cups Frosting. Top with third layer, trimmed side down. Spread a very thin layer of Frosting over top and sides of cake to form a crumb coat. Chill, uncovered, until Frosting is mostly set, 30 to 40 minutes.

7. Remove cake from refrigerator. Spread remaining Frosting over top and sides of cake. Arrange rosemary, sage, bay leaves, and cinnamon sticks around top and bottom of cake. Add Marzipan Pinecones and Frosted Redbird Cookies to top and sides of cake, and dust with powdered sugar, if desired. Frosted undecorated cake may be stored in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 5 days; let cake return to room temperature before decorating and serving.

Marzipan Pinecones

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 10 MIN.

MAKES 2

Divide 2 Tbsp. marzipan in half, and roll 1 Tbsp. of the marzipan between your hands into an egglike shape. Place on a small piece of parchment paper. Starting at 1 pointed end of marzipan, insert sliced almonds in overlapping, shingled rows to create a pinecone-like exterior. Repeat with remaining 1 Tbsp. marzipan and additional sliced almonds. Store in an airtight container up to 3 days.



historically HUMMINGBIRD

You can find our first recipe for Hummingbird Cake on page 206 of the February 1978 issue of *Southern Living*, submitted by Mrs. L. H. Wiggins of Greensboro, North Carolina. We've baked up a lot of variations since then, but this one is extra special.

Frosted Redbird Cookies

Packaged cookie icing (find it in the baking aisle of the grocery store) makes these cardinals a snap to decorate.

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 30 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 45 MIN., PLUS 5 HOURS, 30 MIN. COOLING AND DRYING

MAKES 10 COOKIES

- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling and cutting
- 1/8 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/8 tsp. baking soda
- 1 (7-oz.) pkg. red cookie icing (such as Betty Crocker)
- Red sanding sugar
- 1 (7-oz.) pkg. black cookie icing
- 1 (7-oz.) pkg. orange cookie icing

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Beat powdered sugar, butter, and granulated sugar with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on low speed until just combined. Increase mixer speed to medium-low; beat until mixture is light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Beat in egg yolk and vanilla extract until combined.



2. Whisk together flour, salt, and baking soda in a small bowl. Reduce mixer speed to low; gradually add flour mixture to powdered sugar mixture, beating until dough just comes together, 1 to 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed.

3. Roll dough out on a 13- x 18-inch sheet of parchment paper to 1/4-inch thickness; transfer to a baking sheet, and freeze 5 minutes. Using a lightly floured 4 1/2-inch cardinal cookie cutter, cut dough into as many birds

as you can. Transfer dough cutouts to a separate parchment paper-lined baking sheet, spacing cutouts about 1 inch apart. Chill dough cutouts until ready to bake. Reroll scraps; repeat freezing and cutting with remaining dough.

4. Bake in preheated oven until edges are light golden, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven, and transfer baking sheet to a wire rack; let cool 5 minutes. Transfer cookies to wire rack, and let stand until completely cool, about 30 minutes.

5. Place 1 cooled cookie on a clean work surface. Pipe a thin border of red icing around cookie edges, leaving an open space for the “beak” and “mask” portions; pipe red icing to fill most of the space within the piped border. Using a wooden pick, spread icing to create an even layer. Generously sprinkle icing with sanding sugar. Transfer iced cookie to wire rack. Repeat decorating process with remaining cookies, red icing, and sanding sugar. Let cookies stand until red icing is dry to the touch, about 40 minutes.

6. Gently brush off excess sugar from iced cookies. Working with 1 cookie at a time, pipe a border of black icing along edge of open space closest to red icing to form the mask, leaving a diamond-shaped open area for the beak. Let stand until black icing is mostly dry to the touch, about 15 minutes.

7. Working with 1 cookie at a time, pipe and fill the remaining beak space with orange icing; spread using a wooden pick as needed. Let cookies stand at room temperature until icing has completely dried, at least 4 hours. Store in an airtight container at room temperature up to 3 days.

how to ICE REDBIRD COOKIES



STEP 1 Pipe a thin border of red icing around the edges of a cooled cookie, leaving a blank space for the “mask” and “beak.”



STEP 2 Fill in outlined area with icing, adding a little at a time and spreading with a wooden pick. Sprinkle with sugar; let dry.



STEP 3 Pipe a thin line of black icing to form the “mask.” Let stand; then fill in remaining space with orange icing for the “beak.”

COOKIES IN COLOR

Bake a brighter batch using sparkling sprinkles, dyed doughs, and festive frostings

BY LISA CERICOLA ■ RECIPES BY TRICIA MANZANERO STUEDEMAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG DUPREE
PROP STYLING BY GINNY BRANCH ▶ FOOD STYLING BY EMILY NABORS HALL



■ BUTTER COOKIE WREATHS
recipe, page 144



■ MERRY MITTENS
recipe, page 145





■
**MARBLED
STARS**
recipe, page 145

ESSENTIAL DOUGHS & FROSTINGS

Use these simple recipes to create the vibrant cookies on the following pages

Vanilla Bean Dough

Your go-to extract is fine for this, but splurge for vanilla bean paste if you want a stunning speckled look.

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 45 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 2 LB. DOUGH

- 1½ cups powdered sugar
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 2½ tsp. vanilla bean paste
- ½ tsp. almond extract
- 3⅓ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. kosher salt

1. Beat powdered sugar, butter, and granulated sugar with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on low speed just until combined, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium-low; beat until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Beat in egg, vanilla bean paste, and almond extract until combined, 15 to 30 seconds.

2. Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt in a medium bowl until combined. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture and beat just until dough comes together, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed.

3. Divide dough in half; shape each half into a disk, and wrap in plastic wrap. Chill at least 30 minutes or up to 2 days before using.

Chocolate Dough

Don't skip the instant espresso here; combined with the salt, it coaxes out the subtle notes of the cocoa.

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 20 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 14 OZ. DOUGH

- ½ cup unsalted butter, softened
- 6 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla extract
- 2 tsp. heavy whipping cream
- 1⅓ cups all-purpose flour
- 3 Tbsp. Dutch process cocoa
- ¾ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. instant espresso granules (such as DeLallo)
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt

1. Beat butter and sugar with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Add egg yolk, vanilla, and cream; beat on medium speed until combined, about 15 seconds.

2. Whisk together flour, cocoa, baking powder, espresso granules, and salt in a medium bowl until well combined.

3. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture, beating until combined, 30 seconds to 1 minute, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Use dough immediately, or wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Let dough stand at room temperature until softened before using, about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Spiced Dough

A trio of warm baking spices melds with the butter in this recipe, yielding dough that will fill your kitchen with the scent of the season.

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 15 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 1 ½ LB. DOUGH

- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ⅓ cup powdered sugar
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 2⅓ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- ¼ tsp. ground nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- ⅛ tsp. baking powder

1. Beat butter, granulated sugar, powdered sugar, and vanilla with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on medium speed until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Add egg; beat on medium speed until well combined, about 30 seconds.

2. Whisk together flour, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, salt, and baking powder in a medium bowl until well combined. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture, beating just until combined, about 1 minute, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Dough will be soft; use immediately.

Vanilla Buttercream

Once it sets, this frosting develops a delicate, sugary crust, which is a lovely contrast to the creamy texture beneath.

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 20 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 6 CUPS

- 1 cup vegetable shortening
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 2 (16-oz.) pkg. powdered sugar, sifted
- 5-6 Tbsp. whole milk, divided
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. kosher salt

1. Beat shortening with a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment on medium speed until smooth, about 30 seconds. Add butter, and beat until smooth and well combined, about 1 minute, stopping to scrape down sides as needed.

2. With mixer on low speed, gradually add powdered sugar alternately with 5 tablespoons of the milk, beating just until combined. Add vanilla and salt; beat on low speed just until combined, about 15 seconds. Add up to 1 tablespoon remaining milk, 1 teaspoon at a time, beating until smooth and spreadable. Increase speed to medium, and beat until fluffy, about 1 minute. Use immediately, refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 1 week, or freeze up to 1 month. Let frosting return to room temperature, and whisk until smooth before using.

Cookie Glaze

A splash of milk can take this glaze from thick to runny; add it gradually to achieve the right consistency for your needs.

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 10 MIN.

MAKES 1 CUP

- 3 cups powdered sugar
- 3 Tbsp. light corn syrup
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract (clear, if possible)
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 3-4 Tbsp. whole milk, divided

Stir together powdered sugar, corn syrup, vanilla, salt, and 3 tablespoons of the milk in a medium bowl until combined. Stir in up to remaining 1 tablespoon milk, ½ to 1 teaspoon at a time, until desired consistency is reached (thicker for Chocolate Stockings, page 144; thinner for Tie-Dye Glazed Ornament Cookies, page 143).



●
**EVERGREEN
SPRITZ
COOKIES**
recipe, page
144

●
**SPARKLING
LINZER COOKIES**
recipe, page 144



●
CHOCOLATE STOCKINGS
recipe, page 144



●
CHOCOLATE THUMBPRINTS
recipe, page 144



CHOCOLATE-PEPPERMINT BARS

recipe, page 143



FROSTED SUGAR COOKIE SNOWFLAKES

recipe, page 143



TIE-DYE GLAZED ORNAMENT COOKIES

recipe, page 143



Chocolate-Peppermint Bars

To achieve this Christmas sweater-style look, use different-size star tips to pipe a combination of straight and squiggly lines.

ACTIVE 45 MIN. - TOTAL 55 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR, 30 MIN. COOLING

SERVES 9

Chocolate Dough (recipe, page 139)

2½ cups Vanilla Buttercream (recipe, page 139)

¼ tsp. peppermint extract

Super red, leaf green, and electric pink food coloring gels

Gold pearl sprinkles (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8-inch square baking pan with cooking spray; line with Reynolds Kitchens Unbleached Parchment Paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on all sides. Pat Chocolate Dough into an even layer in prepared pan. Bake until edges are set but center is still soft, about 10 minutes. Let cool completely in pan on a wire rack, 1½ to 2 hours.

2. Stir together Vanilla Buttercream and extract in a bowl. Spread 1 cup of the frosting over cookie. Divide remaining frosting among 3 bowls; stir food coloring gel into each to reach desired shades.

3. Spoon each tinted frosting into a piping bag fitted with desired decorative tip. Pipe alternating lines of each color as desired, about ¾ inch apart. Decorate with pearl sprinkles (optional). Using parchment paper as handles, remove from pan. Cut into bars. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Tie-Dye Glazed Ornament Cookies

Let the refrigerated dough sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes to make rolling easier.

ACTIVE 2 HOURS - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 30 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR COOLING AND 4 HOURS STANDING

MAKES ABOUT 40 COOKIES

Vanilla Bean Dough (recipe, page 139)

Cookie Glaze (recipe, page 139)

Teal, Christmas red, or leaf green food coloring gel

Gold luster dust (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper. Roll half of Vanilla Bean Dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to ¼-inch thickness. Remove top piece of parchment paper. Cut dough using lightly floured 2½- to 3½-inch ornament cookie cutters; do not remove scraps. Transfer cut dough on

parchment paper to a baking sheet; freeze until firm, about 5 minutes. Place cut dough shapes at least ¾ inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Reroll, cut, and chill dough scraps as needed. Repeat process with remaining dough half.

2. Bake in preheated oven, 1 pan at a time, until edges are set, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool on pans for 5 minutes; transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 1 hour.

3. Place ½ cup Cookie Glaze in a medium bowl; set aside. Divide remaining glaze among 2 small bowls. Stir desired food coloring gel into 1 bowl of Cookie Glaze, adding until a deep shade is reached. Stir a smaller amount of the same food coloring gel to second bowl, adding until a lighter shade is reached. Transfer each tinted glaze to a piping bag; cut a ¼-inch hole in each tip.

4. Make a crosshatch pattern in reserved plain Cookie Glaze by drizzling thin lines of deep shade of glaze and topping with thin lines of lighter shade. Dip top of a cooled cookie into pattern in bowl; twist and pull up, letting excess drip off. Place cookie, glaze side up, on a wire rack; wipe edges as needed. Repeat process with remaining cookies, adding tinted glaze in crosshatch pattern into bowl as needed.

5. Let cookies stand until set, about 4 hours. Using a clean paintbrush, decorate tops of cookies with luster dust, if desired. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Frosted Sugar Cookie Snowflakes

When adding food coloring to frosting, a little goes a long way. Start with a small amount, stir, and then increase gradually.

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 30 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS, PLUS 1 HOUR COOLING

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN COOKIES

Vanilla Bean Dough (recipe, page 139)

Vanilla Buttercream (recipe, page 139)

Fuchsia, super red, neon green, and teal food coloring gels

White, gold, and turquoise pearl sprinkles

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper.

2. Roll half of Vanilla Bean Dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to ¼-inch thickness. Remove top piece of parchment paper. Cut dough using a lightly floured 4-inch snowflake cookie cutter; do not remove scraps. Transfer dough on

HOW TO DECORATE TIE-DYE GLAZED ORNAMENT COOKIES



1. Pipe colored glaze in a crosshatch design over bowl of white glaze.



2. Dip each cookie into drizzled glaze, twisting as you lift for a swirled effect.

parchment paper to a baking sheet, and freeze until firm, about 5 minutes. Place cut dough shapes at least ¾ inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets. Reroll, cut, and chill dough scraps as needed. Repeat process with remaining dough half.

3. Bake in preheated oven, 1 pan at a time, until edges are set, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool on pans for 5 minutes; transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 1 hour.

4. Place ½ cup Vanilla Buttercream in a piping bag fitted with a ⅛-inch round pastry tip, and set aside. Divide remaining Vanilla Buttercream among 4 bowls. Stir together fuchsia and red food coloring gels in 1 bowl of frosting, adding gels until desired magenta color is reached. Stir red, green, and teal food coloring gels separately into remaining 3 bowls of frosting, adding gels until desired colors are reached.

5. Spoon each tinted frosting into a separate piping bag, and fit each with a coupler. Fit 1 bag with a ¼-inch French open star piping tip; pipe tinted frosting over a cooled cookie as desired. Use reserved white buttercream to pipe a snowflake design over tinted frosting as desired. Garnish with pearl sprinkles. Repeat with remaining cookies, tinted frosting, white buttercream, and

sprinkles; clean piping tip and transfer it to other piping bags as needed. Serve immediately, or store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Evergreen Spritz Cookies

Swap the green sparkling sugars for red, or use a variety to mimic multicolored Christmas lights.

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 40 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 8 DOZEN COOKIES

Spiced Dough (recipe, page 139)
Light and dark green sparkling sugars

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place a portion of Spiced Dough in a cookie press fitted with desired attachment.
2. Press cookies onto ungreased baking sheets, spacing about 1 inch apart. Repeat with remaining dough, refilling press and changing attachment as needed. Sprinkle tops with sparkling sugars as desired.
3. Bake in preheated oven, 1 pan at a time, until lightly golden and set, 9 to 12 minutes.
4. Immediately transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 30 minutes. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Sparkling Linzer Cookies

Try this versatile recipe with other fillings, such as cranberry preserves or orange marmalade.

ACTIVE 1 HOUR - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 5 MIN.

MAKES 40 COOKIES

Vanilla Bean Dough (recipe, page 139)
Red, green, gold, and silver sparkling sugars
½ cup lemon curd (from 1 [11-oz.] jar)
½ tsp. ground cardamom
Lemon yellow food coloring gel (optional)
½ cup seedless strawberry jam (from 1 [18-oz.] jar)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 4 baking sheets with parchment paper. Roll half of Vanilla Bean Dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to ⅛-inch thickness.
2. Remove top piece of parchment paper from dough. Cut dough using a lightly floured 2-inch fluted round cutter; use 1-inch fluted star, tree, and/or candy cane cookie cutters to cut out centers of half of dough rounds. Do not remove scraps. Transfer cut dough on parchment paper to a baking sheet; chill in freezer until firm, about 5 minutes. Place cut dough shapes

¾ inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Remove 1-inch cutout shapes. Sprinkle cutout dough circles with sparkling sugars as desired. Reroll, cut, and chill dough scraps (including cutout shapes) as needed. Repeat process with remaining dough half.

3. Bake in preheated oven, 1 baking sheet at a time, until edges are set, 7 to 9 minutes. Let cool on baking sheets for 3 minutes; transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, 30 minutes to 1 hour.
4. Whisk together lemon curd and cardamom in a bowl until combined; stir in yellow food coloring gel (if using), adding more until desired color is reached. Whisk strawberry jam in a separate bowl until smooth. Spread lemon curd mixture over half of uncut cookies. Spread strawberry jam over remaining uncut cookies.
5. Place cutout cookies on top of curd- or jam-covered cookies, pressing gently to adhere. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days.

Chocolate Stockings

If you're a fan of sprinkles and want to skip a step, glaze the entire surface of the cookies before dipping them.

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 10 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 50 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR DRYING

MAKES ABOUT 16 COOKIES

Chocolate Dough (recipe, page 139)
½ cup Cookie Glaze (recipe, page 139)
½ cup holiday sprinkles

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Roll Chocolate Dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to ¼ inch thickness. Transfer dough on parchment paper to a baking sheet; chill in freezer until firm, about 5 minutes. Cut dough using a 2 ½- to 3-inch stocking cookie cutter. Place cut dough shapes ¾ inch apart on a large parchment paper-lined baking sheet. (Reroll, freeze, and cut dough scraps as needed.)
2. Bake in preheated oven until tops are dry, about 8 minutes. Let cool completely on baking sheet on a wire rack.
3. Place Cookie Glaze in a piping bag fitted with a ⅛-inch round tip. Place sprinkles on a large rimmed plate. Pipe glaze within sock portion of stocking, leaving cuff portion unglazed. Dip cookie, glazed side down, into sprinkles until glazed portion is completely covered. Turn cookie glazed side up; pipe glaze within cuff portion. Let

cookies stand, uncovered at room temperature, until glaze is set, 1 to 2 hours. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Chocolate Thumbprints

For a different presentation, pipe red, green, or white Vanilla Buttercream (recipe, page 139) into the indentations instead of filling them with glaze.

ACTIVE 50 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 30 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR DRYING

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN COOKIES

½ cup holiday sprinkles
Chocolate Dough (recipe, page 139)
½ cup Cookie Glaze (recipe, page 139)
Red and leaf green food coloring gels

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place sprinkles in a small bowl. Scoop and roll dough into 1-tablespoon balls; roll in sprinkles until evenly covered, and place about ¾ inch apart on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Make an indentation in center of each ball using back of a ½-teaspoon scoop. Smooth any cracks in edges.
2. Bake in preheated oven until tops appear dry, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven, and gently press down centers with ½-teaspoon scoop. Let cool completely on baking sheet on a wire rack, about 30 minutes to 1 hour.
3. Divide Cookie Glaze evenly among 3 small bowls; stir red and green food coloring gels separately into 2 of the bowls, adding more to reach desired shades. Leave third bowl plain.
4. Spoon or pipe glazes into indentations in centers of cooled thumbprints as desired. Let stand until mostly set before serving, 1 to 2 hours. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Butter Cookie Wreaths

Instead of sprinkles, dust these tiny wreaths with powdered sugar for a snowy appearance.

ACTIVE 35 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 35 MIN.

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

Spiced Dough (recipe, page 139)
Leaf green food coloring gel
Red candy sprinkles
Powdered sugar (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Stir together Spiced Dough and food coloring gel in a

HOW TO FORM MARBLED STARS



1. Stack doughs as desired; fold into a taco shape.



2. Cut folded dough into four equal pieces; turn cut side up.



3. Press pieces together, gently combining into a disk.

bowl until the desired color is reached.

2. Spoon a portion of the dough into a piping bag fitted with a 5/8-inch open star piping tip. Pipe dough into 2 1/4-inch rings onto ungreased baking sheets, spacing about 1 inch apart. Repeat with remaining dough, refilling piping bag as needed. Top piped dough with sprinkles as desired.

3. Bake in preheated oven, 1 pan at a time, until set, 10 to 12 minutes. Immediately transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 30 minutes. Dust with powdered sugar before serving (if desired). Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Merry Mittens

Don't have mitten shapes? You can duplicate this look using any combination of large and small cookie cutters. Trade out the hearts for stars, Christmas trees, or even simple circles.

ACTIVE 45 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 5 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR CHILLING AND COOLING

MAKES ABOUT 30 COOKIES

Vanilla Bean Dough (recipe, page 139; prepared through Step 2)

Super red food coloring gel

Leaf green food coloring gel

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Turn out Vanilla Bean Dough onto a clean work surface, and divide in half. Place 1 half in a mixing bowl; knead in red food coloring gel using a gloved hand until desired color is reached (gloves are not required, but dye will stain your hands). Transfer dough to clean work surface. Place remaining half of dough in mixing bowl; knead in green food coloring gel (using a clean glove) until desired color is reached. Wrap each half in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 days.
3. Roll red dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to 1/4-inch thickness. Repeat process with green dough and 2 more sheets of parchment paper.
4. Remove top piece of parchment paper. Cut red dough using a 3 1/2-inch mitten cookie cutter; use a 1-inch heart-shaped cookie cutter to cut in top of mittens. (Do not remove heart shapes.) Repeat process with green dough, cutting out same number of mittens and hearts as red dough. Transfer dough shapes on parchment paper to baking sheets; freeze until firm, about 5 minutes.
5. Carefully remove heart-shaped cutout

from each mitten. Transfer mitten-shaped cookies to prepared baking sheets, spacing at least 3/4 inch apart. Press red hearts into holes left in green mittens and green hearts into holes left in red mittens. Reroll, cut, and chill dough scraps as needed.

6. Bake in preheated oven, 1 baking sheet at a time, until edges are set, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool on baking sheets on a wire rack 5 minutes; transfer cookies to a wire rack, and let cool completely, about 30 minutes. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

Marbled Stars

The mesmerizing swirls in these cookies are surprisingly easy to re-create—just follow the step-by-step photos at right. Choose any single food coloring you like, or try a combination.

ACTIVE 45 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 30 MIN., PLUS 1 HOUR CHILLING AND COOLING

MAKES ABOUT 30 COOKIES

Vanilla Bean Dough (recipe, page 139; prepared through Step 2)

Royal blue food coloring gel

White sparkling sugar (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Turn out Vanilla Bean Dough onto a clean work surface, and divide into thirds. Reserve one-third plain dough. Place one-third of dough in a mixing bowl; add small amount of food coloring gel, beating on low speed until desired light blue color is reached, about 30 seconds. Transfer dough to a clean work surface. Place next third of dough in mixing bowl; add food coloring gel, increasing amount as desired, beating until desired deep blue color is reached, about 30 seconds.
3. Divide each piece of dough in half to yield 6 portions total. Shape 1 plain dough portion into a 6-inch square on a sheet of parchment paper; shape 1 light blue dough portion into a 6-inch square, and place on top of plain dough square. Shape 1 deep blue dough portion into a 6-inch square; place on top of light blue square. Repeat layers once with remaining dough. Fold stacked dough in half toward yourself, creating a taco-like shape. Slice dough crosswise into quarters. Turn quarters cut sides up; press dough quarters together, creating a swirled design. Cut dough in half; shape each half into a disk, and wrap in plastic wrap. Chill in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 days.
4. Roll 1 dough disk between 2 sheets of parchment paper to 1/4-inch thickness. (If dough has been refrigerated for a long period, let stand at room temperature until slightly softened, 30 minutes to 1 hour.)
5. Remove top piece of parchment paper. Cut dough using a very lightly floured 3- to 3 3/4-inch star cookie cutter; do not remove scraps. Transfer dough on parchment paper to a baking sheet, and freeze until firm, about 5 minutes. Place cut dough shapes at least 1 inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Reroll, cut, and chill dough scraps as needed. (Stars will become more blue than marbled with each reroll.) Sprinkle tops with sparkling sugar (if desired).
6. Bake in preheated oven, 1 pan at a time, until edges are set, 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool on pans 5 minutes; transfer cookies to wire rack, and let cool completely, 30 minutes to 1 hour. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.

A Kentucky-fried HANUKKAH

Paducah chef
Sara Bradley draws from
her Jewish heritage to cook up
a celebratory feast

Cheesy
Savory
Keugel
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...ERY KEUGEL
...RIEHT HOUSE FRIED CHICKEN
...ELS SPROUTS WITH
...TE MOLASSES AND WALNUTS
...SUGANIYAT





Freight
House Fried
Chicken

P.151

BY ALANA AL-HATLANI
RECIPES BY SARA BRADLEY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR PROTASIO
FOOD STYLING BY CHELSEA ZIMMER
PROP STYLING BY CHRISTINA BROCKMAN

“**H**

ANUKKAH, for me growing up, was all about potato latkes, doughnuts, and—believe it or not—fried chicken,” says Sara Bradley, chef and proprietor of Freight House in Paducah, Kentucky. All three of her childhood Hanukkah staples made use of oil—a symbolic nod to the origins of the holiday rooted in the miracle of oil used to light the menorah for eight days.

Her family made latkes at home but outsourced the sweets to Red’s Donut Shop, a Paducah institution. Today, she makes Sufganiyat (also spelled sufganiyot, recipe on page 151), doughnuts topped with powdered sugar.

Bradley struggled with her Jewish identity growing up, especially at this time of year. She and her siblings longed for a Christmas tree—Bradley’s mother, Bev, conceded to a ficus, which they decorated in lights and homemade ornaments and dubbed the Hanukkah bush. Inspired by *Saturday Night Live*, the siblings joked that “Hanukkah Harry” was coming to visit instead of Santa Claus. “We were children, and we didn’t really understand at the time that, while we were different, being Jewish was something really special—less than 1% of the world’s population is Jewish,” she says.

She credits Camp Ben Frankel with helping her appreciate her identity. Located in southern Illinois, the camp attracted kids from small towns in nearby states. She spent 12 summers there, where she learned to braid challah (among many activities) and made lifelong friendships with people who shared her heritage. As an adult, Bradley moved back to the South following time spent in Chicago and New York and reconnected with her ancestry. She now teaches cooking classes at her childhood summer camp and local synagogue, helping pass down Jewish recipes.

Bradley has also come to understand how her identity was shaped by her Kentucky home. Starting in the 1840s, Paducah became home to many Jewish immigrants. During the Civil War, anti-Semitic rumors of Jewish merchants participating in illegal trading spread. In 1862, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant issued General Orders No. 11, which expelled Jewish people from the territory he commanded, including at least 30 Jewish families in Paducah. President Lincoln rescinded the order, allowing them to return, but it left a lasting mark on the city and its Jewish population.

When Bradley got older, she connected with her heritage through food, especially when it became her career. She graduated from the University of Kentucky, studying psychology, but worked in restaurants while earning her

degree. Following an unsatisfying office job after graduation, she enrolled in culinary school.

Bradley might not have planned to pursue a cooking career, but in hindsight, her love of food was there from the beginning, thanks to her mother. Bev made dinner almost every night and ended the week with extravagant Sunday meals featuring chocolate pie with mile-high meringue. The child of immigrants from Prussia, Bev also introduced her daughter to Jewish foodways. Bradley’s father, Gorman, called “Butch,” who grew up in Eastern Kentucky in the Appalachian Mountains, connected her with her Southern roots.

“What I think being Jewish and Appalachian brings to my style of food is cooking for necessity, changing with the seasons, and using ingredients that don’t cost a lot of money,” Bradley says. She exemplified this while competing on *Top Chef*, especially when she prepared matzo ball soup, a humble dish made with unleavened bread, on one of the largest culinary stages. Her Cheesy Savory Keugel (often known as kugel, recipe on page 151) also uses simple ingredients like cottage cheese as the base of a casserole steeped in cultural history. On her restaurant’s menu, she seamlessly blends Jewish cooking with regional staples, from butter bean hummus to Kentucky carp with couscous.

Her family is a source of inspiration for Freight House’s menu and a fundamental part of the operations. When she first opened the restaurant in 2015, her mother oversaw the desserts and was in the kitchen 12 hours a day. Bradley’s father helped navigate the business side of things, while her husband, Austin Martin, would polish glasses behind the bar on short-staffed Saturday nights. Now, every Tuesday, her 4-year-old daughter, Lula Bea Martin, comes to the restaurant after eating her dinner, puts on an apron and pink headband, and clears diners’ finished plates. Bradley is excited to pass on not only that work ethic to her children (Lula Bea and her sister, Hazel) but also Jewish food customs. She says, “As a parent and someone who is reconnecting with being Jewish, I’m holding those traditions so dear to my heart.”

Brussels Sprouts with Pomegranate Molasses and Walnuts

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 30 MIN.

SERVES 4

- 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 lb. Brussels sprouts, halved lengthwise (about 4¹/₃ cups)
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste, plus more for garnish
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped shallot
- 1 Tbsp. pomegranate molasses
- 1¹/₂ tsp. red wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. toasted walnut pieces
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro

1. Pour oil into a cold 12-inch cast-iron skillet. Working in batches, arrange Brussels sprouts, cut side down, in a single layer in skillet. Place skillet over medium-high heat, and cook, undisturbed, until cut sides of sprouts are very caramelized and sprouts are tender-crisp, 6 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a bowl or platter; stir in salt until well combined, and season with pepper to taste.
2. Whisk together shallot, pomegranate molasses, and vinegar in a small bowl until well combined. Drizzle mixture over warm Brussels sprouts. Sprinkle with walnuts, parsley, cilantro, and additional black pepper. Leftovers may be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to 7 days.



Brussels Sprouts
with Pomegranate
Molasses and
Walnuts

Sufganiyat

P.151



Chef Sara Bradley at her restaurant, Freight House, in Paducah, Kentucky



Cheesy Savory Keugel

ACTIVE 50 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS, 35 MIN.

SERVES 12

- 1 lb. uncooked wide egg noodles
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 2 cups chopped yellow onions (from 2 medium onions)
- 1/4 tsp. ground fennel seed
- 3 Tbsp. kosher salt, divided
- 12 large eggs
- 1 1/2 lb. sour cream (about 3 cups)
- 1 1/2 lb. 4% milk fat cottage cheese (about 2 3/4 cups)
- 8 oz. goat cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 Tbsp. granulated onion
- 1 tsp. black pepper

1. Coat a 13- x 9-inch baking pan with cooking spray. Cook noodles according to package directions; drain and set aside.
2. Heat butter in a large skillet over medium-high until melted and bubbly. Add onions, fennel, and 1 tablespoon of the salt; cook, stirring often, until onions are softened and translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from heat, and let cool slightly, about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 325°F.
3. Whisk eggs in a large bowl until well combined; set aside. Gently stir together cooled onion mixture, sour cream, cottage cheese, goat cheese, honey, granulated onion, pepper, and the remaining 2 tablespoons salt in a separate very large bowl until combined. Stir in eggs until incorporated. Fold in cooked noodles.
4. Pour mixture into prepared pan, and spread in an even layer; cover with aluminum foil. Bake in preheated oven for 45 minutes (edges of keugel will be just starting to set). Remove foil, and bake until light golden and set in the middle, 22 to 30 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack, and let cool at least 15 minutes or up to 3 hours. Serve warm, cold, or at room temperature.

Freight House Fried Chicken

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 45 MIN., PLUS 4 HOURS MARINATING

SERVES 4 TO 8

- 2 cups whole buttermilk
- 1/4 cup hot sauce
- 3 1/2 Tbsp. kosher salt, divided, plus more to taste
- 8 (about 4 lb. total) bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, trimmed
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 Tbsp. granulated garlic

- 1 Tbsp. granulated onion
- 1 1/2 tsp. smoked paprika
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- Canola oil, for frying

1. Whisk together buttermilk, hot sauce, and 1 1/2 tablespoons of the salt in a large ziplock plastic bag; add chicken thighs. Remove excess air from bag; seal bag, and place in a baking dish or on a rimmed baking sheet. Place in refrigerator, and let marinate at least 4 hours or preferably up to 12 hours.
2. Whisk together flour, granulated garlic, granulated onion, paprika, cayenne, and remaining 2 tablespoons salt in a large bowl. Set aside.
3. Fill a large, heavy-bottomed pot with oil to a depth of 2 1/2 inches, making sure there's enough room to add chicken without oil overflowing. Heat oil over medium-high until a deep-fry thermometer registers 355°F. Place a wire rack over a baking sheet; set aside.
4. Drain chicken; do not pat dry. Dredge each thigh in flour mixture to thoroughly coat; reserve remaining flour mixture. Discard remaining marinade in bag. Transfer chicken thighs to prepared wire rack; let stand 5 minutes.
5. Working in 4 batches, dredge 2 thighs lightly in flour mixture again, and carefully add to hot oil. (Temperature of oil will gradually start to drop.) Adjust heat as needed to reduce oil temperature to 325°F, and cook chicken until an instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest portion of chicken registers 160°F, 8 to 12 minutes. Using tongs, remove chicken from oil, and let drain on a clean wire rack placed over a clean rimmed baking sheet. Season with salt to taste. Return oil to 355°F over medium-high. Repeat process with remaining chicken and flour mixture.

Sufganiyat

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 15 MIN.

SERVES 6

SUFGANIYAT

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- Pinch of kosher salt
- 1/2 cup whole buttermilk, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature, separated
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted

- 1 1/2 tsp. grated orange zest plus 1 Tbsp. fresh juice (from 1 large orange)
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- Canola oil, for frying

GLAZE

- 1/4 cup orange marmalade
- 1 Tbsp. bourbon

ADDITIONAL INGREDIENT

Powdered sugar

1. Prepare the Sufganiyat: Whisk together flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl until well combined. Whisk together buttermilk, egg yolks, butter, orange zest and juice, and vanilla in a medium bowl until combined. Fold buttermilk mixture into flour mixture just until nearly combined. (Batter will be thick; do not overmix.)
2. Fill a large, heavy-bottomed pot with oil to a depth of 2 1/2 to 3 inches. Heat over medium-high until a deep-fry thermometer in oil registers 350°F to 360°F. Beat egg whites in a medium bowl with a hand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment on high speed until medium peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes. Gently fold whipped whites into flour batter in 2 additions.
3. Working in batches of 4 to 5 scoops at a time, use a 1-tablespoon spring-loaded scoop to carefully drop batter into hot oil. Fry, using a slotted spoon or spider strainer to stir and turn Sufganiyat constantly, until golden brown and cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes per batch, adjusting heat as needed to maintain oil temperature. Using a slotted spoon or spider strainer, remove Sufganiyat from oil, and let drain on a paper towel-lined plate. Repeat process with remaining batter.
4. Prepare the Glaze: Stir together marmalade and bourbon in a small bowl until combined. Drizzle warm Sufganiyat with Glaze and garnish with powdered sugar. Serve immediately.



月舉

Southern Heart,

Filipino Soul

At left: Cristina Quackenbush at her home, which is filled with pictures of family and friends

**A HUMBLE FRITTER
COMBINES CHEF
CRISTINA
QUACKENBUSH'S
TWO BIGGEST FOOD
INFLUENCES IN
ONE MEMORY-FILLED
APPETIZER**

BY TARA MASSOULEH MCCAY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CEDRIC ANGELES
STYLING BY STEPHANIE BOHN

CRISTINA QUACKENBUSH isn't a native Southerner, but the first time she set foot in New Orleans, she knew she belonged. "It was 1999," she remembers. "Everyone was all abuzz because Y2K was going to happen, and they thought the world was going to end. I fell so in love with this place that I didn't want to leave. Within two weeks, I had moved my entire family down."

More than two decades later, New Orleans is still her home, but it's also a much bigger part of her story than she would have ever imagined. Quackenbush, who was born in the Philippines, has built her own community near the area where Filipino people first settled in America around 260 years ago. She has also fostered a successful cooking career and a reputation as the "Queen of Filipino Soul Food" in the South.

Combining Cultures

Quackenbush moved to Evansville, Indiana, from the Philippines at the age of 4 when her mom married her American stepfather. The transition was hard, she says. Eager to assimilate, her mom stopped speaking to her in Tagalog and enrolled her in school to help her learn English. The only tether Quackenbush had to her culture was food. Filipino staples like mechado (stew), adobo, and curry were on the weeknight dinner rotation, but special occasions were when her mother really showed out.

“At the holidays, everyone asked my mom to cook Filipino recipes,” she remembers. “She was the one person who brought something that wasn’t American food, and they always wanted what she made.”

One of Quackenbush’s favorite Christmas dishes is shrimp ukoy, a crispy seafood fritter that was often the first appetizer snapped up at large gatherings with her extended stepfamily. It’s the perfect mash-up of her two cultures: The fried patty laced with sweet potato and carrot was similar to the Southern-style fritters prepared by her stepfather’s relatives, and the vinegar dipping sauce sated Quackenbush’s craving for the tangy and sour flavor profiles common in Filipino cuisine. When shrimp weren’t readily available, her mom would substitute fish caught on the nearby Ohio River. “It was funny because my grandfather would use crawfish as bait, and it wasn’t until years later that I found out you could eat them,” she says.

Quackenbush pictured with three of her five children, who are all determined to preserve their mom’s recipes



Despite the fact that she lived in metropolitan Indiana, the combination of Filipino and Southern dishes became a common theme for Quackenbush, who accompanied her mom on weekly trips to the town’s tiny Asian market and tended to the family farm with her stepgrandmother, Mildred Williams.

Weekends and afternoons were spent sowing fields, pulling weeds, harvesting crops, and canning fruits and vegetables. “She planted enough for our huge family; we never had to go to the

Shrimp Ukoy

ACTIVE 45 MIN. - TOTAL 45 MIN.

SERVES 10 TO 12

FRITTERS

- 2 lb. medium-size, peeled and deveined raw shrimp, finely chopped
- 1 cup grated sweet potato (from 1 small peeled sweet potato)
- 1/2 cup shredded carrot (from 1 large peeled carrot)
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 2 Tbsp. fish sauce
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- Kosher salt, to taste

DIPPING SAUCE

- 3/4 cup apple cider vinegar

- 1 Tbsp. chopped shallot (from 1 small shallot)
- 1 Tbsp. light brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp. fish sauce
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 1/2 tsp. finely chopped garlic (about 2 medium cloves)
- Chopped scallions

1. Prepare the Fritters: Preheat oven to 200°F. Stir together shrimp, sweet potato, carrot, egg, fish sauce, garlic, and pepper in a large bowl. Whisk together cornstarch, flour, and 1 1/4 cups water in a separate large bowl. Add shrimp mixture to bowl with cornstarch mixture, and stir to combine.
2. Pour oil into a large cast-iron skillet, and heat over medium-high to 360°F. Working in batches, spoon about 1/4 cup batter for each Fritter into hot oil, using a spoon to

spread batter into 2- to 3-inch-wide circles or ovals. Use a slotted spoon to coax any stray batter pieces to join with circles. Fry until golden brown and crispy on both sides, about 2 to 3 minutes total, flipping halfway through frying. Using slotted spoon, transfer Fritters to a paper towel-lined plate or baking sheet to drain. Transfer hot Fritters to a wire rack set over a baking sheet, and sprinkle with salt to taste. Keep warm in preheated oven until ready to serve. Repeat procedure with remaining batter, stirring in bowl between batches as cornstarch will separate and settle.

3. Prepare the Dipping Sauce: Stir together vinegar, 3 tablespoons water, shallot, brown sugar, soy sauce, fish sauce, cilantro, and garlic in a small bowl until brown sugar has dissolved. Pour Dipping Sauce into a large bowl or several small bowls, and serve with hot Fritters. Garnish with scallions.



Make It Ahead
The batter can be prepared in advance and refrigerated up to two days.

grocery store for produce,” Quackenbush says of Williams, who taught her how to cook. “She grew up in the Midwest, but being poor, she used anything she could and made meals from scratch. She cooked biscuits and gravy—all this Southern soul food.”

Trips to the Asian grocery and occasional potlucks with other Filipino people in the area were the start of Quackenbush’s fascination with that cuisine. “I would eat everything I could get my hands on and constantly ask my mom what it all was,” she says. “That’s where I started to educate myself and really make Filipino food a highlight.”

A Pioneering Journey

Moving to Louisiana marked the beginning of multiple awakenings for her. At 28 years old, the mother of five had just finished earning a degree in computer science but knew it wasn’t her future. “I worked at restaurants in college to pay the bills, but while I was there, I fell in love with them,” she says. “To me, it seemed like everything that I loved the most had to do with food.”

Determined to make a change, she began attending what she describes as the school of hard knocks; she volunteered to work for free in various kitchens so she could learn different cooking styles and cuisines.

Food and culture have always gone hand in hand for Quackenbush. When she arrived in New Orleans, she immediately Googled local Filipino restaurants. She was disappointed to find that there weren’t any but was amazed by what she did discover.

She learned that Filipino fishermen landed on the bayous of Louisiana before America was even established. Filipinos were the first Asian Americans to settle in the U.S., and they still represent the third-largest group of Asian Americans today.

“That just blew my mind,” she says. “There’s a reason I was attracted to this area; I just didn’t know it, but [that connection] was what I was feeling. I thought, ‘Not only do I need to highlight our food but also our history in this area.’ ”

In 2012, Quackenbush began operating a business under the name Milkfish, which is the national fish of the Philippines. At the time, pop-ups were a new concept; Milkfish was one of just three that served regularly around town. National attention came quickly. During its first year, chef and television personality Andrew Zimmern proclaimed that Filipino food was the next big thing, which led the *Today* show to include Milkfish in a blog post. In the decade since, her success hasn’t slowed. Now a fixture in the community, Quackenbush still sells out of her signature fusion creations like Lechon Po’boys and Cheeseburger Lumpia, as well as traditional offerings like chicken adobo and picadillo, almost every time she opens up shop.

Passing the Torch

Quackenbush says that New Orleans helped her accomplish every goal that she set for herself and then some. She built a home and a better life for her kids, spent three years running Milkfish as a brick-and-mortar restaurant before transitioning the business back to its pop-up beginnings, and put Filipino cuisine on the map. “All the dreams I had as an immigrant child coming over, I made happen in Louisiana,” she says.

She also discovered some opportunities she wasn’t expecting, namely a strong connection to her roots and community. Quackenbush is an active member of the Philippine-American Women’s Association of Louisiana as well as the Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society and the Asian Pacific American Society of New Orleans. She mentors up-and-coming Filipino American chefs and pop-up owners who are trying to get their burgeoning businesses off the ground.

When Christmas rolls around each year, Quackenbush’s home is a study in controlled chaos and frenzied merriment. The chef, her five kids, and six grandchildren pile into the kitchen of her Victorian-style shotgun house, where she makes the Filipino recipes that her family grew up on and her grandchildren are already requesting by name.

“Every single one of my kids can cook,” says Quackenbush. “They’re all good in the kitchen, but when we’re together, they would rather not cook because they always say, ‘Mom, yours is best.’ ” No matter what’s on the menu for the holidays, be it lechon kawali (deep-fried pork belly) or Cajun gumbo, there’s plenty of shrimp ukoy to go around too.



A snippet of Quackenbush’s large family gatherings, which include her children (from left to right: Hailey, Paris, and Calvin) and grandkids (from left to right: Rune, Omari, Osyah, and Sula)

THAT'S A
Wrap



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Southern Affairs

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SOUTHERN COOKING
AT ITS BEST

The Kitchen

Skillet Beef
Stew Pot Pie
(recipe,
page 160)

SUPPERTIME

Crowd Pleasers

Hearty, big-batch
meals to feed all your
hungry houseguests

RECIPES: LIZ MERVOSH; FOOD STYLING: EMILY NABORS HALL; PROP STYLING: CHRISTINA DALEY

Beef Stew Pot PiesACTIVE 1 HOUR - TOTAL 1 HOUR,
15 MIN.**SERVES 8**

- 1 (17.3-oz.) pkg. frozen puff pastry sheets, thawed (such as Pepperidge Farm)
- 2 lb. top sirloin steak (about 1½ inch thick), cut into ½-inch pieces
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 2½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 5 Tbsp. unsalted butter, divided
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for work surface
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped (2 Tbsp.)
- 2½ cups beef broth
- 2 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, plus more for garnish
- 2 (10-oz.) pkg. frozen mixed vegetables (green beans, peas, corn, and carrots)
- 2 cups frozen cubed hash brown potatoes (from 1 [32-oz.] pkg., such as Ore-Ida)
- 1 large egg, beaten

1. Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in top third position. Working with 1 puff pastry sheet at a time, roll out on a lightly floured work surface into a 12- x 10-inch rectangle. Using a 10-ounce ramekin as a guide, cut 4 rounds from each pastry sheet ½ inch wider than ramekin rim. Reserve dough scraps for another use. Place pastry rounds on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet; cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until ready to use.

2. Toss sirloin with pepper and 1 teaspoon of the salt. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over high. Working in 2 batches, add sirloin in a single layer; cook, undisturbed, until bottom sides are lightly browned, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Do not wipe skillet clean.

3. Melt remaining 3 tablespoons butter in skillet over medium-high. Add flour, tomato paste, and garlic; cook, stirring constantly, until mixture

darkens slightly, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in broth. Bring to a simmer over medium; cook, stirring often, until thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in Worcestershire sauce, thyme, mixed vegetables, potatoes, sirloin, and remaining 1½ teaspoons salt; set aside.

4. Divide sirloin mixture evenly among 8 (10-ounce) ramekins; place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Brush edges of each dough round with beaten egg, and place, egg side down, on top filled ramekins. Using a knife, cut 4 small slits in top of each dough round; brush with remaining beaten egg. Bake in preheated oven until puffed and browned, 15 to 17 minutes. Garnish with thyme leaves.

Waste Not

Cut festive shapes from the pastry scraps to adorn the tops of these pot pies; brush with beaten egg to help them stick.

TRY IT IN A SKILLET

Omit Step 1. Preheat oven to 375°F with rack in top third position. Prepare Step 2 as directed, using a 12-inch cast-iron skillet. Omit Step 4. Roll 1 **puff pastry sheet** out on a lightly floured work surface to a 12-inch square. Trim about 1½ inches from each corner to form a rough circle. Roll pastry up onto rolling pin. Working quickly, unroll pastry over filling in skillet. Fold excess pastry edges under, and then gently tuck inside skillet (do not press pastry into filling). Using kitchen shears, cut 4 (1-inch-long) slits into top of pastry. Brush top with beaten **egg**. Place skillet in oven, and bake at 375°F until edges turn light golden, about 15 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350°F; continue baking until pastry is puffed, golden, and crisp, 30 to 35 minutes. Garnish with **thyme leaves**.



Half & Half

For a different look, divide the sauces down the dish lengthwise so that everyone gets a taste of both red and green enchiladas.

Christmas-Style Enchiladas

ACTIVE 30 MIN. • TOTAL 45 MIN.

SERVES 6

- 3 cups shredded rotisserie chicken (from 1 [2-lb.] whole rotisserie chicken)
- 4 oz. Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (about 1 cup)
- 1/2 cup crema Mexicana, plus more for drizzling
- 2 Tbsp. finely chopped pickled jalapeño chiles plus 2 Tbsp. liquid from jar (from 1 [12-oz.] jar)
- 3/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 2 (8-oz.) pkg. green enchilada sauce, divided (such as Frontera Green Chile)
- 2 (8-oz.) pkg. red enchilada sauce, divided (such as Frontera Red Chile)
- 12 (6-inch) corn tortillas, warmed
- 1 1/2 oz. Cotija cheese, crumbled (about 1/3 cup)
- Fresh cilantro, sliced radishes, and chopped avocado

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Gently stir together chicken, Monterey Jack cheese, crema, jalapeños, pickled jalapeño liquid, and salt in a medium bowl until combined; set aside.

2. Spread 3/4 cup green enchilada sauce on half of the bottom of a

13- x 9-inch baking dish; spread 3/4 cup red enchilada sauce on remaining half so sauces divide the dish in half crosswise and meet in the middle. Place remaining 1 1/4 cups each green and red enchilada sauces in separate shallow bowls or pie plates.

3. Dip 1 side of 1 tortilla into green sauce, letting excess drain back into bowl; lay tortilla, dipped side up, on a clean work surface. Spoon about 1/4 cup chicken mixture down center of tortilla. Roll up tortilla, and place, seam side down, in

prepared baking dish over green sauce. Repeat process with 5 more tortillas dipped into green sauce and 6 tortillas dipped into red sauce, placing rolled tortillas in dish over corresponding sauces. Spoon 1/3 cup of each sauce over corresponding rolled tortillas.

4. Bake enchiladas in preheated oven until warmed through, about 15 minutes. Drizzle with additional crema, and top with Cotija cheese, cilantro, radishes, and avocado. Serve remaining red and green enchilada sauces on the side.



Easy Pastitsio

ACTIVE 55 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 50 MIN.

SERVES 10

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 lb. 85/15 lean ground beef
- 1 medium-size yellow onion, finely chopped (1½ cups)
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped (2 Tbsp.)
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- ¾ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste

½ cup dry red wine

- 1 (28-oz.) can crushed tomatoes
- 2¾ tsp. kosher salt, divided, plus more for salting water
- 12 oz. large pasta shells
- 2½ cups whole-milk ricotta cheese (such as Polly-O)
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 3 oz. Parmesan cheese, grated (about ¾ cup), divided

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high. While water comes to a boil, heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high. Break beef into large clumps, and add to Dutch oven. Cook, undisturbed, until bottom side is browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Stir and cook over medium-high, stirring and breaking up meat into small pieces using a wooden spoon, until cooked through, about 4 minutes. Add onion, garlic, oregano, and cinnamon; cook, stirring often, until onion softens, about 4 minutes. Add tomato paste; cook, stirring often, until slightly toasted, about 2 minutes. Add wine; cook, stirring often, until almost completely reduced, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in crushed tomatoes and 1 teaspoon of the salt. Bring to a simmer; cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture thickens slightly, about 8 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in 1 teaspoon of the salt.

2. Cook pasta according to package directions for al dente. Drain pasta, and stir into beef mixture in Dutch oven. Spread mixture into an ungreased 13-x 9-inch baking dish.

3. Stir together ricotta, eggs, ½ cup of the Parmesan cheese, and the remaining ¾ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl until combined. Dollop ricotta mixture over pasta mixture, and gently spread to evenly cover; sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup Parmesan cheese. Bake in preheated oven until topping is browned in spots, 35 to 38 minutes. Remove from oven, and let cool slightly before serving, about 10 minutes.



Greek to Me

Traditionally crowned with a homemade béchamel, this weeknight riff on “Greek lasagna” gets the job done with an easier ricotta topping.

Sausage-and-Black-Eyed Pea Soup with Greens

ACTIVE 1 HOUR, 25 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 25 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1½ lb. sweet Italian pork sausage
- 1 medium-size yellow onion, thinly sliced (2 cups)
- 6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced (about 3 Tbsp.)
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 tsp. grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon)

- ½ tsp. crushed red pepper, plus more for garnish
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 1 large bunch fresh collard greens, stemmed and chopped (8 packed cups)
- 2 (15½-oz.) cans black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 6 cups lower-sodium chicken broth
- Grated Parmesan cheese

1. Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high. Break sausage into large clumps, and add to Dutch oven. Cook,

undisturbed, until bottom side is browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Cook over medium-high, breaking up sausage into smaller pieces using a wooden spoon and stirring constantly, until cooked through, about 3 minutes. Add onion, garlic, and salt; cook, stirring often, until softened, about 6 minutes. Add rosemary, lemon zest, and crushed red pepper, and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add wine, and cook over medium-high,

stirring often, until mostly evaporated, about 2 minutes.
 2. Stir collard greens, black-eyed peas, and chicken broth into mixture in Dutch oven. Bring to a vigorous simmer over high. Reduce heat to medium, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until flavors meld and greens are tender but still have a bite, 40 to 45 minutes. Divide soup evenly among 8 bowls, and garnish with additional crushed red pepper; sprinkle with cheese.



Lucky You

If you don't get around to making this comforting soup at Christmas, prepare it on New Year's Day to bring you good luck in 2024.



✕
Warm Welcome

Transfer this soup to your slow cooker so it stays nice and hot for company no matter what time they roll in.

Ultimate Tomato Soup with Pepper Jelly Grilled Cheese

ACTIVE 1 HOUR - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 15 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 medium-size yellow onion, thinly sliced (about 1¾ cups)
- 3 small carrots, peeled and thinly sliced (about ¾ cup)
- 2½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 1 Tbsp. finely chopped garlic (from 3 garlic cloves)
- 1 Tbsp. grated fresh ginger
- ⅛ tsp. cayenne pepper, plus more to taste
- 5 (5-inch) thyme sprigs, plus leaves for garnish (optional)
- 2 (28-oz.) cans whole peeled San Marzano plum tomatoes, crushed
- 2 tsp. light brown sugar

- 2 cups vegetable stock
- ½-¾ cup heavy whipping cream, plus more for serving
- 1 (20- to 22-inch) baguette, split lengthwise
- ½ cup red pepper jelly
- 6 oz. aged white Cheddar cheese, thinly sliced
- 6 oz. smoked Gouda cheese, thinly sliced

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high. Add onion, carrots, and ½ teaspoon of the salt; cook, stirring often, until vegetables are golden brown around edges, 10 to 12 minutes. Add garlic, ginger, cayenne pepper, and thyme; cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 1 minute.
2. Stir tomatoes and sugar into

Dutch oven. Bring to a simmer over medium-high. Cook, stirring often, until slightly thickened, about 10 minutes. Add vegetable stock, and bring to a simmer over medium-high. Cook, stirring occasionally, until flavors meld, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Discard thyme sprigs.

3. Working in 2 batches, ladle tomato mixture into a blender. Secure lid on blender, and remove center piece to allow steam to escape. Place a towel over opening, and process until smooth, about 30 seconds. Return to Dutch oven. Stir in ½ cup of the cream and remaining 2 teaspoons salt. For a creamier consistency, add up to ¼ cup additional cream.

4. Cut split baguette in half crosswise; arrange halves side by side and cut sides up on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Hollow out bread from rounded top halves of baguette. Spread red pepper jelly evenly over cut sides of baguette. Stuff Cheddar and Gouda cheeses evenly into hollowed-out baguette halves.

5. Bake in preheated oven until cheese is melted, 10 to 12 minutes. Carefully place top baguette halves, cheese side down, over bottom baguette halves. Cut each half crosswise into 4 slices for a total of 8 sandwiches. Drizzle servings of soup with cream; garnish with thyme leaves, if desired. Serve with sandwiches.

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*Stouffer's Lasagna with Meat & Sauce.
2x the meat required by the lasagna with meat sauce standard.

THE KITCHEN



1. Cranberry Poinsettia Punch 2. Cranberry Old-Fashioneds 3. Cranberry Margaritas 4. Boozy Cranberries

HAPPY HOUR

That's the Spirit

Brighten up your cocktails with tart cranberries

Cranberry Old-Fashioneds

Place 2 large **cocktail ice cubes** in 2 chilled rocks glasses. Divide $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **bourbon**, 2 Tbsp. **Cranberry Simple Syrup** (recipe at far right), and 4 dashes **orange-flavored bitters** evenly between glasses, and stir to combine. Place **Boozy Cranberries** (recipe at bottom) and an **orange peel strip** in each glass. (Alternatively, thread cranberries onto wooden picks and set on rims of glasses.) Serve immediately.

ACTIVE 5 MIN. - TOTAL 5 MIN. - SERVES 2

Cranberry Margaritas

Place $\frac{1}{4}$ cup **Cranberry Simple Syrup** (recipe at far right) in a small shallow dish; place **margarita salt** in a separate shallow dish. Invert 2 glasses into simple syrup to coat rims. Place each glass into margarita salt to coat rims. Set aside. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **blanco tequila**, 2 Tbsp. **orange liqueur** (such as Cointreau), 6 Tbsp. **fresh lime juice** (from about 2 limes), and 6 Tbsp. **Cranberry Simple Syrup** to a cocktail shaker filled with **ice**. Shake until well chilled, about 15 seconds. Fill prepared glasses with **ice**, and strain margarita into glasses. Garnish with **lime wheels**, and serve immediately.

ACTIVE 10 MIN. - TOTAL 10 MIN. - SERVES 2

Cranberry Poinsettia Punch

Prepare the ice mold: Stir together 2 cups **cranberry juice blend** and 1 cup **water** in a liquid measuring cup until combined. Scatter 1 cup **frozen cranberries** around bottom of a decorative Bundt pan. Slice 1 **medium blood orange** into thin rings, and arrange evenly around cranberries. Pour $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of the juice mixture over cranberries and blood orange slices. Freeze, uncovered, until firm, about 1 hour. Meanwhile, store remaining juice mixture in refrigerator. Once ice mold is firm, remove from freezer. Scatter with additional 1 cup **frozen cranberries**. Pour remaining juice mixture over cranberries. Freeze, uncovered, until completely frozen, at least 8 hours or up to 1 week. Prepare the punch: Stir together 2 cups chilled **cranberry juice blend**, 1 cup chilled **fresh blood orange juice** (from about 6 blood oranges), and 1 cup **orange liqueur** (such as Grand Marnier) in a 12-cup punch bowl until combined. Store, covered, in refrigerator up to 2 days. To serve, remove ice mold from freezer. Fill a large bowl with **hot water**, and gently lower Bundt pan into hot water to loosen ice mold, holding for 10 to 15 seconds. Invert onto a baking sheet, and remove pan. Carefully transfer ice mold from baking sheet into mixture in punch bowl. Gently pour 2 (750-milliliter) bottles chilled **sparkling dry rosé** down sides of punch bowl. Serve immediately.

ACTIVE 20 MIN. - TOTAL 20 MIN., PLUS 9 HOURS FREEZING - SERVES 12

Cranberry Simple Syrup

Combine $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups **water**, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **granulated sugar**, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **maple syrup**, 2 cups **fresh cranberries**, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. **kosher salt** in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer over high, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until cranberries have softened and burst, about 10 minutes. Cook 3 minutes, mashing cranberries with a wooden spoon. Remove from heat, and let cool slightly, about 10 minutes. Pour cranberry mixture through a fine mesh strainer into a medium bowl; discard solids. Transfer Cranberry Simple Syrup to a jar or resealable container. Store, covered, in refrigerator up to 2 weeks.

ACTIVE 20 MIN.
TOTAL 35 MIN.
MAKES 2 CUPS

Boozy Cranberries

Stir together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed **light brown sugar**, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup **water**, 3 (3- x 1-inch) **orange peel strips** plus 2 Tbsp. **fresh juice** (from 1 medium orange), 1 (3-inch) **cinnamon stick**, 3 **whole cloves**, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. **kosher salt** in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high, stirring constantly. Boil, stirring constantly, until sugar has dissolved, about 2 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low, and add 1 cup **dried cranberries**. Simmer over medium to medium-low, stirring occasionally, until cranberries start to soften, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup **bourbon**. Let stand, uncovered, 45 minutes. Transfer to a jar or resealable container. Store, covered, in refrigerator up to 1 month.

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR - MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP



RECIPES: MARIANNE WILLIAMS; PROP STYLING: CLAIRE SPOLLEN; FOOD STYLING: TORIE COX

PIECE OF CAKE

Candy Crush

Three twists on chocolate bark
that'll hit the sweet spot

Cranberry-
Pistachio Bark
recipe, page 170





RECIPES: ALANA AL-HATLANI; FOOD STYLING: RISHON HANNERS; PROP STYLING: CHRISTINA DALEY

Mocha Bark
recipe, page 170

Cranberry-Pistachio BarkACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR,
15 MIN.**SERVES 10**

- 2 cups 60%-70% cacao dark chocolate chips (about 12 oz.)
- ¼ cup chopped pistachios
- ½ cup sweetened dried cranberries
- ¼ cup lightly salted toasted coconut chips (such as Dang) Flaky sea salt (optional)

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; set aside.
2. Fill a medium saucepan with water to a depth of 1 to 2 inches. Bring to a simmer over medium. Carefully place a slightly smaller heatproof bowl on top of saucepan (the bowl should nestle comfortably in pan without touching water). Place chocolate in bowl; cook, stirring often, until melted, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove bowl from heat. (Alternatively, microwave chocolate in a microwavable bowl on HIGH for 1 minute. Stir, then continue microwaving in 30-second intervals, stirring after each interval, until fully melted, about 1 minute, 30 seconds.)
3. Pour melted chocolate onto prepared baking sheet. Using an offset spatula, spread chocolate into a roughly ⅛-inch-thick rectangle (about 10 x 13 inches).
4. Sprinkle chocolate evenly with pistachios, cranberries, and coconut; if desired, sprinkle with flaky sea salt.
5. Chill bark, uncovered, in refrigerator until set, about 1 hour. Break into pieces. Store bark in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 week.



THE GOOD STUFF
For the Gingerbread Bark (recipe below at right), splurge on high-quality white chocolate; it melts more smoothly.

Mocha Bark

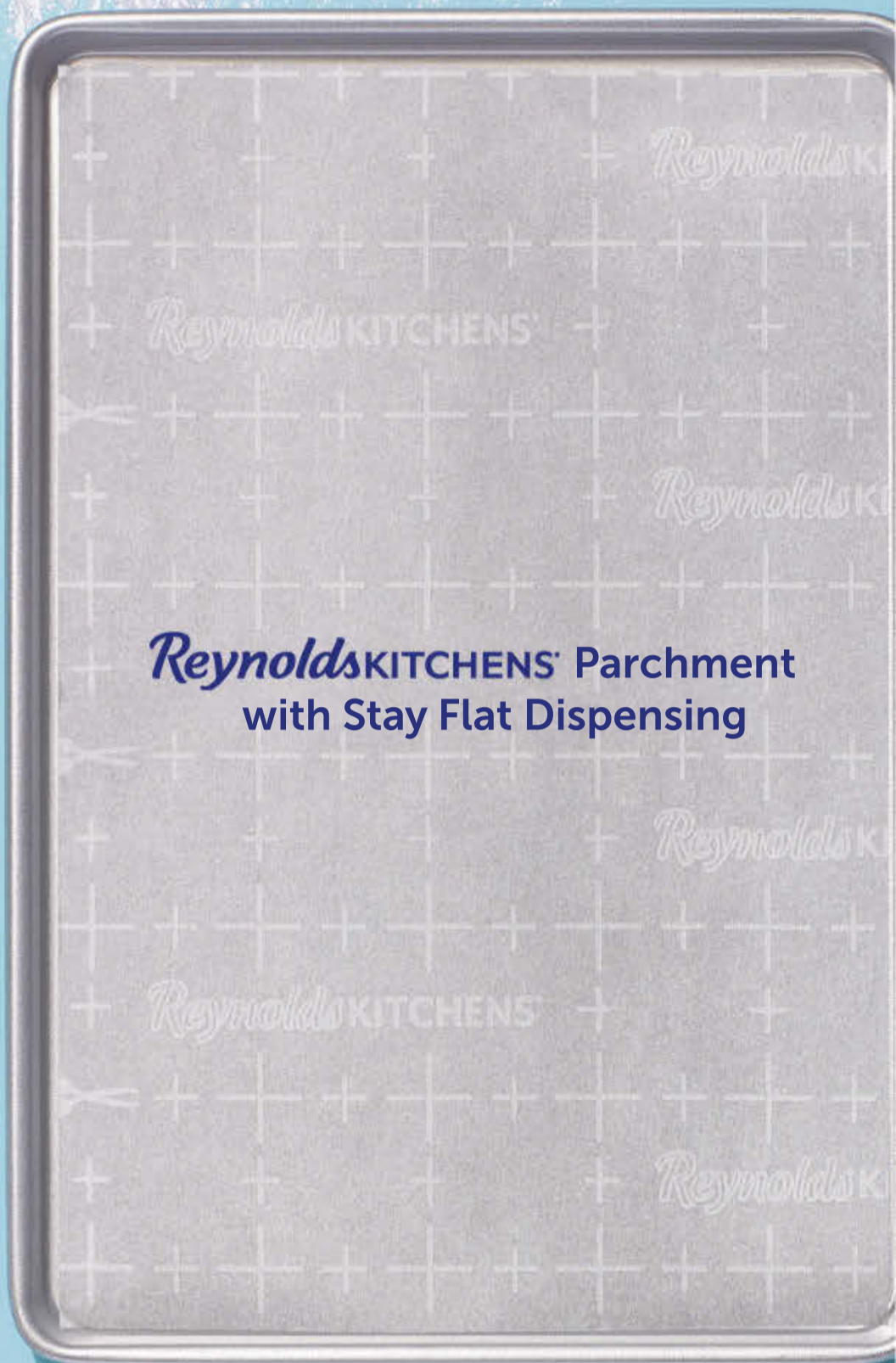
Prepare recipe through Step 2 as directed, using 1 ½ cups **white chocolate chips** and ½ cup **dark chocolate chips** (melting them in separate bowls) instead of all dark chocolate. Omit Steps 3 and 4. Pour melted white chocolate onto prepared baking sheet, using an offset spatula to spread it into a ⅛-inch-thick rectangle. Stir 2 tsp. **instant espresso granules** into melted dark chocolate. Drizzle dark chocolate mixture evenly over white chocolate. Using a butter knife or the tip of the offset spatula, swirl dark chocolate into white chocolate. Sprinkle with ¼ cup chopped **chocolate-covered espresso beans**, and, if desired, sprinkle with **flaky sea salt**. Proceed with Step 5 as directed.

Gingerbread Bark

Prepare recipe through Step 2 as directed, replacing dark chocolate with 2 cups **white chocolate chips** and stirring ¼ tsp. each **ground ginger** and **ground cinnamon** into the melted white chocolate. Proceed with Step 3 as directed. Omit Step 4. Sprinkle white chocolate evenly with about ¼ cup coarsely crushed **gingersnaps** and ¼ cup **chopped crystallized ginger**. Using a Microplane grater, grate zest from half of 1 **orange** (about 2 tsp.) evenly over top of melted white chocolate. If desired, garnish with **flaky sea salt** and **sprinkles**. Proceed with Step 5 as directed.



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Secrets to Cheesecake Success

There's nothing like a perfect bite of PHILADELPHIA® cheesecake: It's smooth, creamy, and slightly tangy. Our editors have spent decades fine-tuning cheesecakes of all kinds, and we're letting you in on their best-kept secrets ahead of the holidays. Here's how you can make your most delicious one yet with help from PHILADELPHIA Cream Cheese.



Ingredient Quality Matters

Fresh fruits and vegetables just taste better, and the same goes for baked goods that are whipped up with flavorful, top-tier ingredients like **PHILADELPHIA Original Brick Cream Cheese**. It's made with five simple ingredients, including fresh milk and real cream, which gives it a thick, super-silky texture that can help transform your cheesecakes into creamy creations. Incorporate it into the filling for a smoother, richer outcome.

It's All in the (Delicious) Details

You've already mastered the basics, so it's time to hone your cheesecake-decorating skills. Keep it classic with sliced fruit and a dollop of homemade whipped cream, try your hand at making a Basque-style cheesecake with a crisp, caramelized exterior, or play around with different drizzles, from sweet-and-savory salted caramel sauce to zesty lemon glaze. During the holidays, add a festive flourish with candied nuts, sugared berries, or crushed peppermint. Rosemary sprigs, shaved chocolate curls, mint leaves, and citrus peels also make for striking garnishes year-round.

More Prep Means Less Stress

Baking and decorating a show-stopping cheesecake takes time. Instead of rushing the process on the morning of your next dinner party or holiday gathering, consider making your cheesecake a day or two in advance and storing it in the refrigerator until the special occasion. It's easy to do—and won't compromise the texture or flavor of your luscious confection. Once the cheesecake has cooled completely, cover it in plastic wrap before popping it into the refrigerator. Be sure to enjoy it within three to five days.



One Bite and You'll Know It's Philly

PHILADELPHIA Original Brick Cream Cheese is made with just five simple ingredients, including fresh milk and real cream, for a silky smooth, creamy texture you'll savor.

Scan the code with your phone to discover more PHILADELPHIA Cream Cheese cheesecake inspiration.





Recipe Makeover

Before
748 CALORIES
70 G FAT
1,440 MG SODIUM

After
412 CALORIES
30 G FAT
822 G SODIUM

LIGHTEN UP

Double-Dip

Help yourself to seconds with this healthier take on an old-school appetizer

Baked Three-Cheese Spinach-Artichoke Dip

For lighter snacking, trade your go-to corn chips for the whole-grain kind and fresh veggies.

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 55 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 1 (8-oz.) pkg. $\frac{1}{3}$ -less-fat cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp. hot sauce
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 (14-oz.) cans chopped artichoke hearts, drained (about 3 cups)
- 1 (15-oz.) pkg. frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

- 8 oz. Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (about 2 cups), divided
- 3 oz. Parmesan cheese, finely shredded (about 1 cup), divided
- Crudités, for serving
- Whole-grain chips, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 375°F; spray a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray; set aside. Whisk together cream cheese, sour cream, mayonnaise, hot sauce, garlic powder, onion powder, lemon zest, and salt in a large bowl until mostly smooth. Fold in artichoke hearts, spinach, $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of the Monterey Jack, and $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of the Parmesan until combined.

2. Spoon mixture into prepared dish, spreading into an even layer. Sprinkle evenly with remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Monterey Jack and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup Parmesan.

3. Bake in preheated oven until golden brown and bubbly, 35 to 40 minutes. Serve hot with crudité and chips.

Good For You!

Eating better doesn't have to mean giving up the foods you crave. This dip delivers big flavor with about half the cheese in traditional recipes.

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Inez's
Sand Tarts,
page 178



HOSPITALITY

The Legend of Great-Aunt Inez's Sand Tarts

Not all family recipes are passed down. Some are baked by a 1950s home economics teacher with a penchant for pecans

IT WAS 2016, and I was making an appearance at a friend's holiday potluck in Manhattan before flying home to Lafayette, Louisiana. I was 30, in a dead-end "situationship," and sharing a sixth-floor walk-up with a grumpy cockapoo and strangers from the internet.

It would be my first Christmas without my Great-Aunt Inez, my Maw Maw's second-oldest sister, who was the yin to my yang, my Ya-Ya with the most endearing eccentricities, a kindred spirit who encouraged my creative pursuits and curious nature. She was the first person to say to me, after I'd performed a one-woman show at age 5 in her kitchen, "Bébé, someday you're going to New York City!" She believed in me, so I believed in myself.

I was still trying to make my dream as a writer in New York City come true when I got the news that she'd passed away peacefully at 92. While I was lucky to spend her last Christmas with her, I wasn't able to return for her funeral in January, which crushed me.

That year, I thought I'd bake her famous sand tarts for the first time and share them with new friends in her honor. I dug up her handwritten recipe

card, a photo I'd saved on my phone's camera roll from my last visit home. The only ingredient I was missing was pecans. So I filled up two totes with prechopped bags of nuts from the corner deli and wondered what she'd think of me spending almost \$55 for something that fell at her feet for free every winter. The batch of cookies came out warm and tan, just like her. I coated them in "Louisiana snow"—powdered sugar—then braced for the chill of the real thing en route to the Upper East Side.

"Did you bring something Cajun?" the host asked. She was a food editor, so I knew she'd appreciate them. It was my shtick, being Cajun, something I could rely on when I felt out of place in the concrete jungle. In a city where I knew no one, at least I knew myself. Or so I thought.

I didn't realize I'd be walking into one of the most embarrassing moments of my adult life.

She grabbed a tart, took a bite, made a face, and asked, "Aren't these just Pennsylvania Dutch cookies?"

"Look them up," she said. "I think they're the same." Before I could say anything else, she'd turned to greet the next guest. I ran to the bathroom to Google "Dutch tarts Pittsburgh." There it was. With my back against



At left, Inez LeBlanc Vincent

the door, I scrolled through aliases like “Pecan Snowball Cookies,” “Sandies,” and “Mexican Wedding Cookies.” *Mais là!* She was right. I wasn’t just mortified; I was shaken to my core. No one had questioned my Cajunness before.

Alone on the subway, I wondered: How could Great-Aunt Inez’s sand tarts not be Cajun? They were a part of my Boudreaux-LeBlanc family traditions from baptisms to *bougeries*. She dedicated her life to the preservation of our language and culture, winning the *prix d’honneur* from Université Sainte-Anne in Church Point, Nova Scotia, for her mastery of the Louisiana French language. She reunited our Canadian relatives that were separated from our kin during Le Grand Dérangement by hosting a reunion in Louisiana. She was even flown to Philadelphia as a featured Cajun cook for a magazine.

Wait. Aha! Could this trip have been where she’d heard of Pennsylvania Dutch cookies? I knew she must have been laughing from Heaven as she watched me struggle on this wild *l’oie* (goose) chase. I became obsessed with discovering the origins of this recipe, and oddly, when I finally uncovered the mystery, I liked the real story even better.

“She got it from a cafeteria worker at the school,” my cousin Tommy, her son, told me.

Then I knew that she was laughing.

When she was a home economics teacher, no one could keep her away from the cafeteria between classes. She loved to *veillée*, or visit, and learn tricks from the skilled cooks in the kitchen. Of course she added her own touch to the passed-on cookie recipe. Instead of keeping the tarts sphere-shaped, she pinched them into rounded rectangles (and sometimes half-moons) so she could monitor the edges. Golden corners meant they were ready. She also added five times the amount of nuts the recipe called for. She didn’t have pricey ingredients or high-tech appliances, but she had plenty of pecan trees.

I learned that the thing Great-Aunt Inez loved most was teaching others about what food could do for the survival of our culture. In this case, it meant turning an American dish into her own and incorporating it into our South Louisiana customs.

That’s when it clicked. Suddenly, I felt closer to my Great-Aunt Inez than I ever had when she was alive. She made Pennsylvania Dutch cookies—or sandies or whatever you want to call them—with the ingredients she had on hand. That’s the Cajun way, and that’s what I am doing in this new city of mine. I think she would be proud.



A LASTING LEGACY
As a home economics teacher in South Louisiana, Inez LeBlanc Vincent spent 60 years sharing the art of Cajun cooking with generations of students.

Inez’s Sand Tarts

The original card reads: “This recipe was handed to me by word of mouth. I have changed it at times. For instance, it called for 1 cup of pecans. I have added 1 and then 3, depending on the harvest of my 3 pecan trees. The oven temperature depends on the stove and times for baking may vary.”

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 2 HOURS

MAKES ABOUT 38

- 1 lb. butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup powdered sugar, plus more for rolling
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 5 cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 3 cups chopped pecans

1. Place butter in a large bowl. Cream butter and powdered sugar together with a spoon.
2. Add vanilla, 3 cups of flour, and pecans. Continue creaming with spoon until combined.
3. Preheat oven to 350°F.
4. Stir in remaining 2 cups flour. This will make a very stiff dough and may be a little messy. Shape into small rectangles, and place on two ungreased baking sheets.
5. Bake in batches for 25 to 30 minutes or to your desired degree of brownness.
6. Let cookies cool thoroughly, and roll in powdered sugar.



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NOTICE OF PROPOSED CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

A court authorized this Notice. This is not a solicitation from a lawyer.

If you paid for a Philips Respironics CPAP, BiPAP or Ventilator that was recalled, you may be eligible for a cash award from a proposed class action Settlement.

A proposed Settlement has been reached with Philips RS North America LLC ("Philips RS"), Koninklijke Philips N.V., Philips North America LLC, Philips Holding USA, Inc., and Philips RS North America Holding Corporation (collectively, the "Philips Defendants") in a U.S. class action lawsuit alleging Economic Loss Claims related to the purchase, lease, or rental of certain CPAPs, BiPAPs, and ventilators that Philips Respironics recalled beginning in June 2021. These devices were sold in the U.S. between 2008 and 2021.

A court authorized this Notice because individuals and entities residing in the United States (including its Territories and the District of Columbia), and military and diplomatic personnel stationed overseas, who purchased, leased, rented, paid for (in whole or in part), or were prescribed a Recalled Device (called "Users") have the right to know about a proposed legal Settlement affecting them. The Recalled Devices are the CPAP, BiPAP, ventilator, and/or other devices sold, leased, rented or otherwise distributed in the United States as identified in the Long Form Notice or on the Settlement website. The Settlement does not affect or release any claims for alleged personal injuries or medical monitoring relief.

What are the Settlement Benefits?

Users may be eligible for a \$100 Device Return Award, a Device Payment Award, and/or a Device Replacement Award. The amount of the Device Payment Awards for Users depends on the specific model of the Recalled Device. Users who paid out of pocket for a CPAP, BiPAP, or ventilator device to replace a Recalled Device may qualify for a Device Replacement Award.

How can I get a Payment?

Users who return their Recalled Device to Philips Respironics by **August 9, 2024** (as part of a Recall Program or by Enrolling in the Settlement) will be entitled to a \$100 Device Return Award and a Device Payment Award without the need to submit a claim form. Visit www.RespironicsCPAP-ELSettlement.com for instructions on how to obtain a prepaid label to return your Recalled Device. Returning your Recalled Device will help you maximize your payments from the proposed Settlement. Visit www.RespironicsCPAP-ELSettlement.com for complete information.

What are my other options?

If you **Do Nothing**, you will be legally bound by the terms of the Settlement, and you will release your claims against the Released Parties, including the Philips Defendants. You may **Opt-Out** of or **Object** to the Settlement by **February 7, 2024**. Please visit www.RespironicsCPAP-ELSettlement.com for more information on how to Opt-Out of or Object to the Settlement.

Do I have a Lawyer in this Case?

Yes. The Court appointed the following law firms to represent you and the other Class Members: Seeger Weiss; Levin Sedran & Berman; Chimicles Schwartz Kriner & Donaldson-Smith LLP; Lynch Carpenter, LLP; Fine, Kaplan and Black, R.P.C.; Johnson Becker PLLC; and Del Sole Cavanaugh Stroyd LLC. These firms are called Class Counsel. You will not be charged for their services.

The Court's Final Approval Hearing

The Court will hold a Final Approval Hearing on **April 11, 2024 at 10:30 a.m.**, in Courtroom 5A of the Joseph F. Weis, Jr. U.S. Courthouse, 700 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, to consider whether the Settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate. If there are objections, the Court will consider them. The Court will listen to Settlement Class Members who have asked to speak at the hearing and will also decide how much Class Counsel should receive in fees and expense reimbursements. After the hearing, the Court will decide whether to approve the Settlement.

This notice is only a summary.

For more information, visit www.RespironicsCPAP-ELSettlement.com or call toll-free 1-855-912-3432.



SNACK TIME

The Last Cheese Straw

Some taste memories grow fonder over time

ACCORDING TO MY particular palate, the “perfect” cheese straws are 30 seconds away from being too toasted, a dash of cayenne short of being too spicy, and just teetering on the edge of being too salty. They are tiny sticks of flavor dynamite, dangerous for their ability to destroy any notions of temperance.

My grandmother May gets the credit for my personal obsession with this snack. Her simple recipe calls for just five ingredients: Cheddar cheese, butter, flour, salt, and cayenne pepper. But when I shared her method with the *Southern Living* Test Kitchen, their batches came out shockingly flat. It was perplexing—until we started thinking like a Southern grandmother. Instead of weighing the flour, we scooped it by the cupful. This small change resulted in the ideal balance of fat to flour, yielding cheese straws with the proper posture.



May in her Christmas skirt

Family recipes take a perilous journey on their way to us. The wisdom and intuition of our predecessors simply can't fit on an index card. Unlike my generation, which documents nearly every meal on social media, folks back then never took any pictures of their food. In my memory, my grandmother's cheese straws are perfectly golden brown, crispy, and deftly dusted with paprika (that she neglected to include in her recipe). But knowing my grandmother, her batches were likely a little different from year to year, depending on how meticulously (or not) she measured the flour or if she got sidetracked and baked them for five minutes too long (I inherited her distractibility). What matters is that she made them well enough to earn them a permanent spot in our taste memories, solidifying the savory delights as a prerequisite for all our Christmas gatherings.

A full tin of cheese straws turns my family into snack predators. The hollow, metallic *thwunk* of the lid being opened is like blood in the water, signaling us to circle like sharks and snatch a handful while we can. Our entire stash is usually gone within two days. Mostly, that is. The portions shrink as the supply diminishes...until there's just one left, lonely in his crumb-riddled tin. Eventually, somebody gives in and opens the container for the final time. We're sad, but not devastated, because my grandmother taught my mother how to make them, my mother taught me and my father, my father taught my husband, and one day I'll teach my nephew. My grandmother may no longer be with us, but her cheese straws always will be. And as long as we keep making them, there will never truly be a last one.

Spicy Cheese Straws

These are inspired by my grandmother's recipe but kicked up just a bit. If you don't have Aleppo pepper, substitute regular paprika.

ACTIVE 15 MIN. - TOTAL 1 HOUR, 50 MIN.

SERVES 8

- 1 lb. sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 6 cups loosely packed)
- 1¹/₄ cups butter, softened
- 1¹/₂ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. smoked paprika
- 3¹/₂ cups all-purpose flour
- Aleppo pepper, for sprinkling
- Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling

1. Preheat oven to 400°F with racks in top third and lower third positions. Add shredded cheese to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment; let stand until room temperature, at least 30 minutes. Add butter, cayenne, salt, and smoked paprika; beat on medium speed until creamy, about 2 minutes. Reduce mixer speed to low; gradually add flour, beating until a thick dough forms, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, about 3 minutes.

2. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper. Divide dough in half; spoon half of dough into a cookie press fitted with a star disk or into a piping bag fitted with an open star tip (about ½ inch wide). Press or pipe dough onto pans, spacing lines about 1 inch apart. Sprinkle with Aleppo pepper and flaky sea salt.

3. Bake in preheated oven until lightly golden brown, 12 to 14 minutes, rotating pans from top to bottom rack halfway through bake time. Let cool completely on pans, about 20 minutes; break into pieces as desired. Repeat piping procedure with remaining dough; bake and cool as directed. Serve or store in an airtight container at room temperature up to 4 days.



OVER EASY

Marvelous Muffins

Everything you love about sausage balls but revamped for breakfast

Sausage-Cheddar Muffins

ACTIVE 30 MIN. - TOTAL 55 MIN.

MAKES 12

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 lb. breakfast sausage (such as Jimmy Dean)
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt, divided
- ½ cup unsalted butter
- ½ tsp. grated garlic (from 2 garlic cloves)
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup whole buttermilk
- 1 Tbsp. pure maple syrup
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda

8 oz. sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 2 cups), divided

Chopped fresh chives

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat a 12-cup muffin tray with cooking spray, and set aside. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high. Add sausage and ½ teaspoon of the salt; cook, stirring often to break up meat into small crumbles, until well browned and crispy, 7 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Transfer sausage to a paper towel-lined plate; set aside.
2. Microwave butter and garlic

in a medium microwavable bowl on HIGH until butter is melted, about 45 seconds. Stir together to incorporate. Let cool to room temperature, about 5 minutes. Whisk in eggs, buttermilk, and maple syrup until smooth. Set aside.

3. Whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt in a separate medium bowl. Add buttermilk mixture, cooked sausage, and 1¾ cups of the cheese; stir until just combined (do not overmix). Lightly coat a ⅓-cup measuring cup with

cooking spray; spoon batter evenly into prepared muffin cups. Sprinkle evenly with remaining ¼ cup cheese.

4. Bake in preheated oven until muffins are puffed and golden brown, 22 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven. Transfer muffin tray to a wire rack; let cool 10 minutes. Gently run a knife or offset spatula around edges of each muffin; remove from tray. Garnish with chives, and serve warm. Cooled muffins may be stored in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 3 days; reheat before serving.



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BAKING SCHOOL

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM THE SOUTH'S MOST TRUSTED KITCHEN

Make Your Mark

Stamps are an effortless way to decorate your next dozen

Yes, Virginia, your batch of cookies can impress without fussing over royal icing. Try easy-to-use stamps, which create intricate, three-dimensional embossed designs in any dough—no artistic skills required. Pro tip: Dip the stamps in flour or powdered sugar between uses to guarantee the best results. \$30/set of three; nordicware.com



Did you know that **instant espresso granules** enhance the flavor of chocolate? Simply stir a small amount (it's potent stuff) into icings, batters, and doughs. The powder can also be used to make hot brewed coffee in a flash for cake and brownie batters.



SECRET AGENTS

Punch up your baking by adding these two items to your pantry



Good for more than just milkshakes, **malted milk powder** helps cookies brown and adds nutty caramel notes to baked goods. You can fold it into any dough, but it does contain salt, so consider adjusting your recipe accordingly.

Well-Rounded

Even professional bakers make imperfect cookies, but you'd never know it, thanks to this kitchen hack. You'll need a drinking glass (or a biscuit cutter) that is slightly wider than the cookies you're making. Immediately after they come out of the oven, turn the glass or cutter upside down and place it over a cookie. Gently swirl the glass in a circular motion until the edges become smooth and even. Work quickly; they won't budge once they've cooled.



Take a Break

You rest steaks before serving, but did you know that you should give your cookie dough downtime too? Resting allows the flour to hydrate, the dough to firm up, and the flavors to meld and deepen—yielding superior results. Even if you have just 30 minutes to spare, you'll taste the difference that a little bit of time in the fridge can make.



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COOKING SCHOOL

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM THE SOUTH'S MOST TRUSTED KIT



Fresh Isn't Always Best

Dried herbs are a better choice for long braises because they won't turn bitter and are also ideal for rubs since they help create a delicious crust. Their flavor is more concentrated than the fresh kind, especially when protected from light, heat, air, and moisture. Generally, if you are substituting dried herbs for fresh, use about a third of the amount that a recipe calls for. You'll also want to add them in the earlier stages of the cooking process, not at the end.

Just a Pinch

It can be expensive and wasteful to buy full jars of herbs and spices, but Occo sells them in half-teaspoon pods that come in mix-and-match packs, for a space- and money-saving way to sample new flavors or replace old ones.

From \$5; eatocco.com



Southern Staple Worcestershire Sauce

Worcestershire sauce was created in 1837 in Worcester, England, when two chemists named John Wheeley Lea and William Henry Perrins first concocted it out of malt vinegar, anchovies, and garlic (among other ingredients). After letting the sauce age for 18 months, they put it on the market and soon started exporting it abroad, bestowing upon it a name tied to the place it was invented. Although the condiment has British origins, the South considers its unique savory-salty flavor to be an irreplaceable part of many recipes. Here are three ways to put it to good use.

- Fold it into a cheese ball for added savoriness.
- Add a splash to your michelada or Bloody Mary.
- Stir a few tablespoons into chili or beef stew to amp up the meatiness.

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Treat Me Right, Santa

You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours



DEAR SANTA, it's just me again. I wasn't actually planning on writing you my annual letter, but then the other day, as I was sorting through some old, abandoned Christmas gifts, I thought about you.

I tried on a 100%-polyester turtleneck from 1977. It was snug, and I rubbed up quite a bit of friction as I struggled to get it back off over my head. It crackled with so much static electricity that there was a loud POP as it came free. I think a little bolt of lightning might have arced up and singed my left eyebrow.

Anyway, thank you for that.

Don't worry. I'm not writing you again to beg for presents that I will never see or

to whine about all the times you and your elves shorted me during holidays long ago. I guess you had your reasons.

It might even be that it was sometimes my fault—maybe I wasn't as good as I pretended to be. While I was never really a bad child, I was slothful, prideful, ill-tempered, irksome, discontented, and occasionally hard to please. And I was a coveter before I even knew what that meant.

I was also bad about throwing rocks.

Such behavior is fine if you are born with a silver spoon in your mouth. When a Rockefeller is writing out his gilded Christmas list, his family could get you to look the other way, to ignore his mischief and deliver that fancy gold-plated rocking horse anyway.

Now, before you get all rosy-cheeked

from your blood pressure, understand that I am not accusing you of malfeasance or saying you would ever take a bribe outright. But your elves? I have seen them hanging out at pawnshops and pool halls with eight tiny reindeer and a roving gang of misplaced penguins, throwing around a bunch of cash and peppermints. Never trust anyone in a pointy hat and curly shoes.

I guess it's pretty hard to keep an operation the size of yours free of corruption. But I know for dang sure that not one of the Vanderbilts ever looked under the tree and found only a four-pack of Fruit of the Loom boxer briefs and a gift box of English Leather soap on a rope with some shaving accoutrements. I mean, I was 11 that year. By the time I was finally old enough to actually have any facial hair, the shaving cream was more like Styrofoam and the soap had evaporated. Have you ever tried to shower with just a rope?

Well, I am more prosperous now. I'm not exactly Bill Gates or Scrooge McDuck, but I like to consider myself a player. You take care of me, and I'll return the favor.

I don't have the long green that the railroad barons and computer magnates have to sweeten the pot, but I can improve upon what I've done in the past. No more leaving you a half-full cup of lukewarm milk. I'm thinking two hot dogs topped with mustard and onions, a cold can of Coke, and a sleeve of fig Newtons.

I'm looking better now, huh? If this is still insufficient, I can throw in a vintage purple velour tennis jacket from the seventies, a gross of tube socks, and almost all the parts of a Big Wheel tricycle.

Regardless, along with Mama and my dog, Speck, I wish you a very merry Christmas. It doesn't really matter what presents you bring me. But maybe, just this once, you could spread that Vanderbilt loot around a little bit.

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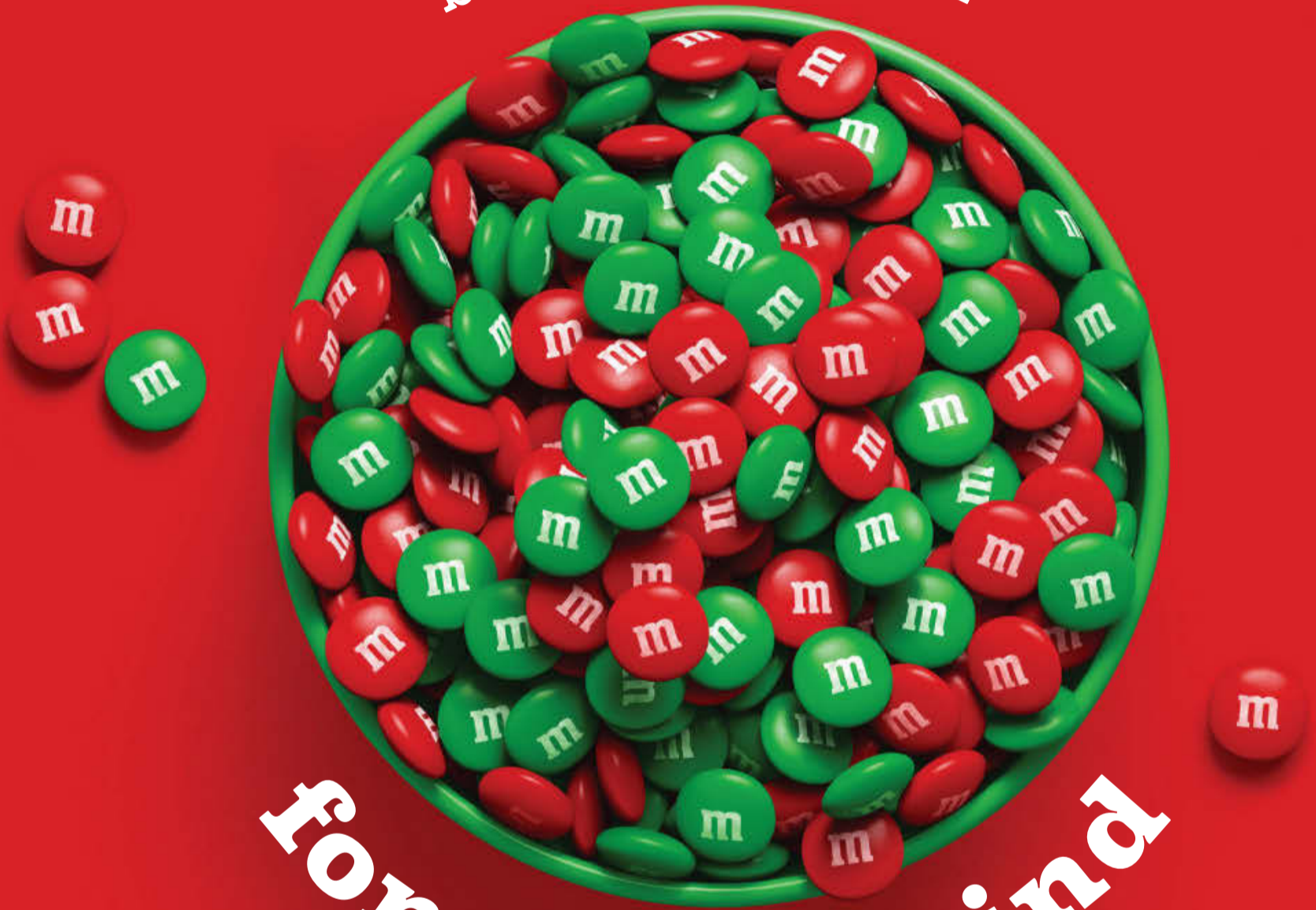
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