

Northeast Kingdom
Foliage Getaway

Cozy Meals for
Crisp Fall Days

A Toast to Vermont
Craft Beverages

FALL
2023

Our Vermont

*Yours to experience—the traditions, people,
and places of the Green Mountain State*

‘The Start of Our Journey’

When Tropical Storm Irene struck Vermont in August 2011, causing some \$750 million in damages, it was considered a once-in-a-century event. But just this past summer, we again saw rainfall that had rivers overflowing their banks in nearly every corner of the state. Neighboring towns were cut off from each other as roads from north to south washed out. Sections of I-89 were closed, forcing cars to pull over and drivers to sit and wait for hours. In Montpelier, the Winooski River came within a foot of breaching the dam that had long protected the capital city. Two hours to the south, the village of Weston saw its beloved summer theater, the Weston Playhouse, flooded when the normally placid West River tumbled across the road; a section of the village store washed away, too.



Amid this upending of normal life, however, another story unfolded: one of neighbors helping neighbors, of entire villages joining together to clear debris and buck each other up. After a residential care facility in Chelsea was forced to evacuate to a church but didn't have enough cots for all its residents, locals came by—despite their own challenges—to bring air mattresses, cots, and bedding. When a favorite bookstore in Montpelier lost much of its inventory, booksellers throughout the state (and beyond) donated their own.

In Weston, the online news outlet VTDigger met up with Ali Ulrich and Mark Weigand, who lived in a 1790 farmhouse that had become all but unlivable, with two feet of water covering the first floor and only the roofs of their cars visible in the driveway. But rather than bemoaning their fate, the couple were doing their best to clean up. “Today is the start of our journey,” Weigand said.

As I write this, *Yankee's* September/October issue is rolling off the press. That cover—just like the one for *Our Vermont*—features the brilliant fall foliage in the Northeast Kingdom, one of the most spectacular places in New England for looking in awe at what nature gives to all of us here. The fleeting weeks from mid-September until late October will see Vermont at its most colorful. This summer's rains will not have muted the foliage show that the landscape puts on, more vivid and memorable here than almost anywhere in the world.

So if you were planning to visit Vermont this fall, please do come! You will experience not only the miracle of the leaves, but also the miracle of the human spirit that refuses to be dampened.

Mel Allen

Mel Allen, editor@yankeepub.com

YANKEE

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*On the cover: The setting sun
lights up foliage surrounding a
weathered barn on Old West Road in
Barnet. Photo by Oliver Parini*

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Autumn hues roll down toward the turquoise waters of Caspian Lake in Greensboro. Story, p. 17.

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The Volunteers

Halloween nights are brightened by the ghosts of gardens past.

It's not always easy to identify a plant that you haven't intentionally planted. It also takes a few years of working in the garden to be able to recognize plants when they are immature. Last summer a friend of mine, relatively new to the garden, told me about her eggplant. It was the first time they had planted eggplant, and she was amazed at how well it had grown. A few weeks later I stopped for a visit, and the first thing she wanted to show me was the eggplant. She and her husband walked me down to the patch and, proud parents, displayed a row of perfectly aligned, immaculately weeded, carefully staked—pigweed. I was at a loss to have to tell them this sad news.

In its early stages, perhaps the pigweed did resemble eggplant. In a twisted form of natural selection, perhaps my friends had actually weeded out the little eggplants in favor of the much stronger and more vigorous-looking pigweed. In any case, the pigweed had clearly won.

At the same time last summer, I had a mystery growing in my garden, out of the perimeter of the compost. It started early and grew fast. I thought at first that it was squash, since I tend to keep winter squash in the root cellar and toss it into the pile, midwinter, when it has gone by. I wasn't sure, in fact, that this squashlike sprout was anything, but I left it to grow since it wasn't in the way of anything. Of one thing I was sure: It wasn't pigweed.

As the summer crested, the vines stretched out and began to take over. With its roots absorbing the richness of the compost, the plant swelled forth. Yellow blooms, as big as trumpets, emerged from the buds. I was amazed at the scope of this volunteer and began to train the vines, still not sure what I had: maybe squash, but maybe cucumbers or perhaps melons.

Soon hard, green fruit burst from the yellow flowers.

It was a while before I realized that what I had percolating were pumpkins: small, round, pie pumpkins. There were ten of them, and as the summer came into fall, I realized I had a potential harvest of real live jack-o'-lanterns.

It was a wealth, somehow more savory than anything else I grew that year, most likely, I suppose,

because they were unplanned, but also because they were so very pumpkinlike. I began to preen over these pumpkins, and when the frost threatened, I tucked blankets around them. They responded by growing perfectly round and deeply, resonantly orange, like glowing full moons on the vine.

Near to Halloween, I went out and cut them from the rugged vines. I needed my sharpest knife for the task. On spread newspapers, I opened them up and scooped out the seeds with my hands. These I added to the compost. Into the deep orange skin, I cut sawtooth mouths and triangle noses, ominously slanted eyes. That night, I lined them up on the table on the porch, facing the road. I set candles into the soft and slippery inside flesh and lit each one. The

faces glowed into the dark and mysterious night of the spirits.

I burned the candles each night for a week inside my little mistakes of nature. The air outside grew colder and the wind more biting. October had become November. The hard shells of the pumpkins grew soft and wrinkled from the heat of the candles. When the candles burned down to nothing, I took the goblins back out to the compost, where, over the winter, the faces melted even as they stared up at the sky from the pile. Beneath them, in the dark warmth of the pile, the seeds had already taken hold. —Edie Clark



Local Flavor

Warming Plates

When the weather turns crisp, these comfort-food recipes deliver all the coziness you require.

With a silky sauce meant to evoke fondue, Caramelized Onion Mac 'n' Cheese is a grown-up version of the childhood classic. Recipe, p. 10.

PHOTOGRAPHED AND STYLED BY LIZ KILLY

White Bean & Sausage Casserole

The crowning touch for this casserole? A deliciously crunchy panko/herb/lemon topping. Serve with a green salad and a loaf of crusty bread.

FOR THE CASSEROLE

6 large cloves garlic
2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 sausages, 1 hot Italian and 1 sweet Italian
2 19-ounce cans cannellini (white kidney) beans, drained and rinsed
1 pound ripe tomatoes, cored and cubed
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
½ cup chopped fresh parsley

⅓ cup dry white wine of your choice

FOR THE TOPPING

1 cup panko breadcrumbs
1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest
1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon olive oil

Preheat your oven to 325°. Place the garlic in a small skillet and cover with 1 tablespoon oil. Roast until tender when pierced with a sharp knife, about 12 minutes. Remove and let cool. Chop coarsely and reserve the oil.

Remove the sausages from their casings and

crumble into a large skillet over medium heat. Cook, stirring and breaking up the sausage, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic with reserved oil, beans, tomatoes, salt, pepper, thyme, and parsley, and cook 10 minutes over low. Raise the heat to high and add the wine; simmer 3 minutes. (This casserole can be made up to 24 hours ahead of time up to this point; cover the skillet and refrigerate until you are ready to bake.)

Preheat oven to 400° and set a rack to the middle position. In a small bowl, mix topping ingredients together. Press onto the beans and sausage. Cover with foil and bake 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake until juices are bubbling and the casserole is very hot, 10 minutes more. *Yields 6 servings.*





Harvest Pumpkin Chili

This vegetarian entree is really more of a stew, but the flavors and garnishes bring to mind a chili—and the effect is just as warming.

3 tablespoons olive oil
2 medium carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
1 medium yellow onion, diced
2 teaspoons kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 large garlic cloves, minced
1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced
1 teaspoon chili powder
¾ teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 cup pumpkin puree
1½ pounds kabocha squash, unpeeled, seeded and cut into 1-inch chunks
2 cans white beans, with liquid
3½ cups chicken or vegetable broth
Avocado slices, cilantro, and sour cream, for garnish

Warm the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, then add the carrots, celery, onion, salt, and

pepper. Cook, stirring often, until onions are translucent, about 6 minutes. Reduce to medium. Add the garlic, red pepper, chili powder, cumin, and oregano and cook, stirring often, for 5 more minutes. Add the pumpkin puree and kabocha squash and stir to coat. Cook, stirring often, for 3 minutes. Add the beans and broth, bring to a low boil, then reduce heat, stir, and simmer until the squash is tender, about 30 minutes more. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed. Garnish with avocado, cilantro, and sour cream and serve. *Yields about 6 servings.*



Classic New England Seafood Chowder

½ cup plus ¼ cup dry white wine
50 littleneck clams (1 bag), sorted and cleaned
2 slices bacon, for garnish
2 tablespoons salted butter
1½ large onions, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme
1 tablespoon Old Bay seasoning
1 teaspoon fresh black pepper
2 cups fish stock
2 large russet potatoes, peeled and diced
1 pound white fish (such as halibut or cod)
1½ cups heavy cream
Oyster crackers and minced parsley, for garnish

To cook the clams, pour 1½ cups water and ½ cup wine into a large pot over high heat. Bring to a boil, then add the clams. Cover and cook until they open, 5 to 7 minutes. Discard any clams that don't open. Use a slotted spoon to transfer clams to a bowl. Strain the cooking liquid through a fine sieve or cheesecloth and reserve 2 cups clam broth. When the clams are cool enough for you to handle, set aside 6 in the shell for garnish, then remove the meat from the rest and chop into small pieces.

In a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, cook the bacon until browned and crisp. Remove bacon (leaving fat in the Dutch oven), drain on paper towels, crumble, and set aside.

Add butter, onion, celery, garlic, bay leaves, and thyme to the Dutch oven. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until translucent, about 6 minutes. Add Old Bay seasoning and 1 teaspoon pepper; cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add ¼ cup wine and cook for 1 minute. Add the reserved clam broth and fish stock and bring to a simmer, stirring, then reduce heat to medium-low and cook for 5 more minutes. Add potatoes and simmer, covered, until just tender, 7 to 10 minutes. Add fish and cook, stirring gently, until opaque and flaky. Add cream and chopped clams and cook until warmed through. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle into bowls and garnish each with one clam in shell, oyster crackers, crumbled bacon, and minced parsley.
Yields 6 servings.

Chicken Pot Pie with Herbed Mashed-Potato Crust

This ultimate comfort food is usually topped with a buttery pastry. But here the topping is made from that other comfort classic, mashed potato.

FOR THE POTATOES

5 medium potatoes, Yukon Golds or russets, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup half-and-half
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE FILLING

$1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons olive oil
1 large leek, leaves removed, thinly sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup diced onion
3 celery ribs, chopped
3 carrots, peeled and chopped
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons kosher salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon salted butter
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup dry white wine
2 cups chicken stock
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup heavy cream
 $3\frac{1}{2}$ cups cooked cubed chicken
1 cup frozen peas
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fresh parsley, finely chopped

Bring a pot of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the potatoes and cook until tender when tested with a small, sharp knife, about 20 minutes. Drain thoroughly and return to the pot.

Mash the potatoes using a potato masher and add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup half-and-half, making sure that the liquid is absorbed into the potatoes. Add the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup half-and-half if the potatoes seem dry. Add the thyme, rosemary, and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

In a large skillet, heat $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons oil over

medium heat. Add the leek and onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 6 minutes. Add the celery, carrots, thyme, rosemary, salt, and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes. Add the butter; when it's melted, stir in the flour. Cook 1 to 2 minutes.

Increase the heat to high and add the wine; it will quickly be absorbed. Add the chicken stock, and bring to a boil; then reduce the heat to low and cook, stirring, 5 minutes. Stir in the heavy cream, chicken, and peas. Remove from the heat and add the parsley.

Pour into a medium-size (about 10-cup) square or round baking dish. Gently spread the mashed potato over the top. (The casserole can be made several hours ahead of time up to this point; cover and refrigerate until ready to bake.)

Preheat your oven to 400° and set a rack to the middle position. Bake until the top is golden brown and the filling is bubbling, 30 to 40 minutes. Serve hot. *Yields 6 to 8 servings.*

Caramelized Onion Mac 'n' Cheese

Replacing the usual milk (which can curdle and turn gritty) with a combination of white wine and cream creates a more grown-up flavor here, but one that also tests very well with kids.

3 tablespoons olive oil
4 medium onions, peeled and thinly sliced
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon granulated sugar
2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
8 ounces macaroni or other tube-shaped pasta
 $3\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons salted butter, divided
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup dry white wine
1 cup heavy cream
10 ounces Gruyère cheese, grated

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
4 ounces crusty sourdough bread (about $\frac{1}{4}$ loaf), torn into large pieces
Minced fresh parsley, for garnish

First, prepare the onions. Heat oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat, then add onions, sugar, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt. Cook, stirring often, until onions turn golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring, until onions turn golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes more. Set aside.

Meanwhile, preheat oven to 400°. Cook your pasta in a large pot of boiling, well-salted water until al dente, 7 to 12 minutes. Drain pasta.

In another large frying pan over medium-high heat, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Sprinkle with flour and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Whisk in wine until smooth, then whisk in cream. Sprinkle in cheese, one large handful at a time, stirring until the mixture is smooth before adding the next handful. Add mustard, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, and cayenne pepper. Add the pasta and caramelized onions, stirring until evenly combined, then pour into a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.

In a food processor, pulse bread with remaining $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons butter. Pulse until coarse breadcrumbs form. Sprinkle breadcrumbs over pasta and cheese, and bake until the top is browned and the cheese is bubbling, 15 to 20 minutes. Garnish with parsley and serve hot. *Yields 6 to 8 servings.*



Baked Apple Mini-Crisps

If you love baked apples and you love apple crisp, why not combine them? Topping apple halves with streusel and baking them in sweet cider gives you the best of two classic desserts.

FOR THE TOPPING

1 cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup firmly packed light-brown sugar
¼ cup pecan halves, chopped fine
¼ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
4 tablespoons salted butter, melted

FOR THE APPLES

8 large baking apples, such as Pink Lady or Honeycrisp, halved crosswise
¼ cup seedless raspberry or red-currant jam
1½ cups sweet apple cider
Vanilla ice cream, for serving

Preheat your oven to 375° and set a rack to the middle position. In a medium-size bowl, stir together the flour, brown sugar, pecans, and salt. Drizzle in the butter, and stir until the mixture clumps together and forms a streusel. Refrigerate while you prepare the apples.

Using a spoon or melon baller, scoop out the core and seeds from each apple half, leaving at least ¼ inch of flesh at the bottom. Arrange the halves in a 9-by-13-inch baking pan, and spread the top of each with about a teaspoon of the jam (this will help the streusel stick).

Remove the streusel from the refrigerator and spoon about 3 tablespoons onto each of the apple halves, pressing down to adhere. Pour the cider into the bottom of the pan and transfer to the oven. Begin testing the apples for doneness after 30 minutes by poking with a knife; then check every 5 minutes until tender and yielding.

Serve warm with ice cream and some of the cider from the pan spooned over the top. *Yields 8 servings.*



Local Flavor



Roots of Success

Pawlet's Laughing Child Farm has a hit on its hands with Vermont-grown sweet potatoes.



12 Our Vermont





Tim and Brooke
Hughes-Muse

A little more than a decade ago, Tim and Brooke Hughes-Muse landed on a farming approach that raised some eyebrows. The young couple, who'd met as students at Green Mountain College, decided to turn their land in Pawlet over to sweet potatoes. *Just* sweet potatoes. "Other people were already doing tomatoes and carrots or beef," says Tim. "If we'd done the same thing, we would have just been slicing up the pie a little smaller." He chuckles. "It definitely got a reaction. *You're doing what? How are you going to make this work?* But I think there are some farmers who see us having to deal with only one crop and are kind of jealous." Today, Laughing Child Farm is the state's largest supplier of locally grown sweet potatoes, specializing in three varieties—Beauregard, Covington, and Bayou Belle—across 32 acres. In a typical year the farm pulls nearly 600,000 pounds of potatoes out of the ground. We recently caught up with Tim for a chat, not long before he was about to begin this year's harvest. —Ian Aldrich

The sweet potato is generally seen as a southern crop. How do you make it work in New England?

We do have a shorter growing season up here. You really need to get your potatoes out of the ground before the soil temperature drops below 50 degrees. So the varieties we grow require about 90 or 100 days before they can be harvested. That means we need to have everything in the barns by the end of September.

Do you get curious reactions from people about eating sweet potatoes from Vermont?

Definitely. Some people are a little skeptical, especially because we're still selling what we grew last year. I'll get emails from customers wondering what we've done to preserve them, like, did we spray them with something. But we just store them in the right conditions. I also hear from people who want to tell me about the kinds of sweet potatoes they grew up eating.... Just the other day we met some people from Mexico, and they were telling me about the sweet potatoes grown there. Someone recently gave me some sweet potatoes that are grown in Kenya.

Are there any unusual aspects to the farming you do?

Storage is the big thing. There's a curing process, where you have to heat the potatoes you pull out of the ground up to 90 degrees and about 90 percent humidity for a week, then you have to keep them at a steady 60 degrees. So we built specialized barns to do this. The nice thing is that in the summer you're working in 65-degree temperatures and it's about the same in the winter. It's not the kind of Vermont farming you imagine, but it ends up being a nice place to work.

Where are your sweet potatoes sold?

We're at all the major food co-ops around Vermont, as well as some in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. More recently, we've started selling prepackaged peeled and sliced potatoes. Our kids also make and sell sweet potato pies for our farm stand on the weekends.

Tell us a little about the three varieties you grow.

The Beauregard and Covington are very similar. Both have an orange skin and an orange flesh. The Bayou Belle also has an orange flesh but its skin is purple. All three are incredibly versatile: They can be used in savory dishes; they can be used in sweet dishes. I'll put them in smoothies instead of bananas. There are just so many interesting ways you can use them.

So your taste buds haven't grown tired of them yet?

Not at all. I eat sweet potatoes with every meal. What I usually do is I roast about a dozen for the week. I'll eat one as a snack, just plain, or I'll warm one up and put some peanut butter on it. Maybe mix in some cinnamon. They're my go-to food. They're very nutritious and healthy. *[Laughs.]* Of course, they can also *not* be healthy, if you add all that butter and brown sugar!

WHERE TO BUY

■ **Laughing Child Farm** is located at 3209 Rte. 30, Pawlet. You can buy sweet potatoes at the farm stand, or find a retailer near you by visiting laughingchildfarm.com.



Country Cooking

With homemade fare including a peanut butter pie to die for, Chester's Country Girl does its diner heritage proud.

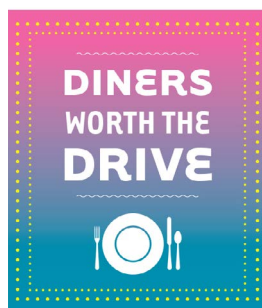


On a Saturday morning back in the old days, you'd have found me working the griddle at my grandfather's Hiway Diner in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. It was a Silk City Diner.

That diner traveled only a few miles from the Silk City factory in Paterson, my hometown. But many ended up much farther away—even as far as Chester, Vermont, where Silk City serial number 48211, which rolled out of Paterson in 1948, is today's Country Girl Diner.

"Our diner was originally in Jaffrey, New Hampshire," says Jess Frasca, who, with her husband, Paul, has owned the Country Girl since 2017. "It was moved here in 1966. This is only its second location."

As I spoke with Jess during a Friday lunch hour, I looked around at what appeared to be the Hiway Diner's sister ship: same booths and stools, same tile pattern under the counter, same gleaming stainless-steel backsplash, with a few individual touches like an "I Love Gluten" sticker and local maple syrup for sale. Same informal



Whimsical black-and-white cow heads keep watch outside the two entrance doors to Chester's Country Girl Diner, which was recently named one of New England's 20 top diners by *Yankee* magazine.

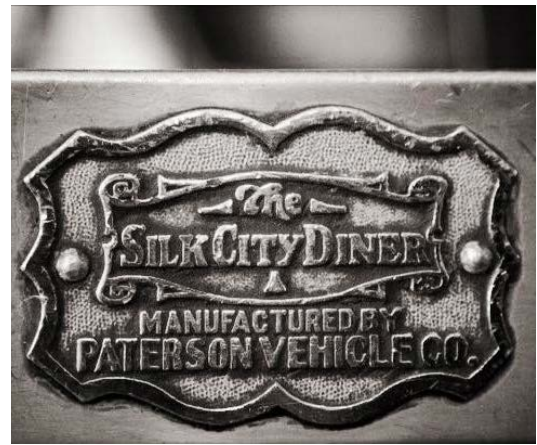


diner atmosphere, too—no sooner had Jess mentioned her baking when a lady piped up from a nearby booth, "Best carrot cake in the whole world."

"And the best corned beef hash," added a guy at the counter. Diners are like that. They're places where you don't hesitate to put your two cents in.

Jess does all the baking at the Country Girl, and Paul, with his son from an earlier marriage, Zach, does the cooking. Jess and Paul met when he was chef and she was a waitress at a restaurant in Ludlow. ("We've both been in food service since our teens," she says.) Paul studied for his career at New Hampshire College, and he's followed it in places as far afield as the U.S. Virgin Islands. "I've worked with great people," he says. "That's how you learn."

Jess's culinary experience dates ever farther back. "I grew up in Connecticut in an Italian family," she told me. "I remember standing on a chair, helping



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:
The Killington Classic sandwich (French toast, fried eggs, and bacon with a side of maple syrup for drizzling); a token of the Country Girl's Silk City pedigree; owners Paul and Jess Frasca, who bought the diner in 2017 and have kept its reputation going strong.

my grandma make gnocchi.” Her family ran the town’s bakery, so that part of her Country Girl responsibilities, and her sideline of creating custom wedding cakes, came naturally. Along with the carrot cake that the lady in the booth vouched for, I heard—from Jess herself—that the peanut butter pie is a standout.

Everything at the Country Girl is homemade. Paul puts specials on the menu every day—“special pancakes, special sandwiches, all made with fresh ingredients,” Jess says. The specials post daily on Facebook and Instagram.

“We survive because we’re family,” says Jess, “and we cook like we’re cooking for our family.” As for the waitstaff, who aren’t related, “Everyone who works here lives in walking distance, so they can get in no matter the weather.”

Survival got a little trickier during Covid. After the state-mandated shutdown, the Country Girl pulled through with a takeout window and outdoor seating. “If we hadn’t had that window on the side, we wouldn’t have made it,” Jess recalls.

That outdoor space serves a happier purpose these days, as Jess and Paul have built a small stage where bands perform on summer Saturday nights. The Country Girl doesn’t serve dinner, but on those Saturday evenings they offer snack bar service, with soft-serve ice cream. People dance right there in the parking lot. The bands? “We’ve had AC/DC cover band AC/VT here,” says Jess. “It’s wild hearing AC/DC in downtown Chester.”

Summer 2023 served up a different kind of wild,

when July’s torrential rains sent the Williams River over its banks. Luckily, the diner escaped unscathed. “The river came within five feet of us,” Jess told me. “All we got was a couple of inches of water in the basement, and we didn’t lose anything.”

Talk is diner currency, but of course it’s secondary to sliding into a booth and chowing down. I let Jess get back to work and, with my wife, Kay, started studying the menu. Kay chose a patty melt, and I went for the Texas burger, a tower of a dish: beef topped with melted cheddar, onion rings, and barbecue sauce. Both burgers were rare, as ordered, and accompanied by hand-cut fries.

Kay passed on dessert, but I had to see what that peanut butter pie was about. It turned out to be about four inches high, built on a chocolate cookie-crumble crust, with a dollop of whipped cream nestled alongside. It looked like one seriously dense dish, but it was surprisingly light. “How,” I asked Jess after I’d taken care of all but the last forkful, “do you get the peanut butter filling so creamy?”

“If I told you,” she answered, “I’d have to...”

I know, I know. Same kind of thing I’d have heard in a diner in Jersey. Maybe even a Silk City. —Bill Scheller

IF YOU GO

■ **The Country Girl Diner** is open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday–Sunday at 46 Rte. 103 S., Chester. 802-442-5140; countrygirldiner.com

Royal Flush

*In the Northeast Kingdom, the fall color comes early—
and in spectacular fashion.*

In Greensboro, a mowed field
surrounds a lone island of
color amid a woodland dell
filled with changing leaves.

PHOTO BY OLIVER PARINI

I've always liked to take what I think of as my "back road" into the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont's Vermont, hunkered hard against New Hampshire and Quebec. It starts when you turn off Route 100, just south of Lake Eden, and climb into high country on East Hill Road.

My wife, Kay, and I took this back road on a day in early fall, when the Kingdom starts to spill color down into the rest of the state. The still-green woods around the lake gave way to all the shades that autumn brings to red and orange, with yellowing birches for counterpoint. After a crest in the road and the opening of an eastward vista, we came to a well-remembered sign of entry into the Northeast Kingdom: the distant white spire of Craftsbury Common's United Church.

In a state where settlement generally followed river valleys, **Craftsbury Common** is unusual. It floats high up on a ridge and clusters around a village green out of all proportion to its size. At its tiny museum you can view relics that date back to the time of Ebenezer

Crafts, who was granted the town in 1780. Ten years later, he and his son Samuel, a future Vermont governor, came to settle here. If it looked on their arrival anything like it did on this luminous autumn morning, they must have thought they'd been granted a morsel of paradise.

Our destination for the night was Greensboro, on Caspian Lake, but since it was too early to settle into our quarters at Highland Lodge, we continued onward to Danville, cutting across Route 2 to reach Peacham on the day of its Fall Foliage Festival. Actually, it was day five of a Kingdom-wide celebration of the season, as each year the festival makes the rounds of seven area towns, putting a different spin on "a movable feast."

Peacham is a pleasantly walkable town, with every festival venue just minutes from the crossroads where Church Street meets the local shard of the famed Bayley-Hazen Road:

One of New England's most stunning town greens anchors the picturesque Northeast Kingdom village of Craftsbury Common, which was first settled in the late 18th century.



ALL PHOTOS BY OLIVER PARINI



library and its book sale on one side, Peacham Café and Peacham Corner Guild craft gallery on the other; historical association a few yards up. We joined locals and visitors alike on the way to the Peacham School, where pupils served an outdoor lunch of homemade quiche, corn chowder, and apple pie. Afterward, we walked up a hill behind the school to visit the Northern Skies Observatory, where amateur astronomers take advantage of the Kingdom's dark night skies.

After Peacham, Kay and I swung up past St. Johnsbury to Lyndonville—where I narrowly resisted killing the afternoon at a favorite spot, Green Mountain Books—and sought out a road we'd never traveled. It runs through deep Technicolor autumn woods to Greensboro Bend via the village-less towns of Wheelock and Stannard, and is punctuated by a marker that states: "In honor of Horace C. Goss who built this road over Wheelock Mountain in 1868." (We assume Mr. Goss had help.)

Returning to **Greensboro**, we checked in at

Acclaimed photographer Richard Brown, who has documented and lived in the Northeast Kingdom for more than half a century, sets up his camera to catch some of the region's seasonal brilliance.

Highland Lodge, a rambling and venerable inn that made us feel as if we'd arrived at Grandma's big, comfortable house in the country. Caspian Lake has long been a quiet summer getaway for people of accomplishment and means,

the types who would avoid the Hamptons like the plague. The late U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist had a place here, as did author John Gunther, who wrote of the "lollipop" moon shining over Caspian. After a canoe paddle around the east shore, where the lake was a mirror splashed with color, we tucked in too early for moonrise.

We woke to a morning of heavy mist over Caspian, the distant call of the loons, and the gabble of a southward flock of Canada geese. The mist cleared during breakfast, and it was time to continue our drive through the autumn Kingdom with a run up Route 16 for stops at two very unusual destinations in the town of **Glover**.



A featured stop on Vermont's African American Heritage Trail, the Old Stone House and Historic Village in Brownington pays tribute to former state legislator Alexander Lucas Twilight as well as chronicles the history of Orleans County.



TOP LEFT: Racks of brightly hued fall apparel brighten the sidewalk scene outside Moose River Lake & Lodge in St. Johnsbury.

LOWER LEFT: At the cheery Peacham Café, homemade bakery treats and fresh coffee make for an ideal leaf-peeping stop.

RIGHT: Highland Lodge general managers Elsa Schultz and Chad Sims on the porch of the historic bed-and-breakfast in Greensboro (top).



The Museum of Everyday Life occupies a former barn on the roadside, and a quirkier, less formal ... well, more *everyday* museum likely doesn't exist. Per a note tacked by the door, you turn on the lights when you go in, and turn them off when you leave. What's inside? Keys and keyholes, alarm clocks, a violin made of matchsticks, a curtain made of safety pins, toothbrushes, shopping and to-do lists (with a map showing where on the streets of New York they were found), a collection of notes discovered in library books, and more.

Just up the road, we turned off to visit a much older and more politically inclined institution, the Bread and Puppet Museum. Here, on the property where artist Peter Schumann and his late wife, Elka, once hosted their "Domestic Resurrection Circus," a cavernous 150-year-old barn is home to the enormous puppets that Schumann and his assistants crafted to

dramatize the social and political struggles of the past half century.

Back in the light of the autumn day, we drove north through Barton to Orleans, where we bought the makings of a picnic lunch to enjoy at one of my favorite places in Vermont. The village of **Brownington** is best known for the Old Stone House, the remarkable granite edifice built by the Rev. Alexander Twilight, the state's first African-American college graduate, for the boys' academy he directed. But just across the road from the Stone House is a pillowy meadow topped by a far less grand but nonetheless captivating structure: a two-story wooden observatory that offers views reaching from Lake Memphremagog into Quebec, to the sugarloaf peaks framing Lake Willoughby, to the Green Mountains to the south. If there is a better spot in Vermont for an alfresco

Early evening lends
pastel pink and purple to
the color palette at Lake
Willoughby in Westmore.





lunch, we haven't found it.

We meandered east on the back roads, keeping an eye out all the while for a surprising recent phenomenon in Vermont demographics. Migrating northeast from their Pennsylvania redoubts—motivated, some say, by exasperation over years of serving as photo opportunities for too many tourists—a number of Amish families have brought their agricultural know-how and 18th-century technology to the Brownington area. After seeing a caution sign bearing the silhouette of a horse and buggy, we started watching out for the real thing. None were spotted, but we were pleased to reflect on the fact that in the realm of farmland preservation, the Keystone State's loss is our gain. And the Amish must realize by now that they've moved to a realm of more spectacular fall foliage (sorry, Pennsylvania).

Poking along Hudson Road in West Charleston, we came upon that quintessential foliage drive stop, the roadside stand. The Devaney Farm Stand offered the traditional cornucopia of fall fruits and vegetables, but the real taste treat of the afternoon was Devaney's ice cream sandwiches, inch-and-a-half-thick treats built

A mountain biker cruises through the autumn landscape at Kingdom Trails in East Burke.

around chewy homemade cookies.

For our last night we were bound for the Northeast Kingdom outpost of **Island Pond**. It does stand alongside a pond—more of a lake, really—with an island in it, and is known by Vermonters mainly as a snowmobilers' haven. Beyond here is the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, 40,000 acres of wilderness reaching to the New Hampshire border.

We had reservations at the WilloughVale Inn, on the northeast shore of fjord-like Lake Willoughby. We got there by way of Hinton Ridge Road, which winds down from Route 105 and crests, high above the lake, at Sentinel Rock State Park. The colors were perhaps a shade past peak up there, which meant they'd be at their pinnacle along the lake.

We reached the inn early enough in the afternoon to aim a couple of its kayaks south, toward the lake-framing mountains Pisgah and Hor, and we paddled up appetites for dinner on the WilloughVale's porch. There, as we finished our wine in the gathering dusk, our own lollipop of a moon rose over the Pisgah foothills, shimmering on the cobalt lake. —*Bill Scheller*

Cheers to Fall

Craft beers and wines add just the right flavor to foliage season.



A freshly poured brew invites sipping amid the scenery at Hill Farmstead Brewery.



PREVIOUS PAGE, OLIVER PARINI; THIS PAGE, COURTESY OF SHELBURNE VINEYARDS

Boasting more craft breweries per capita than any other state, Vermont has come a long way from simply importing lager from beyond its borders. Winemaking, too, has gained a foothold in the Green Mountain State, taking advantage of longer growing seasons and grape varieties developed to survive bitter winters. And one of Vermont's oldest crops, apples, still yields that colonial favorite, cider. What all three have in common are producers eager to welcome visitors for tasting, sales, tours, and food. Here's a sampling of beer, wine, and cider venues worth a stop on a fall foliage drive. —*Bill Scheller*

Shelburne Vineyards | Shelburne

For 25 years, this pioneer on the Vermont wine scene has made the most of cold-hardy grapes such as Marquette and Frontenac, producing an award-winning array of reds, whites, and rosés. The vineyard's recent merger with Eden Cider has introduced Eden's line of still, sparkling, and ice ciders to the Shelburne tasting

Visitors settle onto the lawn at Shelburne Vineyards for a live music performance, just steps from the grape vines whose fruit goes into the winery's acclaimed vintages.

and sales room. Enjoy light snacks of Vermont cheeses and charcuterie, and music on the lawn or in the loft. The location is just off busy Shelburne Road, but the patio sits almost within the vines, and the trails through Shelburne

Farms' colorful woods and meadows are right nearby. shelburnevineyard.com; edenciders.com

Von Trapp Brewing | Stowe

Some breweries build name recognition; this one started with it. The von Trapps of Trapp Family Lodge and *The Sound of Music* fame saw that most craft brewers were concentrating on British ales, leaving the Teutonic lager tradition to imports. Their solution? Build a brewery at the lodge and turn out lagers in the German, Austrian, and Bohemian styles. Of course, what had to come next was a bierhall and biergarten featuring the wursts, schnitzels, and kraut that lager



FROM LEFT: A to-go pack of Bent Hill Brewery's flagship IPA, the sweet and hazy Blood Orange Double IPA; a sweeping autumn view from the taproom at the Braintree-based farm brewery.



was made for. And all around, the hills are alive ... with color. vontrapbrewing.com

Bent Hill Brewery | Braintree

Up a dirt road outside Randolph, Bent Hill has three things going for it: a surrounding view of even higher hills, resplendent in autumn hardwood glory; a meatless menu to tempt even resolute carnivores; and a wildly eclectic selection of beers. Along with requisite IPAs and weighty, fall-friendly stouts, check out stunners like Three Stoned Birds, an ale promising to deliver “flavors reminiscent of a fruit pie,” and brews in which malt cozies up to blood orange, dill, rhubarb, currants, or graham crackers. Settle into a patio divan and wash down black-bean burgers, cauliflower tacos, arancini, and lots more. benthillbrewery.com

Lawson's Finest Liquids | Waitsfield

Craft beer rivals cheese, maple, and ice cream as Vermont's star commodity, so it's fitting for a craft brewer of “finest liquids” to set up shop in the heartland of the state's signature sport. While waiting for Mad River Valley colors to segue into those welcome white blankets over Sugarbush and Mad River Glen, head for Lawson's cozy taproom to enjoy a heady array of IPAs, Pilsners, stouts, and porters. The kitchen serves tasty light fare with a side of jazz, blues, and folk. Check the schedule for

occasional beer-centric dinners and theme nights like Beer and Brats Wednesdays. lawsonsfine.com

Snow Farm Vineyard | South Hero

Since helping launch serious Vermont viticulture in the 1990s, Snow Farm has taken advantage of its island location's Lake Champlain microclimate. Tucked along Crescent Bay, the vineyard enjoys the same growing season as Burgundy, and produces a wide selection of wines from cold-hardy varieties, including luscious ice wines and a formidable port. Summer music events continue into mild fall days, heading indoors when things get chilly. Loath to leave the islands? Book one of four rooms at the Snow Farm Inn, and rise early to enjoy the season's colors in soft lake light. snowfarm.com

Hill Farmstead Brewery | Greensboro

It's out of the way, it doesn't serve food (though you can picnic on your own chow outside) ... and its taps are the Holy Grail for beer fanatics. The origin story is legend: Seventh-generation Vermonter Shaun Hill went to Belgium, learned brewing top to bottom, and returned to the family farm to craft beer voted the world's best. Standards run from lagers to stouts, from citrusy IPAs to powerful barley wines. Look also for brews with subtle fruit flavors, perhaps aged in bourbon, wine, or cognac barrels. Location? Atop the pillowy meadows of Hill's

RIGHT: Red or white? Or, as this vista at Cambridge's Boyden Valley Winery suggests, why not both? BELOW: Long Trail Brewing Co.'s seasonal brown ale, Harvest, which gets a touch of sweetness from Vermont maple syrup; the entrance to Long Trail's riverside brewery in Bridgewater.

hill farm, amid a panorama of Northeast Kingdom color. hillfarmstead.com

Boyden Valley Winery | Cambridge

The Lamoille River loops lazily around the century-old family farm where the Boydens established one of Vermont's earliest wineries. In recent years, wine offerings have been streamlined—though full-bodied Big Barn Red and serve-warm Glogg are still on the ticket—in favor of a flavorful line of creme liqueurs featuring bourbon, maple, and apple flavors (there's also a maple-infused bourbon whiskey). Enjoy, along with charcuterie and cheese plates, at a vintage carriage barn, a Parisian-style bistro, or an outdoor patio near the gateway to Smugglers Notch. boydenvalley.com

Neshobe River Winery | Brandon

Here's a three-in-one stop (four, for golfers) barely five minutes from downtown Brandon. Nestled between the meandering Neshobe River and golf course of the same name, Neshobe offers wines such as its Marquette, aged two years in French oak, and a cassis made with organic currants. Sharing the premises is Foley Brothers Brewing, with a beer card dominated by four IPAs, including a nine-percent heavyweight built on oats and



barley. On site is the 1786 Inn at Neshobe River, a four-bedroom B&B in wooded surroundings. Outdoor tastings only, so come early in the fall. neshoberiverwinery.com

Long Trail Brewing Co. | Bridgewater

The bottles may say "Take a Hike," but the home base of this Vermont brewing pioneer is a lot friendlier than that sounds. Long Trail's brewery and restaurant isn't on the trail; it's set alongside the wooded banks of the Ottauquechee River, just west of Woodstock. The menu goes beyond bar food—bratwurst and shrimp po' boys are favorites—and there's frequent live music. The patio is a great place to delve beyond the brewery's signature Long Trail Ale to sample hearty Double Bag, Harvest, and Hibernator—autumn icons as reliable as the turning leaves. longtrail.com

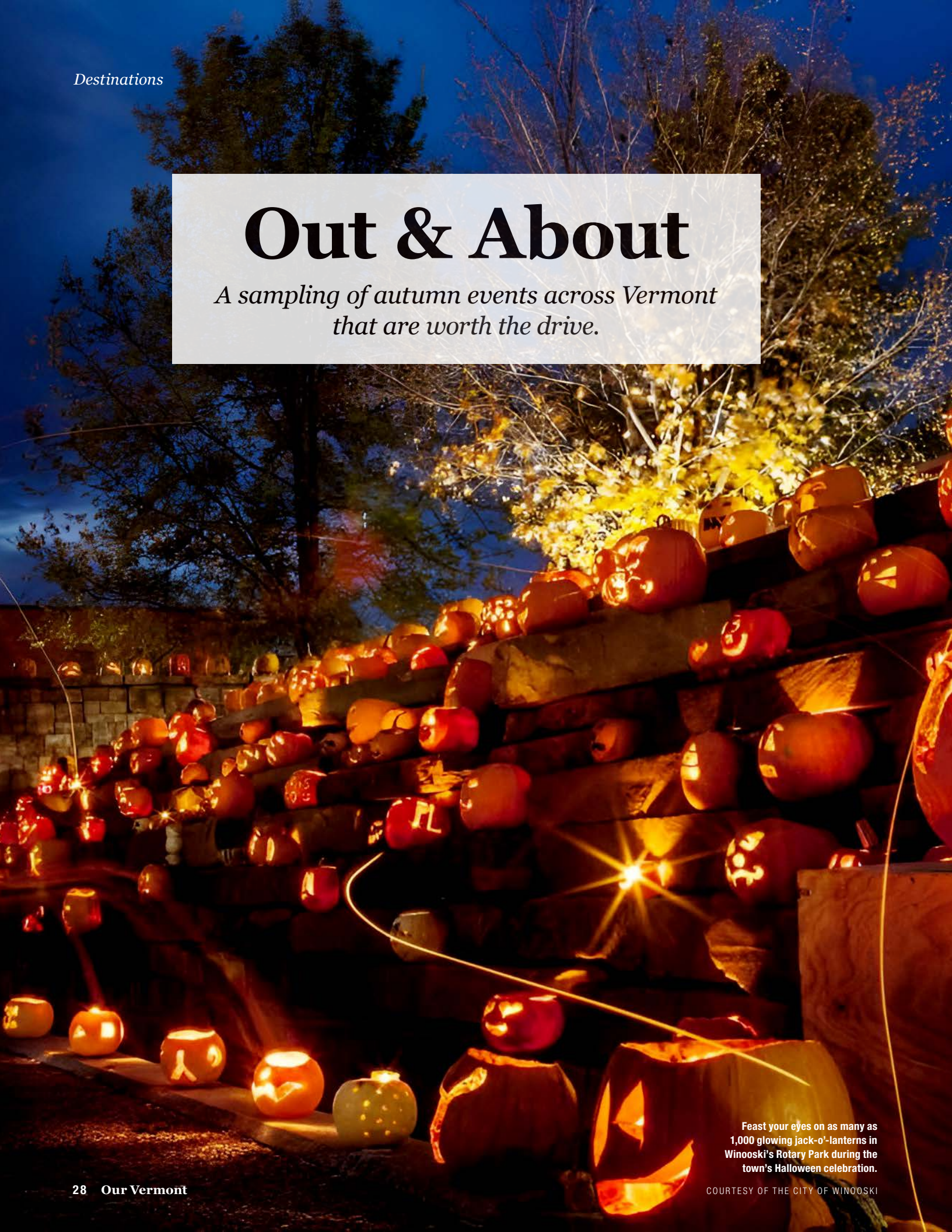
Windfall Orchard | Cornwall

A fall weekend in Middlebury isn't complete without a foliage-dappled visit to nearby Champlain Valley apple country—especially to this small, Saturdays-only orchard where some 30 apple varieties yield a light, sophisticated hard cider fermented with ambient wild yeasts, as well as a golden ice cider owing its deep sweetness to apples alone. There's also British-inspired perry, made from the orchard's pear crop. Brick-oven pizza, homemade soups, and a produce stand round out the experience, and be sure to check the website for news of occasional pop-up dinners. windfallorchardvt.com



Out & About

*A sampling of autumn events across Vermont
that are worth the drive.*



Feast your eyes on as many as
1,000 glowing jack-o'-lanterns in
Winooski's Rotary Park during the
town's Halloween celebration.

COURTESY OF THE CITY OF WINOOSKI

SEPT.



SEPT. 2

Bennington*Garlic Town, USA*

Get your fill of garlicky goodness—in everything from pickles to fudge to cheese curds—at this one-of-a-kind event that also sees sidewalk sales, live music, and family activities. garlictownusa.com

SEPT. 3

Randolph*New World Festival*

A tribute to the vitality of the Celtic/French-Canadian heritage of northern New England, this festival has been bringing downtown Randolph alive with music, storytelling, and dance for more than 30 years. newworldfestival.com

SEPT. 8-10

Burlington*South End Art Hop*

There's no shortage of things to see and do in the Queen City amid three days that spotlight all kinds of artwork and more than 100 open

studios, shops, restaurants, and breweries in the South End. seaba.com

SEPT. 14-17

Tunbridge*World's Fair*

Founded in 1867, this beloved heritage event includes horse and oxen pulls, livestock shows, and a classic carnival. tunbridgeworldsfair.com

SEPT. 14 & 15

Greensboro & Manchester*Opera Vermont**Welcome Concerts*

Enjoy a pastiche of opera and musical theater favorites from *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *West Side Story*, and more at the Highland Center for the Arts (9/14) and Southern



Vermont Arts Center (9/15). Meet-and-greet receptions follow each performance. operavermont.com

SEPT. 16

Stowe*Von Trapp Oktoberfest*

The von Trapp Brewing Bierhall hosts a day of sudsy seasonal revelry, with live German music, cask-tapping and stein-



Mali Obomsawin
at The Flynn, Burlington

holding competitions, and plenty of beer, food, and spectacular mountain views. vontrappbrewing.com

SEPT. 22-23

Wilmington & West Dover*Vermont Wine & Harvest Festival*

After Friday night's wine stroll and soup contest in downtown Wilmington, the action moves to Mount Snow for Saturday's grand tasting and a toast-worthy array of vendors including Vermont wine, beer, and spirits makers. vtwinefest.com

SEPT. 23-24

Grafton*Fairy House Festival*

A testament to the power of imagination, The Nature Museum's annual fundraiser draws visitors from far and wide to marvel at tiny structures that have sprung up from the landscape seemingly by magic. nature-museum.org

SEPT. 29

Burlington*Mali Obomsawin*

Marking the only Vermont performance by Obomsawin and her sextet during their fall tour, The Flynn

welcomes this award-winning bassist, songwriter, and composer from Abenaki First Nation at Odana. flynnvt.org

SEPT. 30-OCT. 1

Tunbridge*Vermont Sheep & Wool Fest*

Small farms and natural fibers are the focus as 70-plus vendors offer yarn and fleece, fiber crafts, and other homespun wares. Plus, look for the fun herding and shearing demos. vtsheepandwoolfest.com

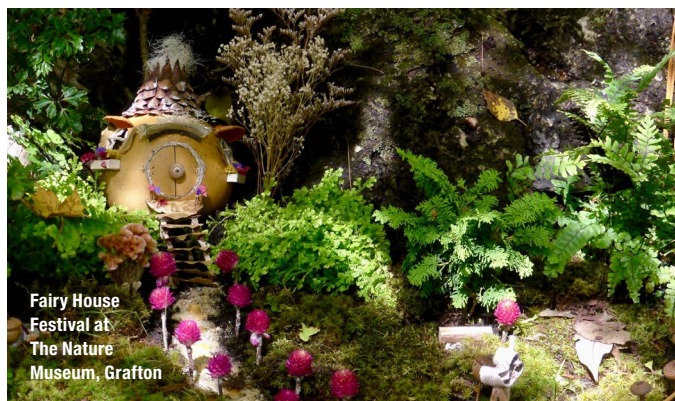


OCT.

OCT. 5-9

Stratton Mountain*Harvest Fest*

Foliage vistas from the summit of southern Vermont's highest peak are just the opening attraction. How about a chili cook-off, hayrides, live music, and a brewfest with craft ales, beers, and ciders, too? stratton.com



Fairy House
Festival at
The Nature
Museum, Grafton

Destinations

OCT. 7

Stowe

Indigenous Peoples' Day Rocks!

Immerse yourself in a day of Native American culture and education at Stowe's Mayo Fields, where highlights include performances by Abenaki drummers and crafts by indigenous artists. ipdrocks.com

OCT. 7

St. Johnsbury

Fall Dog Party

Pups and their humans can have a romping good time at Dog Mountain, the 150-acre art and recreational oasis created by the late Vermont artists Stephen and Gwen Huneck. Expect live music, food trucks, vendors, dog contests, door prizes, and more. dogmt.com

OCT. 7-8

Rutland

Fall Art in the Park

Browse a dazzling array of juried art and crafts ranging from ceramics, paintings, and jewelry to artisan food and drink offerings. Main Street Park is home base for this lively, long-running Chaffee Art Center event. chaffeeartcenter.org

OCT. 8

Lyndon Circle

Ballet Hispánico

Known for its bold, eclectic, and polished performances,



Take Your Pick!

Pumpkin spice is all well and good, but for true New England fall flavor, nothing beats a fresh-picked apple (or a delicious apple pie). Be sure to head out to one of Vermont's pick-your-own orchards this year, and mark your calendar for one of these timeless small-town tributes to fall's favorite fruit:

In Springfield, the **Vermont Apple Festival & Craft Show** (Oct. 7) is a bushel of fun, with pony rides and other kids' activities, pie baking and eating contests, a farmers' market, and craft and food vendors. Woodstock gets in on the action with its **Apples and Crafts Fair & Food Truck Festival** (Oct. 7-8), featuring more than 100 juried craftspeople and specialty food producers and food trucks. Watch fresh cider being made on a century-old press at **Mount Holly Cider Days** in Belmont (Oct. 7-8) and enjoy cider doughnuts and home-baked apple pie or crisp topped with ice cream. Finally, for a celebration of apples of all shapes, colors, tastes and their histories, don't miss the 20th annual **Heirloom Apple Day** (Oct. 8) at Scott Farm in Dummerston.

Ballet Hispánico was founded by National Medal of Arts recipient Tina Ramirez to give voice to the Hispanic experience and break through stereotypes. Head to the Lyndon Institute Auditorium to catch this contemporary dance sensation. catamountarts.org

OCT. 13-15

Brattleboro

Brattleboro Literary Festival

Bibliophiles will want to beeline it to Brattleboro for this celebrated annual event, which is always packed with readings, panels, and other bookish events. More than 60 authors are expected to attend, including Andre Dubus III, Jean Kwok, Ann Hood, and Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy Kidder. brattleborolifefest.org

OCT. 20-29

Burlington

Vermont International Film Festival

Vermont's biggest city lights up with some of the best independent feature films and shorts from

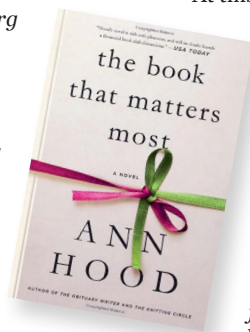
around the world. The Main Street Landing Performing Arts Center is the hub for screenings, panels, Q&As, and special events. vtiff.org

OCT. 21

Wardsboro

Gilfeather Turnip Festival

At this townwide party, the state's official vegetable—the Gilfeather Turnip—is the guest of honor. Sample turnip treats, see would-be prize winners in the turnip contest, and snag a T-shirt to show off your tuber pride. friendsofwardsborolibrary.org



OCT. 28-29

Winooski

Festival of Pumpkins

Rotary Park is the place to see a jaw-dropping display of hundreds of lighted jack-o'-lanterns, a community tradition going back nearly two decades. Details are still being set for this year's iteration, but past events have included a scavenger hunt, a kids club with DJ music, a carving contest, and Halloween happenings at local businesses. downtownwinooski.org

OCT. 29

Woodstock

A Family Halloween

Billings Farm & Museum offers a treat for kids and kids-at-heart with a day of delightful activities, from pumpkin carving to costume parades and wagon rides. Expect Billings's resident farm animals to join in on the fun. billingsfarm.org

NOV.

NOV. 11-12

Essex Junction

Vermont Steampunk Expo

Explore the world of steampunk, a genre of Victorian-inspired science fiction, in this fantastical and family-friendly event filled with artisans, crafters, and performers. vtgatherings.com/vermont-steampunk-expo

NOV. 11-12

Manchester

Holiday Market

Kick-start your holiday shopping in style at Southern Vermont Arts Center's special shopping event spotlighting artisans and vendors from around the region. svac.org



Ballet Hispánico
at the Lyndon
Institute
Auditorium

A Place at the Table

*How one furniture maker
is helping people build
connections with the land,
and each other.*

In 2010 my wife, Grace, became pregnant with our first child. As we prepared to welcome our son, I started thinking about the old dining-room table that had been the focal point of so much family life when I was a boy. It was the stage from which our life in rural New England had played out, and its many scuffs and scratches told the story of its importance. Now that I was set to become a parent, I thought back to the conversations, arguments, and laughter that had taken place during all those meals the table had hosted, and it got me thinking: What if I could build something like it for my own family?

But how? Or, given my limited experience in a workshop, who could help? I found answers to both questions in a renovated former textile mill on the Ottauquechee River in Bridgewater. For the past quarter-century it's been the working home of furniture maker Charles Shackleton and his wife, Miranda Thomas, a potter. The couple operates around the idea

Under the guidance of master craftsman Charles Shackleton, The Naked Table project invites attendees to try their hand at making a one-of-a-kind furniture heirloom.

PHOTO BY CARL TREMBLAY

that the best crafts are those made by hand, start to finish, by a single person. On the furniture end of it, machines aren't completely out of the picture—saws and planers still shape the initial parts that go into a bed or a table—but the finish work, the final crafting of a piece that gives what Shackleton describes as its “personality,” comes from an artisan.

But even art can become a job. By early 2009, Shackleton, who's tall with a thicket of gray hair and an easy, infectious smile, was feeling a bit burned out. As he'd relegated himself almost exclusively to design work, it had been some years since he'd built even a bench. And there were questions, too, about the worth of what he was doing. *What's the point of making more material stuff to put into people's homes?* he asked himself.

Shackleton was thinking about something else, too: For all the focus he'd paid to his furniture's handwork, he was largely a stranger to the people and the skills it took to get him the Pennsylvania cherry he regularly used. His interest in sustainability soon introduced him to the sturdy, beautiful benefits of Vermont-grown sugar maples for furniture making.

Shackleton's appreciation of the importance of the dining table—his own family table had been destroyed years before in a fire at his childhood home—led him even further. What if, he wondered, he offered the opportunity for people to come to his shop to make their own tables, becoming familiar not only with how furniture is made but meeting the cast of local people—the forester, the logger, the mill owner—who'd had a hand in bringing them their wood? Would there be a market for it?

In August 2009, he gambled there would. Thirty people turned out for the inaugural weekend-long event, which married furniture making with field trips to the forest where their lumber had been harvested. They learned about the trees they were using to build their tables; they met the people who'd worked on their wood. The event finished with a celebratory lunch of local food



FROM TOP: Attendees at a 2011 Naked Table event keep an eye on how their handiwork is coming together; project founder Charles Shackleton; a lone maple leaf on an early T-shirt design pays homage to the native sugar maple from which the tables are made.

CARL TREMBLAY (TOP & BOTTOM); ERICA HOUSEKEEPER (MIDDLE)

In this scene from the early years of the Naked Table Project, graduates and their families sit down at their new tables for a locally made lunch inside Woodstock's Middle Bridge. The tradition of concluding the event with a communal meal continues to this day.

served on the group's 15 newly made tables in the shelter of a covered bridge in Woodstock. Shackleton called it the Naked Table Project, and almost immediately it was a success.

Naked Table events soon sprouted up in surrounding Vermont communities and across the river in Hanover, New Hampshire, and he even introduced a class to his hometown in Ireland. It also resonated with its founder: Within a year of that first class, Shackleton was excited about making furniture again. "It creates connections between people and their families, the forest, and the environment," he says. "What was interesting to me—I'd never thought of using local wood before—was meeting all the other people involved. They're real Vermonters, people who've dedicated their lives to doing this one thing. And they all had a story."

That story is still being told. Almost 15 years since the first Naked Table event was held, Shackleton's idea has become a Vermont mainstay. Shackleton has also brought the Naked Table idea to other parts of New England, including a collaboration with cellist Yo-Yo Ma in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, as part of the musician's Bach Project concert series.

"I like things that can change and be made new," says Shackleton. "Naked Table is incredibly versatile and can be done in different ways. That's been part of its holding power."

Shackleton is now looking forward to one of his most ambitious Naked Table projects to date. Originally planned for this September but postponed until 2024 due to Vermont's summer flooding, it will not only be the first one since Covid but also take place on the big green in front of the Vermont State House in Montpelier. Participants will work with wood harvested on nearby land owned by U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, then walk the woods of Hubbard State Forest to explore the area's different sugar maples and ash. The day will conclude with a Naked Table flourish as the participants sit down for a meal made from local ingredients at the very tables they've put together. Proceeds from the event will be donated to Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity.

"This isn't just about making furniture," says Shackleton, who over the past decade has made Naked Table a nonprofit that uses the funds it raises to benefit a broad spectrum of service organizations. "It's about making connections to our environment, to our communities, and seeing sustainable forestry all the way through."



And in doing so, it also sparks the idea that we can all be makers and appreciate more fully the origins of the materials that go into making the things that make up our lives. Today, the table I built in 2010 in Shackleton's workshop is the centerpiece of my kitchen and family life. It's where we host meals, do homework, and hammer out the details of everyday life. And the marks and stains of its use tell the story of how central it's become to our home. It's the sign of a well-used, well-loved piece of furniture. I wouldn't want it to look any other way. —Ian Aldrich

For more information about the Naked Table Project, including updates on the rescheduled Montpelier event, go to facebook.com/thenakedtableproject. To learn more about Charles Shackleton's furniture, go to shackletonthomas.com.



Saap Season

A gifted chef from rural Thailand has found a home—and national acclaim—in the Green Mountain State.

When Nisachon Morgan learned that she had been named a 2022 James Beard Award semifinalist for best chef in the Northeast, she had one just question: “Who is James Beard?”

Her husband, Steve, also a chef, told her that the James Beard Awards were the Oscars of the food world, representing the most prestigious honor a chef can win. So Nisachon ordered a silk dress from Thailand and Steve rented a tux, and the family left their home and restaurant, Saap, in Randolph and flew to Chicago for the awards ceremony. Then something incredible

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Saap celebrates traditional Thai flavors in dishes such as *khao kluk gapi*; chef Nisachon Morgan in the kitchen; Nisachon with her husband and partner, Steve Morgan.

happened: Nisachon won. In her acceptance speech, she thanked her family in Thailand and her family in America and especially her grandmother, who taught her how to cook.

This was just one of many unexpected turns in Nisachon’s life. Growing up in Thailand’s rural northeastern Isan region in a family of rice farmers, she was immersed in a food culture rich in fragrant herbs and spices, sticky rice, and spiced meats. Fruits and vegetables ripened year-round. And

life happened within a fairly small radius. Then she and Steve met online in 2010, and over time she decided to join him in Vermont. In 2015, they opened Saap, which fast became a favorite of foodies in the Green Mountain State and beyond.

We talked with Nisachon—who also goes by Rung, which means “rainbow” in Thai—and Steve about her journey from Thailand to Vermont to culinary stardom. —Amy Traverso

Nisachon, what did you know about Vermont before you moved here?

Nisachon: I didn’t know about Vermont. I knew it was cold, but I didn’t know about the fall foliage. Mostly, I was only thinking about the cold!

Steve: She got here in November, saw the bare trees, and thought something terrible had happened. [Laughs.]

When did Vermont begin to feel like home?

Nisachon: After about one or two years, I saw the seasons and I loved that. When I was talking with my family, I told them, “I never saw trees like these.” In Thailand, we lived in the jungle. Animals were for food or for market. But here, we are surrounded by animals. I love them. The other day, I was in my garden very early in the morning and I saw a bear by the compost pile. I would never see a bear at home.

Do you grow any Thai ingredients in your garden?

Steve: It’s not a very long growing season here, but we do grow some. It’s a lot cheaper to grow our own basil, cilantro, scallions, green beans, and tomatoes, for instance. But lemongrass doesn’t grow well, and we’ve killed about 10 kaffir lime plants. It’s too cold. But Rung’s brother has a giant kaffir lime tree at home in Thailand. Last year, we took three or four buckets of kaffir limes, dried them on canvas, and brought them home. We’ll also bring tamarind back with us.

How did you decide to open a restaurant?

Steve: When Rung first arrived, she was cleaning rooms at a local inn and at Gifford Medical Center, and I was running culinary programs at Gifford. But we were eating this wonderful Thai food at home that was very different from what you see in most restaurants. Dishes like *pad thai* and *pad see ew* are mostly from Bangkok, where

Chinese immigrants brought ingredients like noodles and oyster sauce. So we started thinking, What if we turned this [home cooking] into our own restaurant?

We went on a journey from New York to Maine, going to dozens of Thai restaurants and found that 99 percent had very similar menus and similar execution—which I get. If you can make *pad thai* and Americans are willing to pay for it, why risk making dishes people don’t know and can’t pronounce? But we thought that if people are going to come to Randolph, they have to have a reason. We picked a couple of dishes that we thought people would really love, like *laap ghai tod*, fried chicken with shallot, lime, cilantro, and toasted rice powder. Coming to Saap is more like going to a grandma’s house in Thailand.

How do you feel about the way people have responded to Saap?

Nisachon: I’m happy. I think Americans love Thai food a lot. They love sticky rice. We don’t see many Thai people at the restaurant—it’s mostly American people from Vermont, from New York, from Boston. My family was very surprised by this!

IF YOU GO

■ **Saap** is located in the Kimball House, 50 Randolph Ave., Randolph, and serves lunch and dinner Monday–Saturday. Reservations recommended. saaprestaurant.com

Pad grapow, scallops with Thai basil and stir-fried vegetables, is a Saap mainstay.





Boy's Life

A chance encounter on a country road brings back childhood memories.

Early in the morning, with a touch of frost in the air and the leaves of the maples barely starting to turn, I ride my bike past the farm that sits on a brief plateau midway up a steep hill a few miles west of our home. It is sunny, and the sunshine—coupled with the steady exertion of my pedaling—makes the chill of the air bearable. Almost welcome, even. I love a lot of farms, but I love this one especially. I love the complicated angles of its roof, and how the milk house door is slightly askew in its frame and therefore always open an inviting inch or two. I love how there's always a pile of children's bicycles just

outside the door, and I love the sign that reads “Ford Country,” an unassuming homage to the two big blue tractors parked alongside the bike pile. Or maybe it's not the sign itself that I love, but rather the simple fact that someone hung it.

Just past the barn, the road kicks up again, a final steep pitch before leveling out, and I stand out of the saddle to coax the last bits of power from my legs. At the top of the hill, there's an old farmhouse on my right: big, white, peeling paint, sagging porch. There are two cars, one truck, and a motorcycle parked in the driveway, and the nose of a tractor peeking from

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM HAUGOMAT

around back. It's red, not blue, so I must have crossed the border of Ford Country. One of the cars is an '80s-era Chevy IROC-Z, while the other is a '90s-era Cadillac (I'm not sure which model specifically, because unlike the IROC-Z, I never pined over a Caddy in my youth) and the truck is a Ford F-150 of similar vintage. I can't tell much about the motorcycle, but I can see that its seat has been removed to grant access to the battery, and that the battery of the bike is connected to the battery of the truck by a pair of jumper cables.

I have no idea how many times I've ridden past this house over the years, but this is one of my favorite routes, so I'm confident it's no fewer than 100. And in all those times, I've never seen a human being. If it weren't for the mowed lawn, the changing placement of the vehicles, and the appearance (and subsequent disappearance) of piled firewood, I might have assumed it abandoned.

But on this morning, there is someone outside. A

for the remainder of my ride—for the remainder of my day, truthfully, and even now, again—I think about the boy who lives in the old farmhouse with the old cars, and who rides his scooter down to the barn to ... what? Do chores, presumably, though maybe just because it's where the road flattens at the bottom of that final pitch, and therefore offers a convenient place to turn around.

And now I remember how when I was that boy's age or thereabouts, my friend Trevor and I would push the rolling chassis of an old motorcycle up the hill from his house to mine, then climb on and ride down, faster and faster, and maybe the brakes worked and maybe they didn't, but we never got hurt and I guess that's mostly what matters. And I remember how when we lived next to Melvin's farm, back when Melvin was still farming and we still lived there, my sons would hop on their bikes in the late afternoon and ride out across the grazed plain of pasture to drive the cows down to the barn for evening milking. I remember Penny and me



There are many flavors of hardship, some of which may be exactly the flavors a person needs to thrive.

boy. He's 8, maybe 9. He's standing at the edge of the driveway, right where it meets the road, in front of the motorcycle with its seat off that's attached to the jumper cables. Like an umbilical cord. As I approach, he speaks. "I have a scooter," is what he says. I pause my pedaling and coast a lazy circle in the road. "Oh yeah?" I reply. And then, because this seems an inadequate response to his overture: "Where do you ride it?" He points down the hill, toward the barn with the complicated roof angles and the slanting milk house door and the pile of bikes. "To the farm," he replies, before adding, almost without skipping a beat, "I'm going to school."

I'm unsure of what else to say, and I've already ridden two lazy circles in the road, and besides I've still got eight miles to ride with a very full day awaiting at the other end. So I give him a little wave and wish him a good day. He says nothing more but gives me a little wave in return, and soon I'm far enough up the road that even if I looked back (and I'm tempted to), I know he'd be out of sight.

Out of sight, perhaps, but not out of mind, because

watching from the height of our land, knowing even then that we wouldn't forget.

And I think about what the world has to offer a boy like this, coming of age on the top of a hill along a back road in northern Vermont, in a house that looks like hardship, though of course I can't really know, and besides there are many flavors of hardship, some of which may be exactly the flavors a person needs to thrive. There seems much in common with how my sons grew up, and it's true that I don't often worry anymore about what the world can offer them (though it's also true that maybe I should). Yet even in the intervening decade, so much has changed, and I try to imagine how any of those changes might benefit this boy and others like him. But I cannot.

The next morning I ride the loop again, and although I pass the boy's house within minutes of the same time, he's not there. I pedal on, and soon I'm passing under a canopy of maples, and it's hard to tell for certain, but I'm pretty sure the leaves have just a little more color than the day before. —Ben Hewitt

Witches' View

Vermont's old houses harbor a spooky slant on window design.

Does your house have witch windows? Perhaps you know them as coffin windows, crooked windows, or lazy windows. Some people call them simply “Vermont windows,” because of their noted prevalence in the Green Mountain State.

By any name, though, they are certainly eye-catching: Set diagonally, witch windows are almost always on the gable end of the house, often in a bit of wall space between two roof lines that's not quite tall enough for a conventionally placed window.

The witch window's origin story is lost to history, but in my mind, at least, that first crooked wonder was born after a conversation between a 18th-century farmer and his wife, in which he assured her they'd be able to reuse the original window when the new addition to their house was built. Perhaps she argued that it wouldn't fit, and well ... you can guess the rest.

Whatever the origin, witch windows became common features on 19th-century Vermont farmhouses, where they symbolized a certain Yankee frugality and ingenuity (or maybe plain stubbornness) until advances in custom window manufacturing made other options more practical.

As for the name? *Crooked windows*, *lazy windows*, and *Vermont windows* are more or less self-explanatory, but *coffin windows* give spinners of tall tales a bit more to work with. If a person died on the second floor of a home, they say, the window would allow the coffin to be maneuvered out onto the roof and then lowered to the ground. No one can say for certain that these windows were *never* used for such purpose, but the scenario raises some questions. Were the windows installed preemptively, or only once the situation arose? Was the



Witch windows can be seen peeking out from the eaves of these vintage homes in Craftsbury (TOP RIGHT) and Stowe (ABOVE).

coffin also delivered through the window, or was it carried upstairs? Couldn't the body of the dearly departed simply be moved downstairs before being placed in the coffin?

On the other hand, *witch windows* don't make much more sense. Supposedly, broomstick-riding witches would be unable to enter a house through tilted windows. Beyond overlooking the dexterity and riding skills of well-

seasoned witches, this theory doesn't account for their apparent blindness to the house's other, traditionally placed windows. Variations on this line of thought suggest that witches could *only* enter through crooked windows, or that the windows were designed to prevent their *exit*, rather than their entrance.

In the end, you should call them whatever you like. For me, they will always be witch windows, but for reasons having less to do with the supernatural and more to do with a certain Abbott and Costello routine that sticks in my mind:

“Does your house have a witch window?”

“Which window?”

“Exactly!” —Joe Bills



Made in Vermont

The Cutting Edge

Knives forged by bladesmith Moriah Cowles are true hot commodities.



If you were driving through Vermont on a fine autumn day in the late '80s and stopped in at Shelburne Orchards to do some apple picking, you may have been handed your bag by a very young Moriah Cowles. The daughter of owner Nick Cowles and granddaughter of Bill Cowles, who founded Shelburne Orchards in the 1950s, she grew up on this rambling, tree-filled land and remembers helping customers “when I could barely reach their car door windows.”

Moriah lives on the property today with her partner, Abe Stebbing, and two young kids of their own, helping to run the orchard that they will take over one day when her dad retires. But not far from the iconic red farm stand, tucked away in a sprawling barn, is evidence of what Moriah jokingly calls her “secret identity”: an anvil and a forge, the essential tools of the blacksmith. It is here, mainly after the orchard has been put to bed for the season, that she works on crafting small batches of carbon-steel culinary knives that sell out instantly in online lotteries, held only as her busy life permits.

“My kids and the apple trees, they’re living things that need me when they need me,” Moriah explains. “The knife business I’ve set up so that I can do it whenever I want to. I can just make what I want to make when I want to make them.”

While an orchard might not be where you’d expect to find an acclaimed bladesmith, Moriah’s impulse to create goes back to childhood: She remembers being the kind of kid who was always drawing in the dirt or making little sculptures with it, for instance. Blacksmithing entered her life in college, where she randomly signed up for a summer course on it. “The feeling was so *elemental*—the fire and steel and hammering—I just fell in love with it.” Eventually she turned specifically to bladesmithing, drawn by how knives can marry the tough and sharp with the delicate and beautiful.

She’s been forging her own knives since 2009, her well-muscled arms a testament to the demanding craft that she has studied with masters in Mexico and Brooklyn, New York. But following a shout-out on chef Marcus Samuelsson’s website in 2013, things began heating up for Moriah and her business, Orchard Steel. The following year, her knives were featured in *GQ*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Bon Appétit*, among others.

It was a heady time but stressful, too. Before long, Moriah moved from Brooklyn, where she had been living and working, back to Vermont. She also switched from doing custom orders to selling online as time allowed. The constant throughout has been her craft: making elegant steak and chef knives that are above all, supremely functional. “I love the art of utility,” says Moriah. “Making something creative with a purpose.”

Each knife is outfitted with a handle carved from any



Bladesmith Moriah Cowles at her forge, holding a knife form that’s still glowing red.

piece of wood that catches the eye of Moriah or her husband (the orchard itself has been a fertile hunting ground). Lilac, peach, cherry, box elder, black walnut—all these and more have loaned their distinctive colors and grains to Orchard Steel knives, making each a one-of-a-kind piece of art.

That kind of craftsmanship doesn’t come cheap, with knives running from a few hundred dollars to more than \$1,000. (Which is partly why Moriah was inspired to do occasional knife raffles, with proceeds going to a food bank or other charity.) Money, though, isn’t the reward she’s after. “I love that I can hold in my hand something I’ve created. I love the beauty of it,” she says. “I love the creative process, and that needs to be a part of my life somehow. I feel really lucky to have found something I’m fairly good at that I can have as a business that I actually have space for.” —Jenn Johnson

To learn more about Moriah Cowles and her knives, visit her website at orchardsteel.com.

Cord Values

With winter right around the corner, how does your woodpile stack up?

1. The logs in your pile:

- A. are exactly the same size and length, as measured by a micrometer (4 points)
- B. are more or less the same length (3 points)
- C. include a wide variety of lengths and sizes (2 points)
- D. include several pieces that resemble the creature from *Alien*, only scarier (1 point)

2. When it comes to sorting wood, you:

- A. separate maple, ash, birch, and oak because they burn differently, of course (4 points)
- B. put hardwood at one end, kindling at the other (3 points)
- C. try to keep the dry wood and green wood apart (2 points)
- D. couldn't tell a birch log from a fence post (1 point)

3. To achieve perfectly dried logs, you:

- A. turn them regularly, like bottles of fine wine (4 points)
- B. try to leave some room for air to flow around them (3 points)
- C. replace the tarp every time it blows off (2 points)
- D. put green logs next to the stove and cross your fingers (1 point)

4. You locate your woodpile:

- A. atop a knoll with ideal exposure to sun and good air circulation (4 points)
- B. within a 10-minute shovel of the house (3 points)
- C. on your deck (2 points)
- D. so close to the back door you don't have to take your slippers off to grab a log (1 point)

5. To make your woodpile fall over would require:

- A. a direct nuclear hit (4 points)
- B. an earthquake (3 points)
- C. a stiff wind from the northeast (2 points)
- D. the vibration from slamming the porch door (1 point)

6. What title best describes your relationship to your woodpile?

- A. *Magnificent Obsession* (4 points)
- B. *Pride and Prejudice* (3 points)
- C. *Love's Labour's Lost* (2 points)
- D. *The Comedy of Errors* (1 point)

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

The Natural (6 points)

This is the lazy man's woodpile, which the owner (often an English major in college) appreciates for the "intrinsic beauty of its casual yet organic design." Only slightly tidier than the average beaver lodge, it does have the advantage of being easy to create: "Dump it there."

The Shedmund Fitzgerald (7–9 points)

Listing slightly to port, this impromptu wood shelter is constructed from a top (generally a corrugated roofing panel) and one or more sides, which afford about as much protection from the elements as a negligée.

The Open-Ended-Question Pile (10–12 points)

This liberal-minded woodpile is "cobbed" (with alternating layers in opposite directions) at only one end. The other end trails away like a conversation with no real conclusion. This design is considered cheating by woodpile aficionados (16 points

or more), for whom the Double-Cobbed Pile, stabilized at both ends, is a sacrament.

The Critter Condo (13–15 points)

Depending on the location and the local fauna, a woodpile can easily become a haven for chipmunks, mice, snakes, and the occasional skunk. This is the perfect pile for those who like to combine a little adventure with their home heating.

Fort Knots (16–18 points)

This one is less a woodpile than a security blanket. For the person who builds it, wood is like money in the bank: You can never have too much. For them, actually burning the wood is like taking money out of the bank, so they do it as little as possible, to the dismay of the shivering people they live with.

Maple Manor (19–21 points)

The Taj Mahal of sheds, this edifice is larger than most single-family homes and more comfortable than the average recreational vehicle. Before gaining admission to this five-star wood palace, all logs must meet strict guidelines for length, shape, and quality.

The Masterpiece (22–24 points)

More a work of art than an actual woodpile, this magnum opus is created by folks who a) have a lot of time on their hands or b) are independently wealthy and don't really burn wood. Arranged as beehives, towers, arches, or images of the grandchildren, they're great for photographing, not so great for heating a big old house. Are you going to be the first person to remove a log and ruin the design? We don't think so.

—Ken Sheldon

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