

Our Vermont

F A L L 2 0 2 1

YANKEE



MAD RIVER VALLEY
AUTUMN ESCAPE

ALL-NEW RECIPES
FOR THANKSGIVING

11 AMAZING FALL
FOLIAGE HIKES

*Celebrating the people, places, and traditions
that make the Green Mountain State so original*

Autumn's Top 10

As the editor of *Yankee*, I've often been asked by readers for foliage advice. It's a topic so near to my heart that I could write a book on it, but that will have to wait: For now, I'll condense my half-century of coming to Vermont for the most spectacular foliage in the world into 10 essential tips.

1. DO get lost. Trust that Vermont's nearly 9,000 miles of dirt roads will lead you to lovely scenes and unexpected highlights, like a village so pretty it will make you reluctant to push on.

2. DON'T stay in your car. Get out to walk, smell, and listen. Vermont in autumn is filled with the sweet aroma of apple orchards, the whiff of woodsmoke on chilly mornings, the sounds of swirling fallen leaves.



3. DO get up early. The foliage colors are often the most vivid amid the morning light and dew. Watching the dawn mist rise from a forest-ringed lake or river may be the best treat of all.

4. DON'T overlook the valleys. Though many folks head to the mountains, in fact the lowland areas boast the earliest colors. Look for the swamp maples surrounding the marshes.

5. DO respect "Moose Crossing" signs. Vermont is moose country, and these majestic beasts are on the move during fall. Be especially cautious at twilight and dusk.

6. DO make lodging reservations, particularly during the prime leaf-peeping period. And if possible, come midweek.

7. DON'T miss out on what the locals know. Let Vermonters help you find the prime foliage spots. Stop at the park rangers' stations—their pride in their home turf shines through when you visit their headquarters and ask where they would go.

8. DO head beyond the crowds. Vermonters have a saying: "When good people die, they go to Vermont. When good Vermonters die, they go to the Northeast Kingdom"—but relatively few tourists do.

9. DON'T panic that "peak" is passing you by. "Seeking peak is missing the point," says Katharine Anderson, a cultural geographer and former University of Vermont professor. "It's like condensing the entire season and the entire experience into one moment, like a sound bite."

10. DO check the reports. Visit YankeeFoliage.com often to see the color changes on an interactive map of New England and to see where exactly in Vermont the color is at its best.

YANKEE

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On the cover: A hilltop "witness tree" sugar maple in Peacham glows in the light of the setting sun. Photo by Skye Chalmers

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MICHAEL BLANCHETTE



Cider Pride

How a family tradition made for the sweetest of memories.

In the fall my father would take us to the orchard, and we would select a basket of apples, probably McIntosh, and a gallon of cider. The cider came in a glass jug with a single, earlike handle. My father kept the apples and the jug of cider in the November coolness of the screen porch. In the evening he would bring in the jug from the porch, shutting the door to the dark of the evening, and he would pour glasses of the cold cider and carry them in on a tray to the living room where we watched *I Love Lucy* or *Name That Tune*. The cider was a rich, coppery color with a rim of froth around the edge of the glass. The drink had a tang, almost like beer, and my sister and I looked forward to the treat. Somehow it seemed grown-up, to drink the foaming cider and discover the slight giddiness it gave us.

My father made little of his technique for making hard cider. In fact, he didn't even think of it as a technique. Hard cider was really the only cider, so far as he was concerned. We drank it sweet, sometimes, when we couldn't wait. But for my father, fresh cider was nothing more than fruit juice. If kept in that steady dark coolness, the cider would stay fresh for a remarkably long time. It was the slow aging of the cider that gave it its edge. Time—and the kind of refrigeration that cannot be mustered from anywhere but the slow cooling down of the earth.

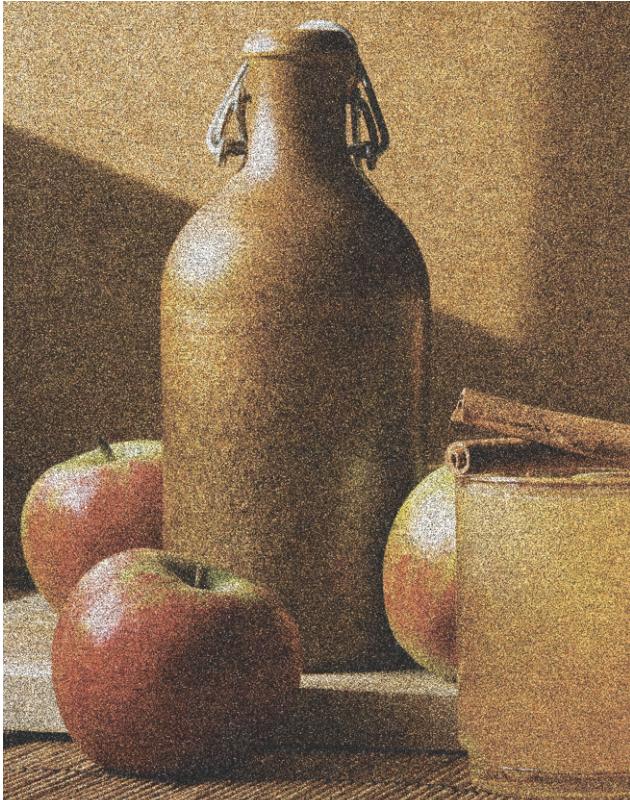
By Thanksgiving my father had a cider to serve that he was proud of. From the silver pitcher, he poured it like fine wine and stood back for the praise. It always came.

When cider began to come in plastic jugs, it didn't take my father long to figure out that the plastic turned the cider to vinegar much faster. He slowed the hands of progress by keeping his own supply of gallon glass jugs on a shelf in the garage. When we got home from the orchard, he transferred the cider right away. My sister and I would watch as he poured the sweet golden liquid out of the filmy gray plastic into the clean glass jar. It was like watching the sky clear.

Some years ago there were rumblings about cider. It is not a sanitary thing, this business of pressing cider, the food gurus told us. The apples come into contact with the hands of the pickers and the hands of the sorters, and then these apples are crushed by a press that cannot always be kept perfectly clean. Bacteria, they hissed. The solution, they said, is pasteurization. That is, that the cider has to be heated and cleared before it can be bottled. But when that is done, we do not have apple cider but

apple juice, such as we get from cans and bottles in the grocery store. Cider as we have known it, as my father knew it, would be no more.

My father weathered the introduction of the plastic jug, but how would he have gotten around this entanglement of the cider house rules? Apple juice cannot be hardened off like cider. It cannot concoct a foamy head. It cannot make little girls feel grown-up. And you cannot pour pasteurized cider through a funnel and have it revive to the ember-red colors that grew richer and deeper every day that it sat on the floor of my father's November porch. —Edie Clark



Local Flavor

The New Yankee Thanksgiving

Festive recipes that put a fresh spin on New England staples.

JOE ST. PIERRE/FOOD STYLING BY JOY HOWARD

Our Vermont 5

Crispy Brussels Sprouts with Maple-Glazed Walnuts

Maple-glazed walnuts may be nothing new, but here they get a kick from cider vinegar. Add savory roasted Brussels sprouts, and you have a sweet, salty, tangy side dish.

1 tablespoon salted butter
½ cup maple syrup
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
⅔ cup chopped walnuts
10 cups (1½ pounds) halved Brussels sprouts
¼ cup olive oil
½ teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 375° and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Add maple syrup and vinegar and cook until the mixture is frothy and starts to thicken, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the walnuts and stir with a rubber spatula. Transfer walnuts to the lined baking sheet and spread in an even layer. Bake until caramelized, about 10 minutes, then remove from the oven. Lift the parchment paper from the baking sheet to transfer the walnuts to a wire rack to cool while you prepare the Brussels sprouts.

Increase oven heat to 450°. Put the rimmed baking sheet back in the oven on the bottom rack to heat.

In a large bowl, toss the Brussels sprouts with the oil, salt, and pepper. Remove the hot baking sheet from the oven and arrange the Brussels sprouts in a single layer, cut side down (use tongs). Return to the oven and roast until the Brussels sprouts are nicely browned on the cut side, 20 to 25 minutes.

Arrange the Brussels sprouts on a serving platter. Break the candied walnuts into small pieces and sprinkle over the vegetables. Serve warm or at room temperature. *Yields 8 servings.*



JOANNA MERIE FOOD STYLING BY JOY HOWARD



Mashed Potatoes with Crunchy Cheddar Crisps

Inspired by the classic green bean casserole with crunchy fried onions on top, this twist on mashed potatoes includes shredded Vermont cheddar cheese baked into crispy rounds as a deeply savory topping. The cheese crisps can be made up to two days in advance but should be added just before serving to preserve their crunch.

**3½ cups shredded Vermont cheddar
2 tablespoons minced chives
4 pounds potatoes, Russet or Yukon Gold,
peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
2 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
2 cups half-and-half
1 stick salted butter
¾ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

Preheat the oven to 425°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

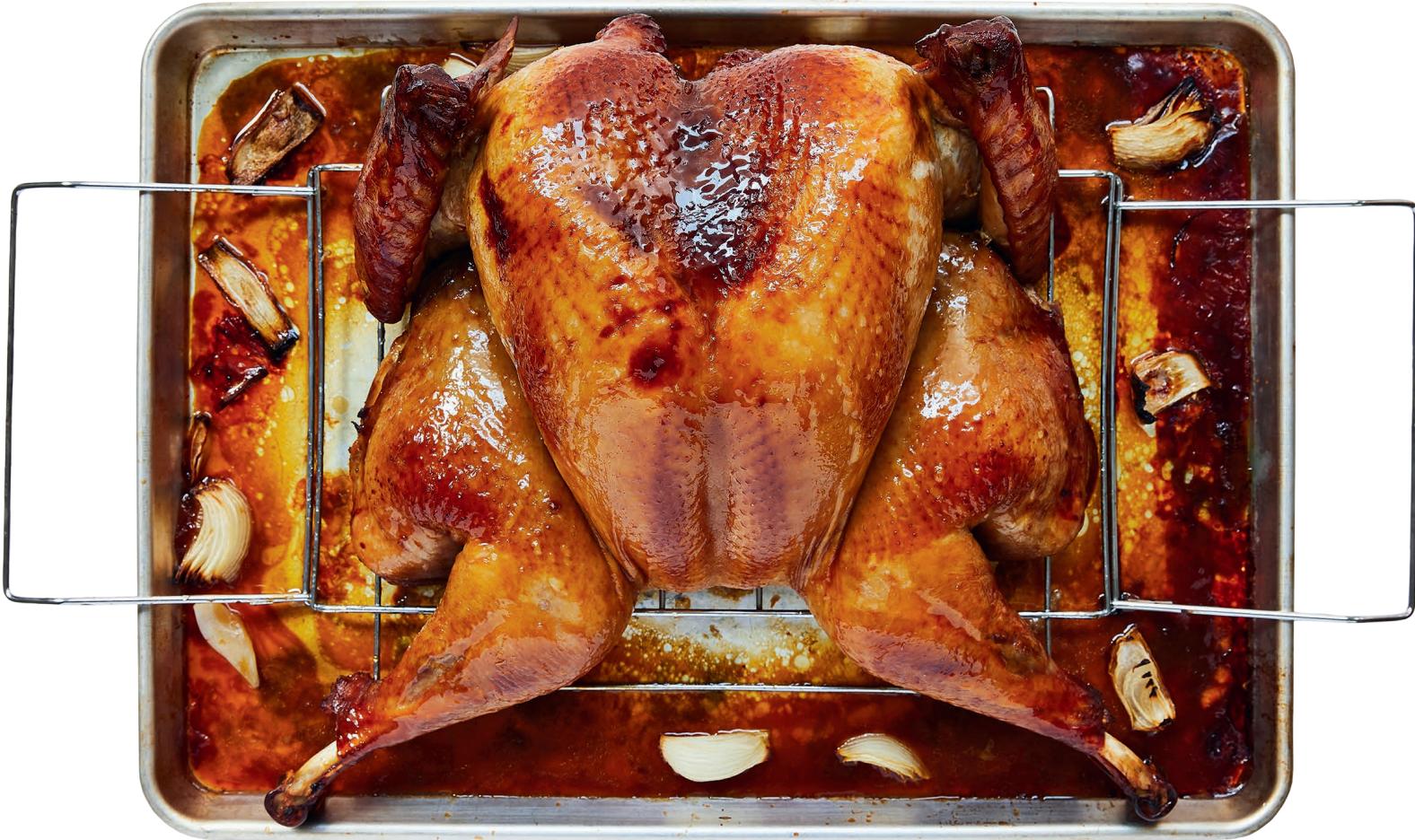
In a medium bowl, toss the shredded cheddar with the chives. Pick up a small handful of the mixture and drop it in a roughly 2½-inch pile on the lined baking sheet. Repeat with remaining cheese mixture. You should have enough cheese to make 16 piles. Transfer to the oven and bake, turning the pan midway through, until cheese is sizzling, crisp, and uniformly amber in color, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and pat with paper towels to remove excess oil. Transfer to a wire rack to cool at room temperature.

Now make the mashed potatoes. Put the cubed potatoes in a large pot and cover with water. Add 2 tablespoons salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat

to a simmer and cook until tender when pierced with a knife.

Meanwhile, warm the half-and-half with the butter over medium heat until butter is melted. Reduce heat to low to keep warm.

When the potatoes are cooked, drain them, reserving the cooking water in a bowl, and return them to the pot. Mash the potatoes until smooth. Using a wooden spoon, add the half-and-half mixture to the potatoes, ½ cup at a time, beating to combine until they reach your desired consistency. If the potatoes still seem dry, add a bit of the cooking liquid. Season with pepper and additional salt to taste. Just before serving, garnish with cheese crisps (whole or broken into pieces) and serve warm. *Yields 8 to 10 servings.*



Molasses-Brined Spatchcocked Turkey with Cider Glaze

A molasses brine gives this bird a rich depth, while a cider glaze adds zing. Spatchcocking, or butterflying, is simply cutting out the backbone of a turkey or chicken and pressing the bird flat so that it cooks more evenly in a single layer. You get crispier skin and tender breast meat. You can ask your butcher to do the spatchcocking for you, or use a sharp knife or kitchen shears to do it yourself (watch a video if doing it for the first time).

For the brine:

- 7 quarts water
- 1½ cups kosher salt
- 2 cups molasses
- 3 medium onions, peeled and cut into quarters
- 1 2½-inch knob of ginger, peeled and thinly sliced

For the turkey and glaze:

- 1 13-to-15-pound natural (unbrined) turkey, thawed and spatchcocked
- 2 medium onions, peeled and quartered
- 2 cups cider
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

For the sauce:

- Pan drippings
- Remaining glaze
- 1 cup reduced-sodium chicken stock, plus more as needed
- 3 tablespoons salted butter

On the morning of the day before Thanksgiving, prepare your brine: In a very large pot, stir the water, salt, and molasses until the salt is dissolved. Add the onions and ginger.

Remove the neck and giblets from the turkey, then submerge it in the brine. If you don't have a big-enough pot, use two brining bags (double-bagged) in a roasting pan. Brine for 8 to 12 hours.

Remove the turkey from the brine and pat it dry, and lay it skin side up on a rack in your roasting pan. Let it sit, uncovered, in your refrigerator overnight. This will result in a very crispy skin.

On Thanksgiving morning, remove the turkey from the refrigerator and let rest at room temperature for 1 hour. Preheat the oven to 300°. The turkey should be skin side up on the rack, with the wingtips tucked underneath the breast and the leg bones angled in so the whole bird fits in the pan. Scatter the onions around. Transfer to the oven.

Meanwhile, prepare the glaze: In a saucepan over medium-high heat, whisk together the cider, brown sugar, vinegar, and mustard. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer and let the mixture cook down until you have ½ cup, about 25 to 30 minutes.

After 2½ to 3 hours of roasting, check the temperature at the deepest part of the breast. It should be about 150°. If not, let it roast another 15 minutes and check again. At this point, brush glaze all over the top of the turkey and increase the heat to 350°. Cook for 15 minutes, then glaze again. Cook for another 10 minutes, glaze once more, and check the temperature. The meat in the deepest part of the breast should be 160° and the thigh should be 170°; if not, let it cook another 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes. Save the remaining glaze for the sauce.

Now, make the sauce: Strain the drippings from the pan into a gravy separator and pour off the fat. You should have about 2 cups of drippings. If not, add a bit of chicken stock. Put the drippings in the pan with the remaining glaze and 1 cup chicken stock. Simmer until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 10 to 15 minutes. Whisk in the butter.

Carve the turkey and serve with the sauce. Yields 8 to 10 servings.



Brown Bread–Cornbread Dressing

New England brown bread is made with cornmeal, rye, and wheat, so we figured: Why not try it in a dressing? It may be too sweet and intense as a solo ingredient, but you can dilute it with—what else?—cornbread. The spicy sausage balances out the sweetness, as do the standard aromatics: carrots, celery, onions, and parsley.

- 4 cups cubed cornbread (1-inch pieces)**
- 2 cups cubed brown bread (1-inch pieces)**
- 4 tablespoons salted butter, plus more for greasing pan**
- 1 medium onion, diced**
- 2 medium carrots, diced**
- 2 medium celery stalks, diced**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- 8 ounces chourico, linguiça, chorizo, or other cooked spicy sausage, cut into ½-inch pieces**
- 1 cup packed fresh parsley leaves, roughly chopped**
- 2 large eggs**
- 2 cups reduced-sodium chicken stock**

Preheat the oven to 325°. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with butter and set aside. Arrange the cornbread and brown bread cubes on a large rimmed baking sheet. Transfer to the oven and cook until toasted, about 15 minutes. Set aside.

Increase oven temperature to 375°. Melt the butter in a large skillet, then add the onion, carrots, celery, salt, and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until softened, 6 minutes, then add the sausage and cook 5 minutes more. Add parsley, stir, then remove from heat.

In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs and chicken stock until blended.

Put the bread cubes into a large bowl, then add the sausage mixture and toss to combine. Pour the chicken stock and eggs over all and gently toss together. Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit for at least 45 minutes and up to 1 day. Bake until cooked through and crispy on top, 40 to 45 minutes. *Yields 8 to 10 servings.*



Pumpkin-Fluff Pie

The inspiration for this pie came from the marshmallow-topped sweet potato side dish that, for many, defines the holiday table. Here, marshmallows take the form of Fluff, the iconic New England spread that dates back to 1917. It's a bit like having the whipped cream in the pie itself! Note: If you don't have a favorite pie crust recipe, check out our time-tested version at newengland.com/pie-crust.

- 1 9-inch pie shell, parbaked
- 1½ cups Marshmallow Fluff
- ¾ cup cream cheese, softened
- ½ teaspoon plus ½ teaspoon table salt
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1 tablespoon unflavored powdered gelatin
- 1 can pumpkin puree
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- Freshly whipped cream, for garnish

Using a handheld or standing mixer, beat the Fluff with the cream cheese and ½ teaspoon salt until smooth. Pour the mixture into the parbaked pie crust (make sure it's cooled) and place on a flat surface in the freezer to firm up, at least 30 minutes and up to 2 days (wrap in plastic if freezing for more than 1 hour).

Meanwhile, pour the half-and-half into a small bowl and sprinkle the gelatin over the top. Let it soften for 10 minutes.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, whisk together the pumpkin, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt until it just begins to steam. Add the gelatin mixture and whisk until very smooth. Remove from the heat and let cool for 20 minutes, stirring often, then spoon the mixture over the marshmallow layer and smooth with a spatula to level out the top.

Transfer the pie to the refrigerator to chill until firm, at least 4 hours and up to a day. If chilling longer, spray the top of the pie with a very thin film of vegetable oil, then press some plastic wrap against the surface to prevent it from drying out.

Before serving, if desired, take ¼ cup of freshly whipped cream and spoon or pipe it into nickel-size circles around the edge of the pie, then drag a toothpick through the circles to form heart shapes. Serve cold or at room temperature, with or without additional whipped cream. Yields 8 servings.



Gingered Cranberry Sauce with Maple Syrup, Pineapple & Pecans

The perfect accompaniment to any Yankee Thanksgiving feast: cranberry sauce, made with that glorious sour New England fruit and sweetened with fresh pineapple and a touch of Vermont maple syrup.

- 3 large oranges**
- 1 cup pecan halves, or your favorite nut**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**
- 2 cups water**
- ¼ cup pure Vermont maple syrup**
- 1 pound fresh or frozen cranberries (no need to thaw)**
- 1½ tablespoons finely chopped fresh ginger**
- 1 tablespoon very thinly sliced crystallized or candied ginger (optional)**
- 1 cup diced fresh pineapple**

Preheat your oven to 350° and set a rack to the middle position. Prepare the oranges: Use a vegetable peeler to remove strips of zest from one orange, then finely chop enough the zest to yield 3 tablespoons. On another orange, finely grate enough of the outer layer of zest to yield 1 tablespoon. Then squeeze all of the fruit to yield 1 cup fresh juice.

Place the nuts on a small baking sheet and bake until they're just beginning to turn light golden brown, about 12 minutes. Remove and let cool. Coarsely chop, and set aside.

Meanwhile, put the sugar and 2 cups of water into a large pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and cook about 15 minutes, or until the syrup begins to thicken slightly and turn a gold color.

Add the maple syrup and cook 2 minutes. Add the cranberries and cook, stirring, until the berries begin to pop their skins, about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to low and add the orange juice, rind, and zest; cook 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the fresh and candied ginger and the pineapple and stir well. Cook another 5 minutes, or until the sauce appears slightly thickened (it will thicken more as it cools). If it appears too thin, remove the cranberries and fruit with a slotted spoon and boil down the liquid about 4 to 5 minutes over high heat, and then mix it all together again.

Remove the sauce from the heat and stir in the toasted nuts. Cool. Transfer to a tightly sealed glass jar, and refrigerate up to a week before serving. *Yields 6 cups.*

Local Flavor

All About Apples

Expert tips on choosing and cooking with fall's most beloved fruit.

ADAM DETOUR

Here in Vermont, apples are a favorite fall staple. But with some larger orchards now growing 100 varieties or more, it takes an expert just to sort it all out. Amy Traverso, *Yankee's* senior food editor and author of *The Apple Lover's Cookbook*, shares her thoughts on getting the most out of apple season. —Joe Bills

Know Your Types

"The two things that make the biggest difference in how your dish turns out are the firmness or tenderness and the sweetness or tartness of the fruit," Traverso says. "It's good to be aware of where an apple falls along those spectrums. A softer apple, like a McIntosh, will dissolve if cooked too long. But a firmer variety can be heated much longer without cooking down."

Find the Right Fit

Traverso divides apples into four categories: *Firm-tart* (Granny Smith, Rhode Island Greening, Northern Spy, Roxbury Russet) work in rich desserts that need some acidity; *firm-sweet* (Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Ginger Gold, Pink Lady) are best for delicate cakes and savory baked dishes; *tender-tart* (McIntosh, Cortland, Macoun) are best for sauces and for eating fresh; and *tender-sweet* (Gala, Fuji) are eaten fresh or used in salads or quick-cooking dishes such as pancakes.

Mix Things Up

In many recipes, Traverso prefers a mix-and-match approach: "In dishes like pies or applesauce, the more varieties that are included, the more complex, and delicious, the flavor will be."

Cook with Care

The longer a dish cooks, the firmer the apple should be. "My grandma made apple pie with Macs," Traverso recalls. "They were delicious, but they were essentially applesauce pies." She recommends using softer apples for dishes that cook quickly, like muffins, and firmer ones for dishes that cook 45 minutes or more.

Make Fresh Picks

Buying straight from the orchard or at a farmers' market is best, of course. In the supermarket, buying fruit marked "local" gives you your best shot at reasonable freshness. Indicators like color and firmness often can't be trusted, because growers and researchers have developed controlled-atmosphere storage methods to manipulate the fruit.



Amy Traverso,
author of *The Apple
Lover's Cookbook*

Keep Them Cool

Historically, many apples were prized primarily because they kept well. Technology has rendered that concern somewhat obsolete. If you don't have a root cellar, Traverso recommends storing apples in a paper bag in your refrigerator's produce drawer. "I've successfully stored Newtown Pippin and Northern Spy well into spring," she says. "Also, pies can be made and then frozen prior to cooking. This is a great way to get extended use out of your firmer apples."

Take It Easy

One of Traverso's favorite recipes for using up lots of apples is apple butter: "It's so simple, and it cooks in a slow cooker overnight. I cook the apples—as many varieties as possible for the most complex flavor—with a little apple cider. Once they're simmering, I turn the heat down, leave the lid ajar, and go to bed. Some slow cookers run hotter than others, so try this out during the day first and keep an eye on it. But by morning you'll have apple butter, and your whole house will smell amazing." *For the recipe, see next page.*



Homemade Apple Butter

Follow these simple instructions to make apple butter in your slow cooker overnight. When you wake up, the house will smell like heaven.

5 pounds (about 10 large) mixed apples, peeled, cored, and cut into medium-size pieces
1 ½ cups granulated sugar
1 whole star anise pod
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon coarse or kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
2 cups fresh apple cider
¼ cup fresh lemon juice

Turn a slow cooker on high and add all ingredients. Cover and cook for 1½ hours, stirring occasionally. Mixture should be bubbling vigorously. Reduce heat to low and cook for 1 hour more. Remove and discard star anise pod.

With the lid slightly ajar, continue cooking until apple butter is dark brown and thick, 7 to 9 hours more. Stir well and pass through a food mill or strainer, if desired, to remove lumps. Sterilize canning jars by boiling in the large stock pot for ten minutes (do not boil lids or bands). Turn off the heat and leave jars in the water until ready to use. Wash lids and bands in hot, soapy water, then dry with clean paper towel. Use tongs to remove jars from water and divide apple butter among them, leaving ¼ inch of headspace at top of each jar. Use tongs to put the lids on top of the jars, then use your hands to gently screw on the bands (don't tighten all the way).

Bring water in large stock pot or canner back to a boil and submerge jars, making sure they're upright, for 10 minutes to seal. Transfer to a rack and let cool to room temperature. Check the seals after they cool; they should be tight. If the lids still pop when you press them, refrigerate the apple butter and use within 3 weeks. Otherwise, screw the bands on completely and store. The sealed jars of homemade apple butter will keep for 8 to 10 months at room temperature. *Yields 6 pint jars or 12 half-pint jars.*

Where to Buy Local

The following is just a sampling of the many terrific Vermont orchards you can visit this fall. Before heading out, though, be sure to call or visit the website for the most up-to-date information on operations and guidelines for visitors.

■ Allenholm Farm, South Hero

Hero: Vermont's oldest commercial apple orchard (c. 1870) has all the greatest hits (Empire, Gala, McIntosh, etc.) plus cider, homemade applesauce, crab apple jelly, and other goodies. allenholm.com

■ Burr's Apple Orchard, Cabot

Cabot: Compact, walkable spot boasting 40-plus varieties and views of the Green Mountains; their fresh cider doughnuts and cider slushies are irresistible. burtsappleorchard.com

■ Champlain Orchards, Shoreham

Shoreham: Family-owned farm overlooking Lake Champlain with more than 100 varieties of apples on offer, along with berries and stone fruits and an array of award-winning hard ciders. champlainorchards.com

■ Chapin Orchard, Essex Junction

Junction: Fifteen-acre orchard and a retail barn selling fruit, Vermont products, and cider made on a century-old press. chapinorchard.com

■ Green Mountain Orchards, Putney

Putney: Prepicked or U-pick apples, blueberries, peaches, pumpkins, and other produce, plus sinful baked goods and fresh cider. greenmountainorchards.com

■ Hackett's Orchard, South Hero

Hero: Over three dozen types of apples in a charming farm setting where you can take orchard tours and wagon rides and load up on cider doughnuts, homemade pies, maple syrup, and more. hackettsorchard.com

■ Happy Valley Orchard, Middlebury

Middlebury: U-pick trees and a farm stand are joined by a cider mill churning out

sweet nectar for visitors as well as for Burlington's own Citizen Cider. happyvalleyorchard.com

■ Mad Tom Orchard, East Dorset

Dorset: One of Vermont's most scenic orchards has been restored and planted with new varieties including Zestar and Blondee, though Macs and Cortlands abound too. madtomorchard.com

■ Mendon Mountain Orchards, Mendon

Mendon: Family-run motel and heritage apple orchard—but wait, there's also a bakery turning out hot-from-the-oven apple pies and turnovers daily. mendonorchards.com

■ Scott Farm, Dummerston

“Ecologically grown” heirloom and unusual apples, such as Roxbury Russet and Belle de Boskoop, on a 626-acre property owned by the nonprofit Landmark Trust USA. scottfarmvermont.com

■ Shelburne Orchards, Shelburne

Shelburne: Named one of the country's 10 best orchards by *USA Today*. Look for the ginger apple cider and the potent apple brandy. shelburneorchards.com

■ Wellwood Orchards, Springfield

Springfield: Among the enticements: pumpkins, a petting zoo, fresh apple cider, and 60 acres of apple varieties, from Lodi to Vista Bella to Red Astercan. wellwoodorchards.net

■ Whitman Brook Orchard, Quechee

Quechee: From America's oldest apple, the Roxbury Russet, to an 1800s variety born in and named for Bethel, Vermont, heirlooms get plenty of love here. whitmanbrook.com

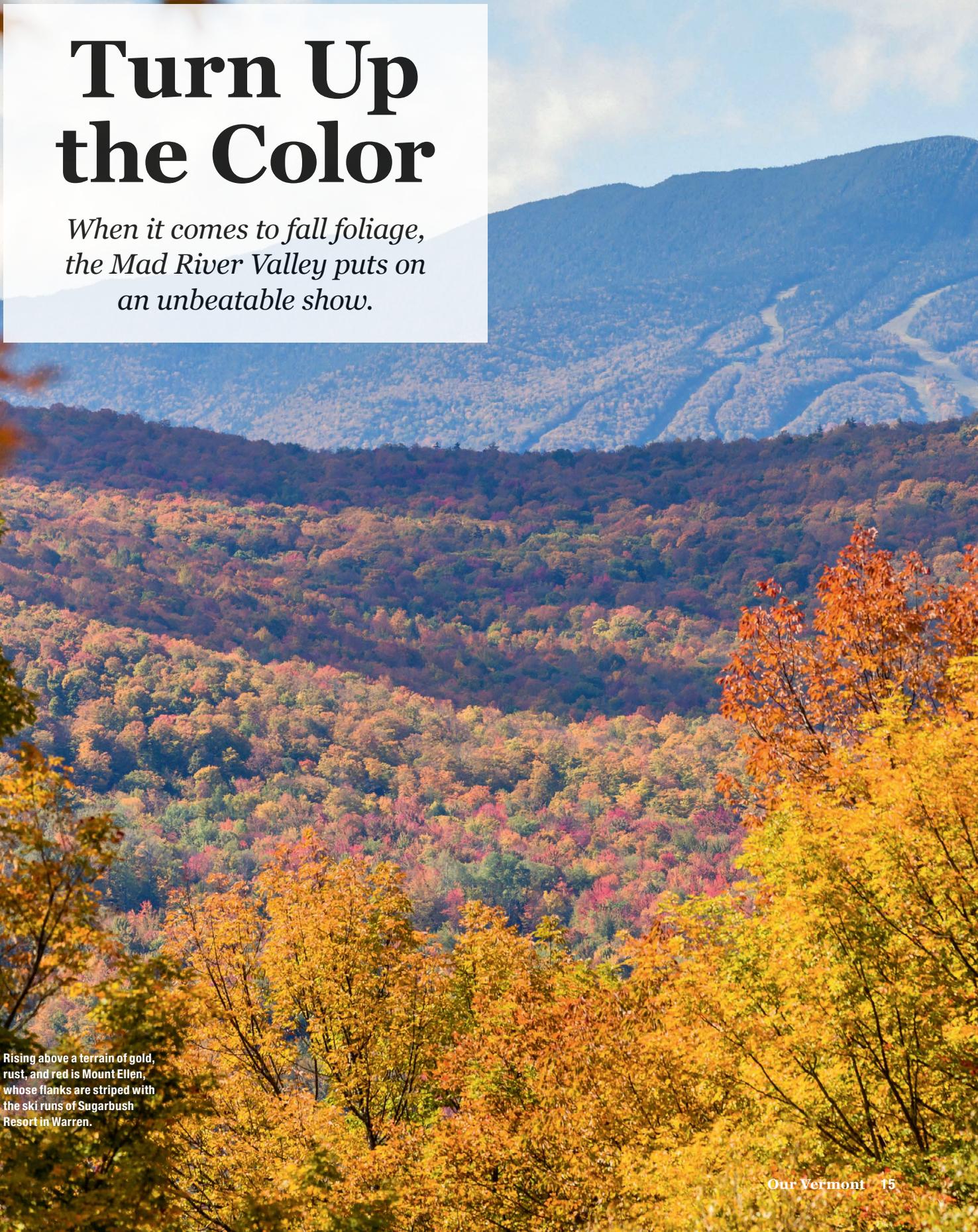
■ Woodman Hill Orchard, Vergennes

Vergennes: Like to keep things simple? This lovingly tended U-pick “micro-orchard” has fewer than a dozen varieties, but they're all delicious. woodmanhillorchard.com



Turn Up the Color

*When it comes to fall foliage,
the Mad River Valley puts on
an unbeatable show.*



OLIVER PARINI

Rising above a terrain of gold, rust, and red is Mount Ellen, whose flanks are striped with the ski runs of Sugarbush Resort in Warren.



The Mad River is a rogue waterway, running north. It courses up from Granville Notch, deep in the Green Mountains, and tumbles through a picturesque valley dotted with villages, red barns, and church steeples, until it finishes just north of Montpelier, with an exhale into the Winooski River.

Along the way, it carves its initials into the land, with swimming holes and fishing nooks. Trails hug it. Covered bridges leap over it in Waitsfield and Warren. The river bestows its name and its identity on this 144-square-mile watershed: the Mad River Valley, a tree-studded haven where you'll find a handful of towns and two major ski resorts.

And while it's not exactly a travel secret, it can

The Mad River pours through a series of small plunges that make up Warren Falls, a popular local swimming hole.

feel that way when you roam around the valley on the cusp of a spectacular autumn weekend. The mountains are flaming with color. The river is lit with sparks of red and yellow. Farms are edged in every shade of orange. When people imagine fall in Vermont, I think, this is what they see.

On my own visit to the Mad River Valley, I found it so easy to be beguiled by this river. It's accessible, and it is beloved. In the center of Waitsfield, a massive sandbar bulges into the water, forming a natural beach surrounded by the river. It's the perfect place to lounge, read, admire the covered bridge. I dangle my feet and gaze at the curves in the river, an invitation to 21st-century minds to let go of the clutter and simply look at the water, look at the leaves, be simple. Also, **the Sweet Spot** is very handy. If you require caffeinated



beverages, a pretty garden overlooking the water, and chunky apple handmade pies, its proximity to the sandbar will make you happy.

Waitsfield has a population (about 1,720) that hovers close to its inception date (1782). The downtown's collection of shops and eateries is anchored by a pretty covered bridge, but just beyond the center, the town catches its second wind, with old farm buildings converted to businesses, and a couple of small-scale shopping centers. These are home to creative endeavors like **the Mad Taco**, **the Tempest Book Shop**, and **the Mad River Taste Place**, where you can learn about Vermont makers, and sample their artisanal cheese, bread, syrups, and chocolate.

When it's time to stretch my legs, I hit the nearby boardwalk outside **Lawson's Finest Liquids**, a microbrewery housed in a magnificent post-and-beam building, for a semicurated walk through the wetlands that fill with puddles when storm clouds over the



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Pitcher Inn puts out the welcome mat in downtown Warren; the Sweet Spot in Waitsfield lives up to its name with its sugary treats, including this trio of chocolate, carrot, and coconut mini cakes; the sight of Icelandic sheep greets visitors to Knoll Farm in Fayston.



Destinations



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Kicking back at the taproom at Lawson's Finest Liquids in Waitsfield; a glider from Sugarbush Soaring floats above the treetops; Waitsfield's Artisans' Gallery, which showcases the wares of 140-plus Vermonters.

mountains open up and drench the land—which is exactly what will happen later today.

Luckily, I'm staying at **the Pitcher Inn**, in the heart of minuscule Warren Village. Staying at this understated Relais & Châteaux retreat is the equivalent of diving under a Vermont Flannel blanket (which incidentally shows up for my in-room picnic, complete with charcuterie, in front of a crackling fire). As the skies open and the rain pours down, I'm happily holed up in the Mountain Room, paneled with sheets of rock and set inside a replica of a fire tower. That night, a chocolate cookie of rugged mountain density and proportion will appear at my bedside.

Across the street from the inn, **the Warren Store**, a former stagecoach stop, affords a ringside seat on the river. At first glance, it's a small general store that's "Almost World Famous," jokes the sign. Dig deeper. You'll encounter fresh-baked bread, a full-blown deli, cookies and tarts, and provisions from homemade granola to pickles. That's just the downstairs. Go

upstairs, and you'll find a deluge of clothing, home goods, and fine kids' stuff.

The rainstorm came the same day I was booked to see foliage while ambling through the landscape on the back of an Icelandic horse. Tucked away in the town of Fayston, at the northern end of Waitsfield, is the **Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm**. I'd visited earlier and met owner Karen Winhold, who has led trail rides here for more than three decades. Icelandic horses,



Strolling through the Waitsfield Farmers' Market, a regional highlight that runs from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays from May to October.

bred by the Vikings to negotiate challenging terrain, are known for their smooth gait and cheerful temperament. More important, they are said to be patient with beginners. I had read that riding an Icelandic horse can feel almost like gliding. But the fierce rains have come between us, and I'll have to wait for another day.

Before I leave the valley, I catch the tail end of the **Saturday Waitsfield Farmers' Market**. This one's special—a good farmers' market is a barometer of community vibrancy, and today the band is rocking out while a toddler dressed like Snow White dances along. It's a happy tent village replete with ancient grains, Taiwanese noodles, Gizmo's pickles, leather belts, and a bounty of cheeses, spread out over the Mad River Green, encircled by the autumn colors that have been my constant companions.

But I'm still a bit hungry, so I'll make one last stop, a short dash away, at the original home of **American Flatbread**, on the Lareau Farm property. George Schenk opened his foodie mecca in 1985, and the feel-good vibe is baked into its bones. A hulking earthen oven sits center stage, open-mouthed, waiting for flatbread pizzas loaded with fresh ingredients that burst with flavor. Mine will be curried cauliflower with turmeric potatoes; I watch it go into the oven, five searing minutes and it's done. Parents guide their kids closer to watch.

Van Morrison's "Dancing in the Moonlight" is playing as I slide out into the night, filled with honest food and the best of this Mad River Valley. It's dark, the colors are asleep, but the feeling, in Van's words, is warm and bright.
—Annie Graves

Exploring the Mad River Valley

■ EAT & DRINK

American Flatbread: Original home of the beloved pizza, fired in an earthen oven. americanflatbread.com

The Big Picture: Movies and maple donuts, a biergarten, and farm-to-table sandwiches. bigpicturetheater.info

Lawson's Finest Liquids: Fresh microbrews in a majestic post-and-beam taproom. lawsonsfinest.com

Mad River Taste Place: A showcase of local food with tastings and learning sessions. madrivertaste.com

The Mad Taco: Grab a spot near the paper towels, with a view of the smoker, and roll up your sleeves for a braised-pork feast. themadtaco.com

The Sweet Spot: Dessert on the river and Awake Coffee, handcrafted in Waitsfield. thesweetspotvermont.com

■ SHOP

Artisans' Gallery: Offering the work of 145 Vermont artists, including Abby Dreyer's hand-built ceramic birdhouses and Christine Schultz's brighter-than-life canvases. vtartisansgallery.com

Mad River Glass: Cairns in glass, colors that rival foliage—these and much more are on display in David and Melanie Leppla's dazzling gallery. madriverglassgallery.com

Reign Vermont: At her workshop Bridget LaMell makes indestructible handbags in fabrics that look like something Gustav Klimt dreamed up. reignvermont.com

Tempest Book Shop: Old and new tomes in what feels like a personal library. rickrayfield.org/tempest-book-shop

■ PLAY

Clearwater Sports: Founded in 1975, this outfitter offers kayak and canoe trips on the Winooski and Mad rivers, as well as river tubing under the Waitsfield covered bridge. clearwatersports.com

Knoll Farm: Stop by the farm stand or buy a day pass to picnic and wander the grounds of this c. 1804 family-owned organic farm. knollfarm.org

Mad River Glen & Sugarbush Resort: Ride a ski lift to the top for a panorama of color. madriverglen.com; sugarbush.com

Sugarbush Soaring: Take a glider ride above the Mad River Valley. sugarbushsoaring.com

Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm: These rugged horses give novice and experienced riders a new perspective on foliage. icelandichorses.com

Peak Adventures

Vermont day hikes that take you into the heart of autumn.



A sunset-painted view
from Owls Head in
Groton State Forest.

MICHAEL BLANCHETTE

All across Vermont, when fall reaches its crescendo it seems you can count on seeing gloriously colorful trees while just running errands around town. But at a time when being outdoors feels especially vital, look to your feet to carry you far away from the man-made world and into the natural one, where the colors are laid out in brilliant carpets and canopies. And while we've included some challenging day hikes in the following roundup of *Yankee* favorites, there are also easier routes with big scenic payoffs, ensuring you don't have to huff and puff to get your foliage fix. —*Ian Aldrich*

Bromley Mountain | Peru

Immerse yourself in a broad palette of autumn colors on this moderate out-and-back trek along a portion of the fabled Long Trail/Appalachian Trail to the top of Bromley Mountain. Much of the route is spent in a hardwood forest with brooks, bridges, and boulders along the way, eventually leading out onto a ski slope and the final push to the 3,260-foot summit. Open and grassy, it's a great place for an autumn picnic, as you take in a sweeping Green Mountain National Forest panorama and fuel up for the hike back. *Distance: 6 miles; fs.usda.gov*

Butler Lodge Trail | Underhill

There are many ways to climb Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak. For hikers who love life above the tree line, one of the lesser-traveled paths offers a straight shot to the summit ridge. From the trailhead on Stevensville Road in Underhill, Butler Lodge Trail warms up with a half mile through hardwood foliage color before shooting steeply uphill. After 1.8 miles and 1,600 vertical feet, the trail arrives at its namesake structure, Butler Lodge, where you can rest before heading back down, or take some time to explore the krummholz (gnarled, windblown trees) via the Wampahoofus Trail. *Distance: About 4 miles; vtstateparks.com*

Camel's Hump | Huntington

Named for the distinctive mass of rock atop its 4,083-foot peak, Camel's Hump may not be the most-climbed mountain in Vermont (that would be Mount Mansfield), but its views take back seat to none. Plus, its setting offers a genuine escape from civilization, as Camel's

Hump State Park is completely undeveloped, with no visitor facilities. Bring water and plenty of snacks, because this one will make you sweat—just as surely as the autumn scenery will make you swoon. *Distance: About 6 miles via the Forest City, Long, and Burrows trails; vtstateparks.com*

Falls of Lana/Rattlesnake Cliffs | Salisbury

This Champlain Valley foliage loop starts off with a splash at the beautiful Falls of Lana, a series of horsetails and cascades that drops roughly 100 feet total through a forest gorge. From there, foliage resumes the starring role on a hike into the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area on the way to Rattlesnake Cliffs (aka Rattlesnake Point), which perch high above the crystal-



Camel's Hump

clear waters of Lake Dunmore and give an unforgettable sunset view toward the distant Adirondacks. *Distance: 4.6 miles; moosalamoo.org*

Harmon Hill | Bennington

This section of the Appalachian/Long Trail begins with a steep climb using rock staircases and switchbacks through a forest filled with maples, birches, and other autumn show-offs, but it soon eases off. At the summit of Harmon Hill, prescribed burns by the U.S. Forest Service fire crews have maintained the historic opening here and its vistas of the surrounding landscape. Look to the west and spy the town of Bennington, as well as Mount Anthony and other hills and mountains of the Taconic Range. *Distance: 3.6 miles; fs.usda.gov*

Hunger Mountain/White Rock Mountain | Middlesex

Located at the southern end of the Worcester Range, Hunger and White Rock are accessible day-hiking destinations that still embody the feeling of remote beauty that befits Vermont's last undeveloped mountain range. A rugged loop hike provides twice the bang for the buck by connecting these two scenic peaks, both featuring wide-open summits above slopes of mixed hardwood forest. From Hunger's south summit, you can look west across the valley to take in almost every peak in the Green Mountain Range, and Lake Champlain beyond. *Distance: 6.4 miles via the Middlesex, Waterbury, and White Rock trails; fpr.vermont.gov*



A view over Woodstock from Mount Tom.

Mount Ascutney | Windsor

In 1825, one of the country's first organized hiking trails was blazed through Ascutney's forests. In the nearly two centuries since, it's been one of the state's go-to foliage adventures. Vermont's past is part of the journey as hikers pass by former quarries, homesteads, and remnants of former logging operations—not to mention big-time scenic lookouts—before ascending the summit (and optional observation tower) for sweeping views of the Connecticut River Valley that extend deep into New Hampshire. *Distance: About 7 miles via the Brownsville and Windsor trails; vtstateparks.com*

Mount Hor | Sutton

Mount Hor rises above the southwestern shores of Lake Willoughby, the loveliest lake in the state. And while its twin across the lake, Mount Pisgah, may have better views, the easier route to Hor's summit (up the Herbert Hawkes Trail) delivers maximum water-and-color spectacle for minimal effort. *Distance: 2.8 miles; vtstateparks.com*

Mount Tom | Woodstock

Just minutes from the downtown center of one of New England's most popular autumn towns, Mount Tom provides big views without a big trek. The switchback trails soften the actual climb, while the postcard-perfect views of Woodstock, Billings Farm, and the

Ottauquechee River make the ideal backdrop for an autumn picnic. If you've got the time and stamina, be sure to explore the surrounding 555-acre Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park. *Distance: 2 miles; nps.gov/mabi*

Owls Head | Marshfield

The centerpiece of Groton State Forest, one of Vermont's largest state-owned conservation properties, this popular hike leads visitors through stunning stretches of birch and maple forest, past eye-catching wetlands, and through a section of evergreens before the final rocky ascent. Look west for stunning views of nearby Kettle Pond and Green Mountain peaks just beyond. *Distance: 3.2 miles; vtstateparks.com*

Snake Mountain | Addison & Weybridge

If you're short on time and energy, you can't beat Snake, a 1,287-foot outlier of the Taconic range that rises abruptly from the surrounding terrain to offer the state's finest panorama of dairy lands, Lake Champlain, and the Adirondacks. Park in the lot on Mountain Road and walk less than a quarter mile to the well-marked trailhead on the left. Follow the Old Carriage Road 1.5 miles to the top, where you'll find a cement platform from an old structure now long gone; today it's a great spot for autumn picnics. *Distance: 5.4 miles; vtfishandwildlife.com*



Where Curiosity Lives

Celebrating 45 years of wonder at the Montshire Museum of Science.

Toward the center of the main floor sits a concave table roiling with fog. I can't resist the urge to try (for the third time this morning) to scoop some into my hand. As the cloud passes through my fingers, I'm startled by the shriek of a young boy somewhere behind me. "I'm doing science!" he proclaims. I turn, but I can't pick the boy out. He might be among the group oohing and ahhing over the bubbles exhibit. Maybe he's one of the newly minted inventors in the tinkering labs. Regardless who he was, his sentiment summed up the day perfectly: Not only were

Though visiting the Montshire Museum of Science (top right) this fall will require masking up, little else has changed about the fun that this Norwich standby provides youngsters, like the ones shown here from a few years ago.

we all "doing science," but if smiles and laughs were any indication, we were thoroughly enjoying it.

And that's the magic at the core of the Montshire. For 45 years, this too-

often-overlooked gem of a museum has been proving that education can—and should—be fun. The "Wonder Woods" exhibit, added in 2020, is aimed at the museum's youngest visitors (even infants!). And this

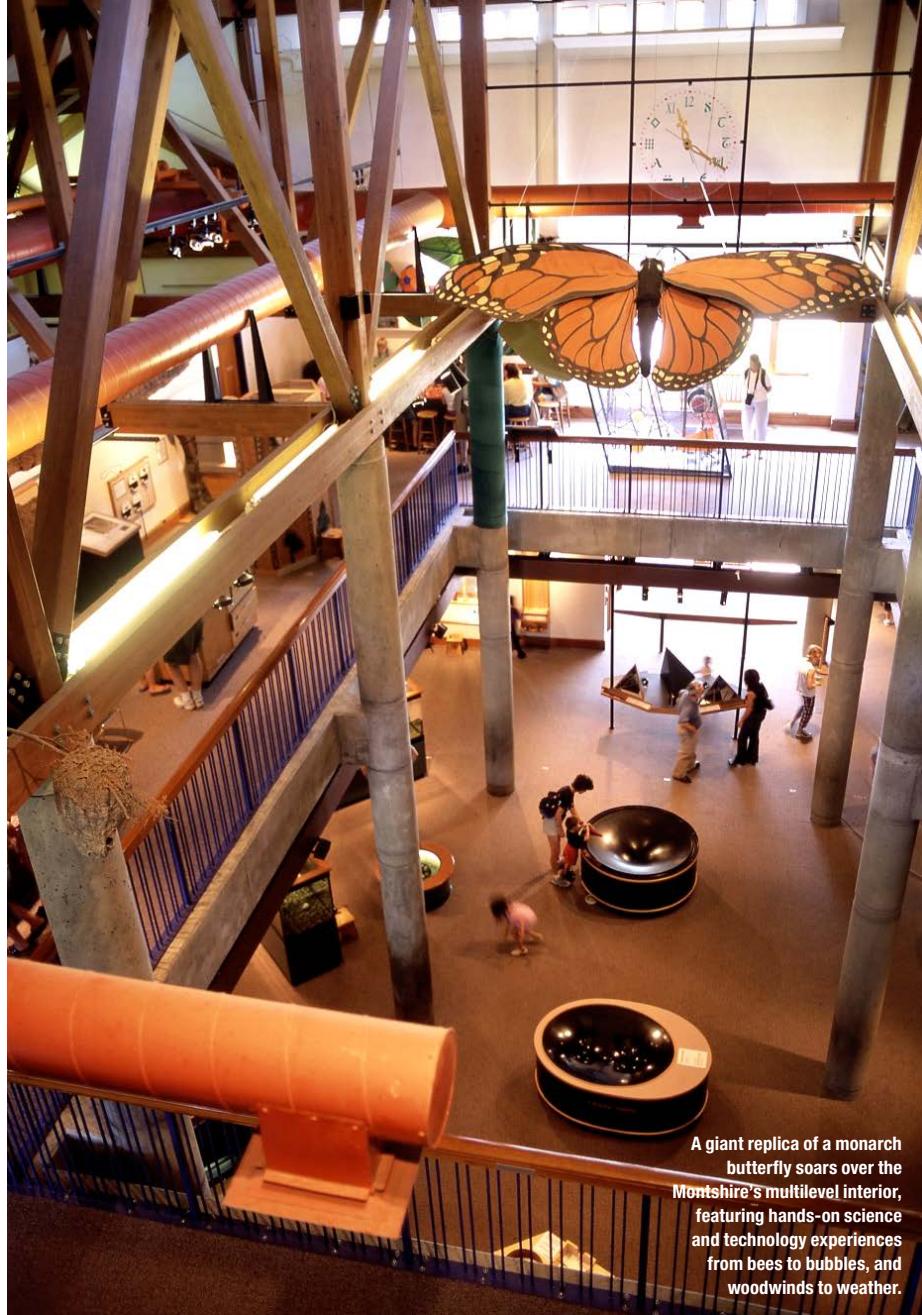
year's "Summer of Dinosaurs" includes a 23-foot-long allosaurus and a "Tiny Titans" exhibit focused on dinosaur eggs and babies (hurry to catch it before it closes September 26).

In the mid-1970s Dartmouth College shuttered its natural history museum, sparking a process that would culminate in the creation of the Montshire, named to reflect the Vermont/New Hampshire state line, where it lives. The new museum opened in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1976, in a building that had previously housed a bowling alley. After about 10 years it moved to its current location, just across the Connecticut River in Norwich.

Exhibits from Dartmouth's museum formed the early core of the Montshire, and some of those treasures remain here on display. The museum's trustees and directors, with a team of some 30 employees and 100 dedicated volunteers, have worked hard to establish the Montshire as one of the country's best independent science centers. Above all else, the museum celebrates inquisitiveness. No matter what you love, there's a fascinating science behind it. And the Montshire Museum will prove it to you.

A quick stroll through the museum's interactive exhibits highlights the omnipresence of science in our lives: from light and prisms and how we see, to the how and why of soap bubbles. There's an aquarium, as well as x-ray exhibits and displays that'll take you inside beehives and anthills. You'll learn about fog and moose and reptiles and more. Even the elevator and the on-site exhibit workshop are open-concept, so that you can see how the machinery works and how a display comes together. The museum store is loaded with smart toys and fun experiments to take home too.

And for those days when it's just too nice to stay inside, the Montshire, which also serves as the visitor center for the Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge, offers 100 waterfront acres featuring multiple trails, a woodland garden, a science park, and even a



A giant replica of a monarch butterfly soars over the Montshire's multilevel interior, featuring hands-on science and technology experiences from bees to bubbles, and woodwinds to weather.

musical fence that's played by the wind. The Play Grove, a whimsical outdoor play area, debuted last year.

More than 100,000 young people visit each year, but it would be a mistake to write off the Montshire as just a children's museum. The line between fun and learning is erased here. This is the kind of get-your-hands-dirty science we shouldn't ever outgrow. —*Joe Bills*

IF YOU GO

■ The **Montshire Museum of Science** in Norwich is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. seven days a week; admission is \$18 adults/\$15 kids/free ages 2 and younger. After Labor Day, it is closed Tuesdays; admission is \$17 adults/\$14 kids. To ensure a safe and fun visit for all, masks are required at this time. For more information, go to montshire.org.

Out & About

As fall gets into full swing, we round up Vermont events that are worth checking out.

AUG. 27–SEP. 5

Essex Junction

Champlain Valley Fair

Vermont's largest annual event promises loads of classic fair fun with 4-H events, horse pulls, amusement rides, and the judging of everything from home-brewed beer to Christmas trees. champlainvalleyfair.org

SEP. 3–5

Quechee

Hot Air Balloon Festival

Vibrant hot air balloons take to the skies over Quechee and the Upper Valley during the longest-running festival of its kind in New England. Enjoy live music, craft vendors, food, balloon rides, and more. quecheeballoonfestival.com

SEP. 4

Bennington

Garlictown, USA

Get your fill of garlicky goodness—in everything

from pickles to fudge to cheese curds—at this community celebration that also sees sidewalk sales, live music, and family activities. bennington.com/garlictown

SEP. 5

Randolph

New World Festival

A tribute to the vitality of small-town Vermont and the Celtic/French-Canadian heritage of northern New England, the New World Festival is a full-day event that brings downtown Randolph alive with music, storytelling, and dance. newworldfestival.com

SEP. 11

Online

Fall Craft Vermont Show

The premier juried show of fine Vermont goes online this year for an interactive event that lets you shop, see live demonstrations and video chats, and win prizes. vermonthandcrafters.com

SEP. 10–11

Shelburne

Grace Potter

As part of this year's Ben & Jerry's Concerts on the Green series, acclaimed Vermont singer-songwriter Grace Potter performs two concerts with her band on the grounds of the Shelburne



Museum, marking her first time back at the venue since making her landmark debut there in 2006. shelburnemuseum.org

SEP. 10–12

Burlington

South End Art Hop

Visit the city's original arts district and discover a plethora of works of art as well as outdoor sculpture, performance art, workshops, kids' activities, and food vendors. seaba.com

SEP. 25

Burke

Fall Foliage Festival

The Northeast Kingdom is a magnet for foliage fun, with a number of towns holding standout autumn events. Burke is a classic example, offering horse-



**Stein of the times:
Oktoberfest returns
to Mount Snow.**



drawn wagon rides, rubber ducky races, a wildlife encounter show, barbecue, live entertainment, a parade—and the list goes on. burkevermont.com

OCT. 1–2

Weston

Weston Antiques Show

A benefit for historic-preservation projects in the heart of Weston, this long-running event at the Weston Playhouse draws dealers from across the nation to present Americana, silver, furnishings, and other treasures. Note: A preview gala will be held Sep. 30. westonantiquesshow.org

OCT. 1–3

Manchester

Fall Art & Craft Festival

At Manchester's annual kickoff to fall, the Riley Rink at Hunter Park plays host to 100-plus exhibitors selling everything from pottery and jewelry to gourmet food and spirits. craftproducers.com

OCT. 2

St. Johnsbury

Dog Mountain 20th Anniversary Dog Party

Four-legged friends and their two-legged companions are invited to have a romping good time at Dog Mountain, with live music, food trucks, vendors, dog contests, door prizes, and more. dogmt.com



Find fun for all ages at the Champlain Valley Fair.

Destinations

OCT. 2–3

Tunbridge

Vermont Sheep & Wool Festival

Small farms and natural fibers are the focus as more than 70 vendors from around the state offer fleece and yarn, fiber crafts, and other homespun wares. Plus: herding and shearing demonstrations. vtsheepandwoolfest.com

OCT. 8–17

Burlington

Vermont International Film Festival

The Queen City lights up with the best independent feature films and shorts from around the world, in a festival held in person with online programming as well. Look for panel talks, Q&As, and special events. vtiff.org



OCT. 9

West Dover

Oktoberfest

German culture comes to a head at Mount Snow, where attractions include not only fine brews and food, but also a keg toss, yodeling contest, and oompah music. mountsnow.com

OCT. 9–10

Mount Holly

Cider Days

Come join in on a local tradition as the townspeople gather on the village green for two days of apple cider pressing, apple pie eating, and local artisans and crafters selling their wares. Don't miss the cheese samples from Crowley Cheese, which has been making cheese here for over a century. mhcavt.org



Even the animals get into the spirit at Billings Farm's Family Halloween.

OCT. 9–11

Stratton

HarvestFest

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

OCT. 14–17

Brattleboro

Brattleboro Literary Festival

Making a big 20th-anniversary splash this year, this festival is beloved by bibliophiles for bringing favorite authors to town—including winners of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award—for readings, panels, and other bookish events. brattleborolitfest.org

OCT. 23

Wardsboro

Gilfeather Turnip Festival & Contest

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, and snag a T-shirt to show your

tuber pride. friendsofwardsborolibrary.org

OCT. 24

Woodstock

Family Halloween

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

NOV. 26–28

Putney

Putney Craft Tour

Take part in the oldest continuous craft tour in

the country as you make your way to the studios of more than 20 of the area's most talented artists: blacksmiths, glass blowers, potters, jewelers, weavers, woodworkers, and more. putneycrafts.com

NOV. 26–JAN. 2

Shelburne

Winter Lights

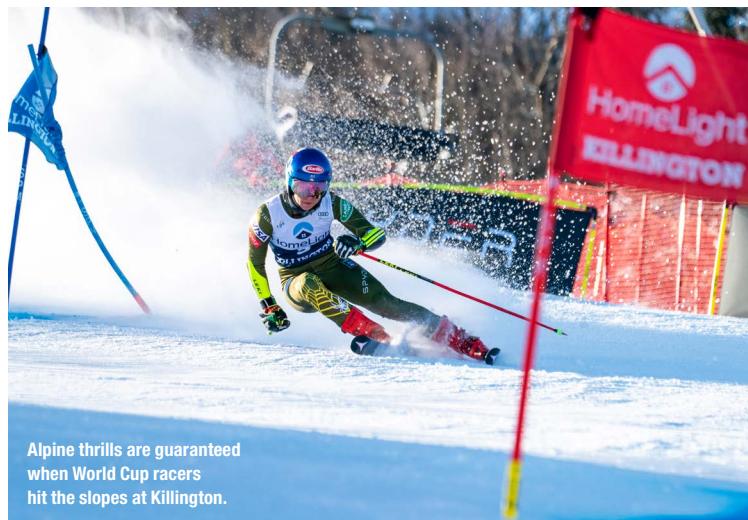
Vermont's holiday landscape is about to get a whole lot brighter, as the Shelburne Museum debuts its first-ever Winter Lights event. Come see the museum's buildings and campus bedecked in colorful, twinkling holiday lights, including the iconic steamship *Ticonderoga*. shelburnemuseum.org

NOV. 27–28

Killington

Audi FIS Ski World Cup

Come celebrate the history and passion for alpine ski racing in the Northeast. In addition to the fastest female ski racers in slalom and giant slalom battling for the top prize during the HomeLight Killington Cup, the weekend is packed full of entertainment including live music, fireworks, parades, movie screenings, and the Friday night bib draw featuring top athletes. killington.com



MANX_IN_THE_WORLD/ISTOCK (FILM); COURTESY OF BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM (HALLOWEEN); COURTESY OF KILLINGTON (SKIING)

Driving with the Leaf Spotter

For this state forestry pro, autumn brings a colorful side gig.



COREY HENDRICKSON

Mike Snyder, photographed early on in his tenure as the state's official "Foliage Forecaster," a position he's held for nearly a decade—along with serving as the state's forest commissioner since 2010.

In late summer 2012, Vermont's tourism department announced that Mike Snyder, commissioner of the Forests, Parks & Recreation department, had been named the state's first official "Foliage Forecaster." Vermont is likely the only state that could justify such a position. Its landscape, 76 percent forested, carries the country's highest proportion of the vibrantly colored but wildly variable sugar maple. Visitors spend some \$460 million during the fleeting weeks of foliage each fall. The department's website had also introduced a foliage-tracking map to help travelers plan their trips along with the changing color. When I first saw it, I imagined aerial photography and remote sensors sending real-time data to the computers that generate the map's bands: 20 percent color here, peak color there, just past peak above that...

So I called Snyder and asked him how the forecasts and the map come together. I was interested not only in what provided the foliage map its data but in what gave the state its color, too. He suggested we go for a drive.

Route 25 in east-central Vermont lifts from the Connecticut River near Bradford and follows the Waits River Valley northwest about halfway toward Montpelier. The route skirts a geologic bedrock zone called the Waits River Formation, which dominates the eastern half of the state, and whose calcium-rich soils are generally sweeter and more productive than all of New Hampshire's and most of the rest of Vermont's.

"That's one reason the color is so good here," Snyder explained. "The calcareous soils produce bigger, more vigorous, faster-growing trees than just about



anywhere else in the state." Out the window we could see the harbingers of the coming foliage season along the roadside: crimson woodbine, blazing sumac, purple asters, goldenrod. The first yellows of the season were emerging in the hillside canopies.

We passed a few small hardscrabble dairy farms still holding on, and Snyder talked about a different kind of bedrock when he said that he liked this area because it showed the transition from an old life to a new one.

We passed the little town-owned rope-tow ski area in East Corinth, and Snyder talked about the mix of species that gives the northern hardwood forest its

distinctive hues—especially sugar and red maple, but also yellow birch and American beech, with cherry, ash, oak, and locust behind those, and, "for contrast and texture," the evergreen hemlock, spruce, and pine—and how the changing climate was already changing the mix.

He pulled into Tillotson Trading, an antiques and salvage company, for a quick chat with owner Steve Tillotson. ("You'll love this place," Snyder told me. "There's that Vermont sense of frugality, and the opinions are free.") He had mentioned that trees' turning color—getting ready to drop their leaves to conserve energy over the long winter—is how they avoid stress, but also how they display stress.

In West Topsham we drove by a newly built commercial sugaring operation and, just beyond it, a wide log landing piled high with cordwood. He waved at the woodpile. "A third of Vermont kids go to schools



Combining input from Vermont's foresters with his own observations, Snyder puts together weekly foliage reports each fall for the state tourism office.



heated with wood, and many homes are still heated by some form of wood. We wouldn't be doing this tour if we didn't have that history."

Near the junction with U.S. Route 302, we swung past the forested wetlands at the headwaters of the Waits River, the nutrient-deprived swamp maples flaring brightly. We drove the long dirt road into Seyon Ranch State Park so that Snyder could touch base with the staff working at the lodge. He looked across Noyes Pond to the reddening slopes of Spruce Mountain and said, "Two days ago I would have called this 'pre-foliage,' but it's starting to come now. I'd say 5 percent color."

He fingered the leaf of a birch tree as he talked. "See the brown edges? *Septoria* fungus," he noted. "In 2011 we saw a lot more foliar disease because of the damp, humid spring—anthracnose and tar spots on the maples, especially. Those trees will recover. This year it's been drought and pear thrips—tiny insects no bigger than black specks, but they can absolutely defoliate a tree."

Along Route 232 in Groton, we passed a stream bed damaged by Tropical Storm Irene, and Snyder pointed out the closed-in, darker-green corridor we were driving through: "We're out of the Waits Formation now—colder, more acidic soils, a tougher environment, so more softwoods, more forestry history than agricultural from here all the way through the Northeast Kingdom."

And that's pretty much the way it went for the rest of the day: Snyder talking about people and the land as we

Off U.S. Route 302 in east-central Vermont, bands of autumn color shine through a light fall mist blanketing meadows and farms.

drove back into Groton State Forest and to Ricker Pond, then hiked up to a bigger landscape picture from Owls Head, where recent patch cuts showing state woodcock-management areas stood out like scars in the forested carpet. Back out 302 through Orange and around to Route 110 through Washington and Chelsea, past still-green tamarack swamps and sugar maple hillsides in full blush, past new horse farms and old dairies and cottage woodworking businesses.

I told Snyder about my image of aerial photography and remote sensors. "Well, you could call my truck 'Foliage Central,'" he replied. "During this whole drive I've been receiving inputs and cataloguing data. We have 12 county foresters doing the same thing. They submit reports to me twice a week during foliage season about what they're seeing on the ground, and what they're hearing from the landowners who are most connected to the land. I use my judgment to try and turn their reports into numbers. I guess as far as the forecasting goes, I'm proud to say that it still comes mostly from local knowledge." —Jim Collins

Editors' note: This story first appeared in Yankee magazine in 2013, but we're happy to report that Mike Snyder is still on the job and sharing his insights at vermontvacation.com/fall-foliage-report.



Easy Rider

There's no better way to start a day than by pedaling down one of Vermont's back roads.

In the warmer months, I like to ride my bicycle early in the mornings. I ride after coffee and chores but before breakfast, early enough that the day is not yet fully formed, late enough that I have a pretty good sense of what sort of day it's shaping up to be. Sometimes the clouds are parting and the sun is breaking through, and sometimes the clouds are closing and I can smell the approaching rain. Or, like this morning, the sky is clear and blue and clean and the air so still that not even the leaves ripple, and it feels as if the day is decided.

I like riding in the morning for lots of reasons. The first is strictly pragmatic, because I know that if I don't

ride early, I probably won't ride at all. The day will sweep me into its river of tasks, and by evening, when I might again be able to carve out some time, I'll simply be too tired. But I also like riding early in the morning because both the air and the light are softest then, because the birds are singing loudest then, because there's little traffic along the network of gravel roads I frequent, and because having ridden my bike, even if only for a short time, I know my day will be better for it. I like that it's a little chilly when I ride early in the day, which is true even in the height of summer, and especially true in fall. I generally don't ride when it's raining, though I've

ridden through my share of snow flurries. I've ridden on deeply frosted mornings when my first breaths sting in my chest, and the leaves that have fallen from the roadside maples crunch beneath my tires.

I like the sheer physicality of riding my bicycle. The pleasure of using my body is something I've inherited from my mother, who at 80 is still a voracious walker along the back roads near my childhood home, where my parents still live. It's not far from here—just over 20 miles—and on occasion I meet her there, and we walk together. I'm always amazed by how quickly she traverses those steep hills, carrying the walking stick that my son Fin carved for her nearly a decade ago. I can see how her hands have worn the top of it smooth from so many hours of use. If I'm to be entirely honest, the

Riding my bike brings me right up close to the sound of the mountain stream and the smell of fresh-spread manure and the warmth of early sun on my face.

stick looks perhaps a bit less sturdy than a son might hope for his 80-year-old mother to be relying on. But I also know that if I am 80 and one of my grandchildren has gifted me a walking stick he carved when he was 9 years old, I'm going to use the damn thing until every single last step is walked right out of me. I'm guessing my mother feels the same.

Another thing I like about riding my bike is that it brings me right up close to the world. It brings me right up close to the sound of the mountain stream and the smell of fresh-spread manure and the warmth of early sun on my face. It brings me right up close to the people who inhabit this land, the old men mowing their lawns, the young men out tinkering on motorcycles and four-wheelers, and the kids selling lemonade on the front lawn of a mobile home along a back road that can't see more than a dozen cars pass each day. I stop and buy a cup for 50 cents and drink it right there. It's not very good lemonade (powdered, I'm sure, and a little on the warm side), but I pretend otherwise, and they look very pleased.

I like riding my bike because of interactions like these, and the one I had just the other morning. I was pedaling the final pitch of the long climb to the height of the mountain road, my legs burning with the effort, my mind already on the long, sweeping descent that lay just over the crest, when I was passed by a man on a motorcycle. I know the road well, and I flew down the other side just as I'd anticipated, not needing to pedal at all, nor brake, just letting gravity do its thing.

And it was in this manner that I soon caught up to the motorcyclist, who was descending slowly on the loose gravel. I hesitated for only a moment before swinging out and around him, and as I passed I yelled, "Good morning!" He looked over and grinned hugely, and I could see that he was missing a fair number of teeth. Then we hit the flats, where he passed me again and we waved.

There are other interactions, too, like the time I came upon a blue jay that had been hit by a car and was flopping desperately in the dust of the road's shoulder. I stopped, preparing to do what I thought right, though I didn't want to do it. Not at all. But when I wrapped my hands around the bird, it soon quieted, and nothing seemed broken beyond repair, so after a few moments

I opened my palms and the jay flew straight as an arrow into the sky.

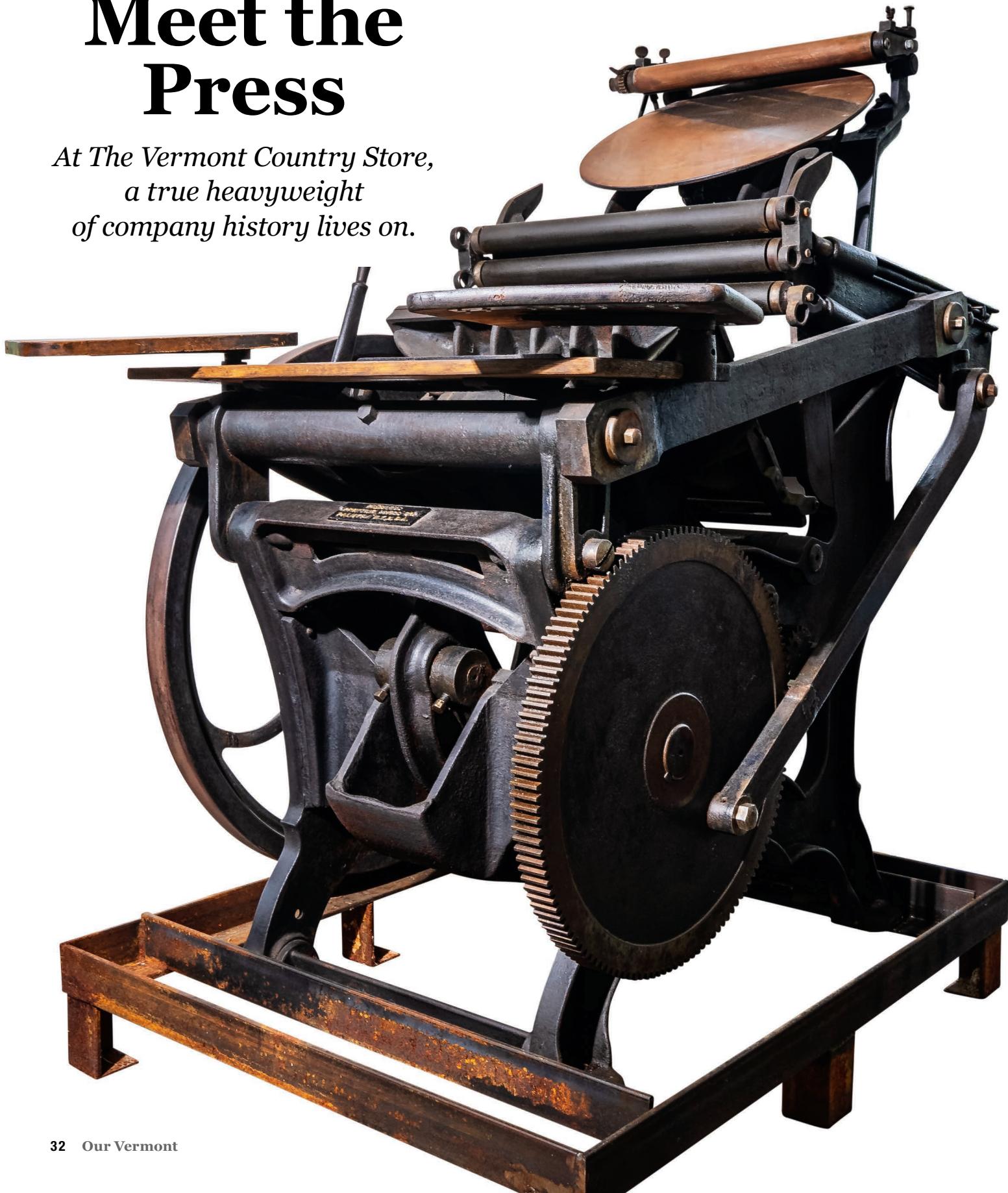
I pass a lot of trash on my bike. And masks. I pass a lot of masks these days, always those blue disposable ones you buy

in boxes of 50 or 100. Occasionally I find something useful, like the big outdoor propane burner that'd been left in a free pile. I'd long had a vague idea that one of those would prove useful, so I hung it over one end of my handlebars and awkwardly pedaled the remaining seven miles home, feeling a little silly but pleased with myself. This was over a year ago, and I haven't used it even once. Yet. On the other hand, I've hauled home at least three pairs of free shoes in the past year, including the ones I'm wearing as I write these very words. I found a five-dollar bill, too, which for no good reason I can't quite bring myself to spend.

I notice more when I ride my bike. I notice how people live, some in wealth and some in poverty, and many more in the indeterminate space between the two. I notice how in rural Vermont, some of the best land and the most-coveted views still belong to those with evidently the least money, the ones whose families have managed to hold on to the land for generations, ever since the land sold for the sort of money a farmer could afford, and ever since the original farm itself was viable. I notice how many barns there are, and how most of them have fallen into disrepair and even collapse. I notice that people are generally (though not always) considerate when they pass me in their cars and trucks; they give me a wide berth and go slow so they don't kick up too much dust. I wave and they wave back, each of us traveling at our own speed, and I know they'll get wherever they're going faster than me. But I also know I'll get where I'm going soon enough. —*Ben Hewitt*

Meet the Press

*At The Vermont Country Store,
a true heavyweight
of company history lives on.*



If you were in the market for a printing press toward the end of the 19th century, your eye may have been caught by an ad from the Peerless Printing Press Company in Palmyra, New York. Headlined “That Smooth, Easy-Running ‘Peerless,’” it gets right to the point: *Constructed substantially. Built to stand the test. High speed—no noise—no jar—is easily operated. Remember we have been building these machines for over 30 years, and each year have improved its mechanism.*

Straightforward and puffery-free, it’s the sort of sales pitch that would have appealed to the late Vrest Orton, founder of The Vermont Country Store, who learned the importance of less-is-more salesmanship from none other than Leon Leonwood Bean. In a 1979 radio interview, Vrest recalled the legendary Maine retailer telling him early on, “When you write something in your catalog, don’t say the merchandise is better than it is. It’s much better for the customer who gets the merchandise to say it’s better than you said it was.”

Vrest Orton was born in 1897, so he probably never saw the Peerless ad. And by the time he embarked on his retail career in the 1940s, a Peerless press was a bona fide antique. But it’s fitting that this machine, its virtues plainly extolled, would churn out the first editions of Vrest’s catalog—a publication whose success selling products that were, above all else, useful would help turn The Vermont Country Store into the multimillion-dollar family company it is today, 75 years onward.

A visit to The Vermont Country Store headquarters in Manchester feels a little like stepping into a local historical society, albeit a particularly well-funded one. The lobby walls are filled with museum-quality panels of vintage photos and Orton family lore. In an alcove next to the company archives is a display of technological artifacts ranging from Vrest’s 1930s Smith & Corona to his son Lyman’s 15-pound “laptop,” a 1989 Compaq. And at the foot of the main staircase sits the Peerless press, several hundred pounds of weathered cast iron, next to its similarly hulking paper cutter.

Now 80, Lyman Orton is the patriarch of the company’s family storekeepers, a group rounded out by sons Cabot, Gardner, and Eliot. Lyman was only 4 when his father, spurred by memories of the country store run by his own father and grandfather in North Calais, Vermont, began laying the groundwork for The Vermont Country Store with his wife, Mildred, in 1945. In Weston, where the family lived, there was a suitable building downtown (by coincidence,



PREVIOUS PAGE: The 19th-century Peerless printing press that cranked out The Vermont Country Store's first catalogs.

ABOVE: Company founder Vrest Orton with the Peerless in his Weston print shop, c. 1936.

BETWEEN: The cover of the first-ever Vermont Country Store catalog, published in 1945.

a virtual twin of the North Calais store), but because of war shortages, merchandise for stocking the shelves was hard to come by. So they began with mail-order.

“My father had started a print shop called the Countryman Press in 1935, so he already had the printing

presses, and he knew how to write and put out a catalog,” Lyman says. “So he gets some local products together, calls them ‘36 items you can buy now,’ and prints a little catalog to send to mainly people on the family Christmas card list.”

Enlivened by Vrest’s conversational descriptions (*The flavor is the best I have ever tasted, and I am a crabby fellow who insists on something pretty special in popcorn*), the medley of local crafts, rurally themed books, and whole-grain foodstuffs drew plenty of orders. “But my parents also got letters from people saying, ‘We’re coming up next summer and we want to see the store,’ ” Lyman says, and laughs. “There was no store yet!”

The Ortons had rectified that by 1946, though, when they opened The Vermont Country Store in the heart of Weston. Lyman remembers learning how to sweep the wooden floor with sawdust and kerosene, and how to open a barrel of pickles; at 6, he was already stamping endorsements on mail-order checks.

As a kid he even helped with the catalog, hand-feeding the paper into the press alongside his father in





FROM LEFT: The original store in Weston, which Vrest and Mildred Orton hurried to open in 1946 on the heels of the catalog's success; today, the same store still welcomes visitors with an air of timelessness.

the garage print shop. “Even to this day, when I pick up a ream of paper for the copy machine, I automatically flex it to break the pages apart, like this.” Lyman gives a vigorous twist to an invisible slab of paper, recalling the way his father would break reams of newsprint.

By the 1950s, though, The Vermont Country Store catalog had grown in size and circulation to the point that the Peerless was retired in favor of newer technology. Along with its paper cutter, the press was offloaded to a professor in neighboring South Londonderry, and it would not be seen by the Orton family again for more than half a century.

Lyman Orton is fond of saying that The Vermont Country Store today is actually three stores: online, wooden, and paper. Yet for all the convenience of the website and the yesteryear coziness of the physical shops in Weston and Rockingham, the catalog endures by offering both those lures at once. It’s a trip back in time—through seersucker and oilcloth, taffy and Teaberry gum, toiletries and remedies—that can be taken from a favorite armchair, unhurried.

“People will even bring their catalogs into the store, with pages folded down on what they like,” Lyman says. “They tell us, ‘My gosh, I’ve

been getting the catalog for 20 years!’”

In millions of households, The Vermont Country Store catalog is an old friend—which means the Ortons, who frequently appear in its pages, are too. “Whenever I’m traveling and someone asks what I do, when I say I own the Vermont Country Store it’s amazing how people will take me into their closest confidence,” Lyman says. “They feel like they know me, which is terrific.”

That same feeling of goodwill toward Vermont’s famous family of storekeepers, in fact, may have led to the return of the prodigal Peerless. Or it could have been plain old small-town connections. Lyman isn’t sure. But he does know that about 15 years ago, someone called to say that Vrest’s old printing equipment was down in his cellar, and the Ortons were welcome to it.

Turns out, the Peerless hadn’t ever moved from the professor’s house in South Londonderry. It had only waited to be rediscovered. And after being scrubbed of decades of grime and rust, the machine that once launched a tiny mail-order business from a garage took its place of honor at The Vermont Country Store’s headquarters—in its own way, a testament to the power of bringing back things remembered. —Jenn Johnson



Lyman Orton succeeded his father as head of The Vermont Country Store in 1975, but he says Vrest never officially retired, and continued helping out with the company’s catalogs as well as greeting customers at the Weston store.



Made in Vermont

Conversations with Clay

*Bridgewater artisan Miranda Thomas crafts pottery
that holds a world of expression.*



Miranda Thomas has a voice made for a good chat. There's a complexity to it, with vowels and inflections shaped by both her British parentage and her years spent living in Australia, England, Italy, and America. There's a warmth, as well, that flows from her love of bringing things into the world, be they children or gardens or works of art. It's a voice of someone you could imagine welcoming into your home.

Her pottery has a voice, too. From the blue and white of the Netherlands to the lustrous gold of the Middle East, it carries the accent of many lands; at the same time, its techniques speak of centuries of human culture. But to really hear what it has to say, Thomas believes, you need to touch it.

"Imagine you have a mug, and you're putting your lips to it or your hands to it or just sort of resting it against your cheek," she says. "And if it's been made by hand, you can feel those very slight variances in the surface. It's just as if you're having a conversation with it. It's another form of your senses being coaxed alive."

Making things by hand—and putting them directly into the hands of others—is a calling that Thomas has long shared with her husband, the furnituremaker Charlie Shackleton. After having met at an art and design school in England, the two crossed paths again in Vermont, where they worked for the famed Irish artisan Simon Pearce. Before long they were married and working for themselves, and today they preside over their joint workshops, ShackletonThomas, which has been headquartered in the same 19th-century mill building in Bridgewater for much of their company's three-decade-plus history.

The couple's mediums are different, but their designs are complementary—in the showroom, her quiet, elegant pottery sits alongside his classic wood furniture. And their point of view is a shared one.

"We both love putting life into an inanimate object," Thomas says. "[Handcrafting] takes a particular sort of



ABOVE: Miranda Thomas at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2018, where she was among a group of master artisans exploring how craft can contribute to global connectedness. BELOW LEFT: Thomas's "Blue Birds of Hope" figurines, which she first created as gifts for the 2018 Davos forum and has continued to make as "totems of hope and beauty."

mixture of material, observation, skill, many things that culminate from your very hands, and it's something the machine can't do.

"There's a famous saying, I'm pretty sure by Pascal: *What is it that puts life into an inanimate object?* *For is that not what man is?* And if you think about it, we're the same as the rocks and the trees and everything around us, but there's a little bit of magic that we instill [in the clay and the wood], and that's what gives them life."

Thomas first realized her affinity for pottery (which she affectionately calls "cooking with rocks") when it was introduced at her high school in Australia. "It was the most surprising thing, at the age of 16, to look down and see a bowl just appearing underneath your hands," she recalls. "I loved it immediately, like I loved surfing. So I just kept doing it."

She honed her craft with a bachelor's degree in ceramics and as well as learning directly from master potters in England, notably Michael Cardew. Thomas's distinctive style emerged early on: strongly decorative but not ornate, with an emphasis on universal symbols of nature, like fish and rabbits, trees and flowers, painted or carved onto the clay.

Thomas was already well into making pottery under



FROM TOP: Porcelain ornaments hand-painted with 22-karat gold, part of Thomas's ever-changing series of holiday decorations; a rabbit bowl featuring slip carving, a decorating technique that creates a raised design on the pottery; limited-edition hand-painted "Imbibe" beakers.



COREY FITCH (ORNAMENTS) / CLARA FLORIN (BOWL, BEAKERS)



her own name — which she had begun doing in 1984 — when she found herself taking commissions from, of all places, the White House. In 1998, on a whim, she had sent President Bill Clinton a “rudimentary, really simple little

pot” as a gift in appreciation for the country’s recent and notably long stretch of peace. What came back was a thank-you note ... and then a request for 16 turquoise and gold pots to be given to Middle Eastern dignitaries ... and then a request for a very large white porcelain bowl carved with a peace dove design, to be Clinton’s personal gift to Pope John Paul II.

(About the Pope’s bowl: Because of the tight deadline, Thomas actually made six of them simultaneously in hopes that just one would sit absolutely true, its glaze pristine and incandescent. And just one did. As for the rest, she says, “President Clinton heard about the bowls that didn’t come out perfectly and he wanted them anyway, because he felt he himself wasn’t perfect. And he gave some of those as gifts as well.”)

Thomas has had several other high-level commissions since then, including bowls for the United Nations to present to Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon, but much of what she makes is meant for everyday people to use in everyday life. And for Thomas, her lasting legacy isn’t about who buys her pottery, anyway. It’s about the next generation working alongside her.

“We have this incredible flow of people across our workshops here who want to learn to be either craftsmen or designer craftsmen, and we’ve created a home or a sanctuary for them for a while,” she says. “When you teach somebody skills, it’s like passing the torch. It’s a wonderful, wonderful thing. And human beings need those skills to be happy. So it’s the one thing I can do for the human race, I think. Working with people and working on those skills and sharing that language—it really places you on a long, long timeline.” —Jenn Johnson

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ **Miranda Thomas Pottery** is available at [ShackletonThomas](#) in Bridgewater and online at: mirandathomaspottery.com

■ **The Connecticut Ceramics Circle** will host an online talk by Thomas on September 20. For details or to register, go to: cceramicsc.org/miranda-thomas

Fair Play

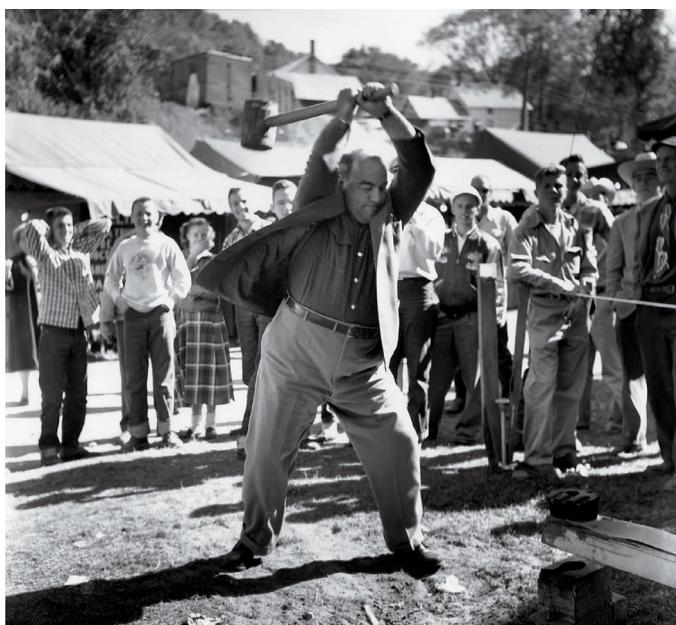
This beloved Tunbridge tradition is a “world” unto itself.

At first glance, the little east-central Vermont town of Tunbridge, population 1,300 or so, seems a little big for its britches, what with attaching the ambitious “World’s” to the name of its four-day country fair held each September. The fair’s origins go back to 1867; over the years, the annual event was interrupted only by the 1918 flu epidemic, World War II, the Hurricane of ’38 (which sent tents, chickens, cows, pigs, and untold numbers of pies hurtling across sodden fields), and of course, the Covid-19 pandemic. The fairgrounds sits by a steep rise off Route 110, amid rolling tree-topped hills, and as you walk the midway, with its games of chance, bumper cars, and food stalls, or stroll through the animal barns, or take in the racing pigs, the ox pulls, the excitable trotting horses, it’s not unlike wandering a village that springs to life each year just for you. But still: “World’s” Fair?

Those words came from Burnham Martin, former Vermont lieutenant governor and state senator, who spoke at the fair in 1867 and perhaps got a bit carried away as he extolled the “Little World’s Fair.” And ever since it has been so. Speaking of “worldly” in a different sense, there was a time ... well, let’s just say that not everyone was enamored of what went on beneath those pretty hills. Burlesque shows, rampant drinking, and a generally boisterous atmosphere led one local to tell a writer, only partly in jest, “They won’t let you in if you don’t have a pint of whiskey in one hand and somebody else’s wife in the other.” But all that changed decades ago: The bawdy and rowdy elements faded from the scene, leaving sheepdog trials, harness racing, a dairy show, horse pulls, and all sorts of talented performers who take their acts to the grandstand stage.

Now during the last days of summer, just as it touches fall, there you are at the top of the Ferris wheel, the voices of neighbors and strangers drifting up through the air; you see everyone below, some dressed up, some dressed down, and across the fairgrounds the aromas of fried dough and sausage mingle with the smell of cattle and hay, and maybe your hand touches the hand of someone you care for... Well, at that moment, is there anywhere else you’d rather be, in the whole world? —*Mel Allen*

The 2021 Tunbridge World’s Fair runs September 16-19; for more information, go to tunbridgeworldsfair.com.



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