Our Vermont

YANKEE

WINTER 2021/2022

SPECIAL HOLIDAY ISSUE

FIVE MUST-TRY CHRISTMAS COOKIE RECIPES

HANDCRAFTED GIFTS FOR YOUR SHOPPING LIST

FINDING THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON IN MIDDLEBURY

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

Giving Time

Years ago, shortly after I came to *Yankee*, we ran a story in our December issue about a Christmas cookie swap. We had space for only a few recipes but we thought (correctly) that readers would want more. So at the end, we added this note: *For a prized recipe for gingerbread boys, plus two dozen more of the finest offerings for a cookie exchange, send a stamped, self-addressed business-size envelope to* Yankee. *We'll rush the recipes to you for your own Christmas Cookie Exchange.*

A few days after the issue arrived in subscribers' homes, our local postmaster called with a mix of excitement and alarm in her voice. Envelopes were flooding in faster than she and her staff could handle them. For days they did not stop: By the end, *Yankee* would receive more than 20,000 requests for that recipe booklet.

But we had made a promise to readers. With help from local townsfolk, we created an envelope-stuffing assembly line and mailed all of them back in time for cookie swaps everywhere. I have no doubt that we helped begin traditions that still endure.

At the time, I thought it was all about cookies. Now I realize the real story is about community. Those who wrote to us wanted to be part of that feeling of giving.

The same feeling runs through many of the pages in this issue of *Our Vermont*, from a collection of brand-new recipes for a holiday cookie swap, to our profile of Middlebury's Bethanie Farrell. During the height of the Covid pandemic, Bethanie transformed a downtown storefront into The Giving Fridge, a place where people can find the makings of a nutritious meal from food donated by local eateries.

In Vermont, a state of small towns and villages, giving takes many forms. I just finished editing a story for an upcoming issue of *Yankee* about Vermont's community ski hills, one of which—Brattleboro Ski Hill—is where my two sons first learned to ride a rope tow, their tiny skis clattering in the tracks. These are the kinds of places where a family can enjoy a day of skiing for about the price of lunch at a mega-mountain lodge. And none of these hills could have survived without volunteers, who know how vital they can be to a community's sense of self. In their own way, on a snow-covered Vermont hill they have given a gift that defies any supply-chain woes: the sense of place and belonging. And that's something no doubt felt equally when you see a friend take your home-baked Christmas cookie, and give one in return.

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YANKEE

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On the cover: A sign of the season at the Russell Christmas Tree Farm in Starksboro. Photo by Dave Barron/PluckVermont.com

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Discover Nordic-style thrills on the longest ice skating trail in the country. Story, p. 19

PHOTO BY MARK FLEMING (SKATER)

Shining Through

A long-forgotten ornament hints at the holidays' timeless joys.

Last fall, I was pruning the lilacs that grow on the east side of my barn. Since they are easily 15 feet tall, this is not a simple task, and it requires the use of a ladder. I was making good progress, taking away the old growth to let the new shoots come in more strongly and snipping off the withered blossoms to encourage better flowers next spring. I worked on one section for as far as I could reach and then moved the ladder over. When I set the legs into the grass, burned down then by frost, I spotted something in the earth, something a bit shiny. It is not unusual to find pieces of old bottles and rusted pieces of farm equipment, even occasionally shards of pottery, in our grasses, in our fields, where our forerunners, in their innocence, disposed of their trash. But this was not the usual find. It was thin, delicate.

With one finger, I pushed aside the dried stems. It looked like a Christmas ornament, half buried in the ground. I carefully worked it free, assuming the underside would be broken. With gentle persuasion, the little ball came loose from the earth's grip. To my surprise, it was whole. Not even a crack. I turned it in my hand. The green color had faded, leaving a mirrorlike finish on one side and clear glass on the other. Bits of grass and earth clung to the sides; it was like an egg just out of its nest.

I took it inside and held it to the light. Where had it come from? How long had it been under the earth beside the barn like that? How had it survived the storms and the cold, the heat, and the rains? Did my predecessors decorate this old hay barn at Christmastime? It seemed so unlikely. But then, so are most Christmas decorations here, where the midwinter is bleak. We are noted for keeping our holiday lights up longer than we need to. It isn't unusual, in mid-July, to find a wreath or two, needles red-brown, as dry as tinder, still adorning the front door. I know of at least one family in town who continue to light their Christmas lights long after the day has passed, long after the cold is gone.

Why do we do it? Maybe we just like to keep feeling that warm, excited anticipation that Christmas brings us. Maybe we find it an effective way to fight off the darkness of winter. Maybe it's an answer to the craving for color that sets in around January, when our world here is so black and white. Probably all of those things contribute, but I tend to think it's a family thing. Those of us who live alone don't usually go in for the decorations in the ways that families do. I pass a house, all lit up, and I think somehow that inside there lives a big family, an excitement building, tantalized by the strobes of the season.

I suppose it can't be analyzed, only acknowledged. I put the ornament on my shelf, without even wiping off the flecks of earth. As the winter closed in, I kept my eye on that little ball. It seemed to have something to say. When Christmas came, I bought myself a string of lights and went out into the woods and cut a small fir tree. I brought it inside and dug out the box of ornaments my late husband and I had collected. Each one I unwrapped reminded me of another time, another place. After I'd hung them all, I put a wire loop inside the tiny gazing ball, its mysteries intact, stories untold, and hung it on the highest branch. *—Edie Clark*

ILLUSTRATION BY CLARE OWEN/I2IART

Sweet Exchange

Everyone loves a Christmas cookie swap—especially one spiced up with irresistible new recipes.

ALL COOKIE PHOTOS BY MARK FLEMING

White Chocolate Cranberry Orange Cookies

Flavored with white chocolate, orange zest, cranberries, and cardamom, these cookies are cozy and bright—just like the holidays themselves. (For the drizzled topping, be sure to use white melting chocolate or chopped white chocolate instead of the more common white chocolate chips, which don't contain enough fat to melt properly.) Recipe courtesy of Suzanne Lee.

2½ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground cardamom
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 large eggs
1½ cups white chocolate chunks or chips
1 cup dried cranberries (preferably 50% less sugar)
Zest of 3 oranges, divided
12 ounces white melting chocolate, for drizzling

Preheat oven to 350° and set racks to the upper and lower middle positions. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

In a bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt, and spices. Set aside.

Using an electric or standing mixer, beat together the butter, brown sugar, granulated sugar, and vanilla on medium-high speed for about 45 seconds, scraping the bowl down midway through. Add the eggs and beat until smooth. Add the dry ingredients and mix on low speed until evenly combined. Using a spatula, fold in the white chocolate, cranberries, and the zest from one orange.

Drop walnut-size balls of dough about two inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until puffed and golden, 13 to 15 minutes, rotating pans halfway through. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely, then repeat with the remaining batter.

While the cookies are cooling, melt the white chocolate in a double boiler (or in a small bowl at 30-second intervals in a microwave set at 50% power). Once the cookies are cooled, use chopsticks or a squeeze bottle to drizzle the white chocolate over one side of the cookies, then sprinkle with the remaining orange zest and let set at room temperature. Cookies can be stored between layers of waxed paper in an airtight container in the refrigerator and kept for up to 10 days. *Yields about 3½ dozen cookies.*

Cinnamon-Spice Snowballs

Based on classic butterball cookies, this recipe adds cinnamon and nutmeg to create a flavor reminiscent of French toast. You can make them up to three weeks ahead since they're good keepers. Recipe courtesy of Kate Van Geldern Bowler.

¾ cup pecan halves
¾ cup walnut halves
1½ cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
2¾ cups all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon table salt
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
Powdered sugar, for dusting

Preheat oven to 350° and set baking racks to the upper and lower middle positions. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

In a food processor, pulse the pecans and walnuts until finely chopped. Set aside.

Using an electric or standing mixer, beat together the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until fluffy, two minutes. Add the vanilla and beat 30 seconds more.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

Add the dry ingredients to the butter and sugar mixture, beating on low speed until smooth. Use a spatula to fold in the nuts.

Roll the dough into one-inch balls and set about an inch apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake until set and barely beginning to brown, 14 to 16 minutes, rotating pans halfway through. Remove from oven and let cool on the sheets until the cookies are just a bit warmer than room temperature.

Fill a medium bowl with a generous amount of powdered sugar. Working in small batches, roll the cookies in the sugar. Cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three weeks at room temperature. *Yields about 6 dozen cookies.*

Quintuple-Chocolate Therapy Bars

Cocoa powder and semisweet chocolate chips enrich these bars, which are crowned with white chocolate, cacao nibs, and a drizzle of bittersweet chocolate. (For the topping, be sure to use white melting chocolate and not white chocolate chips.) Recipe courtesy of Liz Harris.

1¼ cups all-purpose flour
½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
¼ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
2 large eggs
2 tablespoons instant espresso powder
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
¾ cup semisweet chocolate chips
12 ounces white melting chocolate or chopped white chocolate
½ cup cacao nibs
½ cup bittersweet chocolate chips, for drizzling

Preheat oven to 325° and set a rack to the middle position. Lightly spray a 9-by-9-inch baking pan with nonstick cooking spray and then line it with parchment paper, leaving about an inch of paper hanging over the sides of the pan. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.

Using an electric or standing mixer, beat together the butter and brown sugar on medium-high speed for one minute, scraping the sides halfway through. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each. Add the espresso powder and vanilla extract, and beat until combined, scraping the sides halfway through.

Gradually add the dry ingredients, about ½ cup at a time, beating on low speed until fully incorporated. Scrape down the bowl as needed. Stir in the chocolate chips.

Scrape the batter (it will be very thick) into the pan and spread it out using an offset spatula lightly coated with nonstick cooking spray. Bake until set in the center, about 25 minutes (a toothpick inserted into the center should come out clean). Set on a wire rack to cool completely.

When the pan is cool, melt the white chocolate in a double boiler (or in a small bowl at 30-second intervals in a microwave set at 50% power).

Use the overhanging parchment paper to lift the whole block out of the pan and place on a cutting board. Spread with the melted white chocolate in an even layer, then sprinkle with the cacao nibs.

When the white chocolate has set, melt the bittersweet chocolate and drizzle it over the top. Let the topping harden completely before cutting the block into squares. The bars can wrapped in plastic and stored at room temperature for up to 10 days. *Yields 16 bars.*

Chocolate-Dipped Gingersnap S'mores

A recipe dipped into happy memories of summer s'mores, these cookies replace the usual graham crackers with spicy gingersnaps to give them a warm holiday kick. Recipe courtesy of Jerrelle Guy.

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon table salt
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1 cup granulated sugar
¼ cup unsweetened applesauce
2 tablespoons molasses
1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
12 jumbo marshmallows (or 24 regular ones)
14 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped

First, make the cookies: In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, ground ginger, cinnamon, and salt. Beat the butter and sugar with an electric or standing mixer until smooth. Add the applesauce, molasses, grated ginger, and vanilla; beat until combined. Gradually add the dry ingredients and beat until combined, scraping the bowl halfway through. Divide the dough among two storage containers, then seal and refrigerate until firm, at least one hour and up to two days.

Preheat oven to 375° and set racks to the upper and lower middle positions. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

Take the first batch of dough and roll it into 12 one-inch balls. Arrange on the baking sheets, leaving about three inches between each ball. Bake until golden and puffed, about 10 minutes, then bang the pan on the counter a few times to flatten the cookies before returning them to the oven. Bake until browned at the edges, three minutes more. Remove the pan from the oven, bang it again on the counter, then let the cookies cool for five minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool. Repeat with remaining dough.

Now, toast the marshmallows: Turn your oven's broiler to high and set a rack at the highest position. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and lightly spray with vegetable oil. If using jumbo marshmallows, arrange six on the paper and flatten each a bit with the palm of your hand. If using regular marshmallows, arrange in pairs before flattening. Leaving the door slightly ajar and watching closely, broil until golden brown on top, one or two minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool completely at room temperature. Repeat with remaining marshmallows.

Melt chocolate in a double boiler (or in a small bowl at 30-second intervals in a microwave at 50% power). Stir until smooth and set aside.

Sandwich the marshmallows between two cookies. Dip each sandwich halfway into the melted chocolate, then set on a piece of parchment paper at room temperature until the chocolate cools and sets. Cookies can be stored between layers of wax paper in an airtight container for up to 10 days. *Yields 12 cookies.*

Sour Cream Sugar Cookies

This versatile dough is easy to cut into any shape you like (we chose trees, frosted in ombre shades of green). Sour cream lends richness and a subtle tang. Recipe courtesy of Amy Traverso.

For the cookies:
2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1½ cups granulated sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
½ cup sour cream

For the icing:
½ cup vegetable shortening
4 cups powdered sugar
3 tablespoons plus 1 tablespoon milk
Green food coloring

Preheat oven to 350° and set baking racks to the upper and lower middle positions. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk together 2½ cups flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Using an electric or standing mixer, beat the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until fluffy, about two minutes. Scrape down the bowl. Add the egg and vanilla, and beat to combine. Add the dry ingredients in three batches, alternating with the sour cream, then beat until just combined, scraping down the bowl halfway through. Add a bit more flour as needed until the dough begins to adhere around the paddle and form a large clump. Divide the dough into two balls; wrap each in plastic, then press to form a disk. Refrigerate until firm, at least one hour and up to two days.

Take the first batch of dough out of the refrigerator. Dust a counter with flour, then roll out the dough to ¼-inch thickness. Cut out tree shapes, gathering and rerolling the scraps as needed. Transfer cookies to the baking sheets and bake until the edges are just turning golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to wire racks to cool. Repeat with remaining dough.

Meanwhile, make the icing: Using an electric or standing mixer, beat the shortening, sugar, and 3 tablespoons milk on medium-high speed until smooth. Scrape down the bowl and stir again. If the icing appears too thick, stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon milk.

Divide the icing into four equal batches, which you will use to create four successively darker shades of green. Add a small amount of food coloring to the first batch, a bit more to the second, and so on.

When the cookies are cool, frost with the different shades of icing. Return the cookies to the wire racks to allow the icing to set completely. Cookies can be stored in an airtight container between layers of wax paper for up to five days at room temperature and up to 10 days in the refrigerator. *Yields about 3 dozen cookies.*

FOR MORE INSPIRATION
See our article on Vermont's own **Ann Clark Cookie Cutters**, p. 32

MARK FLEMING

TO GIVE AND RECEIVE

Tips for hosting a memorable holiday cookie swap.

A cookie swap is a wonderful way to spend a fun afternoon or evening with friends, with the added bonus of giving everyone the opportunity to collect lots of treats for the holiday entertaining season. Be sure to set aside some time for exchanging stories about the recipes, as well as the cookies themselves.

1 Start Small and Plan Well

Begin with a group of five to 10 friends who enjoy baking. Send out invitations three to four weeks before the event, and try to plan the exchange within two weeks of Christmas, so that the cookies will be at their freshest during the final lead-up to the holiday. Consider a midafternoon start time to minimize conflicts with any other seasonal parties.

2 Send Out Easy Invites

Handwritten invitations are lovely, but if you are feeling pressed for time, it's helpful to know that online invitation sites like Evite, Paperless Post, and Punchbowl have templates specifically designed for holiday cookie swap parties. (Guests can even note which cookies they plan to bring, which is a smart way to avoid repeats.)

3 Organize the Baking

The best holiday cookie swap recipes are, first and foremost, delicious. But they should also have a reasonably long shelf life and be easy to transport. Ask your guests to bring cookies that don't require refrigeration after baking. As a rule of thumb, you'll need six to 12 cookies per guest, plus an additional dozen for sampling during the party. Finally, ask everyone to bring their own serving platters, and to email you their recipes in advance of the party (see tip #7).

4 Create the Cookie Setup

At a craft store, buy several large decorative to-go boxes or cookie tins per guest. Clear off a large table for the exchange, and create a placecard label for each type of cookie. Set up a packing station with boxes or tins, ribbon, scissors, and waxed paper (to place between layers) near the cookie display.

5 Plan the Cookie Swap Menu

An ideal holiday cookie swap menu should feel festive but not heavy—there will be plenty of indulging with the cookie course! In addition to coffee and tea, consider seasonal beverages such as eggnog, mulled cider, and holiday cocktails. A cheese platter and light savory bites (like mini spinach quiches) will help balance out all the sweets.

6 Enjoy the Party

Allow ample time for sampling, snacking, and conversation, then invite everyone to assemble their cookie collections.

7 Share the Recipes

Once you've collected all the recipes, print them out to hand out at the party or email them to your guests right after.

—Amy Traverso

'So Bring Some Right Here'

In praise of plum pudding—a sweetly spiced Christmas classic.

KRISTIN TEIG/STYLING BY CATRINE KELTY

'Tis the Season

KRISTIN TEIG/STYLING BY CATRINE KELTY

Before there were *bûche de Noel* Yule logs, gingerbread houses, or even St. Nick's plate of milk and cookies, there was the grande dame of classic Christmas desserts: plum pudding. Heady and fragrant from a combination of raisins, currants, figs, and spices (along with a glug of spirits for preservation's sake), plum pudding is a rich, dense English dessert whose pedigree dates back to the 15th century—a time when dried fruits were a more affordable alternative to sweeteners such as sugar and honey, and dessert was something special to look forward to instead of a nightly occurrence. By the mid-19th century, plum pudding had evolved into a Victorian Christmas icon.

Despite its name, plum pudding (or figgy pudding, as it's called in the jolly English carol "We Wish You a Merry Christmas") contains no plums and isn't even a pudding by modern culinary definition. It owes its charming name to the popularity of prunes (dried plums) when early versions of the dish were emerging from cauldrons; later, the British used the word "pudding" as a general term for any sweet dessert dish.

Versions like the one Charles Dickens described as the centerpiece for the Cratchit family's Christmas feast in his 1843 novella, *A Christmas Carol,* were bulky from steaming in a cotton bag, but decorative molds soon emerged to yield more uniform, attractive results. Though the results are instantly recognizable on the outside for their curved shape and dark color, almost no two plum pudding recipes are alike. Our version packs plenty of flavor, with dark and golden raisins, currants, and dried figs, enhanced by a quartet of favorite Christmas spices.

A proper plum pudding needs a deep pot of boiling water and several long hours to achieve perfection. But in the end you'll have not only a tasty dessert, but also the latest in a long line of puddings stretching back 600 years—not to mention a kitchen that will entice noses for miles around with the spicy aroma of Christmas.

After all, as the 16th-century West Country carol says, "We won't go until we get some, so bring some right here!" —*Aimee Tucker*

Steamed Plum Pudding

Unsalted butter (for mold)
1 ½ cups fine stale bread crumbs
1 cup all-purpose flour
½ cup milk, scalded
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 ½ cups raisins, chopped
¾ cup dried figs, chopped
¾ cup dried currants, chopped
1 ounce citron, finely diced
½ cup shortening, chilled very cold and cut into pieces
⅛ cup brandy or grape juice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground mace
⅛ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
2 large eggs, beaten

Butter a 1-quart mold or 28-ounce aluminum can and set aside. In a large bowl, combine the bread crumbs, flour, and scalded milk. Let cool slightly.

Add the sugar, raisins, figs, currants, and citron. Fold a few times with a rubber spatula to combine. Add the cold shortening and continue folding, pressing lightly to smooth it into the batter, but not mixing it in completely.

Add the brandy or grape juice, then the spices and salt. Gently fold in the eggs until just combined.

Turn the batter into the prepared mold or can, tapping it lightly against the counter to disrupt any air pockets. Use string or twine to secure a circle of parchment over the top of the mold or can, leaving about 2 inches of overhang around the rim. Once the parchment is secure, wrap the top tightly in aluminum foil and secure with additional string.

Carefully set the mold onto a rack or trivet in a deep stock pot of simmering water. The water should come up to around one-third the height of the sides of the mold. Cover the pot and steam 6 hours. Be sure to check the water level periodically and add more if necessary.

After 6 hours, transfer the mold to a rack and let cool to room temperature. Remove the parchment. You may see some liquid around the sides of the pudding, but don't worry: As the pudding cools, it will be absorbed. Once the pudding has cooled, cover it tightly with foil and store in the refrigerator.

When ready to serve, bring the pudding to room temperature and warm the mold by returning it to a bath of simmering water until the pudding is loose enough to turn onto a plate. Serve warm, sliced, topped with classic Foamy Sauce (recipe below). *Yields 12 thin slices.*

Foamy Sauce

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup confectioners' sugar
1 large egg, beaten
2 tablespoons brandy (or vanilla)

Cream together the butter and sugar until light and fluffy; then add in the beaten egg and brandy (or vanilla). Transfer to the top of a double boiler and heat over simmering water, stirring continuously, until warm and thickened. Spoon over sliced pudding.

Hand to Heart

The world of Vermont crafts offers one-of-a-kind gifts that give back to the local artisan community.

Among the creations showcased at Woodstock's Collective–The Art of Craft are (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): handblown glassware by Nicholas Kekic; pottery by Kathryn Myers; llama and alpaca fiber hats by Carrie Cahill Mulligan; and ethically sourced handcrafted jewelry by Rebecca Haas.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTISANS AND COLLECTIVE–THE ART OF CRAFT

Browsing the graceful handblown glass and shimmering hand-painted silk scarves in Collective–The Art of Craft, an artisan co-op founded in Woodstock 15 years ago, you'll see the individual makers' name attached to their wares, maybe as a tag, maybe as a signature on the piece itself. What you won't see is a brand, but it's there: *Vermont*.

The Green Mountain State has a long history of craftsmanship, with its artisan beer and cheese being perhaps the most widely known but extending to all kinds of creative expression, including handcrafts that go back to the state's earliest days. As Collective founder Marcia Hammond puts it, "Our state's brand is very strong and recognized for its integrity—as are Vermonters!"

As one of just five craft galleries to have earned the Vermont State Craft Center designation, Collective is among the leading ambassadors of that brand. And after a pandemic downturn that saw retail spaces and studios closed to the public, and craft shows canceled, connecting people to Vermont-made crafts can feel more vital than ever, Hammond says.

"When people meet me and then see a painting I did or scarves I wove, they often want to purchase them because they met me—it's an experiential purchase," says Hammond, who, like her fellow co-op members, also works in the gallery that sells her creations. "It's been very heartening. And it holds meaning in this time when connection is so important to all of us."

The talents of 14 co-op members and a rotating lineup of guest artists make for a colorful, eclectic display at Collective–The Art of Craft, in Woodstock.

For those who have not shopped for art and handcrafts before, the holiday gift-giving season presents some compelling reasons to take a look. "For one, local artisans generally aren't caught up in the current supply-chain issues—they have plenty of items for sale!" Hammond notes. "Two, there's a range of affordability, from a hand-felted wool snowball for $5 to a pottery cup for $22, all the way up to a gorgeous glass bowl for, say, $700 that will become a family heirloom."

And if you're not sure what to give? "Oh yes," she says, "we have gift certificates, too!" *—Jenn Johnson*

PHOTO COURTESY OF COLLECTIVE–THE ART OF CRAFT

Vermont Crafts Resource Guide

Looking to check off some locally made gifts on your holiday shopping list? Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

■ **Artisans Hand, Montpelier.** Founded in 1978, this nationally recognized craft center fills its walls and shelves with wares from more than 140 artisans, including Vermont landscape photos and prints, bowls and cutting boards made from locally harvested wood, and jewelry set with Lake Champlain beach stones. *artisanshand.com*

■ **Collective–The Art of Craft, Woodstock.** Still run by many of the same artists who launched it in 2006—including founder Marcia Hammond, an acclaimed fiber artist and painter—Collective keeps its lineup fresh with a rotating guest-artist program, while its setting, a picturesque 19th-century stone building, invites lingering. New this year is Collective's expansion into a basement space, now a visual art gallery. *collective-theartofcraft.com*

■ **Frog Hollow Vermont Craft Gallery, Burlington.** Designated as the nation's first state craft center in 1975, Frog Hollow exhibits the work of more than 200 artisans on a rotating basis and ranks as one of Vermont's largest nonprofit arts institutions. In addition to offering locally created arts and crafts for sale, it also hosts artist demonstrations, lectures, and regular curated shows. *froghollow.org*

■ **Gallery at the VAULT, Springfield.** With "VAULT" standing for "Visual Art Using Local Talent," this nonprofit gallery in Springfield's historic 1908 Victorian Bank Block helped breathe new life into downtown when it opened back in 2001. Two decades on, it hums with the color and beauty of blown glass, origami, painted scarves, pottery, and more, all made by 160 local and regional artisans. *galleryvault.org*

■ **Northeast Kingdom Artisans Guild, St. Johnsbury.** Stop into this homegrown gallery, originally christened Kingdom Handi-Works, and you can expect to be greeted and assisted by one of the friendly artists who help run it. Wood, fiber, glass, iron, pottery, jewelry, fine art, paper, and photography are all here, and all are made by Vermont creatives. *nekartisansguild.com*

■ **Putney Craft Tour, Putney.** Now well into its fifth decade, the event renowned as the nation's oldest continuous craft tour invites the public into the studios of southern Vermont artisans practicing everything from glassblowing to woodworking to oil painting. A portion of tour sales is designated to support the Putney Foodshelf. *11/26–11/28. putneycrafts.com*

■ **Southern Vermont Arts Center Holiday Market, Manchester.** On the hunt for handmade local gifts this season? Check out the SVAC's special shopping event spotlighting artisans and vendors from around the region. *12/4–12/5. svac.org*

Launched last holiday season as a short-term project to help support local restaurants and feed those in need, Bethanie Farrell's The Giving Fridge has made a permanent home for itself in downtown Middlebury.

Growing Goodwill

Houseplants meet hunger relief at this innovative Middlebury project.

Late last year, as the pandemic still gripped the country and winter loomed, Danielle Boyce, the owner of American Flatbread, a pizza restaurant in Middlebury specializing in local ingredients, received an unexpected email. The sender was Bethanie Farrell, a recent Southern California transplant to Middlebury who wanted to connect residents who couldn't afford healthy, nutritious food with area eateries that were struggling to stay afloat. She called it The Giving Fridge.

What caught Boyce's attention was a plan both simple and audacious. Farrell had set up a downtown space to sell plants and local honey; the building's owner and manager had agreed to let her use it, free of charge, until a new tenant moved in. Farrell would use the proceeds from her sales to buy meals from local restaurants and distribute the food between Christmas and New Year's for free to those who needed it. Businesses would get a much-needed boost in revenue, while struggling residents would have easy access to salads, spring rolls, freshly made breads, and vegetable-laden entrees.

PHOTO BY JOHN FLOWERS/ADDISON INDEPENDENT

LEFT: At Farrell's cozy shop on Merchants Row, called Everything Nice, all sales help buy meals from local restaurants and farms to give to the local food-insecure community. ABOVE: In addition to houseplants, Farrell sells things like honey from Republic of Vermont and her own "Everything" seasoning.

"It gave us some money at a time when everything felt so uncertain," says Boyce, who at one point last year saw her business drop by as much as 55 percent. "We all needed whatever help we could find, and this gave us a little bit of revenue. It was awesome."

But what started as a one-week holiday push to get 250 meals to those in need never stopped. Today, The Giving Fridge has a permanent home, called Everything Nice, in a former downtown diner. Each week, Farrell collaborates with area restaurants to assemble and donate nearly 300 dinners and lunches. The recipients are anyone who needs the food, no questions asked. In a state where one in four residents don't always have enough to eat, The Giving Fridge's success is as much a tribute to Farrell's vision as it is a sign of the immediate and deep-seated need she's trying to address.

"I know finances are a barrier to eating healthy, but it shouldn't be," she says. "Good health requires healthy food. If you're not healthy, you can't work. It affects your happiness. It affects whether you have to depend on other people. And that's not a good place for anyone to be in."

Farrell grew up in Ohio, studied painting in college, and then forged a successful career directing gallery exhibits around the world and heading up her own artist management company. But in 2016, Farrell was crippled with a neurodegenerative condition that kept her largely bedridden for two years. Her eventual recovery changed not only how she had to live her life but what she wanted from it. She and her husband, Billy, a photographer and native Vermonter, began talking about leaving their life in Southern California for a new start. Before long, they had bought 27 acres of forest and meadow that hugged the shores of Lake Champlain, which they called Nice Island. Last year the couple moved to Vermont.

The Farrells had planned to build a small farm that could also double as a public space to host workshops on things like pollinators and agroforestry. But the pandemic temporarily shelved construction plans. After Farrell read a University of Vermont study that revealed the depths of the state's food insecurity issues—and with unexpected free time on her hands—she decided to focus on creating something that truly addressed the times.

"[Food insecurity] is not an issue that's easily visible," she says. "There's a woman who comes in here—she and her husband own their home, they have a car, you'd never know they were struggling. But when Covid hit, their income just stopped. She told me, 'We look like we're doing OK, and we can't keep it all together.' They're not the only ones. And knowing how so many restaurants were struggling, there seemed to be a way to be able to make a difference."

That difference is obvious the moment you set foot inside The Giving Fridge's headquarters. This is not a soup kitchen or a food pantry; it's a space that evokes a sense of rebirth and healing. In a building that sat vacant for several years, plants crowd the front of the room. Many are hand-me-downs that Farrell nursed back to health. In the back, the namesake refrigerator hums, stocked with food.

At the moment, Farrell has just finished organizing that day's donations in different plastic crates. The containers are filled with flatbreads, soups, and spring rolls. In the fridge is a stack of stir-fries to give out, as well as potpies. Farrell is confident the maple cookies will go fast and is cautiously optimistic about the salads with goat cheese. On her desk sits a stack of cards that list the partner restaurants as well as Farrell's reminder of what

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GIVING FRIDGE (TOP ROW); COREY HENDRICKSON (INSET)

LEFT: Farrell checks the stock in the actual refrigerator—an old Snapple cooler—at the heart of The Giving Fridge. ABOVE: Chicken piccata meals made with local ingredients by Janis Reinke of Frog Hollow Farms for The Giving Fridge as part of the Vermont Everyone Eats program.

this endeavor is all about: *Someone cares about you and wanted you to have these delicious meals*, it reads.

Soon, a mother from Vergennes and her young son stroll inside. "I loved that goat cheese salad," she says after Farrell explains the offerings. "I liked that other one, but the goat cheese was a surprise. I never would have made it before, but it was great."

Next comes a ponytailed middle-aged man in a black NASCAR "Dale Jr." T-shirt. He's another regular, and he's picking up for himself and two friends. "Looks like you got some nice stuff today," he says, looking over the crates. His eyes widen: "Hey, are those cookies?"

Others file in. Farrell knows them all. The exchanges aren't long, but there's a flow to them. The conversations are relaxed and familiar. Through her own illness, Farrell knows the feeling of shame that can come with asking for help, so she's worked as much as she can to eliminate it from these interactions. She wants people to feel good about the food they're picking up and the sense of community around this project.

Farrell is also thinking beyond what she's already created. She plans to host workshops on nutrition and cooking. She's talked with a local hospital about developing a program around dealing with chronic disease. And as she and her husband develop their farm, Farrell sees The Giving Fridge as a natural extension of the public programming they still want to build there.

"I just want to help people's quality of life," she says. "I was lucky. We were financially OK, but it was still difficult to get the help I needed and the education to understand what I was dealing with. How we often help people is so fractured. We need to be thinking more holistically. I want to help people deal with whatever struggles they might be facing so they can understand their well-being and take control of their health." *—Ian Aldrich*

The Giving Fridge recently became a meal hub for the statewide initiative Vermont Everyone Eats, which has allowed Farrell to increase the number of healthy restaurant-made meals being offered weekly. To learn more about The Giving Fridge, go to givingfridge.com.

How You Can Help

Tap into the spirit of the season by supporting or getting involved with these Vermont-based hunger-relief initiatives.

- **Hunger Free Vermont:** This statewide nonprofit works to expand universal meal programs for children and to ensure older adults have access to nutrition resources. *hungerfreevt.org*
- **Feeding Chittenden:** Vermont's largest direct-service emergency-food shelter dishes up more than 12,000 meals annually. *feedingchittenden.org*
- **Salvation Farms:** Since 2004 this nonprofit has worked with farms to distribute their agricultural surplus to food-relief organizations across the state. *salvationfarms.org*
- **Vermont Everyone Eats:** Funded by the Vermont Legislature to address the impact of Covid, this food-relief and economic-development program engages local restaurants in making to-go meals that are distributed at more than 130 sites across the state. *vteveryoneeats.org*
- **The Vermont Foodbank:** The state's biggest hunger-relief organization coordinates with over 300 community partners to help feed residents in all 14 counties. *vtfoodbank.org*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GIVING FRIDGE (MEALS); COREY HENDRICKSON (FRIDGE)

Blade Running

Feel the rush of "wild skating" on Lake Morey, home to a Nordic sports tradition like no other.

Since 2006, Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee has maintained a 4½-mile groomed ice skating trail, the longest of its kind in the United States.

PHOTO BY MARK FLEMING

It took me just five minutes on the ice at Lake Morey, a two-mile jewel set in a ring of Vermont hills near the New Hampshire border, to realize I'd been using the wrong skates all my life. I flew across the black surface of the lake, shuttered summer camps whipping past onshore, and felt a childlike giddiness bubbling up. I'd rented a pair of Nordic skates from the skate shack at Lake Morey Resort, and right from the start I could feel that this was the fairy tale I'd always chased unsuccessfully in my old hockey skates.

Nordic skates, which are still uncommon in the United States, are long, rugged blades designed for distance over less-than-perfect ice. The blades are topped with cross-country ski bindings that snap right into regular cross-country boots, and their curved tips and wide cut allow them to navigate bumps and cracks without catching a tip. A national obsession in Sweden, they're finally catching on over here.

My first 90 seconds were shaky, I admit. I sat on a wooden bench on the resort's shoreline and attached my blades, then threaded wobbly-legged through a forest of pleasure skaters and pickup hockey games, my arms out for balance. It was weird to look down and see little spears protruding from my boots, Bond villain–style, and weirder still to kick and feel my free heel lifting away from the blade, as if I were wearing tiny cross-country skis.

"Longer strokes," advised Lisa Avery, the resort's co-owner, following behind on a kick sled. "This isn't hockey." The Averys, who have owned Lake Morey Resort for three generations, have made this place into New England's skating mecca. People come for the pond hockey tournament, which draws about 100 teams from all over New England, and especially for

Author Rowan Jacobsen and his wife, Mary, clip on the blades of their rental Nordic skates, which are designed to glide on top of the ice instead of digging into it, as figure skates do.

ALL PHOTOS BY MARK FLEMING

the Nordic skating. The resort is one of the few places that rent Nordic skates, and the 4½-mile groomed trail, which it has maintained since 2006, is the longest in the country.

When I first visited, Mother Nature's Zamboni had just swept through, showering the lake with a January rainstorm that froze into black glass from end to end, so I didn't even need the trail. As soon as I cleared the scrum of people and settled into a rhythm of long, slow kicks, channeling my inner Olympic speed skater, the revelations began.

One, I was *going somewhere*. The shoreline whistled past, a bracing wind in my face. An ice fisherman dipped his head. Tree-lined coves beckoned in the distance. I was freed from the tyranny of the rink. No more round and round. No teenyboppers. No disco!

Two, my feet were incredibly comfortable. Why had I been pinching my toes into hard, cold skates all my life? My boots were cozy and warm. And no more changing into frozen skates on the rink: You just walk down to the ice and snap on your blades. Parents of small children, rejoice.

Three, good God was I going fast. The wider blades glide on top of the ice instead of digging a channel as figure skates do, so you get twice the glide per kick. On a large lake, you don't realize how much speed you've built up … until you try to turn. If hockey skates are the sports cars of the ice, Nordic skates are the SUVs. They'll barrel over all sorts of debris, but they don't cut. If I veered too sharply, I suddenly found myself fishtailing like a stunt driver. I wiped out a few times, yet even that was fun: skittering over the ice like a puck, not really caring how long it took to stop.

I reached the far end of the lake—two miles in just a few minutes—and turned and looked back. Dozens of figures in bright clothing were darting across the surface like reef fish. The pale winter sun hung low over the spruce-capped hills, bouncing off the ice. Satisfied that I wasn't going to kill myself, Avery detoured on her kick sled to catch up with some ice fishermen. An eagle watched from a bare tree, hoping for scraps.

I zipped back across the lake, concentrating on long, powerful kicks, chasing the sun's reflection. There was white ice, milky ice, and crystal-clear "black ice" with thousands of bubbles frozen in time, all of it streaming like a film reel beneath my feet. I sashayed through a field of wooden tip-ups, hugged the shore for a peek

TOP: A member of the Lake Morey Resort "ice crew" grooms the surface of the 545-acre lake, which also hosts a number of pond hockey tournaments each winter. LEFT: Nordic skates are designed to let the wearer navigate the bumps and cracks of natural ice with ease.

Once you get the hang of "free-heeling," Nordic skating can open up a whole new way to enjoy Vermont's gloriously scenic winter landscape.

at some intriguing summer camps, and cruised over a two-inch chasm that would have laid out a figure skater. Crows shadowed me. The ice groaned. I felt as though I were flying through a winterscape. I felt like a Norse god.

Nordic skating has its roots in the centuries-old Scandinavian tradition of strapping bone blades to your boots to cross the ice while hunting and fishing. Eventually steel blades replaced the bone, and then somebody had the bright idea to bond the blades to ski bindings, and a real sport was born. In Sweden, thousands of people traverse the frozen lakes every winter and compete in the Vikingarännet, a 50-mile race from Uppsala to Stockholm. The Dutch used to host a 200-kilometer race (roughly 125 miles) along their network of canals, but it's been two decades since they had enough ice to hold it.

Until New Hampshire's Jamie Hess fell in love with Nordic skating—or "wild skating," as he calls it—in Sweden in 1999, it was unknown in the United States, for reasons my feet and I cannot fathom. Hess began importing the equipment and spreading the gospel through races, guided tours, and unrelenting enthusiasm. The Norwich shop he founded, Nordic Skater, became the North American center of the sport (now located in Newbury, New Hampshire, it's still going strong under the ownership of his son-in-law, Ben Prime). Hess has led tours on Lake Sunapee, Lake Champlain, and Lake Memphremagog, and in 2017 he returned to Sweden for the first time in 18 years.

After two hours on Lake Morey, I was already fantasizing about doing my first. I could have kept going, but the sun was down and the skate shack was closing. I could just make out the last skaters gliding toward the inn. I got halfway back, then thought better of it and turned again, heading out for one more run as the world bent toward infinity, the sky gray, the shore fading, the only sound the *shick, shick* of my blades on the black lake. —*Rowan Jacobsen*

IF YOU GO

■ **Lake Morey Resort:** The skating trail is free to use; check the resort's Facebook page for ice conditions. Nordic skate rentals are available to the public from Wednesday to Sunday (resort guests have access to rentals every day).
1 Clubhouse Road, Fairlee; lakemoreyresort.com

A vista of forest and mountains frames the eye-catching artwork at the Southern Vermont Arts Center sculpture park. Shown here: *Gatekeepers* by Pat Musick.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ABBY RAEDER

Powder Play

In Manchester, art lovers find a reason to come out of hibernation.

Too often we appreciate winter only for what it magically allows us to do. The mountains we hiked and the lakes we swam in just months ago are now places to fly downhill and glide over water. But winter also allows us to *see*: wildlife tracks now plain as day, birds framed by empty branches, landscapes repainted by snow.

These two gifts of winter—doing and seeing—come together seamlessly at the Southern Vermont Arts Center, whose 103-acre campus in Manchester invites visitors to hike, snowshoe, and ski amid the state's largest sculpture park, each artwork transformed by a backdrop unlike that of any other season.

There's another gift of winter here, too, and that's the chance to reconnect with community after the tourist crowds of summer and fall have come and gone. For years SVAC had closed its galleries to visitors in the off-season, but that changed after the arrival of new executive director Anne Corso in 2019. We recently caught up with her to learn more about SVAC's growing role as a destination for recreation, culture, and community, all year round. —*Jenn Johnson*

You actually started in your position at SVAC in the heart of winter. What was that like?

So, I'm a new Vermonter, a new New Englander. I was most recently at the Chrysler Museum of Art, which meant I was coming up from southern Virginia, but my husband has some connections here, he knows the Manchester-Dorset area, and I fell in love with it.

I was prepared for a hard winter. But at the time, SVAC was closed to the public for a good part of

FROM LEFT: **Yester House, part of the original 1917 estate that has been SVAC's home since 1950; on the sprawling campus, a series of story walks encourages kids to explore.**

the winter, about November through April, so what I remember most is it being just *very* quiet. That's changed a lot now that we're programming year-round. Granted, winter will never have the hustle and bustle of summer and leaf-peeping season. But there are a lot of people who live here year-round, and a lot of new people coming into the area, and we're excited to engage with them.

Speaking of year-round appeal, can you talk a bit about the role that the outdoor campus plays at SVAC?

You know, in some ways, we're a small organization in a small community, and yet we are sitting here on 103 acres—that's extraordinary! Particularly in this last year and a half of Covid, we've thought a lot about the outdoors being another facility. And some of it just comes naturally—you know, people just want to walk the trails, take a hike, walk their dog—but we also think about all the activities we can do outside, from our aerial yoga program to children's camps and classes to performances. Last summer we had both the Dorset Theatre Festival and the Manchester Music Festival up on campus.

Something we implemented during Covid that's ongoing is our series of outdoor story walks, which take the essence of a traditional children's story time and put it out into the landscape. We've installed a number of children's books outside in a very simple way—Julia Alvarez's *Already a Butterfly* and Yangsook Choi's *The Name Jar* are two of my favorites—so parents can take the little ones and walk from page to page and read the stories together, and experience nature while doing it.

A huge part of SVAC's outdoor offerings is obviously the sculpture park. Tell us a little more about that.

It's sort of a living exhibition; it moves, it changes all the time. At the moment we have around 100 sculptures. Most are part of an infusion of new works, maybe 70 in all, that came just this past year through a partnership with Salem Art Works, in New York state. Other pieces have been here for decades. You've probably seen *The Muse* by Jack Howard-Potter, a very large-scale, silver steel sculpture of a woman who's truly a commanding presence on the landscape. That's one that people walk up to, kids sit at the base, parents take their pictures.

Do you have any personal-favorite sculptures?

I'm thinking of two that were done by women artists separated by at least a generation: *Gatekeepers*, by Pat Musick, a series of abstract sculptures that are really quite complex and beautiful; and *Diana the Huntress* by Emily Winthrop Miles, which is a bit tucked away behind Yester House [the campus's main building], a spot that's most used for weddings here. And I find it interesting—that juxtaposition of our modern brides and this figure of the goddess of the hunt and childbirth and fertility

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ABBY RAEDER

FROM LEFT: **Anne Corso, who has led as SVAC's executive director since 2019; the on-site restaurant, curATE café, offering refined fare and views of the art-filled campus.**

almost kind of "looking over" the wedding ceremonies.

Moving to SVAC's indoor offerings, what can visitors look forward to this winter in terms of exhibits and programs?

So we have two buildings where you can see and experience artwork, Yester House and the Wilson Museum and Galleries. Through the end of November, we have a wonderful environmental exhibition, "Our Tangled Choices," which features the work of Pat Musick and Michelle Lougee, as well as our members' exhibition in the 10 galleries here at Yester House. Then in December, we have two Japanese-related shows in a fascinating contrast of old and new: the first one, a historic exhibition of the Japanese woodblock artist Hiroshige [1797–1858], will be in the more contemporary Wilson Museum; and an exhibition of artists now working in the vein of Japanese woodblock prints and watercolor, will be in the more traditional Yester House.

Anything special planned for the holidays?

Absolutely. On the first weekend in December we'll have a fun prelude to the holiday shopping season with our annual craft market, featuring about 27 vendors showing and selling their wares. And that event complements our museum gift store, which has a huge variety of artist- and artisan-made gifts as well as unique products.

And December 4 we're hosting a holiday concert by an incredible vocalist, Maxine Linehan, who has performed all over the world but who just happens to make her home here in Manchester. She's launching her holiday album, *This Time of Year*, and doing a world-premiere performance in our Arkell Pavilion. Tickets are still available, but they're going quickly.

Sounds like there's plenty on tap to draw people into SVAC this winter—have we missed anything?

Our restaurant, curATE café, is one last great reason to come visit. Set within historic Yester House, it's an elegant contemporary restaurant that comes to us in partnership with Church Street Hospitality, who are the same folks that run the Barrows House in Dorset and the Publyk House in Bennington. We have lunch, dinner, and a wonderful Sunday brunch—so absolutely make a reservation and come check it out!

IF YOU GO

■ The **Southern Vermont Arts Center** is located at 930 SVAC Drive in Manchester. Gallery hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday; admission free for members, $10 for adults; $5 for students and seniors. The sculpture park and trails are open daily; admission is free. *svac.org*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SOUTHERN VERMONT ARTS CENTER

Soup's On!

When the temperature drops, nothing lifts our spirits like soul-warming comfort food.

FRENCH ONION SOUP

Comfort food comes in many forms, and we all have our personal favorites, but it's hard to deny the warm, soothing security of a bowl of soup or stew—especially when the snow is piling up outside and the wind is rattling the windowpanes.

Another point in favor of soups and stews: They're among those rare comfort foods that can actually be good for you, packed as they often are with beans and winter vegetables. And they're also highly adaptable. Need to get rid of some leftovers or use up some pantry staples before they go bad? Got too many veggies in your latest CSA box? You can probably find a way to repurpose them in your trusty soup pot. *—Annie B. Copps and Amy Traverso*

FRENCH ONION SOUP

This classic soup made with white wine, fresh herbs, and Gruyère cheese is a warming, flavorful favorite. A word of advice, though: While slicing onions by hand gives you the most consistent results, it's OK to use a food processor to get through the heaps needed to make this soup (they'll cook down to about a quarter of their original volume). And when arranging the bread, be sure not to overlap the slices too far or you'll wind up with too much bread in the dish overall.

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter
3–3½ pounds (about 6 large) yellow onions, thinly sliced
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons flour
1 cup dry white wine
8 cups beef or chicken stock (homemade or low-sodium store-bought)
1 parsley sprig
1 thyme sprig
1 bay leaf
1 baguette, cut into ½-inch rounds
1½ cups (about 6 ounces) shredded Gruyère cheese

In a large, wide soup pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onions and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook gently, stirring frequently, until onions are very soft and have begun to turn a deep blond shade, about 40 minutes. (It's important to avoid browning them.) Stir in flour and cook 3 to 4 minutes, stirring frequently. Pour in wine and increase heat to medium-high, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pot to loosen any caramelized juices. Cook until liquid is almost completely reduced. Add stock.

Tie herbs together with string or place inside a piece of cheesecloth. Add herb bundle and bring to a simmer. Season lightly with salt and pepper and simmer 20 to 30 minutes. Onions should be soft but not falling apart. (You may make this soup ahead to this point if you like, and hold it for several hours or even a few days before serving.) Just before serving, heat oven to 350 degrees. Arrange baguette slices on oven rack. Toast lightly, 7 to 10 minutes, and set aside. Increase temperature to 450 degrees. Set six ovenproof crocks on a heavy baking sheet, and ladle the hot soup into them. (Discard herb bundles.) Float toasts on the soup surface and top each with a handful (¼ cup) of Gruyère.

Bake until cheese is melted, bubbly, and barely golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Serve immediately when cheese is gooey and crocks are hot. *Yields 6 servings.*

CLAM CHOWDER

This simple New England chowder recipe turns shellfish, cream, bacon, and potatoes into a dish that's rich and thick without being glunky.

7 pounds cherrystone clams, scrubbed and rinsed
3 cups water
4 strips bacon, finely chopped
1 medium Spanish onion, diced small
2 tablespoons flour
3 large red potatoes, cut into ½-inch dice
1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1 cup heavy cream

In a large soup pot over high heat, add clams to 3 cups water. Bring to a boil and cook just until clams open, about 10 minutes. Remove clams from broth and set aside. (Discard any clams that don't open.) Strain broth through a sieve lined with a coffee filter, and set aside.

Clean your soup pot; then over medium-high heat, saute bacon until it's browned and fat is rendered. Using a slotted spoon, remove bacon to a paper towel. Discard all but 2 tablespoons bacon fat. Add diced onion to the pot and saute until translucent. Stir in flour and cook 1 minute, being careful not to brown. Whisk in reserved clam broth. Add potatoes and thyme, and simmer 10 minutes. Remove clams from shells, reserving liquid, and chop meat roughly. Strain liquid; then add clams and liquid to the soup pot. Stir in parsley and cream; chop bacon and add. Cook just long enough to heat clams through, about 3 minutes. *Yields 6 servings.*

CLAM CHOWDER

REAL CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP

The soup that originally inspired the Campbell's classic was wildly popular in the early 20th century—and if you try your hand at making it from scratch, you'll see that the genuine article has a freshness that could never come from a can.

6 tablespoons salted butter, divided
1 pound sliced fresh button mushrooms
1 small onion, chopped
1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt, plus more to taste
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup chicken broth
2 cups whole milk or half-and-half
1½ cups sour cream, at room temperature
Chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a 4- or 5-quart heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, onion, salt, and pepper, and cook, stirring often, until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

Reduce heat to medium and melt remaining 3 tablespoons butter. Add flour and cook, stirring, until glossy, about 3 minutes. Slowly drizzle in chicken broth and milk, whisking as you go. Increase heat to a simmer and cook until mixture thickens, whisking often, about 5 minutes.

Reduce heat to medium-low, stir in the reserved mushroom mixture, and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and add the sour cream. Serve garnished with chopped fresh parsley. *Yields 4 to 6 servings.*

KELLER + KELLER

HEARTY LENTIL SOUP

HEARTY LENTIL SOUP

A pro tip for making this deliciously filling dish: Squeeze the lemons over the soup only after *it's in the bowl. If the juice sits in the soup too long, it throws off the delicate flavor balance.*

4 medium onions, finely chopped
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon olive oil
4 carrots, peeled and finely chopped
6–8 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons dry coriander
1 pound dry lentils, rinsed
2–3 tablespoons cumin
1 tablespoon kosher or sea salt
1 bunch Swiss chard, stems removed and cut into 2-inch pieces
1 tablespoon flour
¼ pound vermicelli or angel hair pasta, broken into 1-inch pieces
2 fresh lemons
Fried pita chips or unseasoned croutons

In a large pot over medium-high heat, sauté onions in ½ cup oil until translucent. Add carrots and garlic and cook 2 to 3 minutes. Add coriander, stir well, and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add lentils and stir well. Add water to cover the ingredients by 3 inches (about 8 cups). Stir in cumin. Cook about 30 minutes, or until lentils are al dente. Season with 1 tablespoon salt. Add Swiss chard and cook about 10 minutes. Remove 1 cup of broth and whisk in flour, then whisk back into soup pot.

In a sauté pan over medium-high heat, cook pasta in 1 tablespoon oil until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Add pasta and cook about 8 minutes. Ladle into bowls and squeeze about 1 tablespoon of lemon juice over each. Serve with pita chips or croutons. *Yields 8 servings.*

FIREHOUSE CHILI

Made with beef, veggies, beans, and the perfect blend of seasonings, this award-winning firehouse chili is a crowd-pleaser. Adapted from a recipe by Dennis Carr.

4 pounds ground beef
3 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
3 large onions, coarsely chopped
1 medium-size carrot, peeled and grated
2 green bell peppers, cored, seeded, and chopped
1–2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and finely chopped
¼ cup loose-packed light-brown sugar
3–4 tablespoons chili powder
3 tablespoons cumin
2 tablespoons cinnamon
¼–½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 28-ounce cans crushed tomatoes
1 15-ounce can each kidney beans, black beans, and chickpeas

Preheat your grill to medium, about 350°. Shape ground beef into large, flat patties. Grill patties until centers are medium rare, about 5 minutes on the first side and 3 on the second. As an alternative, you may cook the patties in a skillet, or just brown the meat in the chili pot over medium-high heat, breaking it up into smaller pieces with a wooden spoon.

In a large Dutch oven or stock pot over medium heat, warm oil. Add onions, carrot, bell peppers, jalapeno, brown sugar, chili powder, cumin, cinnamon, cayenne, salt, and black pepper. Cook, stirring often, until vegetables soften, about 10 minutes.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, kidney beans, black beans, and chickpeas. If you grilled the beef, add patties now and use a large spoon to break them up into bite-size chunks. Reduce heat to low and cook uncovered, stirring often, 1 hour. If mixture seems too thick during cooking, thin it with a bit of water.

Check seasoning and add more salt or black pepper if you like. Serve hot. *Yields 12 to 14 servings.*

KELLER + KELLER

Ode to a Woodshed

There's a special pride in building a home for the wood that heats yours.

I built a woodshed. This is very exciting to me, because for years our firewood has been covered by sheets of rusty roofing tin held in place by old truck tires and the smattering of heavy maple rounds that would not yield to the maul. There's nothing wrong with the old tin/used tires/unyielding maple approach to sheltering firewood; many a Vermont home has been heated for decades, if not generations, with precisely the same technique. When it comes to rural thrift, it's at least as proven as the repurposing of old pickup truck caps as animal shelters, and nearly as obvious as the baling-twine-as-a-belt trick. Still, there are deficits.

First, there's the issue of collapse. This becomes apparent only after you've extracted a sufficient quantity of wood from the center of the stack, something that often coincides with accumulating snow atop the roofing tin. At this perilous point, you can either remove the snow or simply hope for the best as you continue to diminish the stack, armload by armload, keeping an uneasy eye on the sagging metal. Having experimented with both techniques, I can report that I prefer a third: Send the boys out for more wood.

The other deficit is purely aesthetic, because it's pretty much inevitable that by the end of the heating season, the tin that covered the wood we've burned will now be stacked (or worse yet, not stacked) in our front yard. Now, no one would accuse us of keeping too neat a homestead; on any given day, you might find a shovel leaning against a tree, for no apparent reason other than it was the most logical place to lean it at the time. Or you might notice

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM HAUGOMAT

that someone has left the floor jack at the edge of the driveway, where he recently changed a flat tire (in his defense, I'll point out that the jack is extremely heavy, and that I, er, he will only need it again in 12 hours when I, er, he retrieves the patched tire from our mechanic). In fairness, I should note that in our family, the unflattering tendency to leave things lying about is 100 percent a male trait. For her part, Penny has always been one of those "a place for everything and everything in its place" sorts of people. But as there are three of us and only one of her, there's really not much she can do to mitigate.

So: a woodshed. One small step in the battle against homestead clutter, and one giant step in the direction of convenience. And then there's the old adage that a woodpile is a reflection of the person who made it. Indeed, in his book *Norwegian Wood*, Lars Mytting offers a handy guide to woodpile personality profiling. From Mytting's book, I learned that I am a man of big ambitions but also should be watched for sagging and collapse (tall pile); that I'm unstable, lazy, and prone to drunkenness (unfinished pile, some logs lying on the ground); and finally that I should be viewed with suspicion, because some of the wood I'm claiming as my own might actually be stolen (old and new wood piled together). A woodshed might not bend every one of these character traits in a positive direction, but surely it could be seen as a sign of growth and maturity.

I built the shed over the course of about three weeks, in my usual fits-and-starts style, using cedar poles for the main frame and small-diameter spruce trees as rafters. For the roof, I dipped into my pile of special 2x4s, the ones that came off the mill crooked, or with too much wane to serve as proper framing stock. I like having a pile of imperfect lumber lying around almost as much as I like having a pile of perfectly good lumber lying around, if only for the satisfaction of finding ways to utilize inferior materials. I screwed the 2x4s across the top sides of the spruce poles to serve as purlins for the roofing, for which I was able to repurpose a significant portion of the aforementioned rusty tin. All told, I screwed and hammered my way through maybe 10 bucks' worth of fasteners; all other materials either came from our woods or were diverted from some less glorious fate. This did not result in the grandest structure in the history of woodsheds, but then again: 10 bucks. I've known folks to pay more for fancy coffee drinks.

Even before the shed was fully complete, we began filling it. I'd installed vertical cedar posts at roughly 18-inch spacing along both sides of the shed; these would serve as uprights against which to stack each row. When stacked to a height that, according to Mytting, pegged me as a man of big ambitions, each row would contain approximately one cord of wood. This meant that we could fit roughly 10 cords of firewood in our new shed, enough for nearly two full seasons of heating and cooking. I didn't have that much wood ready for stacking; I figured we had maybe six cords split, and another two or so in logs. No doubt if not for my instability and drunkenness, it'd all be ready to go, but alas. My vices are sundry.

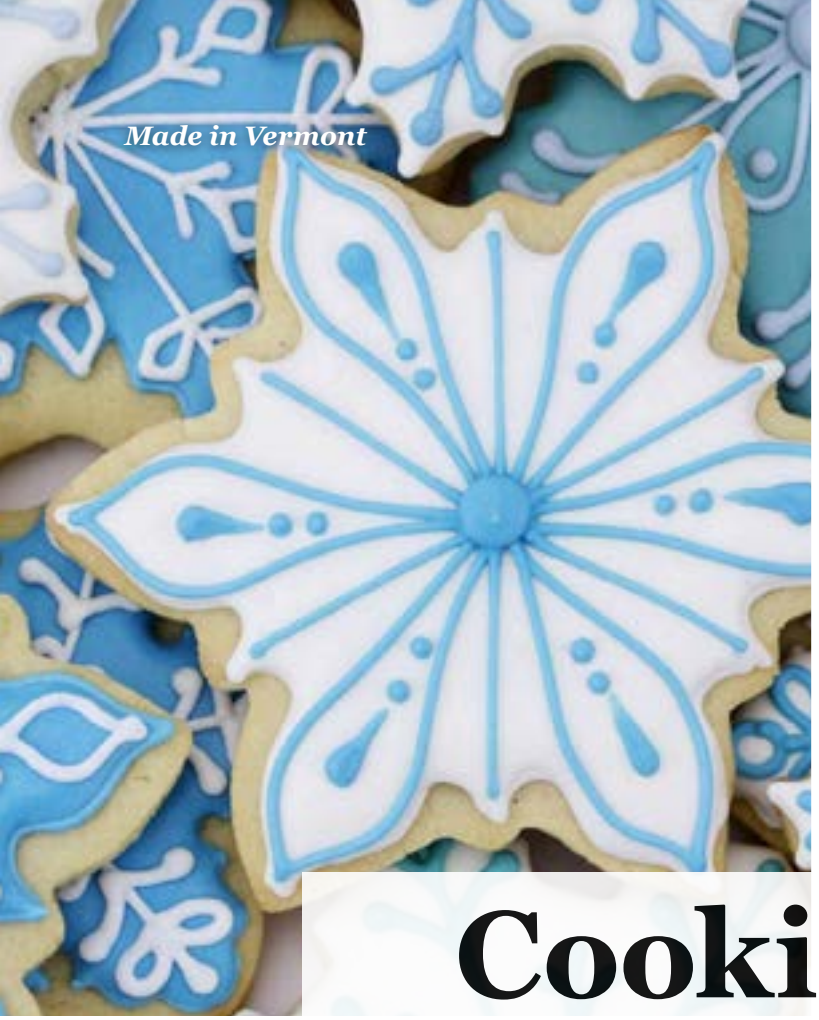
Over the course of many evenings stretching across many weeks, Penny and I stacked neat rows in the new woodshed, armload by armload, maybe five sticks to each armload, an incalculable number of armloads per row. Sometimes we worked in silence, other times we talked, keeping to a rhythm that allowed us to pass each other at the midpoint between shed and pile, one of us with arms full, the other with arms to be filled, the air redolent with the sweet smell of fresh-cut wood, which is tied for first place with freshly baled hay as the smell I love beyond all others.

Stacking wood demands relatively little of the mind while asking just enough of the body, a combination I've always found to be fertile ground for clear thinking.

The boys helped too, and I was reminded that one of the greatest pleasures in my life is listening through the open kitchen window to my sons' back-and-forth banter as they work, their conversation freed to roam by the straightforward nature of the task. Stacking wood demands relatively little of the mind while asking just enough of the body, a combination I've always found to be fertile ground for clear thinking (and good storytelling).

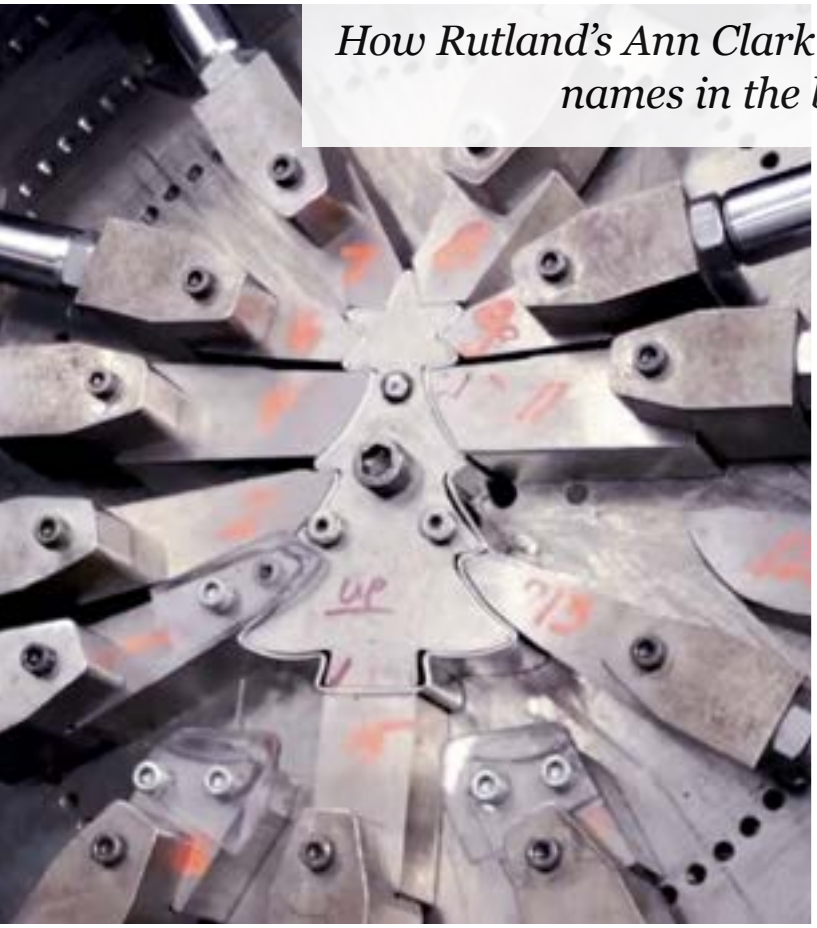
By the time you read this, our new woodshed will be full, or nearly so. Certainly near enough to full that we'll be assured a winter's worth of well-sheltered firewood, plus at least a solid down payment on the following winter's ration, a goal that's eluded me for more heating seasons than I can count, but which finally, finally feels so close that failure is all but incomprehensible. I wonder what Mytting would say about a fellow who, after more than a dozen consecutive years of falling woefully short, is on the verge of achieving his firewood ambitions. I'd like to think that he'd paint me as a man of resolve, a determined provider who retains his equanimity even in the face of a dream deferred.

Yeah. That sounds about right to me. *—Ben Hewitt*



Cookie Star

How Rutland's Ann Clark became one of the hottest names in the baking world.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KELLY CASTRICHINI/KC COOKIE CO/@KCCOOKIECO_NY (TOP RIGHT); ANN CLARK LTD. (ALL OTHERS)

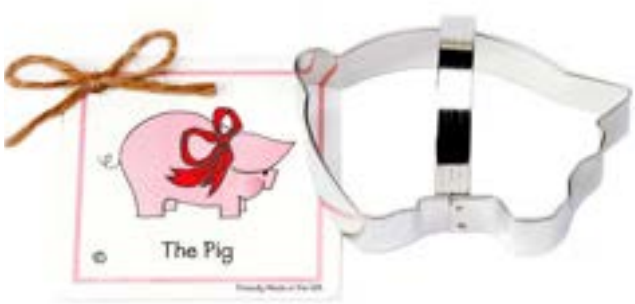
If you work at a manufacturing company, attending a trade show with your boss probably falls into the category of standard business chores. Not for Jen Giancola.

"I like to say it's like traveling with Beyoncé. When the elevator doors open and people see her, they either stand there in shock that she's standing in front of them and she's a real person, or they start screaming and want to hug her."

The object of all this adoration is a sprightly grandmother from Vermont who just happens to also be the founder of the world's largest cookie cutter company: Ann Clark. And the people who clamor to take a picture with her are attendees at CookieCon, an annual series of conventions that draw hundreds of cookie decorators from across the nation and beyond.

It's a fan base that not only is deeply loyal to the core product—timeless steel cookie cutters in thousands of shapes and sizes, made right here in the Green Mountain State—but also often feels a connection with Ann Clark's personal story. That was certainly true of Giancola, who started working at the company in 2018 before becoming its "chief cookie ambassador" in 2019.

"All of Ann's success happened after she had raised her three children and was an empty-nester in her late 40s," says Giancola. "I was sort of in the same boat when I started here, with kids going off to college and thinking, 'Well, what's next?' And the fascinating thing about Ann, for me, is that everything you know about her now is the 'what's next.'"



ABOVE: Now in her 80s, Ann Clark still comes into work every day at her namesake company in Rutland. "She knows everybody's name," says Jen Giancola, chief cookie ambassador. "She knows how many kids everybody has, their spouses' names—it's that kind of place."

LEFT: The design that helped launch the Ann Clark cookie cutter empire more than 30 years ago.

Clark, who graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in art, always had a knack for making things. For years she had been creating and selling toys, dollhouses, and ornaments, but it wasn't until 1989 that she came up with a cookie cutter shaped like a plump, cute little pig—and as it turned out, that pig would fly.

"A friend who owned a kitchen store hooked Ann up with a manufacturer in Pennsylvania, who started making prototypes," Giancola says. "And then those got picked up by a catalog. And then there was a trade show with a cancellation, so Ann and her husband, John, picked up a booth last-minute and came home with a ton of orders—she couldn't believe it."

The demand for Clark's cookie cutters was so strong that it was hard to find a manufacturer to keep up with it, Giancola says. So it was eventually decided that Ann Clark Ltd.—by now a full-fledged company—would have its own manufacturing facility right in Rutland, and that's where the business has stayed ever since.

"It's something that Vermont and especially Rutland can be really proud of," Giancola says. "We're the leader in cookie cutters in the world, and we're based right here. Ben & Jerry's gets a lot of attention, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters gets a lot of attention, but our company, you know, we're just kind of sitting here under the radar."

Overseen today by Clark's son, Ben, as CEO, the company has had a remarkable surge in growth in recent years: By one report, it went from turning out

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANN CLARK LTD.

Giancola estimates that Ann Clark is tagged every day on social media by up to individual 100 bakers and cookie artists, eager to show off what they've made using her cutters—such as (LEFT) @sweetconfectionscookiery and (RIGHT) @sweethomecookieco. BELOW: Recipe booklets included with sets of cookie cutters help get novice bakers on their way.

500,000 cookie cutters in 2014 to 4.5 million by 2019. All made from food-quality U.S. steel, Ann Clark cookie cutters can be found everywhere from Sur La Table and Williams Sonoma to Amazon, the latter of which sells them in at least 19 different countries (which can yield some interesting cultural insights, Giancola notes: "Apparently Great Britain *loves* teddy bears!"). The brand was even featured in a Made in America trade show at the White House in 2018.

Part of the reason for this explosive success is that cookie decorating has become a year-round activity, thanks in no small part to the showcase that Instagram and Facebook provide these sugary masterworks. "It's not just limited to Christmas anymore," Giancola says. "Fall is crazy now, because of Halloween and even Thanksgiving. Mother's Day is huge, graduations and weddings are huge. There's no quiet time of the year, really!"

That means new opportunities for Ann Clark Ltd., which has begun rolling out additional products, such as icing mixes, piping bags, and even its own food colorings. But at the core will always be the cookie cutters—the multitudinous mix of stars, snowflakes, maple leaves, llamas, Sasquatches, and hundreds more that have descended from that first perky little pig.

"The nice thing about Ann's cookie cutters is if you treat them right, they will last forever. They can be handed down from generation to generation," says Giancola. "And also, we don't do designs that are too trendy or too unrecognizable. So a hundred years from now, that cookie cutter will still be holding its shape, and people will still know what it is."

As for Ann Clark herself, she remains the friendly face of the company she founded, greeting fans at gatherings of the cookie faithful—something that Giancola, for one, is eager to get back to. "We just missed two CookieCons because we're not traveling, and we thought we would be by now. But we're cautiously optimistic we'll get back to that next year," she says. "I mean, Ann doesn't sell anything at her booth, she literally just gives away thousands of cookie cutters and chats with everybody who comes by. That's why people love her. We had volunteers stand in at the booth for the past two events, but she was missed. She's the rock star!" —*Jenn Johnson*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANN CLARK LTD. (CUTTERS); SWEET CONFECTIONS COOKIERY (LLAMAS); KELLEE YACOUB/SWEET HOME COOKIE CO. (PENGUINS)

Smooth Operator

Bag Balm proves some things are too good to keep down on the farm.

Leave it to New Englanders to be resourceful enough to take a product intended for cows' udders and slather it on their own skin to relieve chapping. The story goes that when dairy farmers' wives began noticing how soft their husbands' hands were, they demanded answers and equal treatment. And so an unexpected dry-skin remedy for humans was born: Vermont's own Bag Balm, rubbed on udders since 1899.

Produced in the Northeast Kingdom—a place where folks know well how rough and rugged winter can be—the rich yellow ointment traces its history back to a Lyndonville farmer named John L. Norris, who was so smitten with the balm that had been created by a Wells River pharmacist that he put together the money to buy the formula and start making it himself. Calling it Bag Balm, Norris packaged it in a now-iconic green tin stamped with a cow's head and Vermont's indigenous red clover.

From there, the lanolin-and-petrolatum-based salve spread out across the country and beyond, as people seized on it to soothe chapped fingers and toes, sunburn, diaper rash, hooves, and paws (along with, yes, udders). Other, even less-expected uses included quieting creaky bed springs, waterproofing boots, and even oiling soldiers' weapons.

Along the way, the quirky do-it-all ointment has achieved an impressive measure of fame: Admiral Byrd took it to Antarctica, and it was rubbed into search dogs' paws at the World Trade Center site in the wake of 9/11. Celebrities as diverse as Charles Kuralt, Shania Twain, Oprah, and Tracee Ellis Ross have touted its virtues, as have publications like *The New York Times* and *Bicycling* magazine (turns out Bag Balm does wonders for saddle sores, too).

After more than a century of family ownership, Bag Balm was bought in 2014 by Vermont's Original LLC, which has expanded the product lineup to include things like moisturizing soap and lotions. But the salve that started it all is still front and center, offering its time-tested guarantee of softer skin … and a winter's glow that doesn't involve stoking the woodstove. *—Annie Graves*

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