

HOLIDAY PREP: BEST STOCK, PERFECT PIE CRUST, MAKE-AHEAD STARTERS

FOOD & WINE

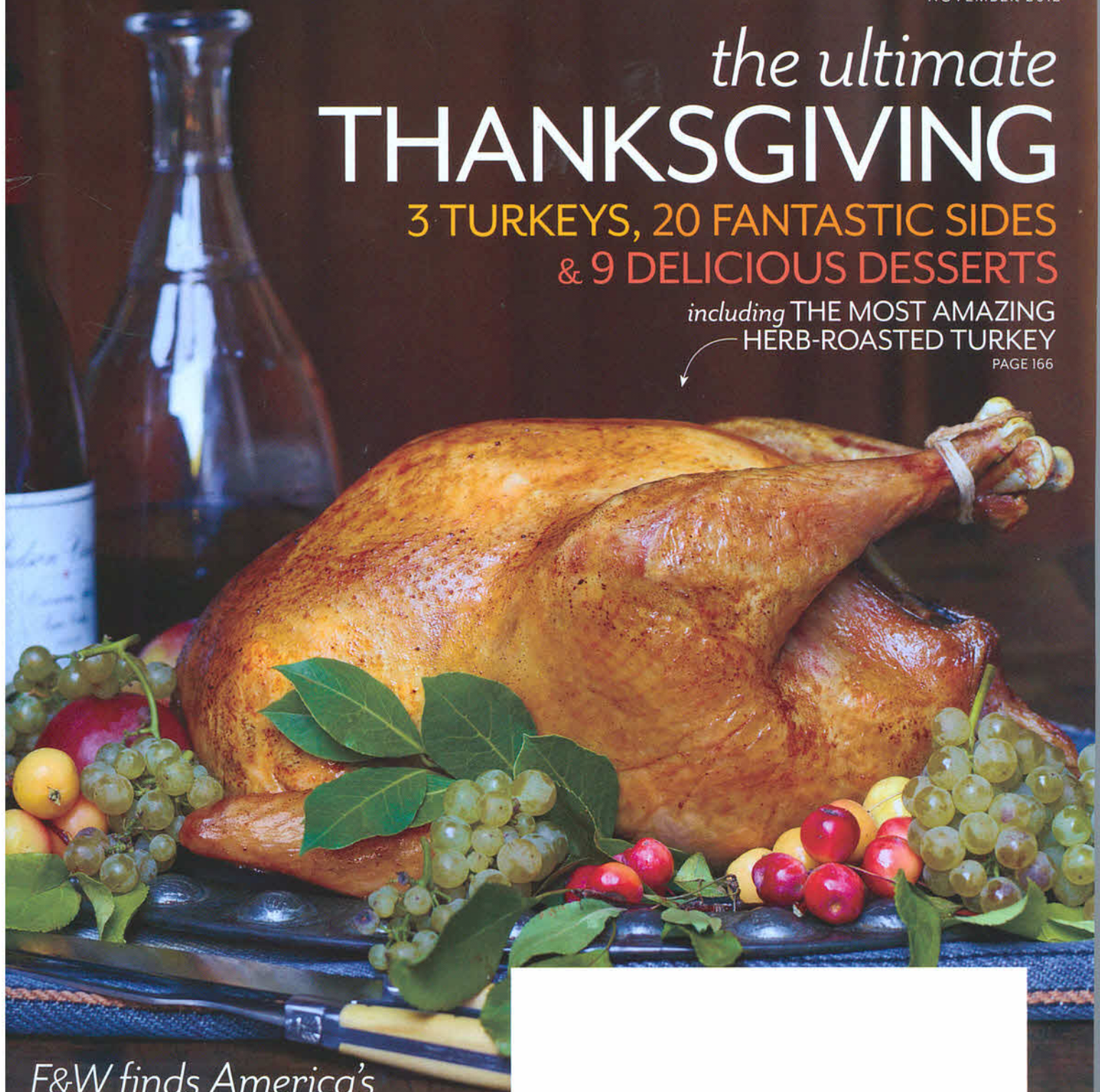
NOVEMBER 2012

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HERB-ROASTED TURKEY

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F&W finds America's
**GREATEST LITTLE
FOOD TOWNS**

HONORS

Helen Keplinger is equally at home making superstar Napa Cabernets or complex Rhône-style blends.



NAPA VALLEY

Aaron Pott

AARON POTT (ABOVE) is trying to take Napa Cabernet back to its roots. "I think I'm looking for what existed in Napa before the late '90s," he says. "All these artificially concentrated, superfruity wines are a bit boring." He's fulfilling this goal with wines like his 2009 Pott Wines Her Majesty's Secret Service (\$110), a profound single-vineyard red that's equal parts power and finesse (also true of the wines he makes for star properties like Blackbird and Seven Stones). Pott's influences are far-ranging—he has managed Bordeaux châteaux and made wines all over the world—but his true inspiration is his home turf. "I've tasted so many great, older Napa wines, and I always wonder, Why aren't we making these wines anymore?"



ROCK STAR

The 2010 Keplinger Lithic gets its name from the rocky soil in the vineyard where it's grown.



BOTTLED HISTORY
Aaron Pott's 2009 Her Majesty's Secret Service recalls the great Cabernets of Napa's past.

NAPA VALLEY & THE SIERRA FOOTHILLS, CALIFORNIA

Helen Keplinger

ONE CHARACTERISTIC GREAT WINEMAKERS share is that they understand potential. Helen Keplinger, for instance, is making extraordinary wines in very unassuming regions—the steep, rocky vineyards of California's Amador and El Dorado counties in the Sierra Foothills, mostly known for affordable Zinfandels.

How does someone recognize that kind of hidden potential? In Keplinger's case, it stems from time spent making other world-class reds (for Napa Valley's Bryant Family Vineyards), as well as familiarity with *terroirs* like the Priorat and its similarly stony vineyards (she was a winemaker there). Or, it just might be a love of rocks. As she says, "If you like rocks the way I do, these places are insanely compelling." Either way, her vision is clear in wines like the 2010 Keplinger Lithic (\$60), a mineral-rich, layered blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre; it's the kind of wine that may someday help redefine a whole region.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Gavin Chanin

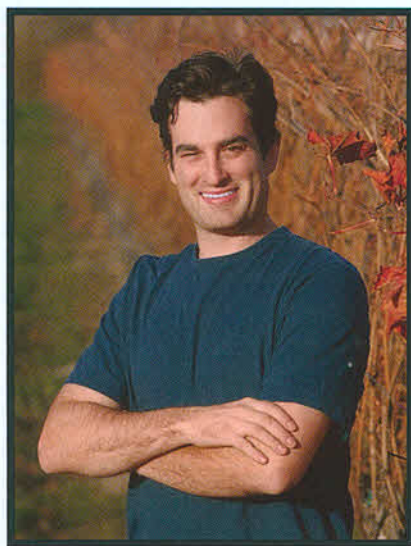
IF GAVIN CHANIN (left) has his way, big, ripe, in-your-face California Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays will someday be a thing of the past. "Making balanced wines was the reason I started my winery," Chanin says. "Overly ripe, overly oaked wines don't reflect where they're grown. But I also think balanced wines simply taste better." His 2010 Chanin Wine Company Bien Nacido Vineyard Chardonnay (\$35), with its laser-like focus, is a perfect example of the style he's after.

Until a few months ago, Chanin worked for two of the Central Coast's best winemakers, Au Bon Climat's Jim Clendenen and Qupé's Bob Lindquist. But now he's struck out on his own, to concentrate on Chanin Wine Company and the start-up Price Chanin Vineyards, a partnership with investor Bill Price (Buccella, Kistler), which will focus on single-vineyard Pinots from some of California's greatest vineyards. ●



PERFECT FOCUS

Forget dull, flabby Chardonnay: Chanin's 2010 Bien Nacido bottling is thrilling.



Winemakers of the Year

The top up-and-coming talents for 2012 are growing obscure grapes in Cab country, extracting intensity from stony vineyards and much more.

BY RAY ISLE



Steve Matthiasson champions esoteric Italian varietals in the heart of Napa Valley.

NAPA VALLEY

Steve Matthiasson

IF YOU WANT TO BE a terrific winemaker, consider becoming a grape-grower first. That has been Steve Matthiasson's approach; he was a sought-after vineyard consultant for many years before starting his eponymous winery. It has quickly become a source for some of Napa Valley's most remarkable wines, like the 2010 Matthiasson White (\$35), a focused blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Ribolla Gialla, Sémillon and Tocai Friulano—a surprising mix of varietals in the heart of Cabernet country. The inspiration for it came from a trip to Italy's Friuli region, about which Matthiasson says, "I realized, tasting these Friulian whites, that you didn't have to throw out richness to have freshness. You can have both in the same wine."

With his grapes-come-first sensibility, his skill at balancing lushness with crisp intensity and his fascination with little-known varieties, Matthiasson is helping to change the Napa Valley paradigm.



ITALY IN NAPA
Matthiasson's precise white blend combines unusual Italian varietals with Sémillon and Sauvignon.



Maggie Harrison at home in Oregon's Dundee Hills.

WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OREGON

Maggie Harrison

SOMETIMES LUCK is a vineyard. In 2005, Maggie Harrison was living in Santa Barbara, California, working as assistant winemaker at Sine Qua Non, helping to make some of California's greatest wines. She had no plans to move anywhere, but then she got a call asking her to look at a vineyard site in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Shortly after arriving—"less than a minute," she says—she decided to pick up and move to the Dundee Hills.

Good luck, but also a smart choice. The rocky, 11-acre Antica Terra vineyard, located on a prehistoric seabed, happens to be capable of growing extraordinary Pinot Noir. And Harrison has the skill to fulfill that potential, as her complex estate and silky Botanica bottlings (the latter from renowned Shea Vineyard) show. But as good as those wines are, Harrison's talent is even clearer in her 2010 Erratica Rosé (\$50). Made with lengthy contact with Pinot skins and a year of aging on lees (dead yeast), it's a rosé with the complexity and depth of a great red; both intriguing and delicious, and a firm promise of even more ambitious wines yet to come.



PROFOUND PINOT
Antica Terra's Botanica bottling has a remarkably silky texture.