

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

# AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

THE MAGAZINE CELEBRATING LIFE IN AMERICA

ISSUE 132



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*merry*  
**CHRISTMAS**

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## Front of Tear Out Card 1



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## Back of Tear Out Card 1





## AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

Dear Bill and Judy,

Between the busy holiday season and the onset of the new year, this time of year can be as hectic as it is fulfilling. Whether you're planning an upcoming event or keeping an eye toward the future, this issue of American Lifestyle is full of ideas to help, including a list of must-have items for hosting get-togethers, wintry destinations perfect for skiers, postholiday organization tips, and much more.

The weeks leading up to and following the holidays are prime time for welcoming friends and family into your home. To make your life easier, be sure to check out the enclosed guide full of gadgets and other items that can help simplify the decorating, cooking, and cleanup processes.

Across the country, ski resorts are gearing up for another magical season on the slopes. If you love the feeling of gliding down the mountain or prefer relaxing in a luxurious lodge, the article inside offers some of the best places to visit for your next trip.

The holidays are often one of the busiest times of year, making it hard to stay on top of your health and home upkeep, among other areas. In this issue, you'll find tips to help you find balance as the new year gets going.

What are you most looking forward to in the year ahead? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

**Stacey Shanner**



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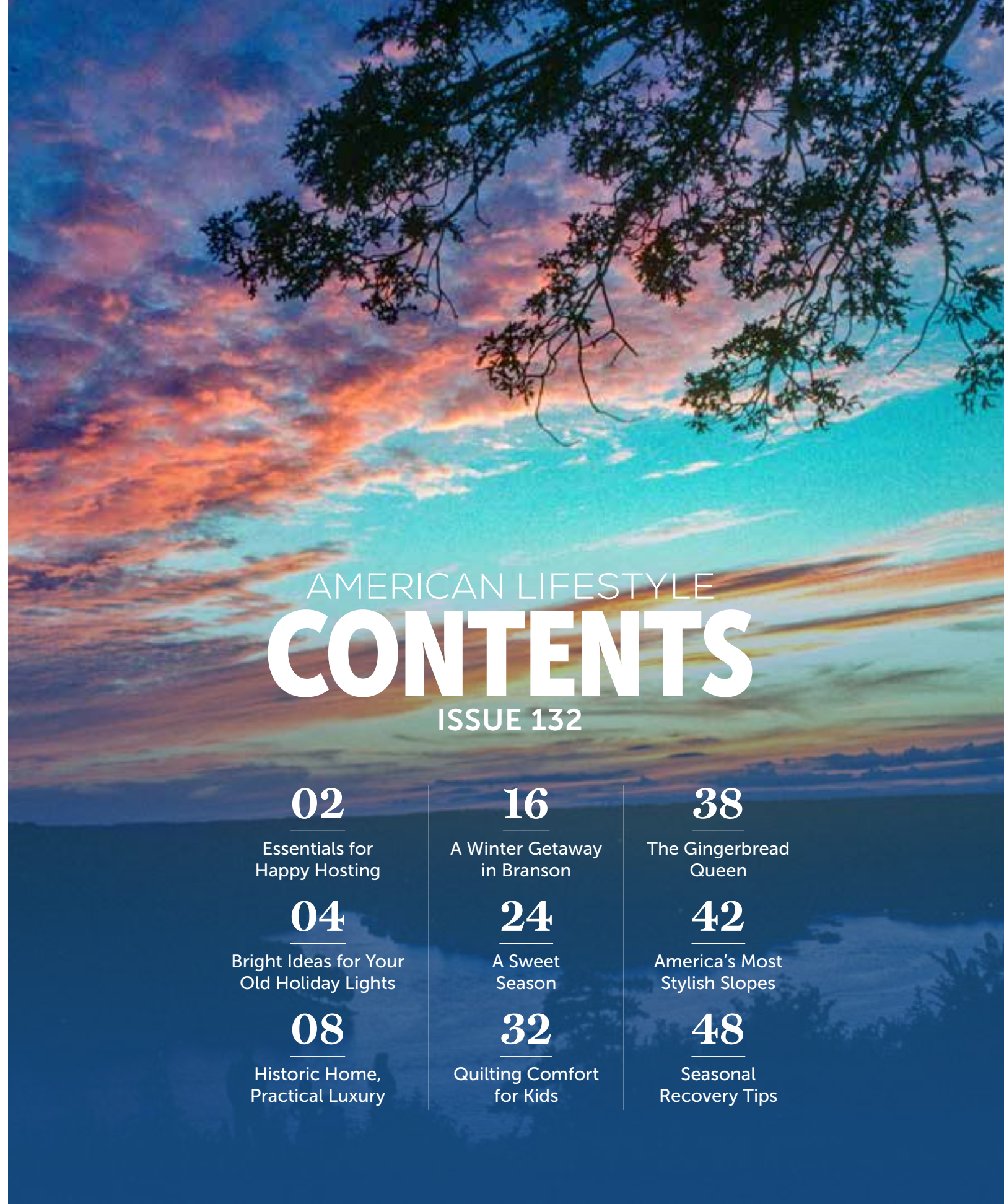
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# ESSENTIALS FOR HAPPY HOSTING

Written by **Alexa Bricker** / Photography by **Getty Images**

Welcoming guests into your home can be a great opportunity to make memories that will last a lifetime. But between decorating, food prep, and cleanup, there's also nothing easy about it.

To help ensure that everything goes off without a hitch, consider having the following items on hand.

### **Cordless handheld vacuum**

More people results in more mess, but an easily accessible handheld vacuum can allow you to pick up small spills in a pinch. Some cordless varieties can handle both dry and wet messes, so you'll be able to handle virtually any mishap that occurs.

### **Designated trash cans**

You'd be surprised by how much trash can accumulate after just a few hours, and having to take the trash outside multiple times throughout the party is a huge pain. Set up and label a few receptacles—for both trash and recycling—throughout your home; this will prevent guests from having to search high and low to dispose of their waste and you from having to empty the bins so often.

### **Extra seating**

There's nothing more awkward than guests having to pile uncomfortably onto a love seat or, even worse, stand

to enjoy their meal. It's worthwhile to purchase a set of folding chairs you can pull out at a moment's notice in case an unexpected plus-one arrives.

### **Ice machine**

An ice maker might sound superfluous, but if your event is long or has a lot of guests, it can be a much easier option than trying to estimate how many bags you might need from the local gas station. Alternatively, if your freezer has a built-in ice maker, collect a few bags of ice from it in the days leading up to your party to prevent from running out.

### **Unscented candles**

Certain smells can be divisive at best and downright irritating at worst, so it's best to avoid scented candles altogether. Opt for unscented varieties instead, which will provide your home with a pleasant glow without an overbearing aroma.

Hosting is a big job, but by equipping yourself with these essentials, you can spend less time problem-solving and more time with your loved ones.



***BRIGHT  
IDEAS***  
FOR YOUR OLD  
**HOLIDAY  
LIGHTS**

Written by **Lauren Kim**  
Photography by **Getty Images**

**F**or many, twinkling holiday lights are a beautiful and anticipated seasonal feature. But what should you do with them after they stop working or when you want new ones? With these ideas, you can find a new purpose for your old festive strands of lights.

#### The environmental problem

The holiday season can be joyous, but it also generates a lot of garbage. Americans throw away about 25 percent more this time of year, straining landfills. Wrapping paper, packaging, and food are the major culprits. But discarded lights are often mixed in as well, releasing harmful chemicals like mercury and lead into the environment. Unfortunately, putting them in the recycling bin instead isn't a great solution either since they often contain a mix of glass, metal, and plastic that must be separated before processing. Additionally, their long cords can damage recycling equipment by getting tangled in it. If you have old lights on your hands, don't lose hope—there are several safer options for getting rid of them or repurposing them.

#### Try swapping them out

Before giving up on your malfunctioning holiday lights, even if they seem as determined to stay dark as Clark Griswold's in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, you can check for a simple solution. It may be possible that a blown fuse or burned-out bulb is responsible for the



## Stuff them into a beautiful jar or lantern to add inexpensive but beautiful lighting to your front porch.

malfunction, and replacement parts are likely readily available. However, don't attempt to revive lights with broken sockets, loose connections, or frayed wires, which can create a safety or fire hazard.

#### Recycle or upcycle

If it isn't possible to salvage your holiday lights, contact your local municipal waste service to determine whether there is a recycling program in your area where you could drop them off. You could also check whether your local Home Depot or Lowe's will take them; some locations will accept them for recycling during the holiday season. If your lights are still in good condition, consider donating them to a friend, school, or thrift store or even listing them for free on an online platform like Facebook Marketplace or a Buy Nothing group.

Another option is to use your craft skills to repurpose them. For instance, string them across your patio to create extra sparkle or stuff them into a beautiful jar or lantern to add inexpensive but beautiful lighting to your front porch. Another option is to slip a faux flower or brightly colored plastic cup around each bulb to make festive decor for your next party. Creatively reusing these seasonal decorations can give them new life and allow you to enjoy them well past the new year.

It may take extra work to properly dispose of or breathe new life into your old holiday lights, but doing so will be worth the effort for your own peace of mind and the planet.

# HISTORIC HOME, *Practical Luxury*

Interview with **Paulina Perrault**  
Written by **Matthew Brady**  
Photography by **September Days Photography/Laura Reoch**

AFTER



BEFORE



Bay Area interior designer **Paulina Perrault** discusses a unique project: transforming a partially updated 1908 house in the suburb of Larkspur.

**What was your path to design like?**

I grew up in the Midwest with some serious DIY parents who bought older houses and fixed them up, so transformation is deep in my DNA. Professionally, my design journey is very winding and essentially self-taught. I dabbled in design and then went into corporate sales, but the internal pull of the former inspired me to finally jump in wholeheartedly. I started knocking on doors of various businesses and ended up working for a model home firm in Southern California. For the first four months there, I did so for free to get more experience, but they just kept throwing work at me until it became clear that I had proven my value and they had to start paying me. Within a year, I was managing projects and quickly became very fluent in both architecture and construction.

After I left that firm, I married my then-husband and moved to the Bay Area, where I started collaborating with him on some bigger city projects and development projects in the



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BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE

wine country. I'm now pushing thirty years in the interior design space, and I've had my own studio, Paulina Perrault Interiors, for about five.

**Tell us the backstory of the Larkspur home:**

The couple who owns it had updated the kitchen, the backyard, and the understory, which created a second family room and laundry. However, with old houses such as this one, the structural integrity has to be addressed, which is really expensive. So those initial projects cost much more than they had expected. They had younger kids at the time and figured that they could just add some furniture to the existing living and dining rooms and make them great. Instead, these areas ended up becoming dumping spaces filled with old furniture—when we arrived, the living room was littered with lacrosse bags!

The owners told me that they rarely even went to the front half of their house because it was depressing and dark, which was a shame since the kitchen was bright, airy, and modern. Overall, the area was just forgotten and underutilized, and it restricted their home life. They lived like that for a good eight to ten years.

**What was most challenging about this project?**

The husband really values design: elevated style, furnishings, and finishings. But after I established

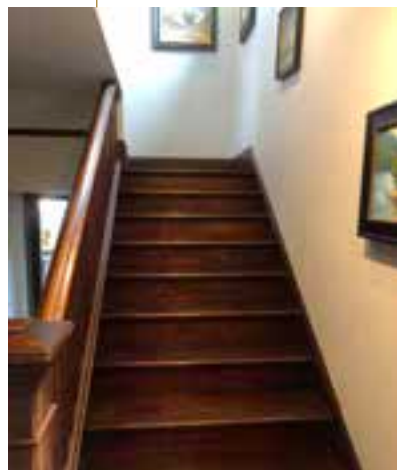


the budget and chose the designs and new furniture with him and his wife, she told me she wanted to spend about half the price.

Fortunately, they let me decide where to value-engineer to get the most bang for their buck. For instance, I kept the existing high-end chandelier and rug in the dining room and paired them with a retail dining table and chairs. The window and wall treatments and the stone of the built-in in the living room also remain.

Another challenge was that this house is on the historic register, which limited what we could do. In fact, the historical society wouldn't allow us to touch the fireplace at all. But the general contractor of this project can solve any problem. He actually suspended a marble slab over the face of the original fireplace, so it's not glued or mechanically fastened to it at all.

**BEFORE**



### **How did you deftly combine old and new in the stairwell and entry?**

The stairwell had dark wood paneling and was empty underneath, so we kept the original design but added pullouts that go the depth of the stairway. We also honored the architecture by refinishing all the old Douglas fir in the

**AFTER**



stair treads, newels, and guardrail and brought in a nice white color for the balusters and paneling. In the entryway, we installed a built-in bench while leaving the window sashes and millwork untouched. Overall, the shape and classicism are still there but updated and revitalized with a fresh coat of paint.

### **What changes transformed the living room/dining room area?**

The passageway between the rooms was short, narrow, and tight, so we removed the pocket door and made the opening as wide as possible. That allowed me to furnish the area around the fireplace symmetrically and add a little more breathing space to the living room, which had originally crept into the passageway. We also kept the casework but made it bigger and painted it and the windows white as a gorgeous reference point to the original architectural language. We then added a softback sofa that serves as an elegant transition to the dining room. Now, the space feels great room-ish but still has a beautiful passageway.

### **How did you make the dining room so drastically brighter?**

We used a high-gloss, cloud-colored paint on the wall paneling and casework and an

**AFTER**



**BEFORE**



almost metallic paint from Modern Masters on the ceiling above the wainscot and millwork and on the back of the built-in. The latter has an iridescent quality: it appears to be pearlized from one angle and blue from another. It was really difficult to execute, but once the painter did it, it was like [*blow's chef's kiss*].

We also added lights inside the built-in and under its upper cabinets and a marble slab to the counter and backsplash. Doing all that transformed the room: it still feels traditional and Craftsman but is now light and inviting. It used to be a bit of a black hole, but now it invites you in.

#### **What inspired the blues, greens, and oranges throughout the project?**

The brighter colors feed off the clients' artwork, personal tastes,

**For the bathroom, I chose old restoration hardware for the lampshade sconces and painted the walls a glossy orange.**

**AFTER**



**BEFORE**



and beautiful, airy family neighborhood. They have an incredible collection of California plein air art; we keyed off that with the palette choices for the entry wall color and the nearby powder room. For the bathroom, I chose old restoration hardware for the lampshade sconces and painted the walls a glossy orange. That combination just works in spaces like a powder room, where you can go a little crazy design-wise.

We also furnished the master bedroom, which the wife wanted to be green. Since green and orange are good friends, we did a riff on the orange with coral and on the green with olive in the beautiful new bedding and rug.

#### **How did the clients respond to the home's transformation?**

We achieved their goal of not only wanting to live in but also *enjoy* the front half of their house, so they were thrilled with the results. They're actually best friends with another client I'm working with now, so I also hear from *them* that the couple is still quite happy with how it turned out.

For more info, visit [paulinaperrault.com](http://paulinaperrault.com) or follow Paulina on Instagram [@paulinaperraultinteriors](https://www.instagram.com/paulinaperraultinteriors)

**AFTER**



**BEFORE**



# A WINTER GETAWAY IN BRANSON

Written by **Allison Gomes** / Photography **as noted**

**T**hough you may long for warm summer days spent lying by sandy shores, winter is also a wonderful time to escape to new destinations, explore exciting sites, and embark on thrilling adventures. Among the many must-see locations across the nation is an under-the-radar spot in the Show-Me State: Branson, Missouri. Stunning all year round but especially in winter, Branson beckons visitors to explore its historic streets and discover new sites around every corner.

## **A whimsical wonderland**

Missouri may not be the first place that comes to mind when pondering vacation destinations, but Branson proves more than worthy of consideration. As it's less than a day's drive away for one-third of the American population, the city makes for a perfect getaway for couples, families, and friends alike. It's home to an award-winning amusement park and contains numerous museums, attractions, restaurants, wineries, and breweries, all just waiting to be explored.

Don't hold off on visiting until temperatures warm up, however. Winter unveils a different kind of charm in this vibrant city that you won't experience at other points of the year. The historic downtown area and various attractions are

decked in holiday cheer through December, but even beyond the new year, the city has a charm to it, with the nearby Ozark Mountains standing sentinel over a landscape adorned with glistening frost and twinkling lights. So bundle up and prepare to be enchanted as you explore the magic of Branson in the colder months.

**Branson's top attractions**

A stay in Branson is guaranteed to ignite the inner child in you, especially after a stop at Silver Dollar City, an 1880s-themed amusement park. If you're visiting in December, you can revel in the festive decorations and more than 6.5 million lights adorning seemingly every inch of the park as well as catch Broadway-style performances of *A Dickens' Christmas Carol* and *Coming Home for Christmas*. But the fun doesn't end there! Though the park closes for January and February, if you visit later in the year, you're not going to want to miss the dozens of rides and attractions, including the WildFire roller coaster, which reaches speeds up to 66 miles per hour and features a vertical drop of fifteen stories. Or take a journey on the newly opened Fire in the Hole, an indoor family roller coaster that is the largest of its kind in America's heartland. Just be sure to keep an eye on the weather during your visit since some attractions may not operate in lower temperatures.

Additionally, the city offers a variety of family-friendly activities, including indoor water parks, museums, and arcades, ensuring



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SILVER DOLLAR CITY

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SILVER DOLLAR CITY

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**Winter unveils a different kind of charm in [Branson] that you won't experience at other points of the year.**

INSPIRATION TOWER,  
SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS, BRANSON



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THE  
TITANIC  
MUSEUM,  
BRANSON



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that boredom is never on the itinerary. If you're after something a little less thrill-inducing, consider visiting Branson's Titanic Museum, the world's largest Titanic-themed attraction. Here visitors have the chance to walk an exact replica of the luxury liner's grand staircase while viewing more than four hundred artifacts from the ship's wreckage. You can also spend all day at Beyond the Lens! thanks to its over 150 interactive, technology-based exhibits, including FlyRide, a virtual experience that takes you high above some of the nation's most awe-inspiring landmarks.

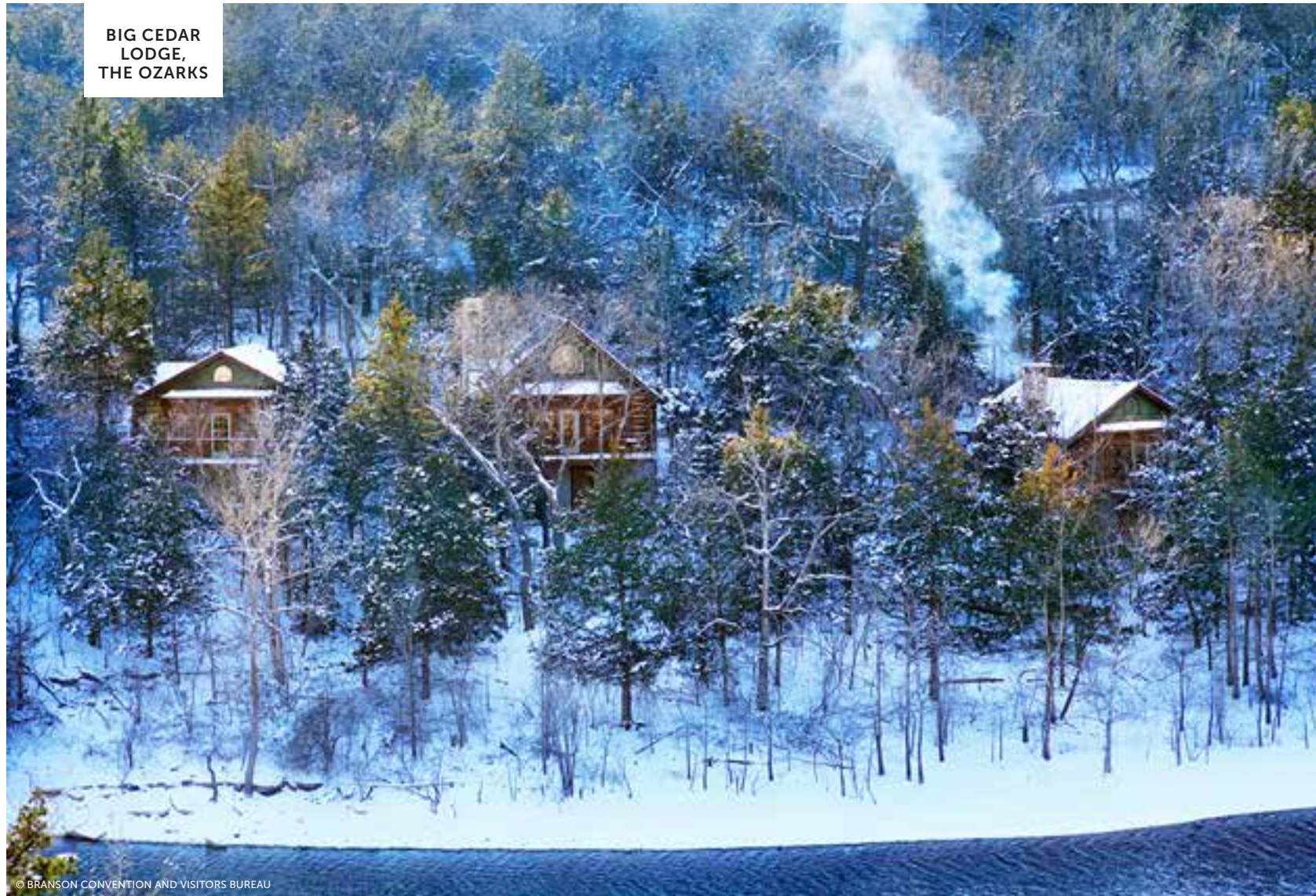
No visit to Branson is complete without a stroll through the historic downtown area. Get a slice of authentic Chicago-style pizza at Mr. G's before making your way to the Branson Board Game Cafe, where you can select from over 1,300 games to play solo or with family and friends. Consider taking the free trolley, which travels throughout downtown Branson and offers one of the best ways to visit the numerous shops and sites located here. Along the trolley

route, stop and shop at Branson Landing, home to over one hundred shops and restaurants and a 1.5-mile boardwalk along the Taneycomo lakefront. Branson Landing's main attraction, however, is its dazzling water fountains. Merging water, fire, light, and music, the choreographed spectacle was created by Wet Design, the same team responsible for the world-renowned Bellagio fountains in Las Vegas. It's an enchanting experience you won't want to miss.

#### Escape to the Ozarks

Winter in Branson doesn't just mean cozy indoor activities—it's also the perfect time for outdoor adventures. The Ozark Mountains offer a picturesque backdrop for activities such as hiking, snowshoeing, and even zip-lining. There's something truly magical about exploring the snowy trails and witnessing the serene beauty of nature in its winter attire.

For some of the best views of Branson and the Ozarks, make a trek up to Inspiration Tower at the Shepherd of the Hills. The 230-foot tower is



**BIG CEDAR LODGE, THE OZARKS**

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**BRANSON LANDING**

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**Whether you choose to explore the various shops, restaurants, and attractions that make the city so great or spend your trip in the great outdoors, a winter vacation to Branson is guaranteed to be one that you'll never forget.**



**BIG CEDAR LODGE, THE OZARKS**

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**BRANSON TROLLEY**

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situated on the highest point in southwest Missouri and provides a jaw-dropping view of the surrounding areas. The structure is also the launching point for the Vigilante Extreme ZipRider, which flies you over the area at 50 miles per hour. Operations of the zip line are weather dependent, though, with rides only taking place when temperatures are over 50 degrees. (Please note: Inspiration Tower and Zipline Canopy Tours are the only attractions open in January and February.) For other stunning views of the mountains, be sure to check out Highway 165's scenic overlook or the one at Big Cedar Lodge. Both are a short ten-minute drive south of Branson and offer picture-perfect vantage points of the often snow-covered hills.

Another must-see destination is Table Rock Lake, a serene spot nestled in the Ozarks and that boasts more than 43,000 acres of water and 800 miles of shoreline. The lake doesn't freeze in winter, and though you may not want to go for a swim, it still offers a prime bass-fishing spot during the cooler months. For a beginner-friendly hike by the shore, consider embarking on the 2.2-mile trek along Table Rock Lakeshore Trail. And just west of Branson lies the Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area, where you can encounter 1,534 acres of forest and hills. With over 5.6 miles of hiking trails, a scenic overlook, and a lookout tower, it's a great place to experience the beauty of the area and the magic of winter.

Whether you choose to explore the various shops, restaurants, and attractions that make the city so great or spend your trip in the great outdoors, a winter vacation to Branson is guaranteed to be one that you'll never forget. So pack your bags and cold-weather gear and get ready to explore a new destination this season.

# a sweet season

Recipes by **TRACEY ZABAR**  
Photography by **ELLEN SILVERMAN**



EXCERPTED FROM *SWEET LITTLE CAKES FROM MRS. ZABAR'S BAKESHOP: PERFECT DESSERTS FOR SHARING* © 2023 TRACEY ZABAR. PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELLEN SILVERMAN. USED WITH PERMISSION OF RIZZOLI NEW YORK.



Get the rest of the recipes here.

## *citrus poppy seed* CAKE

Poppy seed cake is often made with too much lemon and a sticky, overly sweet glaze. Try my take on this old favorite. If desired, substitute lemon, lime, clementine, or tangerine zest and juice for the orange. Serve with candied orange peel on the side.



Makes one 5-inch bundt cake (serves 4)



Preheat the oven to 350°F.

### INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for the pan  
½ cup granulated sugar  
Finely grated zest of ¼ orange  
1 large egg  
¼ cup heavy cream  
1 teaspoon freshly squeezed orange juice

½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
2 tablespoons poppy seeds  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon baking powder  
Pinch of salt  
Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter one 5-inch well of a Bundt quartet pan, and set aside.
- 2/ In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Add the orange zest and egg and beat until combined, then add the cream, orange juice, and vanilla and beat to combine. Add the poppy seeds and mix until incorporated. Add the flour, baking powder, and salt and mix just until combined.
- 3/ Scrape into the prepared pan and bake until the edges start to brown and the cake is set, about 35 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes in the pan, then remove the cake from the hot pan and allow to cool completely on a wire rack. Dust with confectioners' sugar before serving.



# chocolate-hazelnut-topped CAKE

This simple, spongy cake is made in a tart pan and marbled with an Italian favorite, gianduia—chocolate-hazelnut spread.



Makes one 4 by 13-inch cake (serves 6)



Preheat the oven to 350°F.

## INGREDIENTS

- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for the pan
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla bean paste
- 1 cup cake flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chocolate-hazelnut spread (gianduia), store-bought, for topping

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 4 by 13-inch rectangular tart pan with a removable bottom and set aside.
- 2/ In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 8 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Beat in the eggs, then the vanilla bean paste. When the vanilla bean paste is incorporated, add the flour and mix just until combined. Scrape into the prepared pan.
- 3/ Bake until set, about 25 minutes. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then remove the sides of the pan (be careful, it will still be very hot). Cool the cake completely on the bottom of the pan set on a wire rack. Cover the cooled cake with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator before piping the top.
- 4/ Pipe the chocolate-hazelnut spread in lines across the width of the cake, and drag a toothpick or knife the length of the cake, alternating directions to make a chevron pattern. Remove the bottom of the pan before cutting the cake.





# LAMINGTONS

This amazing treat from Down Under will wow your guests. You will be surprised at how easy it is to whip up a little batch to make everyone happy.



Makes Four  
4 by 2-inch  
cakes (serves 4)



Preheat the  
oven to 350°F.

## INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened,  
plus more for the pan  
1/3 cup granulated sugar  
1 large egg  
1 large egg yolk  
1 teaspoon full-fat sour cream  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

3/4 cup cake flour  
Pinch of salt  
2 ounces milk or dark chocolate, chopped  
3 tablespoons heavy cream  
1 1/2 cups unsweetened shredded coconut  
2 tablespoons raspberry jam  
4 raspberries, for topping

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch square baking pan and set aside.
- 2/ In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 4 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Add the egg, egg yolk, sour cream, and vanilla and mix to incorporate. Add the flour and salt, and mix just until combined. Scrape into the prepared pan and bake until the edges start to brown and the center is set, about 13 minutes. Cool completely in the pan before removing the cake from the pan.
- 3/ While the cake is cooling, place the chocolate and cream in the top of a double boiler. Gently whisk until the chocolate melts and the mixture is smooth. Pour into a heatproof bowl and let cool for 5 minutes.
- 4/ Cut the cake into four 4-inch squares. Place the coconut in a medium bowl. Spread the jam on top of 2 squares. Place the 2 remaining squares on top of the jam-topped squares. With 2 forks, dip one cake into the chocolate, coating all sides, then lift the square with the forks and dip it into the coconut, coating all sides. Repeat with the remaining cake.
- 5/ Place both squares on a platter in the refrigerator for 20 minutes before serving. Slice each square into two rectangles. Top each with a raspberry.



# pecan BARS

Is this a cake? Or a pie? Or some form of cookie? Is it a cousin of the brookie (part brownie, part cookie)? It doesn't matter because these yummy squares are sweet and gooey. They are a favorite of my pecan pie-loving son Michael.



Makes ten  
1½ by 4-inch  
bars or four  
4-inch squares  
(serves 4 to 5)



Preheat the  
oven to 350°F.

## INGREDIENTS

### CRUST

⅓ cup granulated sugar  
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 tablespoon heavy cream  
1 cup all-purpose flour

### FILLING

2 large eggs  
⅓ cup light corn syrup  
½ cup packed light brown sugar  
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted  
1 tablespoon pure vanilla bean paste

1 tablespoon heavy cream  
Pinch of salt  
1½ cups pecan halves  
½ cup chocolate chips

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line an 8-inch square pan with parchment paper, and set aside.
- 2/** To make the crust, in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the granulated sugar and butter. Add the cream, then the flour, mix just until combined, and press into the prepared pan. (Leave the paddle attachment on the mixer, and return the unwashed bowl to the mixer.)
- 3/** Bake the crust until it starts to brown on the edges, about 20 minutes. Let the crust cool a bit while you prepare the filling, leaving the oven on.
- 4/** To make the filling, add the eggs to the bowl of the mixer and beat them, then add the corn syrup, brown sugar, melted butter, vanilla bean paste, cream, and salt and mix until well combined.
- 5/** Pour the filling onto the crust, and scatter a layer of pecans over the top, then scatter the chocolate chips on top of the nuts. Bake about 30 minutes.
- 6/** Cool completely in the pan, then refrigerate in the pan for at least 1 hour. Remove the cake from the pan, discard the parchment paper, trim the edges, and cut into 1½ by 4-inch bars or 4-inch squares.

# QUILTING COMFORT

## FOR KIDS

Written by **Matthew Brady**  
Photography courtesy of **Project Linus**

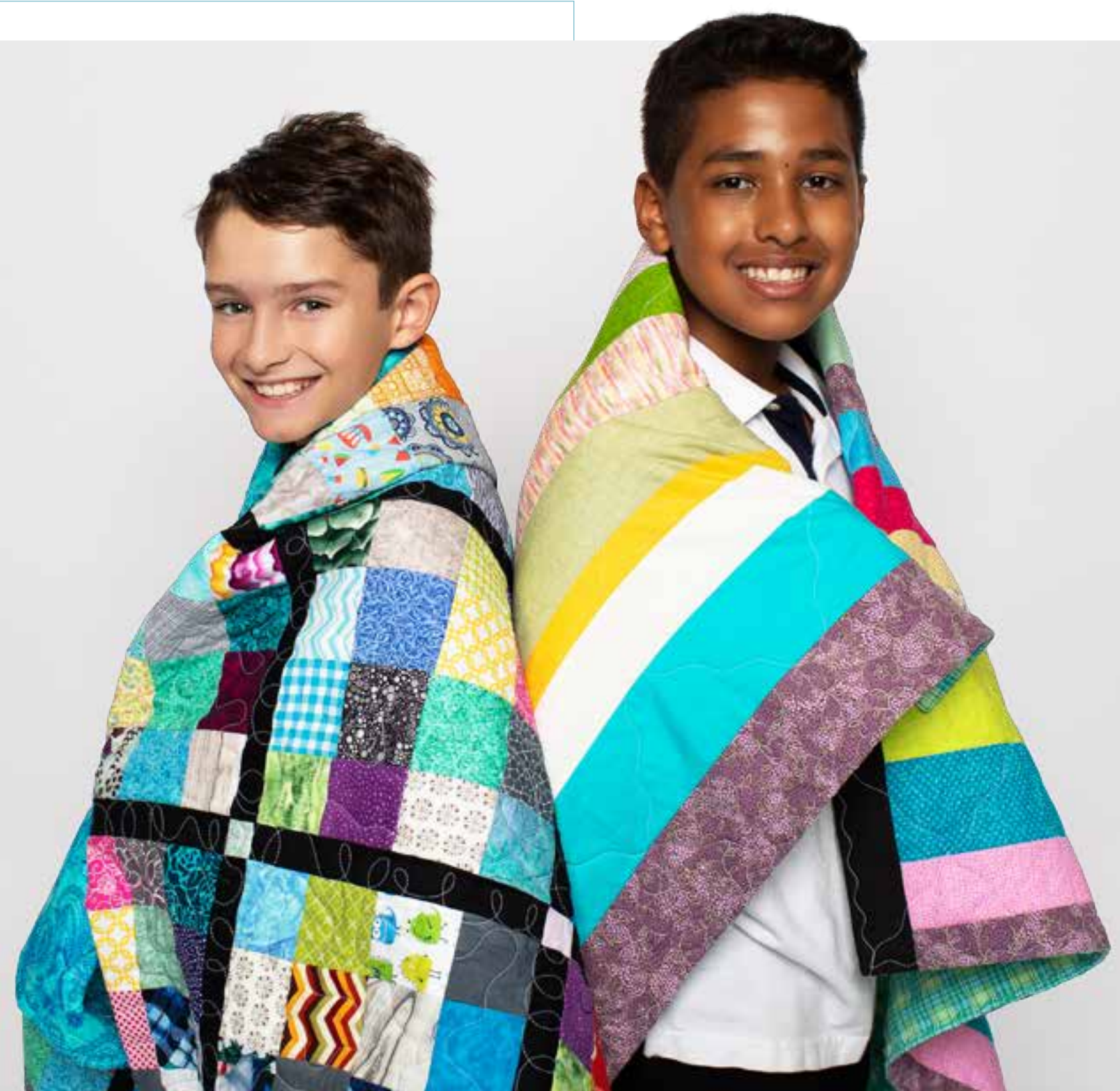
**L**inus Van Pelt, the resident philosopher of the *Peanuts* gang, is known not only for his holiday speeches and Great Pumpkin optimism but also for his constant sidekick—his trusty blue blanket. An eternal source of comfort, it even became the focus of a 2011 book, *Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown*.

We're all like Linus to a certain extent: Who doesn't love snuggling under a toasty covering, especially when it's cold outside? But blankets can also improve our mental well-being; according to *Psychology Today*, such objects "bring psychological strength and assistance" to their users. That's the exact impetus behind Project Linus, an organization that collects and distributes security blankets to children across the country going through challenging times.

### **The start of a meaningful mission**

It all began in 1995, when Project Linus founder Karen Loucks read a Christmas Eve article about





an inspirational three-year-old girl named Laura, who was fighting cancer and had endured chemotherapy treatments for two years thanks in large part to her security blanket. Touched by the story, Loucks began quilting blankets and donating them to kids at a local children's cancer center. Almost thirty years later, Project Linus has provided over ten million blankets and afghans—each one handmade by volunteers—to kids up to age eighteen facing illness, trauma, or other struggles.

As you can imagine, it takes a village to make such a difference. Project Linus has over 300 chapter coordinators across the country who make sure that the items crafted by its 80,000 volunteers (lovingly dubbed “blanketeers”) reach their destinations. “A blanket can be left at drop-off points set up by the local chapter or given directly to a chapter coordinator,” explains Patty Gregory, Project Linus’s national president and CEO. “The coordinator collects, labels, and bags all blankets and then takes them to local facilities such as hospitals and shelters, which are ready to distribute them to kids.” Also helping the effort: over a dozen other businesses that are friends to the Project Linus cause, including fellow Missouri-based companies and national brands like Joann.

**Putting the fun in fundraising**  
Project Linus feeds the creative needs of its crafters by providing classes and holding special events that not only raise money and awareness but also encourage community.

- Gregory, an avid quilter herself, hosts monthly Scrappy Sewing with Patty sessions over Zoom, during which participants work on new projects and get insights.
- Knit and Crochet Along is an annual affair in which people register to download a special pattern, which they’ll use to make a blanket. Each person works at their own pace while sharing their progress with fellow Project Linus crafters on Facebook.
- Its biggest event is National Make a Blanket Day. Held on the third Saturday in February since 1999, it’s a day dedicated to both promoting the work of Project Linus and crafting blankets at local chapters.

Project Linus has over 300 chapter coordinators across the country who make sure that the items crafted by its 80,000 volunteers (lovingly dubbed “blanketeers”) reach their destinations.



- The organization makes the holidays brighter every December with its Season of Giving fete, an annual push to gather blankets and raise much-needed funds.
- Every other year, Project Linus holds a retreat for its coordinators and volunteers so they can come together to bond, share ideas, and learn more about the organization.

### A never-ending need

Having been with the organization for almost twenty-five years, Gregory can confirm that the demand for security blankets is, unfortunately, far from waning. “More children are born each year, many of whom will need us throughout their childhood,” she says. “Without those who support our mission—both corporate and individual—and our tens of thousands of volunteers, we could not do what we do.”

As far as the impact of her organization, Gregory gets reflective. “Honestly, I can’t even put a face on the impact Project Linus has made,” she shares. “We actually don’t know who specifically ends up getting our blankets most of the time, other than it’s children who are ill and/or traumatized. When we do hear stories and get thank-you notes, we are so grateful. It gives us the energy to continue our work, knowing that we’re making a difference to children by showing them that people care and there is goodness in this world.”

For more info, visit [projectlinus.org](http://projectlinus.org)



Project Linus has provided over ten million blankets and afghans—each one handmade by volunteers—to kids up to age eighteen facing illness, trauma, or other struggles.





# THE GINGERBREAD QUEEN

Interview with **Nikki Wills**  
Written by **Lauren Kim**  
Photos courtesy of **Tikkido.com**



Baker and cookbook author **Nikki Wills** discusses her love of making gingerbread houses and reminisces about her experience on Food Network's *Holiday Gingerbread Showdown*.

## How did you get started baking gingerbread houses?

My mom began making them when I was an infant using a published recipe by former White House executive chef Hans Raffert. It makes delicious, hardy gingerbread that's perfect for constructing all sorts of gingerbread creations. Around Thanksgiving every year when I was growing up, my mom and I would start making gingerbread houses for ourselves and our friends and family, including my classmates and my dad's fellow engineers at the Air Force Institute of Technology; she would make me wait until Christmas to eat mine. I have many fond memories of those times.

## When did you first bake gingerbread on your own?

I began to miss gingerbread while studying for my first-semester finals at Vassar College. I asked the college if I could use the mixer in the dining



hall and was told that the pastry kitchen wasn't used on Sundays. I was granted the run of the entire facility, including the giant mixers and professional ovens. Using my mom's recipe, I made a gingerbread house that my friends and I decorated; I also gifted each of my professors their own house.

**What are your tips for making gingerbread houses?**

The dough must be thick and sturdy, and you shouldn't rush through mixing it. It also helps to have a good mixer. I love my 13.5-liter professional one—I can prepare a triple batch of dough in it.

When assembling a gingerbread house, it's helpful to put the walls up first, pipe your icing to secure them, and let them air-dry overnight so they'll be extra sturdy; you can then put your roof on the next day. Royal icing is essential for constructing gingerbread houses because as it hardens, it glues everything together. Royal icing is usually made with raw egg whites, but you can also substitute powdered egg whites, meringue powder, or aquafaba, the liquid from a can of chickpeas.

**You moved from the United States to St. Albans, England, a few years ago. What inspired you to make gingerbread likenesses of the pubs there?**

The pubs are lovely and serve as family-friendly community living rooms, so I wanted to honor them in gingerbread form. Plus, I enjoy having an elaborate gingerbread project to work on in addition to my usual baking during the holiday season. For Christmas 2023, I made a gingerbread house of the Robin Hood Pub. It was later served at the pub during a big gingerbread party, which I really appreciated—especially since I didn't have to eat all that gingerbread myself. *[Laughs]*

**What was it like competing on Food Network's Holiday Gingerbread Showdown?**

Terrific, especially because my mom was my baking partner. We competed against two other competitors in nine total rounds—we won the



tasting challenge but eventually lost. We both had a blast, even though the competition's chaos and time constraints were challenging.

I always enjoy myself when making gingerbread houses. It's hard to have a bad time while making a giant cookie house and decorating it with crazy amounts of candy.

For more info, visit [tikido.com](http://tikido.com)





# AMERICA'S MOST STYLISH SLOPES

Written by **Andre Rios** / Photography **as noted**

STOWE,  
VERMONT

GETTY IMAGES

**AS WINTER DESCENDS, MANY** American towns transform into havens of opulence and sophistication, each luring ski aficionados with a unique blend of world-class amenities, breathtaking scenery, and wealth of winter activities. If you're seeking the perfect spot to après-ski against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains, indulge yourself with a trip to one of the following winter-wonderland retreats.

#### **Stowe, Vermont**

Venture to the northeastern Green Mountains of Vermont, and you'll find the striking town of Stowe, a destination rich in accommodations ranging from luxury resorts to cozy bed and breakfasts. Some notable spots include the traditional charm of the Green Mountain Inn and the Trapp Family Lodge founded by the famous Von Trapp family—as evidenced by its luxe, Austrian-inspired design. After you settle in, wander through Stowe's boutique shopping and gallery avenues or take





to Mount Mansfield for top-quality skiing and snowboarding. Be sure to dine at Harrison's Restaurant, a town treasure that serves creative contemporary American dining in a comforting family establishment. Do so, and you may quickly discover why *Fodor's Travel* once named Stowe the country's top ski stop for foodies. Whether you're a nature enthusiast, fine-food connoisseur, or thrill seeker, Stowe promises fulfillment for just about anyone.

**Santa Fe, New Mexico**

"The City Different" presents a distinct perspective on winter with its ancient adobe structures, vibrant New Mexican cuisine



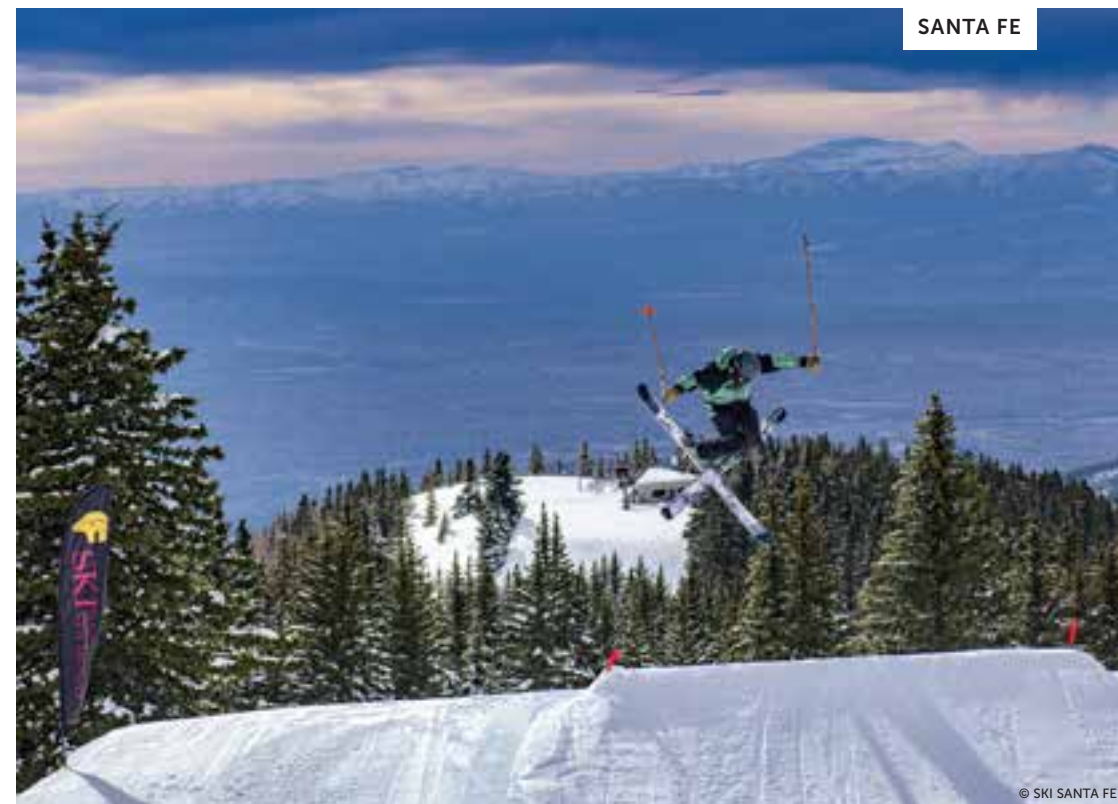
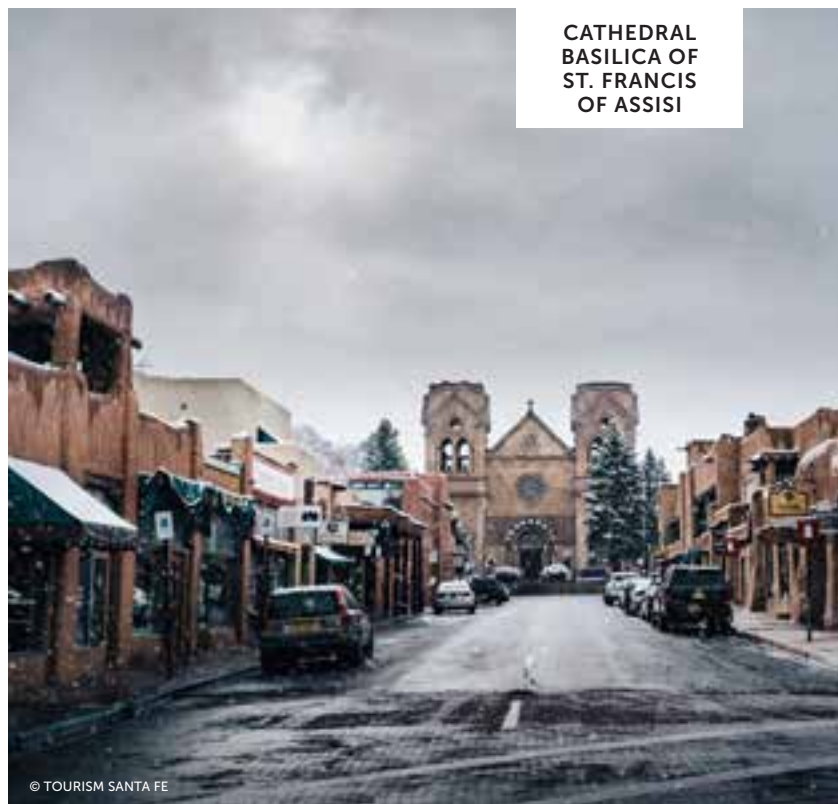
inspired by generations of Southwestern recipes, and one-of-a-kind shopping that spotlights products by indigenous artisans. In fact, it's earned the honor of being designated a UNESCO Creative City for its aesthetic wonders that include outstanding crafts and folk arts as well as fascinating museums. Santa Fe has also won praise for its skiing as well thanks to its location on the foothills of the surrounding Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These various resorts offer luxurious accommodations that perfectly balance history-inspired style with modern amenities, including the soaking baths at Ten Thousand Waves' spa



14,000 feet in elevation, which are the perfect height for enjoying our nation's favorite winter sport to the fullest. Or if you'd rather soak in this breathtaking scenery without a down jacket, settle in with a cocktail or hot cocoa inside one of the town's iconic hotels, such as the Lumière's boutique accommodations or the Madeline Hotel & Residences' five-star rooms. Be sure to take the stunning gondola ride up the peaks to Allred's restaurant, which features an award-winning wine list and an unforgettable prix-fixe menu—it's a one-of-a-kind experience not to be missed.

**Big Sky, Montana**

Located just an hour north of iconic Yellowstone, Big Sky is a worthy destination unto itself—and a more ideal site for winter tourism. This ski mecca in the heart of the Rocky Mountains features a vibrant community that's rich in public art installations,



and fine dining and mixology at the Four Seasons Resort Rancho Encantado Santa Fe. Vibrant and unique, this spectacular cultural city must be experienced firsthand to be believed.

**Telluride, Colorado**

If you associate ski towns with nothing but repetitive trips up and down a frosty mountainside, Telluride is here to exceed your expectations. It's rife with first-class culture, including indulgent spas, renowned art galleries, and fascinating architecture ranging from ancient Anasazi sites to charming Victorian homes. Then again, don't shrug off the skiing—Telluride boasts North America's highest concentration of mountains between 13,000 and



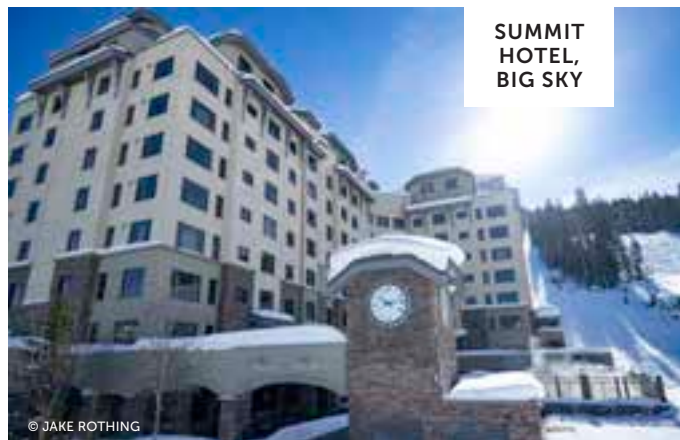
ALLRED'S DINING ROOM, TELLURIDE

© DRIVE STUDIO



TELLURIDE CHAIR 9

© BRETT SHRECKENGOST, TELLURIDE SKI RESORT



SUMMIT HOTEL, BIG SKY

© JAKE ROTHING



BIG SKY LIFTS

© CASEY PARKS

Located just an hour north of iconic Yellowstone, Big Sky is a worthy destination unto itself—and a more ideal site for winter tourism.



BIG SKY

© MARGARET SIBERELL

offers over 5,800 acres of winter-sports terrain, and boasts boutique shops that source name-brand winter apparel and locally made crafts alike. For relaxation like nowhere else, check into one of the area's many gorgeous accommodations, including the famed Summit Hotel, a contemporary

“Euro-Western” institution that promises elegant amenities such as an indoor/outdoor soaking pool and in-room fireplaces. Big Sky invites worldwide visitors to partake in chic experiences that ensure all the comforts of city life—without losing touch with its gorgeous alpine setting.

# SEASONAL RECOVERY TIPS

Written by **Alexa Bricker**  
Photography by **Getty Images**



The holiday season is one of the most joyous times of the year, but it's often one of the busiest too. If you feel like you could use a vacation after your winter break, here are some ways to regroup and get back on track in three key areas of your life.

## FINANCES

Did you go a little crazy on presents this year? If so, don't panic or shove your stress under the rug. Instead, spend some time reviewing your finances, noting how well you stuck to your budget and how much you currently owe between credit cards. Based on your income and essential expenses like rent or mortgage payments and utilities, formulate a reasonable plan for paying extra toward your debt every two weeks. Start with high-interest cards first to avoid paying significantly more over time.

## HEALTH

There's nothing wrong with enjoying yourself during the holidays, but depending on how much and how frequently you indulged, you might be feeling more sluggish and tired or weaker in the gym than usual. Don't punish yourself by trying to get back on track too quickly—such behavior can have the opposite effect and result in burnout. Start slowly by setting smaller goals to ease back into a healthier routine. For example, vow to exercise one more day a week than you currently do and prioritize healthy proteins, carbohydrates, and fats at every meal.





## HOME

Your home might look like it was ransacked at the end of the season, especially if you hosted. To get it back to a sanctuary-like space, put away any holiday decor one room at a time, starting inside and working your way to the exterior. Then conduct a thorough deep-cleaning of your home; pay close attention to overlooked areas like light switch faceplates and doorknobs. Finally, bring in a few new decorative pieces, such as a vase of fresh flowers, to add some personality and make your living spaces pop long after the holidays have passed.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING WARM

Almost nothing feels as satisfying on a cold day as bundling up in a warm jacket, in a cozy blanket, or by a fireplace. But cold weather is more than just uncomfortable—it can also negatively impact your health. **Check out the top reasons why warming up in winter is great for wellness.**

-  **Increases energy:** Because exposure to cold temperatures can drain your body's energy, staying warm means retaining more energy for being active and productive.
-  **Improves blood flow:** Warm temperatures help you maintain healthy blood flow to your organs and extremities. This is especially important for those with conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.
-  **Keeps illnesses at bay:** Your immune system is less responsive in cold temperatures, which increases your risk of catching certain illnesses. In fact, scientists have even found that the flu virus is stronger in colder temperatures.
-  **Sustains your breathing:** Cold air can actually irritate and narrow your airways, worsening the effects of some respiratory conditions, such as asthma.

Prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures can lead to serious conditions like hypothermia and frostbite, but even mildly cold weather can still impact your health. **So as temperatures dip, stay bundled up when outside and keep warm indoors to help ensure that you enjoy this season to its fullest with a healthy mind and body.**

## Front of Tear Out Card 2



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**www.remindermedia.com**

**The Shanner Group**

1100 First Avenue  
Suite 200  
King Of Prussia, PA 19406

## Back of Tear Out Card 2



*makes 4* .....

### INGREDIENTS

For the cream:

- 1 ¼ c. half-and-half
- ¼ c. brown sugar
- 1 tbsp. molasses
- 2 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground nutmeg

For the cocktail:

- 4 oz. vodka
- 4 oz. coffee liqueur
- Crushed gingersnaps, for garnish

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium pot over low heat, whisk together the cream ingredients. Heat the mixture for 5 minutes or until blended and the sugar has dissolved. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
2. Fill a shaker with ice, then add the vodka and coffee liqueur and shake until cold. Strain the mixture into chilled glasses, and top with cream. Garnish the cocktails with the crushed gingersnaps before serving.

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# 5 HOLIDAY HOSTING HACKS



**Are you stressed over holiday-season hosting? Don't freeze up—just modify how you tackle it. Here are some easy ways to simplify the upcoming festivities before, during, and after the big event.**

- 1 Make it a potluck.** Don't take on the entire meal-planning process alone. Instead, stick to one main dish and ask your guests to bring their favorite holiday sides, beverages, or desserts. Just keep note of who is bringing what.
- 2 Collect decor from nature.** Rather than shopping for new holiday decor, which strain your budget and schedule, select a few pieces from your yard to feature, such as winter blooms, branch garlands, and pine cones in decorative vases.
- 3 Host a decorating prep party.** Invite loved ones over a few days before the event to help you set up for it. Serve snacks and beverages, and plan a game or movie viewing at the end to celebrate finishing your hard work.
- 4 Set the table simply.** Overdressed holiday tables are costly and time-consuming to set up—and they can crowd diners. Instead, choose simple place settings that work year-round, and finish the look with a vase of fresh foliage.
- 5 Clean up immediately.** Saving all the cleanup for after your holiday party can leave you overwhelmed. Empty your trash can and dishwasher before the event, and as you take used plates, scrape them off and set them for washing right away.