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# RANGE LIFE

## RIDING HIGH

Elizabeth Poett surveys her family's 14,000 grassy acres. Today, their 181-year-old spread is completely modernized, yet takes a sustainable approach and is rooted in generations of rich history—and hand-me-down recipes.



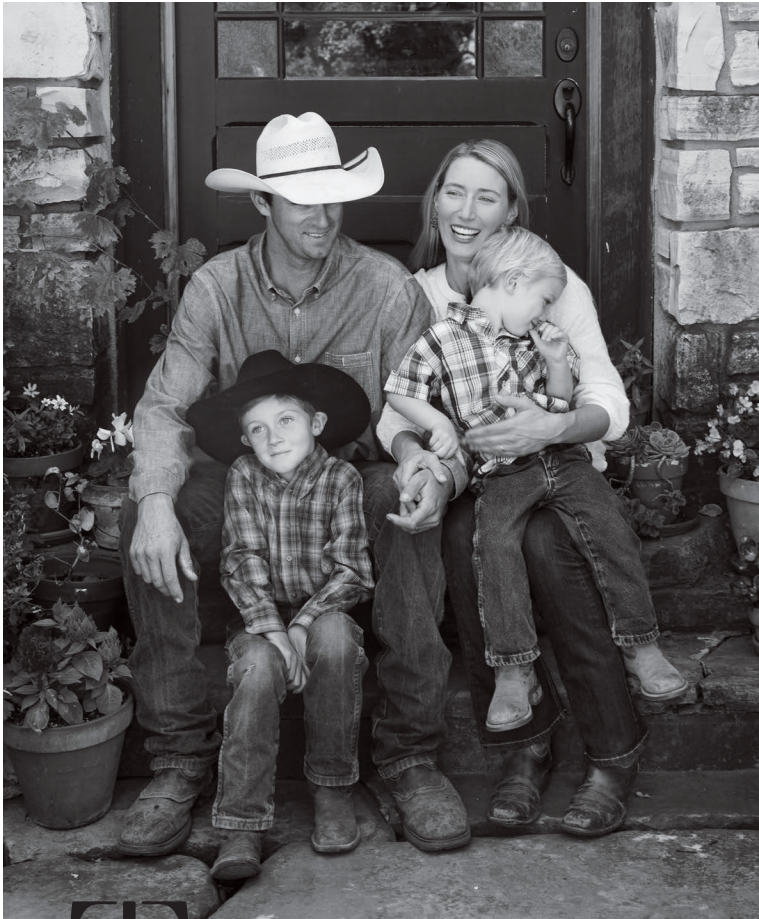
When these hardworking cowgirls and cowboys get the chance to kick back, they do so in spirited style. Here's how a California family keeps a tradition of celebrating summer on the ranch, and thanking loved ones for their year-round help and lifelong friendship.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN ROSS  
TEXT BY GEORGIA FREEDMAN



## MODERN SETTLERS

**Below:** Poett; her husband, Austin Campbell; and their sons, Jack and Hank, cozy up by their front door. Poett's great-grandmother, Mercedes de la Guerra Poett, had the house built in the late 1800s—in Santa Barbara, 40 miles south. When she moved north in 1918, to escape an outbreak of Spanish flu, she had it transported on a barge up the Pacific coast. **Right:** Stands of California live oak, wooded gullies, and golden hills cover the property.



**T**HE CLANG OF WHEELS on the cattle guard tells Elizabeth Poett that her dinner guests are arriving. It's a rare quiet afternoon on Rancho San Julian, her family's ranch, and she's brightening a long trestle table with flowers. Creating the colorful, hyperlocal feast—courtesy of her vegetable garden, fruit trees, and herd of black Angus cattle—is a tradition in early summer, between the all-hands-on-deck frenzy of the beginning of the year and weaning season, in July. "If you need to move cattle, you call your neighbors, and they come help. That's how it's done. We help each other," she says with a nod to her close friends Katie Rose Hames and Blakeney Sanford, who are on their way up the hilly drive, families in tow. "One way we say thank you is with food."

Poett is a seventh-generation rancher who learned how to feed the cows and mend fences from her father, Jim Poett. He was one of the first Californians to raise organic beef, back in the late



1980s, roughly a decade before the USDA even had organic standards for livestock. The land has been in their clan since 1837, when the Spanish government granted it to his ancestor Jose de la Guerra, the commandant of the presidio in Santa Barbara, making it one of the oldest ranches in the state that's still run by the same family—a family that is deeply devoted to environmental conservation and sustainability. Poett moved back home in 2006, after working in TV production in New York City and Los Angeles. She sells the ranch's famously flavorful beef to chefs and home cooks at farmers' markets in Santa Barbara and L.A. (and at [theranchtable.com](http://theranchtable.com)), while raising her sons, Jack, 7; and Hank, 3, with her husband, Austin Campbell. The two met when Campbell, a bona fide cowboy himself, was working weekends with Poett's dad; now he helps run the ranch.

Tonight, the family and their friends unwind in the cool air that comes off the mountains in early summer. The ranch's first lettuces, carrots, and Swiss chard are also springing from the soil. "When you live here, you can't just go to brunch on a Sunday," says Poett. "You make your own fun." The group piles onto benches by a mission grape arbor and raises a glass—to good timing, good friends, and a season's worth of hard, satisfying work.





## LEARNING THE ROPES

The kids know how to collect eggs from the chicken coop, and Hank (above and left, on horseback with Dad) and big brother Jack (below) often spend free time practicing riding and roping. "We actually do need their help," says Poett. "But we want them to learn in a way that's fun for them." This year, Jack rode Charlie, his gentle 16-year-old horse, to help round up the cattle for the first time.



## WESTERN ACCENTS

Zinnias and Queen Anne's lace are gathered in leather-wrapped tin cans. The custom-dyed bandanna-print tablecloth was inspired by Poett's heirloom linens.







## SIPS AND SIDES

**Left:** Campbell tends corn on their Santa Maria-style barbecue, a wood-fired grill with movable grates. **Right:** Hames (far right) grew up on a neighboring ranch and is Poett's oldest friend; their families are so close that Poett had her first ice cream cone while at the hospital waiting for Hames to be born. Sanford (center) lives a few miles away, in the Santa Rita Hills, where her father, Richard Sanford, was one of the first winemakers to grow the region's now-famous Pinot Noir. **Bottom right:** Butter lettuce and cucumbers, tossed here with avocado-buttermilk dressing, come from the garden; the salad, topped with crispy bacon, is served with grilled garlic bread. **Below:** Poett puts the finishing touches on the table.

**THE DETAILS:** White lantern-light lamps (below), \$23 for 4, [trademygun.com](http://trademygun.com). Brickett Davda Collection black medium round bowl (bottom right), \$175, [marchsf.com](http://marchsf.com).

For recipes, see page 124.





## FEEDING A HERD

**Right:** High-quality marbling and a robust flavor make rib eye a favorite cut of Poett's. Because her cows are grass-fed and free-range, they have less fat than corn-fed ones do; a marinade with Spanish smoked paprika and crushed coriander seeds and a simple garnish of charred scallions enhance the meat. **Below, from top:** Plum margaritas kick off the evening; Hames's daughter, Helen Bell, sidles in next to Hank.

**THE DETAILS:** Oaxacan drinking glass (below), \$8, [marchsf.com](http://marchsf.com).





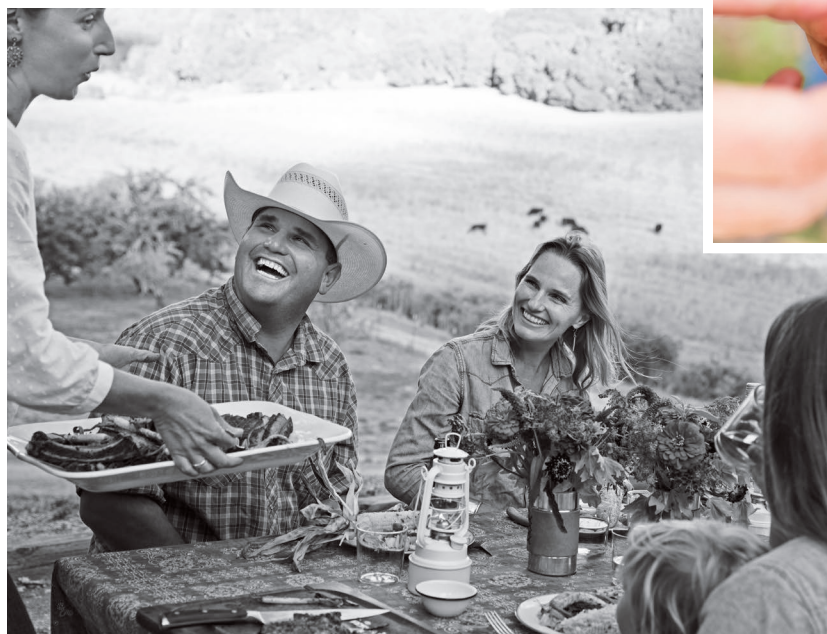


ART DIRECTION BY DAWN SULLOWSKI; FOOD STYLING BY SHIRA BOCAR; PROP STYLING BY MELANIE GOMEZ

## BEARING FRUIT

**Right:** The first plums to ripen are a small but tangy variety that has been growing here for so long, no one knows when it was planted. The ranch has roughly four acres of fruit trees that peak each summer, including with the apricots that are baked into a rustic tart (bottom).

**Below:** Poett offers prime cuts to Sanford and Will Hames (Katie's husband, and Campbell's good friend from high school).



## LOCAL COLOR

**Left:** The ranch grows most of its own produce under the charge of its farmer and longtime family friend Chris Thompson, who introduced bio-dynamic methods when he moved to the area in 2012. In addition to the five-acre vegetable plot, 120 acres are planted with lima beans, popular in this climate because they can be dry-farmed—grown with only the moisture the soil has stored from winter rain. Here, they're tossed with roasted poblanos and queso fresco in a hearty chopped salad, and grilled corn is sprinkled with chile-lime salt, diced red jalapeños, and cilantro.

**THE DETAILS:** March black-on-white splatterware serving bowl (left), 18", \$240; and Charvet Editions white-and-black Festin tablecloth (right), \$240, [marchsf.com](http://marchsf.com).

