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AS WE STEP INTO THIS FESTIVE SEASON

adorned with the spirit of Thanksgiving and the anticipation of Christmas, this issue is a heartfelt homage to the rich tapestry of traditions, delectable recipes, and timeless celebrations that define the soul of our beloved state.

This time of year the aroma of holiday delights and sounds of festive get-togethers infuse homes with the sweet spirit

of Christmas, and we include several features to inspire you. Emily Black whisks us into a world of delectable treats with her enticing gingerbread recipes. Patty Roper invites us to a wreath-making party—an ode to the joyous creativity that creates a chance to come together and craft memories that linger long after the decorations are taken down.

Every year, this issue peeks into Mississippi homes where seasonal parties and festive décor reign. We share one such party known as “Toast in the Oaks.” It has been a cherished holiday tradition for two decades, unfurling its festive magic in the heart of Hattiesburg’s historic Oaks District. Alternating each year between Angelle McQueen’s and Elizabeth Schwartz’s homes, it’s a much anticipated annual fête. Michael Harold and Quinn Peeper, renowned hosts and authors, open the doors to their enchanting world, showcasing a classic Christmas dinner that’s as much about the company as it is about the cuisine. Their entertaining book *Classical Shindig* was released in September and is a treasure trove of inspiration, and we are delighted to share a glimpse of one of their magical holiday gatherings. The issue also unfolds the holiday décor in three remarkable homes—a Back Bay beauty on the coast, a historic home in Grenada, and a colorful twist on traditional colors in Madison. Each home is a canvas, reflecting the unique tastes and styles that make Mississippi homes a true embodiment of warmth and hospitality.

We also embark on a journey to discover the flame-grilled flavors of Mississippi. Our feature on old-school steakhouses takes me back to my childhood in Greenville. At my house, Friday nights were filled with the aroma of hot tamales from Doe’s



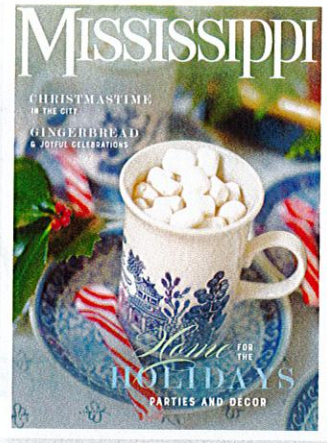
ABOVE: I was honored recently to accept on behalf of the magazine the award for Best Overall Traditional Media from the Mississippi Tourism Association at the Governor’s Conference in Meridian.

Eat Place. We’d pull up and grab a coffee can full of these Delta delicacies from the kitchen at Doe’s. My dad would make a pot of chili, and we’d have hot tamales with saltine crackers and ketchup (It’s a Delta thing) to go with it. It’s such a great childhood memory. While everyone loves their hot tamales, it’s the steaks at Doe’s that are legendary. Just like this restaurant feels like home to me, many steakhouses around the state mean the same thing to others. This article is a celebration of the enduring charm of these iconic places that are part of the soul of Mississippi, where the interiors might not be considered as ultra-fine dining, but the meals are a testament to culinary excellence.

As you turn the pages of this issue, let the stories, recipes, and festive spreads inspire your own celebrations. May this season be a reflection of the love that fills our homes, the flavors that grace our tables, and the timeless traditions that connect us all. From our Mississippi family to yours, here’s to a holiday season filled with joy, warmth, and the magic that only this special place can offer.

Melanie

Melanie Mullen Ward
Editor



ON THE COVER: A cup of hot cocoa is the perfect ending to a day spent crafting holiday wreaths with friends. Photo by Melanie Thortis

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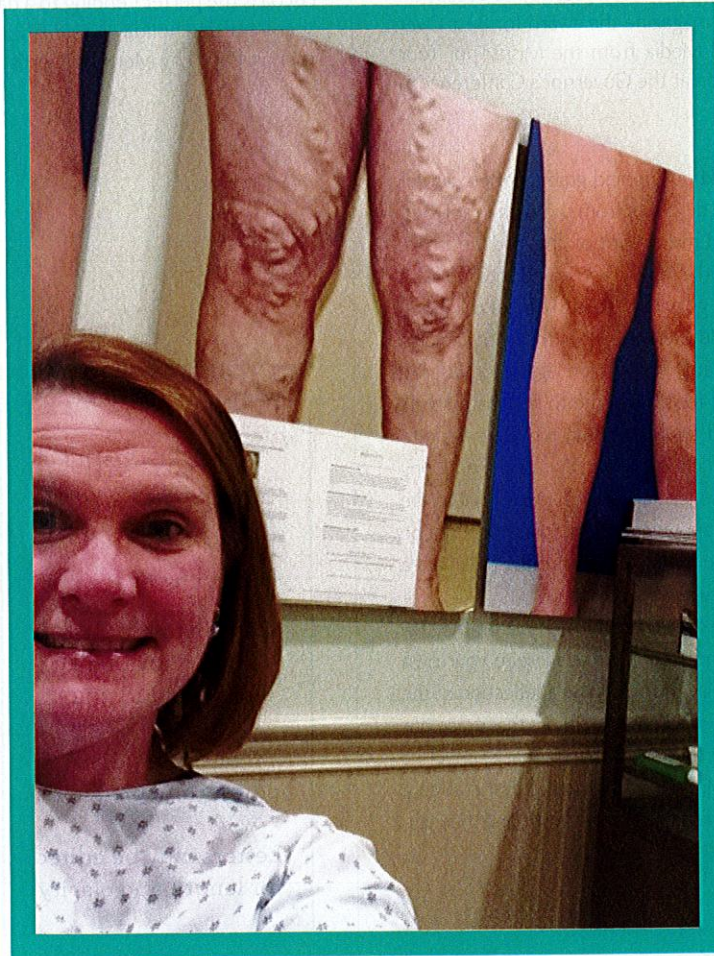
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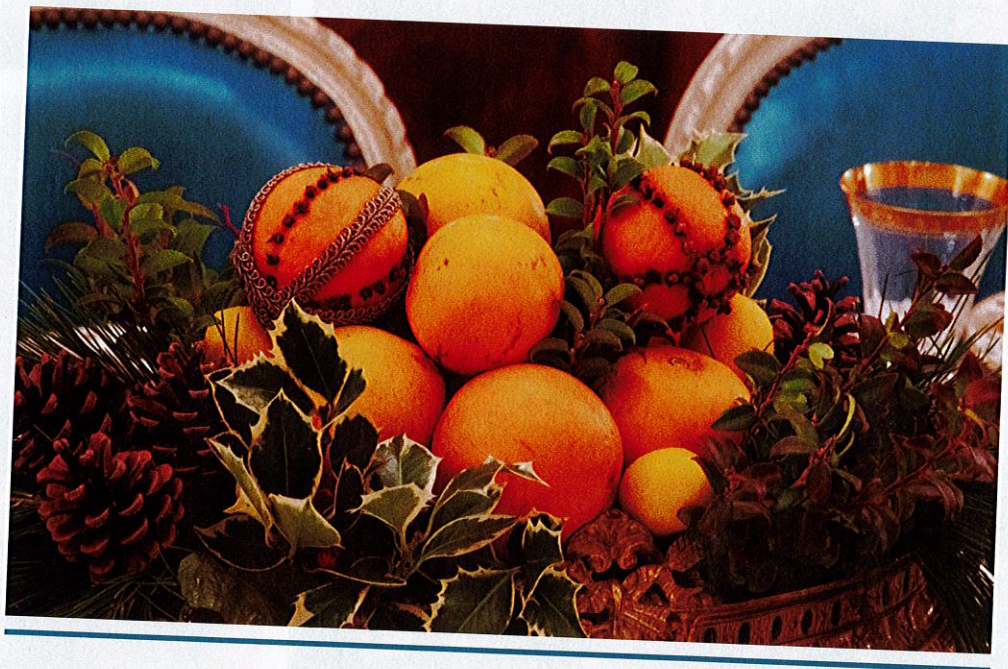


 St. Dominic's



The More the MERRIER

Classical Shindig authors Michael Harold and Quinn Peeper find Christmas joy in celebrating with friends and family.



Dinner guests at Michael Harold and Quinn Peeper's home on the outskirts of New Orleans' Garden District won't be welcomed at the front door.

But that's only because there is no front door. The 1862-built home that the couple calls their "Swamp Palazzo" was originally a duplex, so side doors serve as entry points to the sumptuously decorated spaces within.

THROUGH THESE DOORS HAVE WALKED BRITISH ARISTOCRATS AND CRESCENT CITY BUREAUCRATS, FAR-FLUNG FAMILY MEMBERS AND NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS—ALL GREETED WITH EQUAL FONDNESS AND LAVISH HOSPITALITY.

"I like the anticipation of the event almost as much as the event itself," says Peeper, who along with Harold has written the new book *Classical Shindig* about their entertaining experiences. "I like to set the table, get the flowers, polish the silver, and work on seating arrangements."

writer KELLI BOZEMAN | photographer ELIZABETH DONDIS

ABOVE: Old-fashioned pomander balls add a pop of festive color. OPPOSITE: The tree shows off a new twist on the traditional holiday palette.



THE PAIR'S PASSION FOR HOSTING IN A FORMAL BUT FUN STYLE IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, AND THE BOOK CAPTURES EVERY ELEGANT DETAIL—

from a Twelfth Night supper to kick off the Carnival season to an autumn tea held on the lushly planted patio. But it is Christmastime when their house literally shines brightest, with Peeper's collection of gilded ornaments catching the glow from twinkling lights, and antique ribbon-wrapped pomander balls illuminated by tall candles on the dining room table.

"I like doing a sit-down Christmas dinner," Harold says. "Generally, Christmas parties are stand-up cocktail par-

ties, which are fun, but people tend to really want to sit down and have a nice dinner."

For one featured feast dubbed their "Lucullan Christmas dinner," Peeper abandoned the typical red and green color palette and filled the house with shades of orange and turquoise instead—hues that better suited the blues, coppers, and creams of their existing décor. Working with Kerry Moody of New Orleans-based Decorations Lucullus, the couple brought their vision to life with luxurious touches including miniature Fortuny fabric stockings by Rebecca Vizard of B. Viz Design, turquoise-lined Christmas crackers, and Florentine marble-wrapped gifts beneath the tree.



TOP AND BOTTOM: Elegant details dress the dining table. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A collection of delicate ornaments fills the Christmas tree. A unique version of a silver service. Wrapped gifts complement the color scheme.

THE DINING TABLE WAS SET WITH AN ARRAY OF ANTIQUE AND COLLECTED FINERY,

from gold and white Spode china and gold-rimmed crystal glassware to an antique silver jardiniere and plateau for the centerpiece. Calligraphed place cards were tucked into silver Christmas tree holders, and lace-trimmed white napkins were wrapped in silver rings.

On the menu for the Christmas celebration were a variety of family-favorite dishes, including Harold's traditional Louisiana Creole oyster stew, a beef tenderloin recipe passed down from one of Peeper's physician colleagues,

Peeper's mother's cornbread dressing, and old-fashioned peas and pearl onions. The meal's sweet ending was a long-time favorite chocolate chip pie recipe topped with fresh whipped cream and served on circa-1815 Vieux Paris plates.

The holiday parties don't stop on December 25 here, as the couple say they also enjoy hosting gatherings in the days after Christmas "when people don't have as many parties to go to and they're free," Harold says. "We also like to entertain on New Year's night; no one has plans, usually, and I think sometimes they're a little sad that the holidays are over."



ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: Custom stockings hang from the mantel in anticipation of St. Nick. Grapes with antique grape scissors are history-inspired nibbles. OPPOSITE: A calligraphed menu card displays the delectable offerings. A Fortuny stocking from B. Viz Design serves as a favor for each guest.

Indeed, how can one's mood be anything but jovial with an invitation to this hospitable home in hand? The remaining pages of *Classical Shindig* serve up an abundance of seasonless get-togethers, including several elaborately themed affairs hosted for a local book club. For a meeting to discuss William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Harold and Peeper dished out spicy chicken curry and a 19th-century recipe for punch made with arrack; James Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* inspired the Anglophile hosts to break out the Union Jacks and coronation memorabilia.

Harold and Peeper are already at work on the sequel to *Classical Shindig*, which will focus on parties they have hosted at their second home in Pass Christian. The couple purchased their 1940s-built Gulf Coast residence during the pandemic in 2020 and say it was the perfect place to escape much of the chaos at that time. "It has been the greatest thing ever," Harold says. "It's an hour and 15 minutes from New Orleans, and we're away from everything, but we're only a block from the beach, and it's just beautiful. The community is terrific, and everyone has been so embracing."

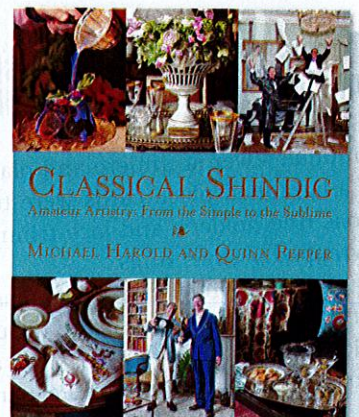
Since their arrival, the Pass Christian house has already been the site of many celebrations. For Peeper's mother's 80th birthday, the couple put on a mermaid-themed party complete with live "mermaids" in the pool and guests wearing sea-inspired costumes. That gathering will have its own chapter in the forthcoming book, which is nearing completion.

Meanwhile, the authors say the reception to the original *Classical Shindig* has been overwhelming, with old friends reaching out as they learn about its publication and signings taking place across multiple states.

WITH EVERY NEW CONNECTION MADE, IT'S ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR THESE QUINTESSENTIAL ENTERTAINERS TO FOSTER A FRIENDSHIP, AND PERHAPS TO SPARK AN IDEA FOR ANOTHER UNFORGETTABLE GATHERING.

"I hope our book inspires people to have more dinner parties," Harold says. "When we invite people into our home, we want them to feel valued and special. That feeling of satisfaction of having good conversation, nice wine, and good food is hard to beat."

Classical Shindig: Amateur Artistry from the Simple to the Sublime was released by Susan Schadt Press in September. The hardcover entertaining book sells for \$60.





HOT SHRIMP DIP

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese | $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt |
| 1 stick butter | $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped green onions,
white and green parts | 1 pound boiled shrimp, finely chopped |
| 1 teaspoon lemon juice | Dash Tabasco sauce |
| 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce | Ritz crackers |

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a small bowl, microwave cream cheese and butter until just melted. Add green onions, lemon juice, Worcestershire, salt, and pepper. Gently fold in shrimp, and mix with a few dashes of Tabasco sauce. Transfer dip to an ovenproof casserole dish or bowl, and bake for 10 to 15 minutes. Serve hot with Ritz crackers.

Yield: 8-10 servings

OYSTER STEW

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 6 tablespoons butter | 2 dozen oysters with liquid |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped celery | 1 tablespoon sherry |
| $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped scallions | $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt |
| $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped parsley | $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon white pepper |
| 1 tablespoon flour | Dash Worcestershire sauce |
| 2 cups warm milk | |

Melt butter in a double boiler or heavy saucepot. Add celery, scallions, and parsley, and sauté until tender. Sprinkle in flour and stir for 2 minutes. Add warm milk and stir for 1 minute. Add oysters with their liquid, and simmer just until edges begin to curl. Mix in sherry, salt, pepper, and Worcestershire. Do not let it boil.

Yield: 4 servings



OYSTER STEW



FOOLPROOF BEEF TENDERLOIN

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 whole tenderloin/filet of beef,
room temperature | ½ cup olive oil |
| ½ teaspoon salt | 3 pods garlic, minced |
| ½ teaspoon pepper | ½ cup chopped parsley |
| 1 stick butter | 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar |

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Rub filet with salt and pepper on both sides, and place in a roasting pan. In microwave oven, melt butter and olive oil in a bowl but do not brown. There can be parts of soft butter. Add minced garlic, parsley, and vinegar to melted butter, and pour over filet, making sure beef is covered in butter and oil. Bake, uncovered, for 15 minutes for rare meat and 20 minutes for medium rare. Remove filet from oven and place it on a large sheet of aluminum foil. Wrap the whole filet in 1 sheet of foil and repeat the process with 4 sheets of foil. Filet should be completely wrapped in aluminum foil like a torpedo. Let it sit for 45 minutes. When unwrapping filet, save juices for sauce or gravy.
Yield: 8-10 servings

CHOCOLATE CHIP PIE

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 (9-inch) pie crust | 2 sticks butter, softened |
| 2 cups sugar | 2 cups chopped pecans |
| 1 cup flour | 2 (6-ounce) bags chocolate chips |
| 4 eggs, beaten | 4 teaspoons vanilla |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bake pie crust for 8 minutes; let cool. Mix sugar and flour until well combined. Add eggs and beat until mixture is smooth. Add butter, pecans, chocolate chips and vanilla. Mix until a batter is formed. Pour ingredients into crust. Reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees. Bake pie for 45 minutes or until brown.
Yield: 8 servings

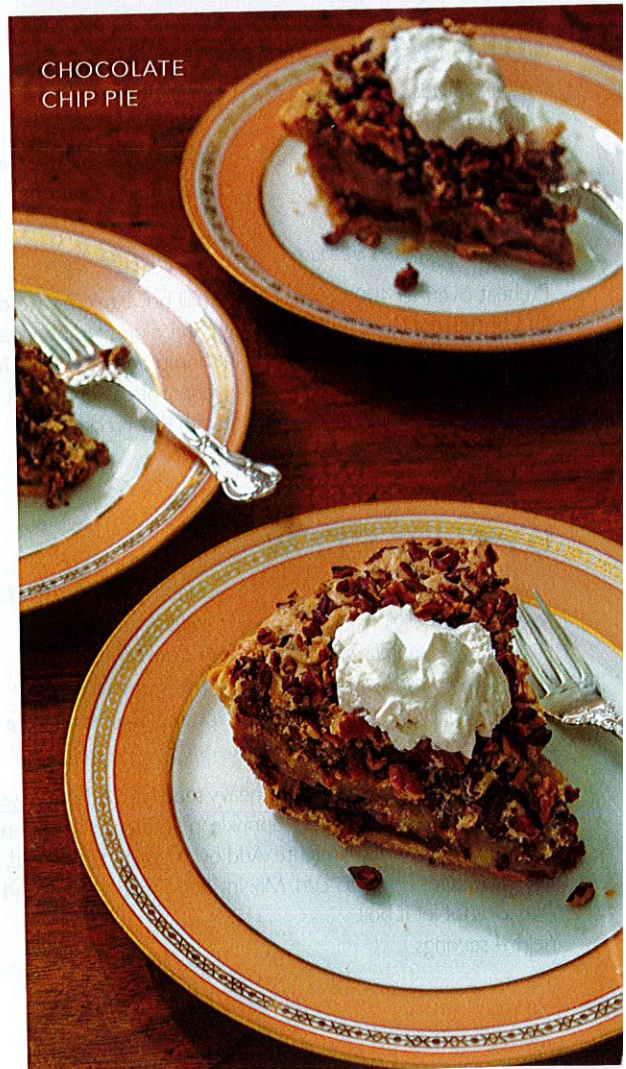
BOURBON SLUSH

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 large tea bags | 2 (6-ounce) cans frozen orange juice |
| 2 cups boiling water | 1 (6-ounce) can frozen lemonade |
| 1 cup sugar | 3 cups bourbon |
| 7 cups cold water | |

Steep tea bags in 2 cups boiling water; discard tea bags after steeping. Mix prepared tea with remaining ingredients, and place in freezer overnight. Remove from freezer and let thaw for 20 minutes. Crush the ice with a strong spoon or ice pick, and let it turn into a slush before serving.
Yield: 8-12 servings



FOOLPROOF BEEF TENDERLOIN



CHOCOLATE CHIP PIE