



TORY MCPHAIL

by Lisa LeBlanc-Berry

LOUISIANA CHEFS WHO LOVE TO HUNT

COOKS GONE WILD

Soon, families will gather throughout America for what is perhaps the most anticipated meal of the year—Thanksgiving dinner.

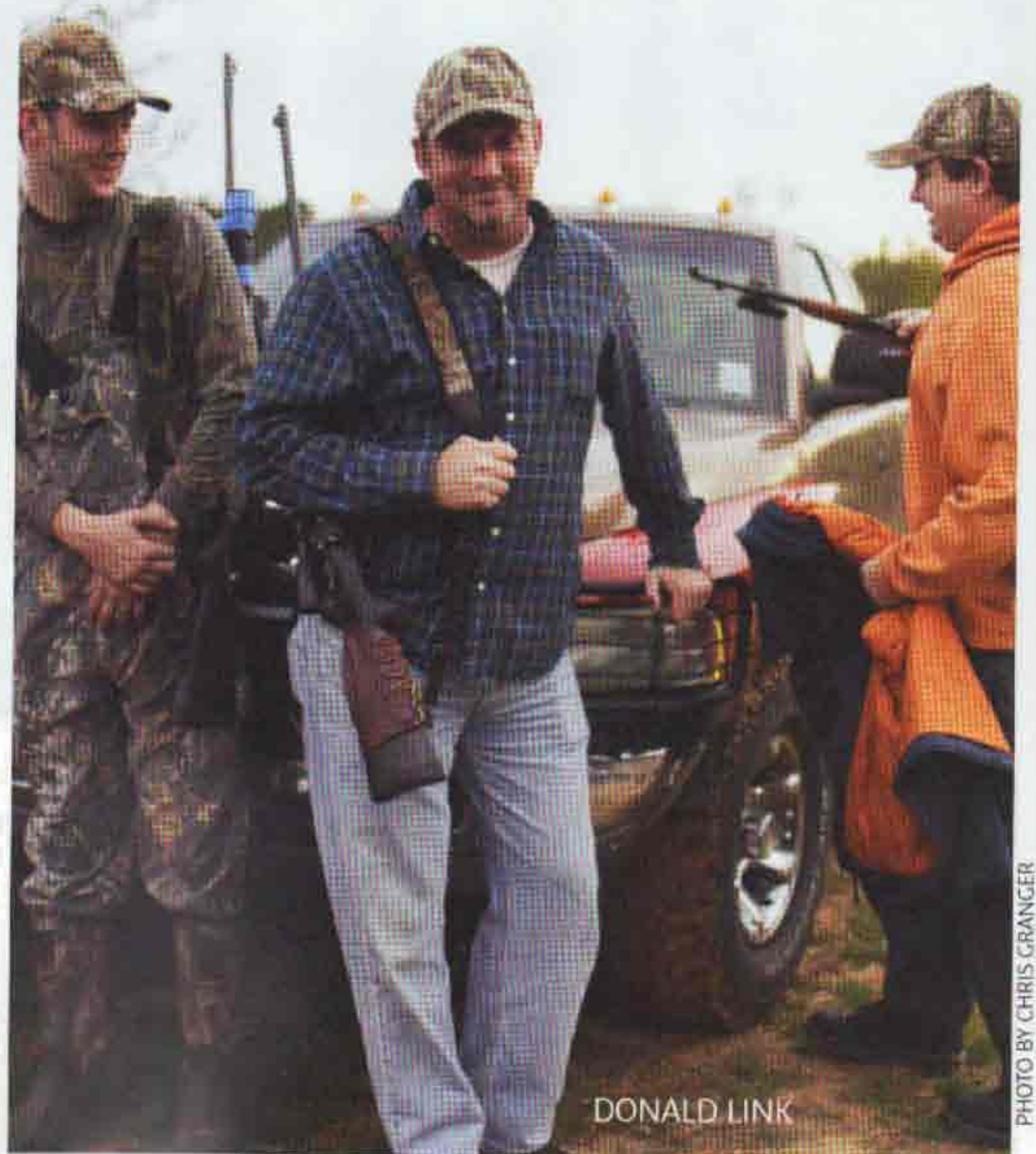
Here in south Louisiana, the Thanksgiving holidays are synonymous with duck hunting season, which kicks off in November. It begins with an influx of camouflage hats and waders, decoys and duck calls, and is followed by black ironpot cooking and the “three-beer roux,” as we say in Cajun country.

Some declare it’s a man thing. For me, all this hunting fanfare translates to holiday eating at its best: an evening of wild duck and oyster gumbo as part of the welcome wagon, doves on toast for breakfast, quail and grapes flamed in brandy or roasted rack of venison as our “second” Thanksgiving meat offering, and my annual holiday centerpiece—a fat goose stuffed with tiny teal, roasted until the skin darkens into hues of chestnut and gold like the autumn leaves. Frozen turkeys begone!

Although hunting isn’t common among most chefs who are at ease handling an abundance of lethal weapons in restaurant kitchens throughout the U.S., an exclusive group of fearless Louisiana chefs can’t wait to pick up a 12-gauge shotgun, or a singlecam compound bow, and go where the wild things are.

“For Thanksgiving, we always go out to our camps that float like houseboats in the Atchafalaya,” Mark Falgoust tells me, while on a hunting trip in Bayou Pigeon, a small Cajun hamlet on the east side of the swamp. A fervent weekend hunter from a large Cajun family, he is the executive chef of Grand Isle restaurant in New Orleans.

“There are around twenty of us packed in each camp. It’s an annual family tradition and everyone is speaking in French. We eat



DONALD LINK

a big Thanksgiving dinner; then, we all go to the camps to spend the holidays. We go duck hunting in the morning. In the evening, we climb up in the tree stands with bows and arrows to hunt deer. This is the last American frontier.”

While some chefs like to go knee-deep into the marsh in the hopes of bagging specklebelly geese and greenheads, others prefer to dangle in trees on the lookout for whitetail bucks. Most simply enjoy the outdoor experience, no matter what the game.

I grew up around sport hunters and have always felt that there is nothing better than a handsome man who can cook, especially one who comes bearing gifts of wild game. John Besh is such a man.

Busy as the star chef is with seven restaurants under his command (August, Lüke, La Provence, Besh Steak, Domenica, The American Sector, Lüke San Antonio), when duck season rolls around in November, this passionate hunter has one thing on his mind. Besh likes to join with his friends and head down to their camp to go duck hunting and cook gumbo. He also likes to bring home geese to his family for holiday meals— God bless him.

Besh's new cookbook, *My Family Table*, released November 1, 2011, is filled with clever recipes, and includes tips for the holiday table (I recommend trying out his recipes for roast goose and potato latkes for Thanksgiving). My favorite photograph (by Maura McEvoy) depicts two of his young sons holding up large geese from their father's hunting expedition. Besh is opening yet another restaurant, Borgne, early next year with the former executive chef of Galatoire's, Brian Landry; Borgne will be located in the newly reopened Hyatt Regency.

Some chefs go hog-wild when it comes to the creatures they hunt. Chef Donald Link (owner of Herbsaint, Cochon, Calcasieu, Cochon Butcher, and the newly opened Cochon Lafayette) had just passed up a teal hunting trip when he spoke with me about his adventures in the wild.

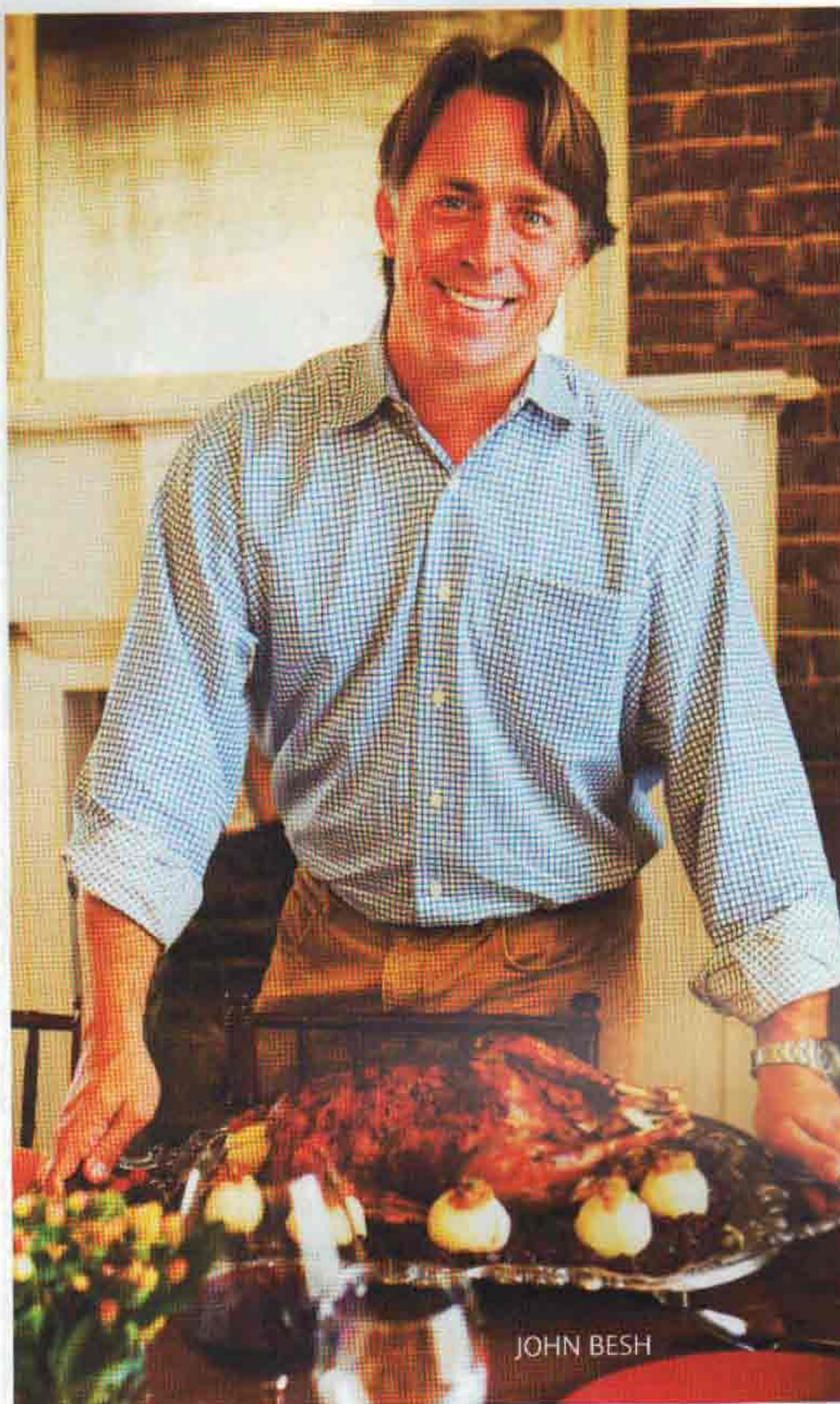
“My brother-in-law in Kentwood has a bunch of wild pigs running around. I went pig hunting in hopes of doing a *boucherie*. It's possible you could get charged (by the pigs) so you have to be real careful. I was on the ground and heard something in the bush and thought it was a pig, but it was an armadillo, and I almost blew it to pieces!” The celebrity chef is currently working on his second cookbook, which includes recipes for wild game.

Link is teaming up this month with celebrity chefs Emeril Lagasse and Mario Batali to host Boudin & Beer—a new fundraising event to benefit the Emeril Lagasse Foundation—which showcases renowned boudin experts (including Chef Link), Cajun music, and bold Abita brews. Boudin masters from Emeril's restaurants and the Link Restaurant Group are providing a taste of their sausage-making talents. This new event will be held on November 11, 2011, in New Orleans, and will be a lead-in event for Carnivale du Vin 2011, the annual Gala and Wine Auction which also benefits Emeril's signature foundation (www.boudinandbeer.com; www.carnivaleduvin.com).

Emeril, an avid hunter, who has appeared on more than 2,000 television shows (including segments about wild game cooking), came out with his 16th cookbook September 27, *Sizzling Skillets and Other One-Pot Wonders*. He also launched his eighth television series in September, *Emeril's Table*, part of Hallmark Channel's daytime lineup.

The owner of 12 restaurants, Emeril has a lasting affinity for quail. “Quail is one of my favorites and a true staple of the sportsman's kitchen,” Emeril said while pondering recipes. “Roasted quail with a mushroom stuffing is one of the first dishes I created when I was preparing for the opening of Emeril's. It's named quail Milton after a long-time customer, and we still get special requests for it today.”

Another devoted huntsman and culinary rock star is Tory McPhail, executive chef of Commander's Palace. He is co-author of *Commander's Wild Side: Bold Flavors for Fresh Ingredients from the Great Outdoors*, with Ti Adelaide Martin. His television show, *Off the Menu*, which aired on Turner South for six years, included episodes where McPhail and his staff were featured hunting and fishing in the



JOHN BESH

PHOTO BY MAURIA MCEVOY

wild, after which they returned to Commander's to create new dishes with wild fish or game. McPhail grew up hunting mountain lions and other wild game in Washington and Montana, where his family lives.

“Mountain lion is not something that you would typically choose to hunt, but these days, especially in the upper Rocky Mountains, their population there is so abundant, that if you are lucky enough to draw a tag, that would be on the top of my list instead of something more mainstream, like say, antelope,” McPhail said.

Most game dishes we see on chefs' special menus are farm-raised, since the USDA doesn't allow cooking with “hunted” wild game in a professional kitchen. “This year we will have Axis venison, antelope, quail, turkey, and rabbits for our holiday menu,” McPhail said.

“Wild game doesn't have to be fancy,” he pointed out. “Yes, hunters enjoy the challenge of shooting, but hunting is about so much more. When you ask a hunter why he likes to hunt, you will hear about the wonder of the outdoors, the respect for wildlife, and the camaraderie with family and friends.”

Besh noted, “There are few things that I look forward to in life as much as the brisk north wind on chilly mornings after a long, sweltering summer in south Louisiana, with ducks hovering over my decoys, and me waist-high in the marsh with my black lab, Schatzi, minutes from home.”



ANDREW AND LUKE BESH

ROAST GOOSE (Serves 10)

It takes patience to cook a goose, for there's only one right way and that is low and slow. The point is to gradually render all of the luscious fat beneath the skin, which will baste the bird throughout the cooking process. A goose is self-basting! The best thing is that you're left with incredible pan drippings, including valuable tasty goose fat. I separate most of the fat from the drippings and save it along with the liver for my pâté. The wings and vegetables in the bottom of the pan act as a natural roasting rack for the goose, plus they add big-time flavor to the sauce.

1 8- to 10-pound goose	2 carrots, diced
Salt	2 stalks celery, diced
Freshly ground black pepper	2 tablespoons butter, softened
1 head garlic, halved	Leaves from 3 sprigs fresh thyme
2 shallots, peeled and halved	3 tablespoons flour
Several fresh thyme branches	2 cups chicken broth
2 onions, diced	Butcher's string

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Cut the wings off the goose at the elbow joint and set aside; you'll need them later. Season the bird liberally inside with salt and pepper and stuff the garlic head, shallots, and thyme branches inside.
2. Tie the legs together with butcher's string, securing the flavor-giving garlic and herbs inside.
3. Scatter the onions, carrots, and celery in a heavy-bottomed roasting pan. Arrange the wing ends to make a flavorful rack for the goose. Lay the goose on top, season with salt and pepper, and rub all over with the butter. Sprinkle the exterior liberally with the thyme leaves. Add enough water to the pan to cover the bottom by 1/2 inch.
4. Roast the goose for 4 hours, or until the skin turns amber and the drumstick twists easily in its socket. Carefully remove the pan from the oven and gently transfer the bird to a large serving platter.
5. For the sauce, pour the pan drippings, including the vegetables, into a large measuring cup and wait for the fat to rise to the top. Separate the fat from the drippings.
6. Put 3 tablespoons of the fat into a medium saucepan over a high heat. With a wooden spoon, mix in the flour and stir vigorously until the flour is evenly browned. Once the roux is brown, whisk in the chicken broth and remaining pan drippings. Bring the sauce to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer slowly for 15 minutes. Remove the sauce from the heat and pass it through a fine mesh strainer. Season with salt and pepper and serve with the goose.

—From *My Family Table: A Passionate Plea for Home Cooking* by John Besh/Andrews McMeel Publishing

MUSHROOM-STUFFED QUAIL

This recipe by Emeril Lagasse originally appeared on *Emeril Live* on Food Network, courtesy Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Inc.

INGREDIENTS:

8 (3 1/2 ounce) boned quail
2 tablespoons Creole seasoning
Mushroom Stuffing, recipe follows
4 tablespoons melted butter
Truffle Sauce, recipe follows

DIRECTIONS: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Lay the quail, skin side down, on a baking sheet and season lightly with 1 tablespoon of the Creole seasoning. Insert 1 portion of the mushroom stuffing into the cavity of each quail and wrap the bird around it. Replace each bird on the baking sheet, breast side up. Brush the butter over the quails and season with the remaining tablespoon of Creole seasoning.

Roast until the birds are tender and golden brown, 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve 2 quails per person. Serve with Truffle Sauce.

MUSHROOM STUFFING:

2 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup minced shallots
1 tablespoon minced garlic
2 pounds assorted mushrooms, such as button, shiitake, wood ear, and chanterelles, stems trimmed and roughly chopped
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup dry white wine
1/2 cup packed grated Parmesan
1/4 cup fine bread crumbs
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves
1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil leaves
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano leaves

Heat the oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shallots and garlic, and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the mushrooms, salt, and pepper, and cook, stirring, until the mushrooms are wilted and begin to caramelize. Add the wine and cook, stirring to deglaze the pan and until the liquid has almost all evaporated, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and transfer the mushrooms to the bowl of a food processor. Add the cheese, bread crumbs, parsley, basil, and oregano, and process on high speed to a thick paste.

Transfer to a bowl and divide into 8 equal portions. With your hands, pack each portion into a tight ball. Set aside until ready to stuff the quail.

Makes about 3 cups.

TRUFFLE SAUCE:

1/2 pound butter, at room temperature
1/4 cup white truffle oil
1 cup white wine
1 tablespoon minced shallots
1 teaspoon chopped garlic
Salt
Freshly ground white pepper
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 small black truffle
Chives, for garnish

In a mixing bowl, mix the butter and truffle oil together. Place the butter and oil mixture on plastic wrap, form a log, and wrap tightly. Refrigerate until firm. In a saucepan, combine the white wine, shallots, and garlic. Season with salt and white pepper. Bring the liquid to a boil and cook for 3 minutes. Stir in the cream and cook for 1 minute. Cut the butter into 1-inch pieces. Reduce the heat to medium-low and whisk in the butter, 1 piece at a time. Reduce the heat to low and keep the sauce warm. Garnish with shaved truffles and chives.

Makes about 2 cups sauce.