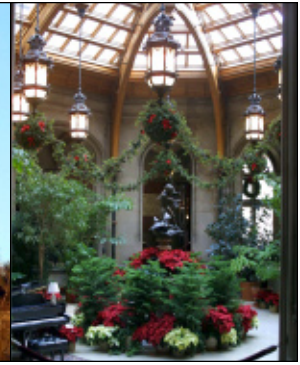


BURT WOLF  
**TRAVELS & TRADITIONS**  
**CHRISTMAS AT BILTMORE ESTATE**  
**ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA**



**B**iltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, is the largest private home in North America. It was built by George W. Vanderbilt in the late 1800s. George was the grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt. At one time Cornelius was the wealthiest man in the world and the family's sense of grandeur is clearly visible throughout the estate. The original property covered 125,000 acres.

During the 1880s Asheville became a popular health resort. People came here to enjoy the mineral springs, the fresh air, and the mild climate. In 1888 George Vanderbilt came here for a vacation and decided that this was the place to build his home. He'd been visiting Europe and admired the giant estates with country farms that made the property self-sustaining. He named his place Biltmore. *Bildt* was the name of the town where his family came from in Holland and *More* is an old English word that means rolling hills.

From the very beginning Vanderbilt wanted an estate that was commercially productive and that is precisely what he ended up with. The land produced fruits, vegetables, grain crops, meat, dairy products and honey. The forest supplied 3,000 cords of firewood. Biltmore had its own lumber mill. The nursery grew five million plants and became one of the most important nurseries in the country. George introduced innovative farming techniques to the region and helped found the first institute for scientific forestry in America.



George hired Richard Morris Hunt, well-known architect, to design the building and Frederick Law Olmstead to take care of the surrounding land. Olmstead had become famous as the landscape architect for New York's Central Park. Hunt modeled the main structure after the French chateau of the Loire Valley that had been built during the 1500s. The house looked old but behind the walls was the most advanced technology. Central heating, central plumbing, electricity, mechanical refrigerators, fire alarms and elevators: very new stuff for the time.

The main house has 250 rooms that cover four acres of floor space. There are 34 family and guest bedrooms each in a different style. There are 43 bathrooms with hot and cold running water. In Asheville the idea of turning on a tap and suddenly having hot water was revolutionary. The house was equipped with three kitchens. The main kitchen was the center of activity. There was also a rotisserie kitchen with a wood-burning oven and a mechanized rotary spit with an adjustable speed gauge. The pastry kitchen produced the breads, cakes and pies. An indoor swimming pool held 70,000 gallons of water, which had been heated in Biltmore's boilers. There were underwater lights and a diving platform. Fitness was coming into fashion so Vanderbilt included a gym. They had Indian clubs that were used to improve hand-eye coordination, and early type of rowing machine and barbells. Bowling was brought to America in the 1600s by the Dutch and since George's ancestors were Dutch and arrived in the 1600s, it was only fitting that he installed a two lane bowling alley. Biltmore also has 65 fireplaces including one that is slightly larger than my first apartment.

The first floor is made up of the public rooms where the Vanderbilts lived as a family and entertained their guests. The area known as the Winter Garden (pictured above) is a glass-roofed space designed to look like an indoor jungle of exotic plants. On the walls surrounding the Winter Garden are copies of the Elgin Marbles that stood in the ancient Parthenon of Athens until Lord Elgin decided they would make a nice souvenir of his trip to Greece and brought them back to the British Museum. It was a lot like taking home the Eiffel Tower to remind you of your visit to Paris.

Off the Winter Garden is the banquet hall, the largest room in the house; 72 feet long, 42 feet wide and 70 feet high. This was where the Vanderbilts held their formal dinner parties and celebrated Christmas with the great tree.



For centuries, the fireplace has been an important part of Christmas. Originally fireplaces were round and placed in the center of the home. It represented a link

to the history of the family and a connection to heaven through the chimney. The fire inside symbolized emotional warmth, love and light.

The Flemish tapestries on the walls were created during the 1500s and tell the story of Venus, the goddess of love, Mars, the god of war who was Venus' not so secret lover and her jealous husband, Vulcan, the god of fire. Talk about watching a soap opera while you're eating.

Next to the banquet hall is the breakfast room. This is where the family took its meals. It is much more intimate and all the pictures are of nice relatives who behaved properly.

Of all the rooms at Biltmore, George Vanderbilt's favorite was probably the library. George was a serious scholar and loved to read. He amassed a collection of 23,000 books. The art on the ceiling was painted in the 1600s and brought to Biltmore from a palace in Venice.



The tapestry gallery runs for 90 feet between the entrance hall and the library. It was used as a sitting area and probably a ballroom. The tapestries are part of a set woven in Brussels in the mid 1500s and called "The Triumph of the Seven Virtues." There are also two



portraits by John Singer Sargent; one of George Vanderbilt and one of his mother, Maria Louisa. On the opposite wall is a portrait of George's wife, Edith Vanderbilt, by James McNeill Whistler, who was on break from painting his mother.

Mr. Vanderbilt's bedroom was on the second floor - heavily carved pieces in walnut, baroque chairs and a bathroom with hot running water. Down the hall is Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom. The oval shaped space is decorated in the style of Louis XV - very popular in France during the 1700s and copied by wealthy Americans in the 1800s. Between the bedrooms of Mr. Vanderbilt and Mrs. Vanderbilt was the oak sitting room, a private space connecting their separate apartments. It was modeled after the Great Hall at Hatfield House, a seventeenth century English estate that the Vanderbilts had once visited. It's the perfect location to inquire "My place or yours?"

### Christmas at Biltmore

George first opened the estate to his friends and family on Christmas Eve, 1895 and ever since, Christmas has been an important celebration at Biltmore. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Vanderbilts were asked to open the estate to the public in the hope that it would

## THINGS TO DO

### CHRISTMAS AT BILTMORE

THE BILTMORE ESTATE  
1 LODGE STREET  
ASHEVILLE, NC 28803  
TOLL-FREE: 1-800-624-1575  
[WWW.BILTMORE.COM](http://WWW.BILTMORE.COM)

### CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS EVENINGS

TOLL-FREE: 1-800-289-1895  
[WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT](http://WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT)

Tickets and dining reservations are available for *Candlelight Christmas Evenings* at Biltmore November 6, 2001– January 1, 2002.

### BEHIND THE SCENES TOURS

(THE BUTLER'S TOUR)  
TOLL-FREE: 1-800-543-2961  
[WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT](http://WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT)

Tour guest bedrooms, servants' quarters and the sub-basement of Biltmore House. During this 60-minute guided tour, see unrestored areas of the house not on the self-guided visit, plus rooms used to store furniture and decorative accessories from George Vanderbilt's collection that are not currently displayed to the general public.

### THE WINERY

TEL: (828) 274-6280.  
[WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT/WINERY](http://WWW.BILTMORE.COM/VISIT/WINERY)

In keeping with George Vanderbilt's original vision of an estate that was commercially productive, Biltmore has developed a winery. Settlers in North Carolina had been growing grapes and making wine as far back as colonial times, and this is very much in keeping with local tradition.

Today, almost 60,000 vines thrive on the sloping acres of the western portion of the estate. The estate cultivates Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot for their red wines and Chardonnay and Riesling for their whites and sparkling wines. The tasting rooms have more visitors than any other winery in North America.

create a tourist attraction and become a source of income for the local residents. These days Biltmore has almost 1 million visitors annually, and it's easy to understand why. It's an extraordinary place, and particularly interesting during Christmas. Biltmore House is the ideal place to take a look at the traditional American Christmas. Almost everything we think of as part of Christmas—the tree, the trimmings, the presents, Santa Claus and the foods and drinks—all of it came into American culture in the years just before and just after George Vanderbilt moved to Biltmore.



## The Solstice

Ancient astronomers believed that the sun traveled around the earth on a giant track. Every day it would move along covering a distance equal to its own width. It took six months to travel from its farthest point in the North to its farthest point in the South. When it got to the end of the track, it would turn around and head back.

The most northerly point on the track was known as the Tropic of Cancer; the most southerly, the Tropic of Capricorn. Tropic is an ancient Greek word meaning the turning point. Whenever the sun would reach one of these turning points, it would stop and rest for a couple of days. That rest was known as the solstice. Solstice is a Latin word and it means the sun stands still. We have two of them a year. One takes place at the end of June and marks the brightest and longest day of the year, one takes place at the end of December and marks the shortest and darkest day of the year. Societies all over the world celebrate a solstice and one of the most important is known as Christmas.

Christmas is about remembering your past—the sound of sleigh bells, the smell of pine needles, the taste of gingerbread, toys trains and little villages you thought you could control. It reminds us of the time when we believed all of our dreams could come true.

One of the ways that message is sent is with the greenery used to decorate the home. German tribes would gather evergreen branches and make them into wreaths as an expression of hope that spring would soon return. Christian society kept the activity and associated it with overcoming the forces of winter and darkness. In ancient Rome a decorative wreath was a sign of victory, which for Christian Europe became a symbol of victory over the darkness and the sorrows of life.



## Christmas in America

We're not really sure how the images we associate with Christmas in America took hold but it seems to me there were four guys in this deal. The first was the American author Washington Irving. Thanks to Hollywood, Irving is most famous for his short stories *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*, but in 1820 Irving wrote a story with a detailed description of an old fashioned English Christmas. People loved the images of Christmas that were presented in Irving's story. Over 20 years later in 1843 Charles Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*, which included a lot of the stuff that came from Irving's story. During the Christmas season of 1867 Dickens toured the United States reading *A Christmas Carol* to huge audiences. Over 10,000 people showed up in Boston. Clearly Dickens had the better PR agent.

But the imagery in both those stories was exactly what the American public needed at the time. Christmas as a national holiday was quite new and the descriptions in Dickens and Irving connected what was happening here with the older traditions in England.

During the 1880s newspapers, magazines and books were filled with stories saying nice things about the materialism of the American Christmas. It looked back to the opulence of Christmas in old England and claimed that if it was good enough for them it was okay for us. Undoubtedly, George Vanderbilt was aware of these attitudes and reflected them in his own home.

The two other men that gave American Christmas its present look were illustrators. J.C. Leyendecker took his inspiration from Irving's description of the ceremonies of Ye Olde English Christmas. Norman Rockwell referenced the Christmas of Charles Dickens.



## The Christmas Tree

Ancient societies from the Druids and the Celts to the Franks and the Egyptians marked the winter solstice by decorating their homes with evergreen plants. In Catholic communities, St. Nicholas, the Three Kings and the Christ child were represented in human likeness. German Protestants felt the representation of humans and animals was inappropriate, and during the 1500s introduced the Christmas tree as a counterbalance.



The idea of a Christmas tree came to America in December of 1850 when *Godey's* magazine published a picture of Queen Victoria and her

## WHERE TO STAY

Visiting was very much part of George Vanderbilt's plan for Biltmore. When the estate opened on Christmas Eve of 1895, it was filled with guests. His relatives and friends would often come for extended visits and everything was done to make them feel completely at home. By June of 1900 Vanderbilt was thinking about building an inn on the property.

It took a hundred and one years for the idea to become a reality, but during the spring of 2001 the Inn on Biltmore Estate opened to the public. Documents in Biltmore's archives indicate that the Inn was to be built on a hill and that is precisely what was done. It sits just above the winery with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains.

Descendants of George Vanderbilt oversaw the design and construction of the Inn and their objective was to reproduce the type of gracious American resort that was available during the 1890s.



### THE INN ON BILTMORE ESTATE

1 LODGE STREET  
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[WWW.BILTMORE.COM/INN](http://WWW.BILTMORE.COM/INN)

family standing around a small Christmas tree that was sitting on a table.

The Queen's husband Prince Albert was German, and Christmas trees had been part of the German holiday tradition for centuries. Prince Albert was merely introducing his kids to what had happened in his own childhood, but anything that happened in the British royal household was immediately covered by the British press, and anything that was in the British press was immediately covered in the United States.

One year later, in 1851, a farmer in the Catskill Mountains paid a license fee of \$1 to the City of New York and set up the first official sidewalk concession for the sale of Christmas trees. The greenery of the forests slipped into town and everybody loved it.

The first set of electric Christmas lights went onto the tree of Edward Johnson, who just happened to be the Vice President of Thomas Edison's electric company in New York. The establishment of Edison's electric company, his light bulb factory and the acceptance of Christmas as a legal holiday all took place within a few years. Electric lights were more economical than candles because they could be reused for years and perhaps, even more important, they were much safer than the candle's open flame.

For the same two reasons, money and safety, artificial trees became popular. During the 1890s, we

began importing artificial trees from Germany that were made of goose feathers, and when the First World War cut off the supply from Germany, we began making them here in the United States. Today, Americans use more artificial trees than real ones, and some manufacturers offer them with the lights already attached to the branches. Just open the box and Christmas pops out.

## Christmas Ornaments

We think of F.W. Woolworth as the father of the five and dime store. But a big hunk of his fortune came as a Christmas gift. In 1880, he was wandering around the warehouse of a Philadelphia importer, looking for some inexpensive toys to put in his store. The importer showed him a series of glass Christmas tree ornaments that he had imported from Germany.

For hundreds of years, the German town of Lauscha had been a glass blowing center and during the middle of the 1800s, they began manufacturing glass Christmas tree ornaments in the shape of balls and reindeer. Woolworth thought the importer was whacko. The breakage during shipment would be enormous and if any of them got through in one piece, no one would know what to do with them anyway. The importer felt so strongly about the ornaments, he guaranteed the sale. If Woolworth didn't sell \$25 worth,

he would get his money back.

The ornaments came into Woolworth's store just before Christmas and he put them out thinking, "Boy, am I wasting good retail space." Two days later, they were sold out. The next year, he stocked even more and sold them out. Eventually he made \$25 million on those little glass ornaments. When the Second World War put an end to trading with Germany, he taught the Corning Glass Works of Corning, New York how to make the little Christmas tree ornaments and they didn't do badly either.

## Santa Claus



In 1897, eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon, the daughter of a New York City doctor, wrote to a local newspaper and asked, "was there really a Santa Claus?" Francis Church, a correspondent for the paper, answered with his famous column, "Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus." The column recommended that Americans be generous of spirit, love their fellow man, and even in the darkest days of winter trust that the sun, (which was also the name the newspaper) would return. It recommends that we all have a positive vision of the future.

For over a hundred years, the dominant image of Christmas in the United States has been Santa Claus. But who was Saint Nicholas before he hit the big time? During the fourth century, he was a bishop in what is now Turkey and he was famous for giving gifts to kids and dowries to young ladies who wanted to get married. He became a minor folk character in northern Europe, and arrived in New York City with the early Dutch settlers.

The first important media exposure for Santa Claus came in the 1860s, when he showed up in a series of illustrations for Harper's Weekly. The artist was Thomas Nast.

At the time, people were interested in the explorers who were heading to the North Pole and it was Nast who decided that Santa Claus lived at the North Pole. Nast's drawings showed him in a sleigh pulled by reindeer, big sacks of gifts behind him and stockings hung by the chimney with care. Nast got those ideas from a poem by Clement Moore called "A Visit From Santa Claus." Moore got those ideas from Washington Irving, all of which is to say that our picture of Christmas started with the work of Washington Irving.



In 1931, Santa signed with Coca-Cola and has appeared in their holiday promotions ever since. (And you thought Tiger Woods had a great agent!) Santa in

his present form is an American invention. The size of his stomach, his ruddy complexion, his fur-trimmed suit all speak to a national abundance. Santa stands there with a brand name product in his hand declaring that we are economically the richest nation in the world and proud of it.

Clearly Santa is running a major international business. He's got his own factory which has a very sophisticated labor force. One hundred and fifty years before Federal Express, he had an airborne delivery system in place. He's got to be one of the world's leading authorities on the not-for-profit business.

## Christmas Gifts

Originally, Christmas presents were for little kids. They were stuffed into stockings—the presents, not the kids. If you were good, you found little toys inside. If you were bad, you found coal and sticks. My stockings contained lots of coal and lots of sticks and an occasional potato, but my mother never told me why she put them in there. I thought it was because she knew I loved barbecue.

The tree was the holder for the simple gifts that were light enough to hang from the tree; usually nuts, candies and dried fruits that were placed into homemade containers that hung from the branches. A big tree with strong branches can hold bigger presents. When the presents got too big to hang from the tree, they started showing up under the tree, but they were still clearly visible. No packaging. What you saw was what you got.

During the 1860s, the first wrapped gifts showed up, always wrapped in plain paper held in place with sealing wax or pins and later with string and tinsel cord. By the middle of the 1870s, everybody wrapped. Fancy wrapping paper arrived when J. C. Halls' little shop in Kansas City, Missouri ran out of solid color tissue and filled in with French envelope lining that he used in his greeting card business. It was so successful, he started printing his own wrapping papers and used the brand name Hallmark.

Some historians believe that the idea of wrapping a present is part of the Victorian passion for enclosing things, for disguising all intimacy, for holding off the anticipated. To tell you the truth, that's kind of a stretch for me. I tend to think a cigar is just a cigar. Nevertheless, 96 percent of all Christmas presents given in the United States are wrapped.

Some people feel that the stack of gifts under the tree has turned Christmas into a national festival of consumption. But I disagree. Christmas is the story of Christ—God giving his only child as a gift to humanity.



All we're doing is following the example by giving gifts to the people we love and the neediest of our fellow men. The United States is the most successful industrial society in the world, and there's no reason for us to be ashamed of our commercial ability. There's just a need for us to share.

## Christmas Foods

Perhaps the greatest single influence on Christmas dinner in the United States came from the meal described by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*. He took the grand old family feast of the old English Christmas and downsized it for a single household. It became the perfect instructional manual for the American homemaker.

Christmas, like all festivals, is different from every day life. When you eat foods that are only eaten at a particular festival it makes the occasion even more special. A perfect example is the Christmas pudding. It shows up once a year and is packed with information. A traditional Christmas pudding contains 13 ingredients representing Christ and His disciples. When you light the brandy that is poured over the pudding the flame represents Christ's passion, while the garnish of holly is a reminder of His Crown of Thorns.

*Stollen* is a Christmas specialty that comes from Germany. It is a rich yeast bread filled with dried fruits, nuts, raisins and candied citrus and topped with powdered sugar. It originated in Dresden, Germany during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Mincemeat is a Christmas staple: a rich blend of fruit, nuts, spices and brandy or rum. It's used in pies, tarts and puddings. At Biltmore it becomes a filling for turnovers.



Christmas is also cookie time and baking them is a perfect way of getting kids into the business of preparing for Christmas. The cookies can also be given a special role as decorations on the tree.

Another gastronomic tradition associated with Christmas is the gingerbread house. Ginger is an ancient spice that originated in Asia. During the middle ages it was the second most popular spice right after black pepper and bakers began adding it to breads and cookies. German bakers loved it and the city of Nuremberg became the gingerbread capital of the world. The town's sculptors, wood carvers and goldsmiths began forming the gingerbread into hearts, angels, men, animals and houses.

The beverage of choice is often eggnog. Eggnog is related to a series of drinks made from milk and wine



that go back for hundreds of years. When wine and milk drinks arrived in colonial America we dropped the wine and replaced it with rum. Rum drinks were called grog and

some historians believe that this particular recipe was known as egg and grog, which eventually became eggnog.

During the 1800s, Christmas began with oysters followed by a soup like pumpkin bisque. After a fish course came sweetbreads or p<sup>ât</sup>é and then the roasted meat course. In the hierarchy of cooking, roasting has the most prestige. It is the technique of choice for festivals and special occasions. After the roasted meat, the roasted game arrived. All of this was washed down with Roman punch or mulled wine. Guests were then offered cheese and fruit.

In keeping with tradition, executive chef Steven Adams of Biltmore Estate prepared a Christmas dinner. The elaborate menu included leg of lamb stuffed with pine nuts and basil and roast goose stuffed with onions and fresh sage and garnished with cipollini onions. Dessert featured a black walnut pie with a little sweet cream and plum pudding cake.

### BRAIDSTREAM

144 FLINT ST.

ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

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[WWW.BRAIDSTREAMMUSIC.COM](http://WWW.BRAIDSTREAMMUSIC.COM)

Almost everything associated with Christmas is about remembering. One of the most powerful triggers for memory is music. Throughout the Christmas season Biltmore Estate fills the house with music. The Winter Garden was often used for musical presentations by the Vanderbilts and during my visit the room was being used by Braidstream:



Paul Ghost Horse, cello.  
Rita Hayes, flute. Donna Germano, hammered dulcimer. Jeff Johnson, guitar. David Cohen, percussion.



## TRAVELS & TRADITIONS

RECIPES FROM  
CHRISTMAS AT BILTMORE ESTATE



### GOOSE STUFFED WITH ONIONS AND FRESH SAGE *Makes 4 servings*

*One 6-8 pound fresh goose*  
*1 pound cipollini onions, peeled*  
*3 tablespoons olive oil*  
*1 cup diced celery*  
*6 cups French bread, cut into 1-inch dice*  
*3½ cups chicken stock*  
*2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage*  
*Pinch freshly grated nutmeg*  
*Salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*  
*10 whole fried sage leaves, for garnish*

Remove the giblets and neck from the cavity of the bird and discard. Trim the neck flap, tail, and inside cavity of excess fat. Cut the wing tips at the joint and discard. With a paring knife, remove the wishbone by cutting underneath both sides of the bone to free it from the flesh. Cut through the bottom of the wishbone where it meets the neck, and then pull it until it comes free.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Reserve 8 cipollini onions and cut each of the remaining onions into six wedges. In a large skillet, over medium-high heat, heat the oil. Add the onion wedges and celery and saute for 5 minutes. Add the bread cubes and toss until the bread just begins to brown. Remove the skillet from the heat and add 1 cup of the chicken stock, sage, nutmeg, and season to taste with the salt and pepper. Set the stuffing aside until it is cool enough to handle.

Stuff the goose with the stuffing mixture and tie the legs of the bird together with kitchen twine. Prick the skin all over with a fork and season to taste with salt. Lay the goose, breast side up, on a rack set in a large roasting pan and place in the oven. Roast for 30 minutes; then carefully pour off the excess fat from the roasting pan and continue to cook, repeating this process, every 30 minutes, until the juices run clear from the breast and the thigh will move easily in its joint. This will take 1½ to 2 hours. Add the whole cipollini onions to the roasting pan in the last hour of

cooking. To brown the skin of the bird, raise the heat to 500°F and cook until the skin is nicely browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the bird and the whole onions from the oven and let it rest in a warm spot for 20 minutes while you make the gravy.

To make the gravy: discard all of the excess fat from the roasting pan. Put the roasting pan over a medium flame and pour the remaining 2 cups chicken broth and simmer until the sauce has thickened and reduced by half. Season to taste with the salt and pepper.

To serve the goose: carve the breast, leg, and thigh into thin slices. Arrange on a warmed platter with the stuffing and roasted onions and serve with the gravy on the side. Garnish the platter with the fried sage leaves.

*Recipe courtesy of Biltmore Estate Executive Chef Steven Adams.*



### LEG OF LAMB STUFFED WITH PINE NUTS AND BASIL *Makes 6 servings*

*One 3-5 pound boned leg of lamb*  
*1 tablespoon dried rosemary, chopped*  
*Salt*  
*Freshly ground black pepper*  
*2/3 cup toasted pine nuts*  
*½ cup chopped fresh basil*  
*2 tablespoons olive oil*  
*2-3 sprigs fresh basil for garnish*

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

To prepare the lamb: Unroll the roast and trim the excess fat. Season the inside of the meat with the rosemary and salt and pepper to taste. In a small bowl, mix together the pine nuts and basil and spread the mixture evenly over the roast. With the long side of the roast in front of you, lift it up and over the pine nuts, tightly packing the filling inside. Tie up the roast, in 1-inch intervals, using kitchen twine. Season the

*Continued on page 8*

outside of the roast with salt and pepper.

In a large oven proof skillet over medium heat, add the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the lamb and brown on all sides over high heat. Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook for 1 hour, or until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the roast reaches a temperature of 125°F to 130°F for rare to medium rare. Remove the roast from the oven to a warm spot and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving. This keeps the meat juicy.

To serve, snip the kitchen twine and discard. Thinly slice the meat and lay out on a heated platter. Pour pan juices over carved meat and garnish with the fresh basil.

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*Recipe courtesy of Biltmore Estate Executive Chef Steven Adams.*



### BLACK WALNUT PIE

*Makes 8 servings*

*½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter*  
*1 cup light corn syrup*  
*¾ cup packed brown sugar*  
*4 eggs, lightly beaten*  
*1 tablespoon vanilla extract*  
*¼ teaspoon salt*  
*1 cup black walnut pieces*  
*One 9-inch prepared pie crust*

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

In a small heavy saucepan, over medium low heat, melt the butter, corn syrup, and brown sugar together stirring constantly. Set the mixture aside until it has cooled to room temperature.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, vanilla, and salt. Slowly add the cooled sugar mixture to the eggs, whisking constantly until the custard is well combined. Scatter the walnuts evenly into the prepared pie crust and pour the custard over the nuts to completely cover.

Bake the pie in the oven for 30 minutes or until the top is golden brown and custard has set. Remove the pie from the oven and set aside to cool completely. Serve at room temperature.

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*Recipe courtesy of Biltmore Estate Executive Chef Steven Adams.*



### STOLLEN

*Makes 1 large loaf*

*½ cup dark rum*  
*1 cup currants*  
*⅔ cup milk*  
*Two (¼ ounce each) packages active dry yeast*  
*⅓ cup granulated sugar*  
*2¼ cups all-purpose flour*  
*1 teaspoon kosher salt*  
*½ cup ground almonds*  
*9 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened*  
*2 tablespoons diced candied orange peel*  
*2 tablespoons diced citron or other candied fruit*  
*½ cup confectioners' sugar, plus more for dusting*

Heat the rum in a small saucepan, remove from the heat, add the currants, and set aside to plump.

In another small saucepan warm the milk slightly. Pour the milk into the bowl of a standing mixer, sprinkle the yeast over the surface, and add a tablespoon of the granulated sugar. Let the yeast proof. After about 5 minutes, the yeast will expand and start to bubble.

With the dough hook attachment and the machine on medium speed, add 1½ cups of flour and the salt to the milk to make a wet dough; mix for 2 to 3 minutes, until smooth.

Continue mixing on medium speed, and add the almonds and the remaining sugar. Reserve a tablespoon of butter, break the rest into 4 or 5 pieces, and add it to the dough. The dough will be very wet and sticky. Add enough of the remaining flour to make a soft, elastic dough, and continue to mix at a medium speed for 4 or 5 minutes.

Drain and reserve the rum from the currants. Add all the dried fruit to the dough and mix for 2 or 3 minutes more, or until evenly incorporated.

Coat the inside of a bowl with the reserved tablespoon of butter. Turn the dough out of the mixing bowl, dust your hands with flour, and form the dough into a ball. Roll the dough in the bowl until it is covered with the butter. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and set the bowl aside in a warm spot until the dough doubles in size, 1 to 1½ hours.

When the dough has doubled, carefully turn it out onto a parchment-lined baking sheet, lightly dust with flour, and press it out into a large oval, about 15 inches long. Fold the dough over lengthwise like a clam shell, with the top covering four-fifths of the bottom. It's like a very long Parker House roll. Straighten the long edges of the loaf. Cover the dough with a kitchen towel. Let it rest

*Continued on page 9*

for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Bake the stollen in the middle of the oven for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes rotate the baking sheet to insure even cooking. Reduce the temperature to 350°F. Continue to bake the stollen for 25 to 35 minutes until golden brown and it sounds hollow when thumped. If the bottom of the loaf is browning too quickly, slip a cool baking sheet underneath to control the heat. Transfer the finished loaf to a rack to cool.

As the loaf cools, make the glaze. In a small pan whisk 2 tablespoons of the reserved rum or water with the confectioners' sugar. Cook over a low heat until the mixture is dissolved and slightly thickened, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Paint the top of the warm stollen with the glaze. Cool. Wrap in plastic wrap until ready to serve. Dust with the confectioners' sugar before serving.



#### CHRISTMAS SPICE COOKIES *Makes about 2 dozen cookies*

*1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter*  
*1 cup granulated sugar*  
*1 large egg*  
*½ cup honey*  
*4½ cups all-purpose flour*  
*¾ teaspoon double-acting baking powder*  
*½ teaspoon salt*  
*2 teaspoons ground ginger*  
*1 teaspoon cinnamon*  
*Multicolored sugar for garnishing (optional)*

In a large bowl, cream the butter and granulated sugar together until very light in color. Add the egg and honey and continue beating until the mixture is light and fluffy.

Sift the flour, baking powder, salt, ginger, and cinnamon together and stir into the butter-sugar mixture.

Wrap the cookie dough in wax paper and chill in the refrigerator for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Roll out the chilled dough until it is about ¼-inch thick and cut it with a 3- to 3½-inch cookie cutter. Place the cookies on a lightly greased baking sheet and sprinkle with multicolored sugar.

Bake for about 12 minutes, or until the cookies are golden.

#### PLUM PUDDING CAKE WITH BUTTERMILK ICING *Makes 2 10-inch cakes*

##### FOR THE CAKES

*2 cups flour*  
*½ cup sugar*  
*1 teaspoon nutmeg*  
*1 teaspoon allspice*  
*1 teaspoon cinnamon*  
*1 cup buttermilk*  
*1 teaspoon baking soda*  
*3 large eggs*  
*¾ cup vegetable oil*  
*1 cup pitted, stewed and mashed prunes*  
*1 cup pecans, chopped*

##### FOR THE BUTTERMILK ICING

*1 cup sugar*  
*1 pound unsalted butter*  
*1 teaspoon light corn syrup*  
*½ cup buttermilk*  
*½ teaspoon baking soda*  
*1 teaspoon vanilla*

TO MAKE THE CAKES: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Brush two 10-inch cake pans with butter or oil.

In a medium bowl sift the flour, sugar, and spices together and set aside. In a large bowl whisk the buttermilk and baking soda together, then add the eggs and vegetable oil and whisk until smooth. Add the egg mixture to the dry ingredients and stir until the batter is just combined. Fold the prunes and pecans into the batter. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pans. Bake for 45 minutes or until the cake is lightly browned and a wooden skewer inserted into the center of the cakes come out clean. It should be slightly springy to the touch. Cool on racks for 10 minutes, remove the cakes from the pans, and cool them completely on the racks.

TO MAKE THE ICING: In a medium saucepan over high heat combine the sugar, butter, corn syrup, buttermilk, and baking soda together. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to low and gently simmer and cook for 15 minutes. Keep an eye on the icing to be sure that it does not boil over. Remove the pot from the heat and add the vanilla. Pour the hot icing onto the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or pour into a large heatproof bowl and use a hand held mixer to beat air into the icing until the icing is cooled to room temperature.

TO ICE THE CAKE: Set one cake layer on a rack over a jelly roll pan and pour on the icing, allowing it to soak into the cake before pouring on a second layer of icing. Repeat the process with the second cake layer. Set the cake at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving.

*Recipe courtesy of Biltmore Estate Executive Chef Steven Adams.*