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STOPPING BY SHEILA BRIDGES'S ON A SNOWY EVENING

Joy to the world.
Joy to Sheila Bridges's
relatives for passing
along recipes that
have fed and amazed
generations of family
and friends. Happy
holidays to all—
and to all a good bite.

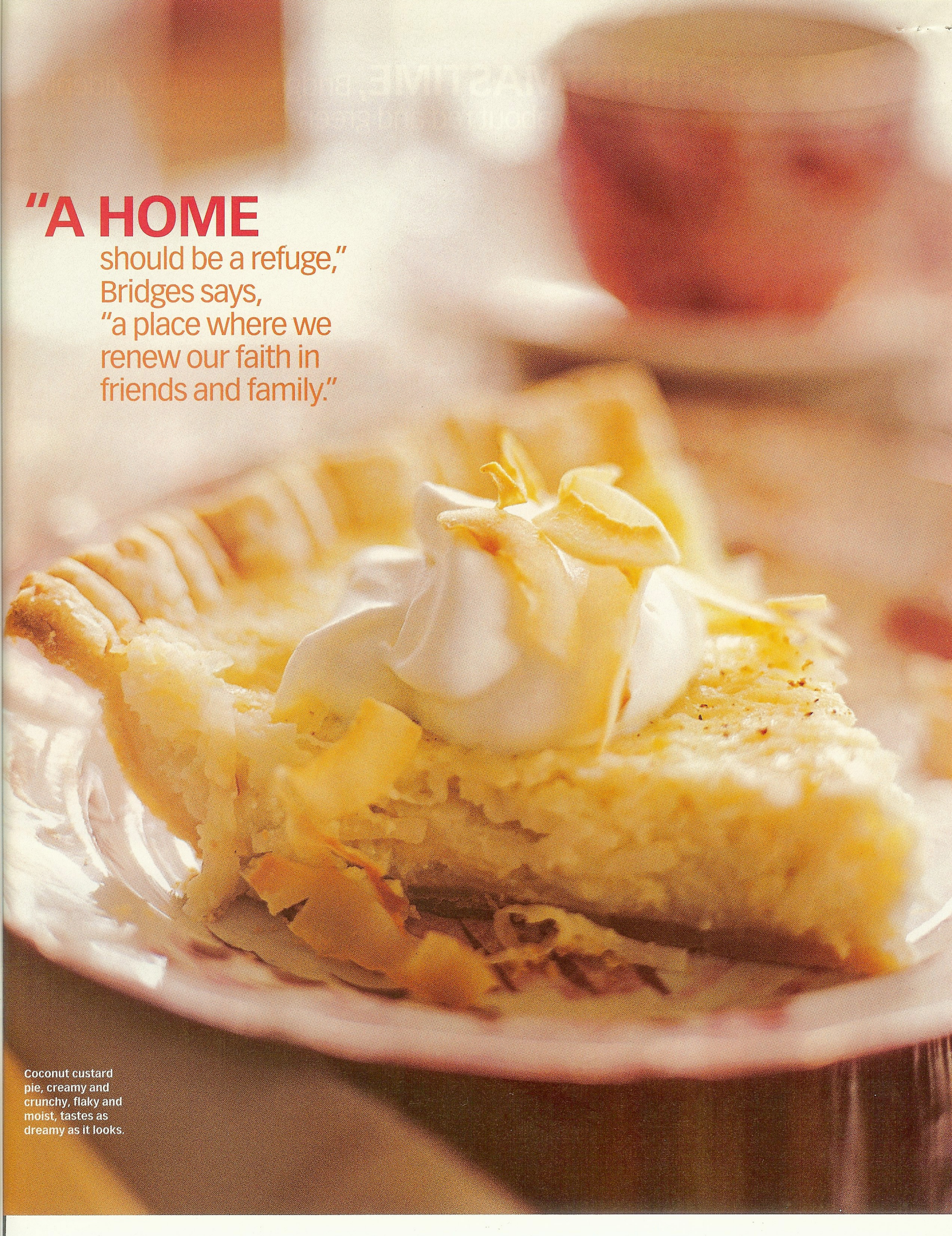


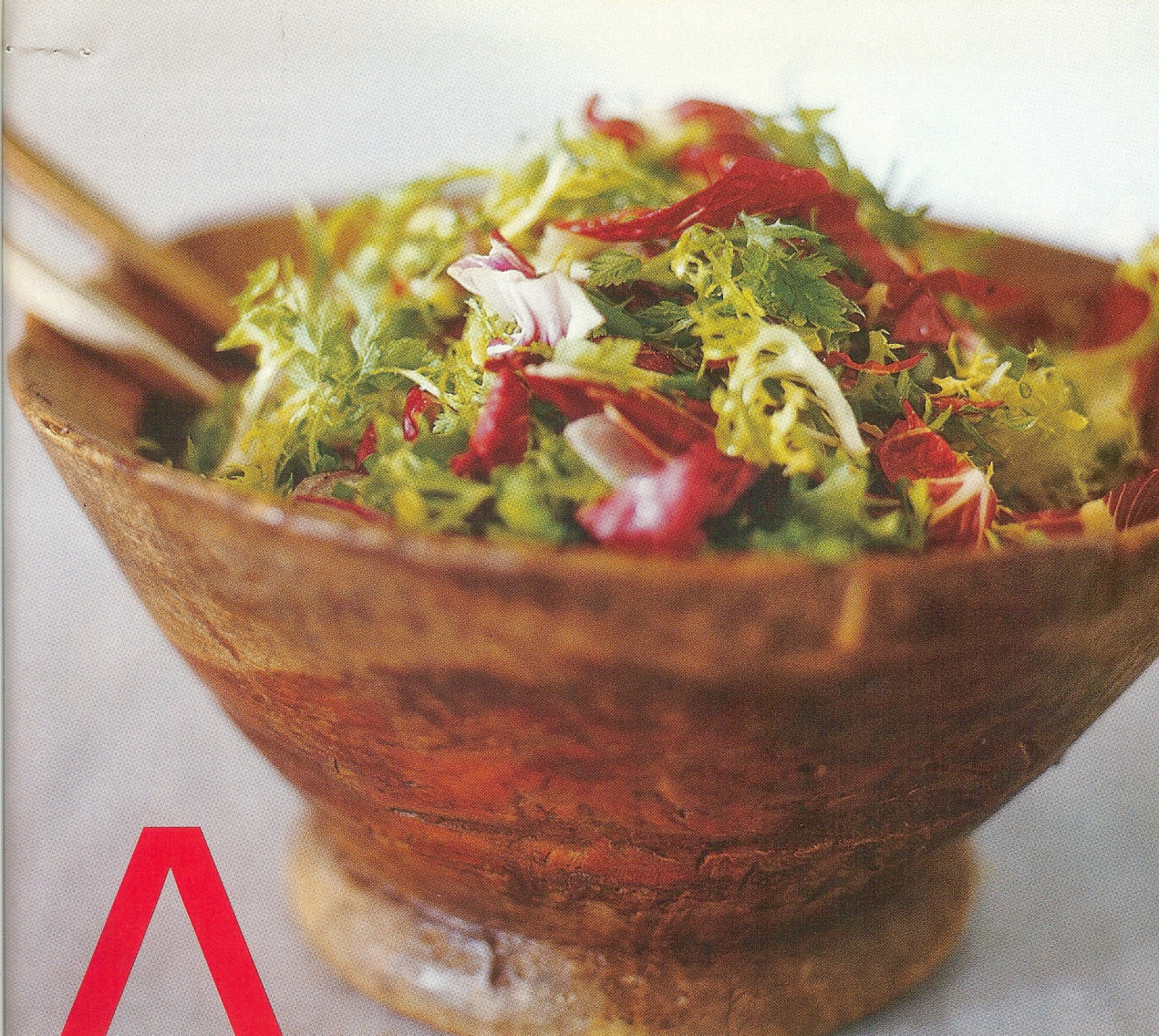
PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMY NEUNSINGER

"A HOME

should be a refuge,"
Bridges says,
"a place where we
renew our faith in
friends and family."

Coconut custard
pie, creamy and
crunchy, flaky and
moist, tastes as
dreamy as it looks.





Bridges loves a wooden bowl that's been around the block and has the character lines to prove it, like this one (*left*), filled with a salad of frisée and radicchio dressed with olive oil and vinegar. *Below*: Maya, the 2-year-old granddaughter of a lifelong family friend—you just want to wrap her up and take her home. *Opposite page*: Richer than rich, three-cheese macaroni defines comfort food.

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T SHEILA BRIDGES'S HOLIDAY dinners, there's something for everyone. The macaroni and cheese is for her. The sweet potatoes with rum and marshmallows are for her brother. The coconut

custard pie is for (and by) her father. Cranberry sauce splits the family along gender lines: "The women love my version, and sometimes I get experimental with it, adding things like oranges and seasonings," Bridges says. "The men have to have it canned."

All right, then: two kinds of cranberry sauce, coming up. But while she'll take liberties with food, deferring to popular taste or tweaking an old family recipe (her paternal grandmother's baked macaroni called for one cheese, not three, like the dish shown here), she's more particular about the visuals. Bridges, who has decorated the home of music producer Andre Harrell and designed Bill Clinton's Harlem office suite, knows how to create a scene—from what's on the plate to the plate itself, from the dining room to the view beyond it. ▶



Opposite page: As an interior designer, Bridges knows how to work a room. Biscuits with sweet-savory honey-thyme butter are served on antique Lustreware, an iridescent-glazed china that she collects and likes to mix and match. *This page:* Cornish game hens, stuffed with locally grown mushrooms and herb-infused wild rice, are an earthy delight.



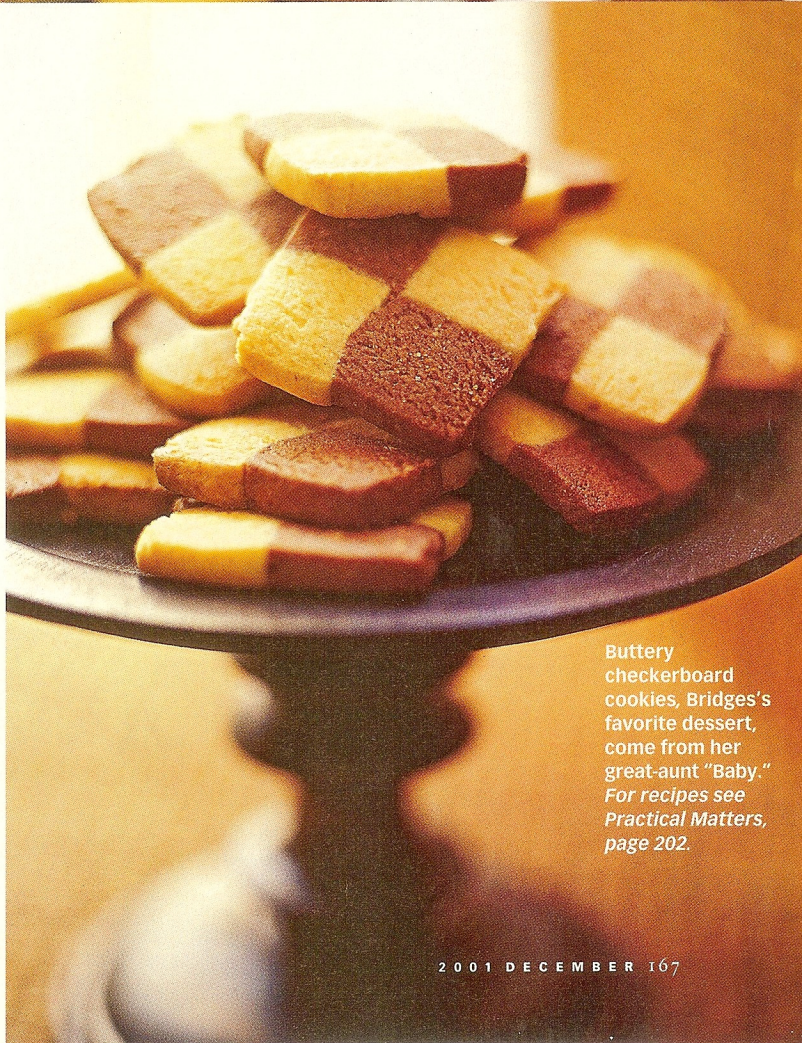


Yes, please! Bridges's mother, Joyce, reaches out. **Left:** Family treasures include honey-glazed ham, rum-spiked sweet potatoes, and peppery succotash.

Her country house, an 1880s Colonial in a part of upstate New York that's very over-the-river-and-through-the-woods (actually it's *on* the river and near the mountains), is relaxed and warm. She'll sneak in a Crate & Barrel find among the local antiques, the fine chandelier, and the distressed pine table from the south of France. She likes lushly textured fabrics in cool blues, greens, and pinks, and at Christmastime she doesn't suddenly turn Nordic. "I'm not crazy about red and green," she says. "We don't need to have reindeer in the windows and tinsel hanging from everything to be festive."

Ultimately, Bridges's holidays aren't about exquisite decor and perfectly tuned menus. "The things we surround ourselves with affect our emotional well-being," she says. "A home should be a refuge, a place for contemplation and healing—a place where we renew our faith in friends and family." And on those all too rare occasions when we gather around a table, whether it's from the south of France or south Jersey, words like joy, peace, grace, and goodwill seem anything but canned. •

WINE SAVVY When choosing wine for a holiday meal with a large variety of dishes, "find a wine that flatters the entire menu," says Christophe Le Chatton, food and beverage director at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. He recommends full-bodied reds, such as the Saint Clement merlot (about \$22) and Steele pinot noir (about \$19), both from California. For white wine lovers, try the Joseph Phelps sauvignon blanc (about \$15) or Acacia chardonnay (about \$20). And why not end your festive meal on a bubbly note? Le Chatton suggests Huet Vouvray Demi Sec le Mont (about \$19), from the Loire Valley.



Buttery checkerboard cookies, Bridges's favorite dessert, come from her great-aunt "Baby." For recipes see *Practical Matters*, page 202.