

# FOOD & WINE

DECEMBER 2010

## best HOLIDAY RECIPES 2010

plus the best wines to  
drink this Christmas

10 FAVORITE  
DISHERS OF 2010

*Cookies from  
Top Chef's newest  
star, great  
with tawny port*  
PAGE 159



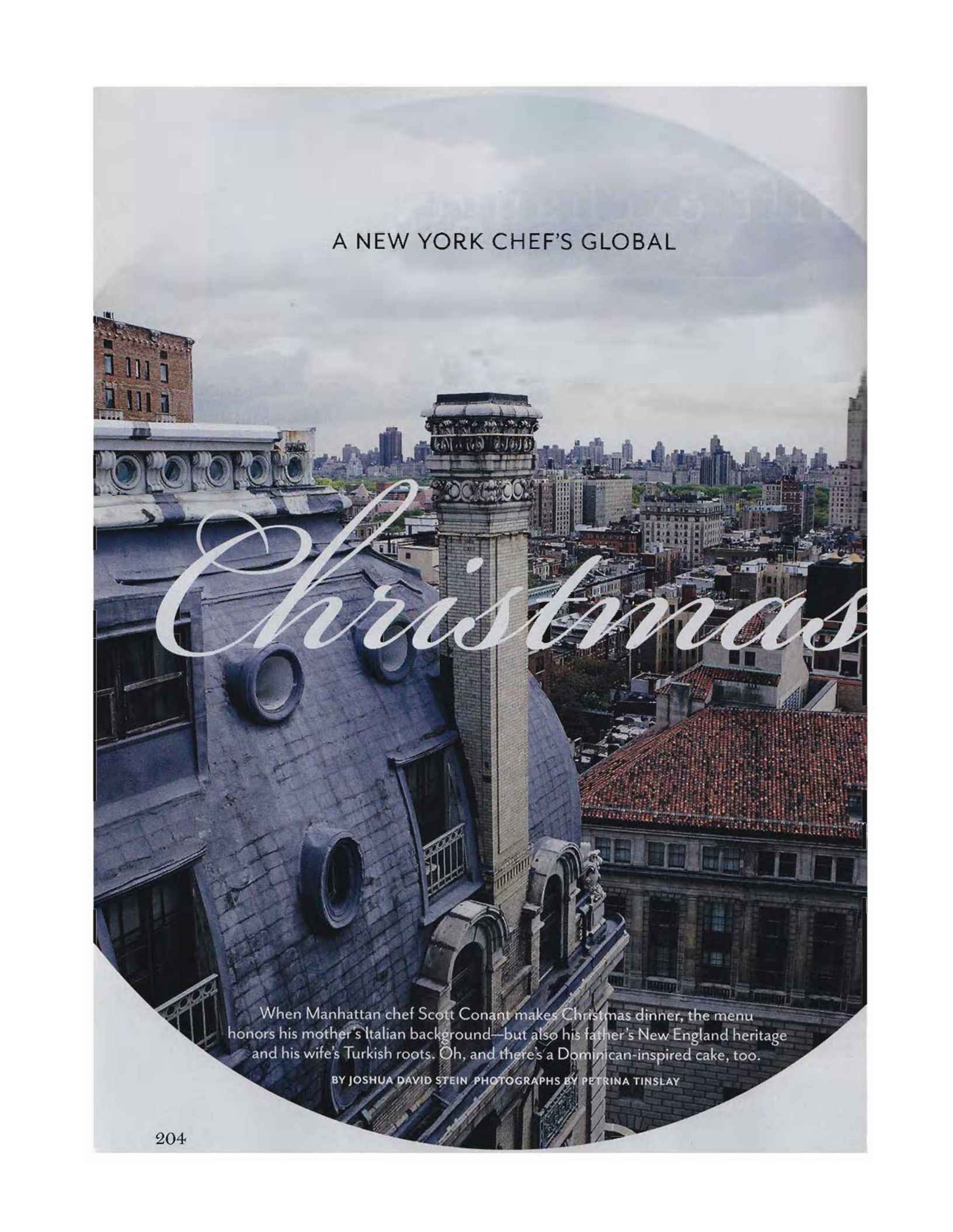
**D**OES IT MAKE ME SEEM SUPERFICIAL if I admit that I like the holidays because they give me an excuse to shop for pretty things? And does it make me seem selfish if I also confess that I make mountains of food gifts because it helps get me out of chores like folding laundry? Maybe I could hide my naked impulses and just say, “I’m testing recipes for the magazine.” Which would be completely true.

Whatever your motivation, you’ll find that this issue is full of fantastic gifts to make and buy. I could sit down with a notepad, write my list and get all my planning done: Compass Box’s Flaming Heart whiskey for my husband, p. 184; Altamura Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon for my wine-focused brother, p. 229; Christmas cookies for my kids’ teachers that I’ll bake with recipes by *Top Chef* winner Kevin Sbraga, p. 159 (that’s me in the photo at right with *Top Chef* judge Tom Colicchio at a party for the Season 7 finale). And I’d buy a Nesco food dehydrator, p. 86, for me—it’s OK to get myself a present, isn’t it?

For a less materialistic approach, I would point you in the direction of “A New York Chef’s Global Christmas.” Scott Conant’s delicious menu is the culinary equivalent of a family get-together: a slow-roasted pork loin with a balsamic-molasses glaze that reflects both his Italian and his Yankee heritage, an eggplant-and-phylo pie that symbolizes his wife’s Turkish roots. Plus a Dominican cake, simply because he loves it.

Of course, for some people, December is less about celebration than it is about taking a midwinter break. If that’s the case, by all means follow our awesome travel editor, Jen Murphy, and hop a plane. She went to northern India and came back with the stories of a lifetime—plus amazing recipes, jewelry and dresses. Which reminds me: I need to put Indian spices on the list of gifts for myself.

Dana Cowin



A NEW YORK CHEF'S GLOBAL

# Christmas

When Manhattan chef Scott Conant makes Christmas dinner, the menu honors his mother's Italian background—but also his father's New England heritage and his wife's Turkish roots. Oh, and there's a Dominican-inspired cake, too.

BY JOSHUA DAVID STEIN PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETRINA TINSLAY

A balsamic-molasses marinade  
doubles as the sticky glaze  
for pork roast (recipe, p. 210).

*"Tiago" platter by Thomas O'Brien.*





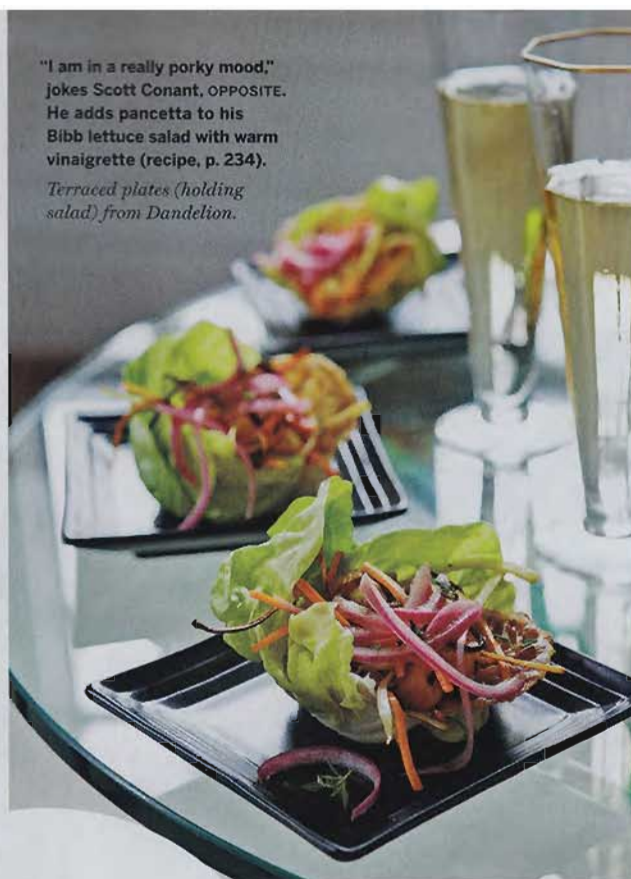
cott Conant is the chef-owner of several outstanding Italian restaurants (notably New York City's Scarpetta and Faustina) and the host of the Food Network show *24 Hour Restaurant Battle*. But at Christmas, he's just a cook. "During the holidays, I slave over the hot stove at home," he says. "Despite my ambition and my desperate attempts to be successful, I crave a very simple life." Greeting guests at their annual holiday dinner in Manhattan is Conant's Turkish-American wife, Meltem, with a plate of cheese and black-pepper breadsticks balanced on one arm (recipe, p. 209) and, in the other, little Ayla Sophia Reina Conant bundled up in a blanket.

If he wanted to, Conant could lay claim to the iconic New England scene that occupies the American imagination—all floral aprons, chimney smoke against a vivid blue sky and American flags fluttering in the cold air. "My great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Roger Conant founded Salem, Massachusetts," he explains, then adds wryly, "It's been downhill ever since." Conant grew up in Connecticut, "on the border between Yankees and Red Sox territory—I was on the Yankees side," but during the holidays, the family visited his father's relatives at their farm in Maine. "It was very Norman Rockwell, with

mincemeat pie." Then they'd head back to Connecticut to his mother's family, the Varrones, who emigrated from Italy just before World War II. "Christmas there meant Italian-American classics," Conant says. "A huge antipasto plate with meats and cheeses, soup like *stracciatella*, homemade cavatelli—which they called 'macaroni'—and of course, braised pork."

This year, Conant's main course is a tribute to both his New England and Italian roots: a slow-cooked pork loin glazed with molasses (a New England staple) and balsamic vinegar (recipe, p. 210). "I am in a really porky mood," Conant chuckles: In addition to the pork loin, there's pancetta lurking in the sautéed brussels sprouts with sun-dried tomatoes (recipe, p. 234) and scattered on the Bibb salad tossed with a warm root-vegetable vinaigrette (recipe, p. 234). While Conant bastes the pork loin, he cracks joke after joke. "I'm the biggest clown in my restaurants," he says, "but never at the expense of a customer."

Other dishes on the menu are Turkish-inspired, in honor of Meltem. Conant recalls the first time he visited Meltem's mother in her hometown of Zonguldak, east of Istanbul, and experienced the food there. "The flavors were different from any I'd ever had before. They blew me away." He re-creates some of them in a silky potato soup topped with shrimp tossed in Turkish red-pepper paste (recipe, p. 209) and an eggplant *börek*—a flaky vegetarian phyllo pie filled with eggplant, toma-



"I am in a really porky mood," jokes Scott Conant, OPPOSITE. He adds pancetta to his Bibb lettuce salad with warm vinaigrette (recipe, p. 234). Terraced plates (holding salad) from Dandelion.

toes and green peppers—that takes the place of the pasta course he would normally serve (recipe, p. 230). "The *börek* is exactly Meltem's recipe. She made it for me when we were dating, and it was one of the things that won me over."

Roger Conant might also be surprised by the dessert his great-great-great-great-great-grandson serves at Christmas: a satiny white Dominican cake layered with dulce de leche (recipe, p. 212). "When we have parties, we always get a Dominican cake from the Bronx or Washington Heights," Conant says. This year, he made his own version, folding the Italian hazelnut liqueur Frangelico into the dulce de leche filling. "It's kind of like the rum-soaked sponge cake at Ferrara's I ate growing up," he says, referring to the iconic bakery in Manhattan's Little Italy.

Clearly, Scott feels no need to hew too closely to Conant family tradition. "I grew up Catholic, but I lean more toward Buddhism," he says. "My wife grew up Muslim, but she's studied a lot of Kabbalah. We have a lot of friends who are Jewish and Christian and Muslim." When it comes to Christmas, "We're starting our own traditions," he says. "Hopefully they will continue to evolve."

## 3 *superfast* hors d'oeuvres

### LIVERWURST TOASTS

Spread liverwurst on rye toasts and top with store-bought onion jam.

### SMOKED-FISH CANAPÉS

Top sturdy ruffle-cut potato chips with a dollop of horseradish sour cream and pieces of smoked trout or salmon.

### MARINATED-ARTICHOKE SPREAD

Chop fresh herbs with oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes and marinated artichokes, then mix them into cream cheese. Serve on crackers or with pita chips.



Conant sets out peppery breadsticks with creamy La Tur cheese from Piedmont, Italy, for scooping. OPPOSITE: He also tops potato soup with Turkish-spiced shrimp—a nod to his Turkish-American wife.



### Potato Soup with Spicy Shrimp

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR

10 SERVINGS

Influenced by his Turkish-American wife, Meltem, Scott Conant spices up his silky potato soup with Turkish red-pepper paste (*biber salcasi*), made from sweet and hot peppers. Look for the paste at Middle Eastern groceries, or use harissa instead.

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 medium shallots, thinly sliced (1 cup)
- Kosher salt
- 1½ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- One 8-ounce baking potato, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 7 cups chicken stock or low-sodium broth
- 1¼ pounds medium shrimp—shelled, deveined and halved horizontally
- 2 teaspoons Turkish red-pepper paste or harissa
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced

1. In a large pot, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Add the shallots and a pinch of salt and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes and cook, stirring, until barely softened, about 5 minutes. Add the chicken stock and simmer over moderate heat until the potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Strain the broth into a heatproof bowl and transfer the shallots and potatoes to a blender. Add ¼ cup of the olive oil and 1 cup



of the broth and puree until smooth. Return the puree to the pot. Stir in the remaining broth and season with salt. Bring the soup back to a simmer over moderate heat.

2. In a medium bowl, toss the shrimp with the pepper paste and the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Season with salt. Add the shrimp to the soup and cook just until they are pink and curled, about 1 minute. Ladle the soup into bowls, garnish with the scallions and serve.

**MAKE AHEAD** The soup can be prepared through Step 1 and refrigerated overnight.

**WINE** *This soup is incredibly smooth and luscious. Serve it with a lively sparkling wine, like the NV Col Vitoraz Valdobbiadene Prosecco Brut, to give it a little lift, or pair it with an equally silky white wine, like the full-bodied 2009 Heartland Stickleback White.*

### Black-Pepper Breadsticks

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR

MAKES 32 BREADSTICKS

Conant serves these tender, peppery breadsticks as a starter. He packs them into a tall glass or plates them with small wedges of La Tur cheese (a dense, buttery Piedmont cheese made from a blend of cow, sheep and goat milk), drizzled with aged balsamic vinegar and sprinkled with flaky sea salt.

- 1 cup warm water
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast (about 1½ envelopes)
- 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons bread flour
- ¾ cup solid vegetable shortening
- 4 teaspoons kosher or Maldon salt
- 1½ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper



## a star chef's christmas

BLACK-PEPPER BREADSTICKS, P. 209  
 POTATO SOUP WITH SPICY SHRIMP, P. 209  
 NV Col Vektorz Valdobbiadene Prosecco Brut

SLOW-ROASTED PORK LOIN  
 HERBED NEW POTATOES  
 CARAMELIZED BRUSSELS SPROUTS, P. 234  
 GINGERED GREEN BEANS, P. 212  
 BIBB LETTUCE WITH WARM VINAIGRETTE, P. 234  
 EGGPLANT BÖREK, P. 230  
 2007 Boscarelli VINO Nobile di Montepulciano

DULCE DE LECHE LAYER  
 CAKE, P. 212



1. Preheat the oven to 350° and line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper. In the bowl of a standing electric mixer fitted with the dough hook, combine the water, yeast and 2 tablespoons of the flour and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. Add the remaining 3 cups of flour along with the shortening, salt and pepper and knead at medium speed until the dough is smooth and elastic, 7 to 8 minutes. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rest for 15 minutes.

2. Turn the dough out onto an unfloured work surface and divide it into fourths. Cut each quarter into 8 pieces. Roll each piece into a 9-by-½-inch rope. Using a knife, trim the breadsticks to 8 inches; arrange on the baking sheets and bake for about 45 minutes, until golden and firm, shifting the pans halfway through baking. Transfer the breadsticks to racks and let cool before serving.

**SERVE WITH** Wedges of La Tur cheese drizzled with aged balsamic vinegar.

**MAKE AHEAD** The breadsticks can be stored in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

### Slow-Roasted Pork Loin with Molasses and Balsamic Glaze

**ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 4 HR**  
**10 SERVINGS**

Conant says this recipe is a perfect reflection of his heritage: The molasses harks back to his father's New England background, and the balsamic vinegar is a tribute to his mother's Italian roots. The marinade is a syrupy glaze that Conant slathers over the pork so it can soak up the flavor before roasting.

- 1 cup balsamic vinegar
- ½ small onion, coarsely chopped
- 6 thyme sprigs
- 2 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade
- 1 cup unsulfured molasses
- 2 tablespoons powdered mustard
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- Two 5-bone pork loin roasts, chine bones removed (about 4 pounds each)
- Kosher salt
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 rosemary sprigs, broken into 2-inch pieces

1. In a medium saucepan, combine the balsamic vinegar with the onion and 2 thyme sprigs and boil over moderately high heat until reduced to ½ cup, about 10 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a heatproof cup. Add the stock to the saucepan and boil over moderately high heat until reduced to 1 cup, about 10 minutes. Add the balsamic reduction and boil until the liquid is thickened and reduced to ⅔ cup, about 15 minutes.

2. Strain the balsamic sauce. Transfer ¼ cup of the sauce to a small bowl and reserve. Return the rest to the saucepan and stir in the molasses, mustard and crushed red pepper; let the glaze cool.

3. Place the pork roasts on a large rimmed baking sheet and season generously with salt. Coat the roasts with the glaze and let stand for 30 minutes, brushing occasionally (the glaze will slide off the meat).

4. Preheat the oven to 300°. Set a rack in a large roasting pan. Transfer the roasts to the rack, allowing the glaze to drip back onto the sheet. Top the roasts with the remaining 4 sprigs of thyme and the garlic and rosemary; season with salt. Add ½ inch of water to the roasting pan and roast the pork for about 2½ hours, until it is richly glazed and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the roasts registers 145°. Add water to the pan as it dries out and baste the meat with the pan juices from time to time during roasting.

5. Transfer the roasts to a cutting board and cover loosely with foil. Let rest for 20 minutes. Carve the roasts into chops and arrange on a platter. Drizzle with the reserved balsamic sauce and serve.

**MAKE AHEAD** The balsamic glaze and sauce can be refrigerated separately overnight.

**WINE** This impressive roast pork loin calls for an equally decadent wine, like the velvety VINO Nobile di Montepulciano, a red blend from Tuscany. Try the 2007 Boscarelli or the 2007 Avignonesi.

### Herbed New Potatoes

**ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR**  
**10 SERVINGS**

Boiling these delicious potatoes before roasting them serves three purposes: The insides get ultra creamy, the outsides get extra crispy, and roasting time is cut in half, freeing up oven space for other recipes.

A little balsamic glaze  
drizzled over the pork  
makes it extra moist.  
OPPOSITE: Meltem Bozkurt  
Conant at the table; the  
brussels sprouts are a  
favorite (recipe, p. 234).

*"Syracuse Taupe"*  
dinner plate by Robert  
Haviland & C. Parlon.



- 5 pounds small red new potatoes, scrubbed
- 6 rosemary sprigs
- 6 thyme sprigs
- 4 garlic cloves, smashed

Kosher salt


- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 tablespoon chopped flat-leaf parsley

1. Preheat the oven to 425°. Put the potatoes in a large pot and cover with water. Add half of the rosemary, thyme and garlic and season generously with salt. Bring to a boil and simmer until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Drain the potatoes and pat dry. Discard the herbs and garlic.

2. Cut the potatoes in half and transfer to a large bowl. Add the olive oil and crushed red pepper. Tear the remaining rosemary and thyme sprigs into 1-inch pieces and add them to the bowl along with the remaining garlic. Season with salt and toss. Arrange the potatoes cut side down on 2 large rimmed baking sheets; add any herbs, garlic and oil left in the bowl. Roast for about 25 minutes, until the potatoes are golden and crisp, shifting the pans halfway through baking. Discard the garlic and herbs. Transfer the roasted potatoes to a platter, sprinkle with the parsley and serve.

**MAKE AHEAD** The boiled whole potatoes can be refrigerated overnight.

### Gingered Green Beans

 **TOTAL: 25 MIN • 10 SERVINGS**

Conant makes his crisp-tender beans with ground ginger, since freshly grated ginger invariably creates unappealing little chunks.

- 2 pounds asparagus beans or Chinese long beans, cut into 3-inch lengths, or whole green beans
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper

Kosher salt

1. Fill a large bowl with ice water. In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the beans until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Drain the beans and transfer them to the ice water to cool. Drain and pat dry.

2. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil. Add the garlic and cook over moderately high heat until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in the ground ginger and crushed red pepper, then add the beans. Season with salt and stir-fry until the garlic is lightly browned and the beans are tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer the beans to a platter and serve.

### Dulce de Leche Layer Cake

**ACTIVE: 1 HR; TOTAL: 4 HR PLUS**

**2 HR COOLING • 10 TO 12 SERVINGS**

The version of Dominican cake that Conant's friends introduced him to was a white cake layered with dulce de leche filling and frosted with a very sweet meringue. In his adaptation, Conant (along with his pastry chef Gerry Minos) lightens up on the sugar in the meringue and adds a nutty liqueur to the filling and frosting, giving it an Italian flavor. The cake is a knockout, with or without the liqueur, and stellar with either homemade or store-bought dulce de leche.

#### FILLING

- One 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 tablespoons nut-flavored liqueur, such as Frangelico or biscotti liqueur

#### CAKE

- 2½ cups cake flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ cups plus 6 tablespoons sugar
- 4 large eggs, separated, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup milk

#### FROSTING

- 4 large egg whites
- 1½ cups sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons Frangelico or biscotti liqueur
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

1. **MAKE THE FILLING** Submerge the unopened can of condensed milk in a large, deep pot of water and bring to a boil. Simmer over moderately low heat for 2 hours, adding water as needed to keep the can completely submerged. Carefully remove the can and

let cool slightly. Carefully open the can with tongs and transfer the dulce de leche to a bowl; it should resemble creamy caramel. Whisk until smooth, then gradually whisk in the nut liqueur. Let cool completely.

2. **MEANWHILE, MAKE THE CAKE** Preheat the oven to 350° and butter two 9-inch cake pans. Line with parchment paper and butter and flour the pans. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour with the baking powder and salt. In the bowl of a standing electric mixer fitted with the paddle, beat the butter with the 1½ cups of sugar at medium speed until fluffy. Add the egg yolks and vanilla and beat until smooth. Beat in the dry ingredients and the milk in 3 alternating batches, scraping down the side of the bowl occasionally.

3. In a clean bowl, using clean beaters, beat the egg whites at medium-high speed until soft peaks form. Gradually add the remaining 6 tablespoons of sugar and beat until glossy. Fold the egg whites into the batter.

4. Scrape the batter into the prepared pans. Bake in the center of the oven for 40 to 45 minutes, until the cakes are golden and a toothpick in the centers comes out clean. Transfer the cakes to a rack to cool slightly. Run the tip of a knife around the edges and invert the cakes onto the rack to cool completely. Using a serrated knife, split each layer horizontally in half.

5. **MAKE THE FROSTING** In a clean bowl, using clean beaters, beat the egg whites at medium-high speed until soft peaks form. In a medium saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil over high heat, stirring, until the sugar is dissolved and a candy thermometer in the syrup registers 235° for soft-ball stage. Remove from the heat and add the liqueur. With the mixer at medium speed, carefully drizzle the hot sugar syrup into the egg whites. Beat in the lime juice, then beat at high speed until the frosting is light and fluffy and slightly warm to the touch.

6. Place a cake layer on a large cake plate and top with one-third of the dulce de leche filling. Repeat with the remaining layers and filling, ending with a layer of cake. Spread the frosting all over the cake, swirling decoratively. Let stand at room temperature for at least 2 hours before serving.

**MAKE AHEAD** The cake can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 2 days.

*continued on p. 230*

*Conant makes  
Dominican-style  
cake, spiking  
dulce de leche filling  
with hazelnut liqueur.*

"We have lots of Dominican friends," says Conant, explaining his fluffy white cake layered with dulce de leche.

*"Vienna" plate from Dandelion.*

