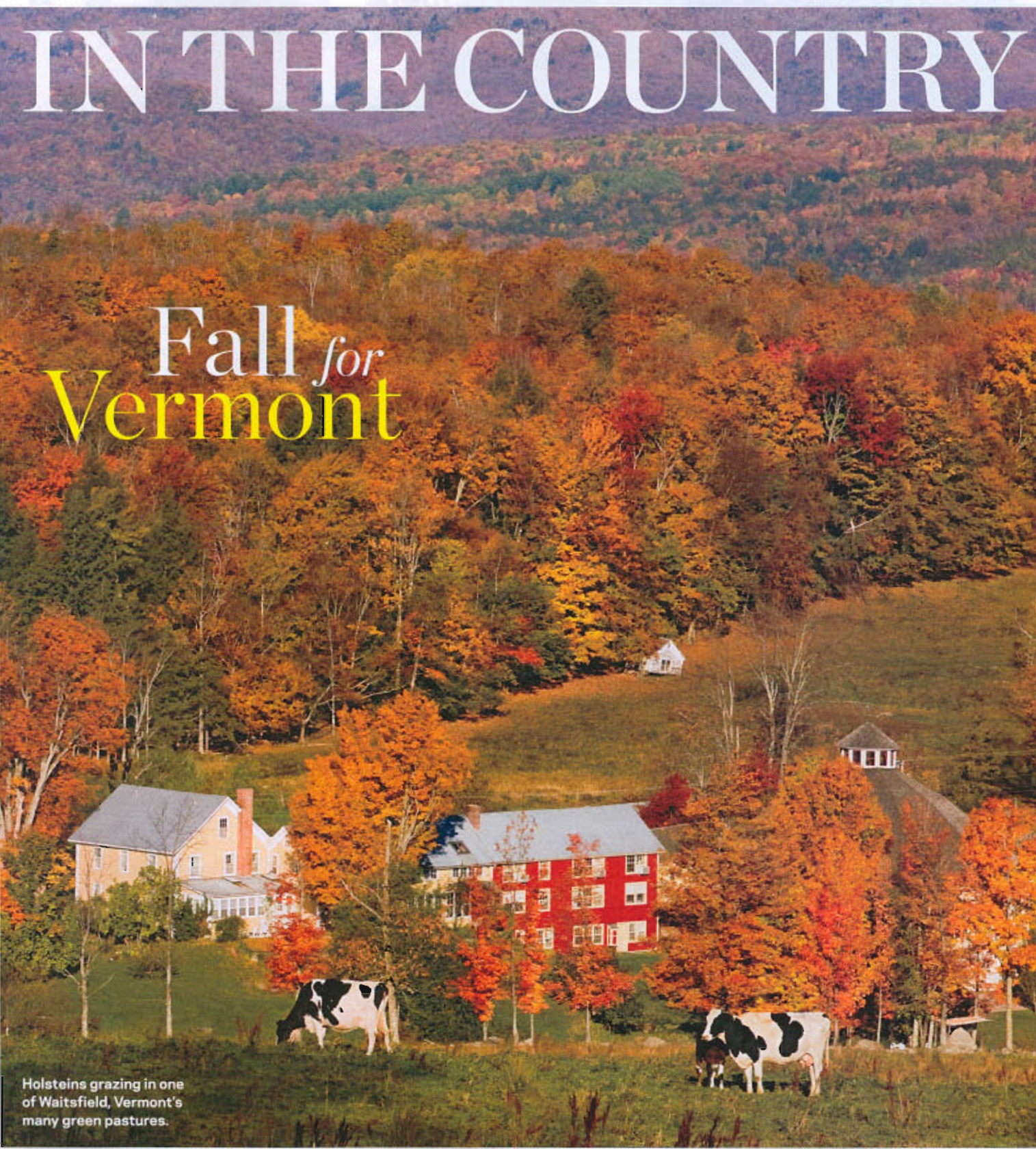


# IN THE COUNTRY

## Fall *for* Vermont



Holsteins grazing in one of Waitsfield, Vermont's many green pastures.

**THERE'S NO PLACE** quite like Vermont for an idyllic leaf-peeping weekend. Come autumn, a dazzling flush of color makes a spectacular backdrop for rolling meadows, big red barns and white steepled churches. Head for the central part of the state, and follow this short list of favorites that are all within easy—and scenic—driving distance.

The **Pitcher Inn** (*doubles from \$425; 275 Main Street; 802-496-6350; [pitcherinn.com](http://pitcherinn.com)*), the Green Mountain State's only Relais & Châteaux property, began as a fond tribute to the original establishment, which burned to the ground in 1993. What had been a modest 1850s Colonial-style house in the historic village of Warren was rebuilt by Win and

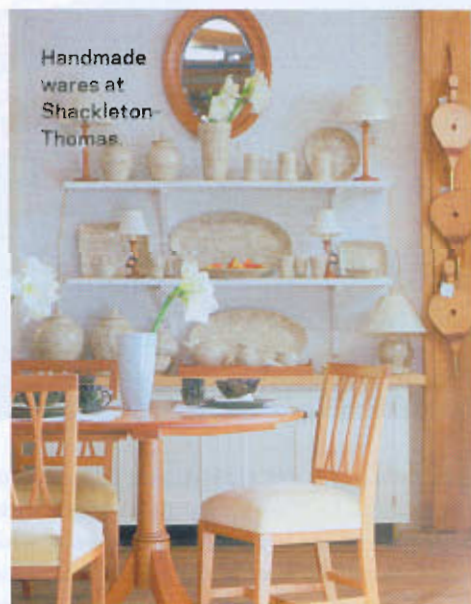
# IN THE COUNTRY *Fall for Vermont*



The rebuilt and welcoming Pitcher Inn.

Maggie Smith (also the founders of the luxe Litchfield Hills hotel Winvian, in northwestern Connecticut) as a quirky, elegant inn, designed by more than 200 craftspeople overseen by architect David Sellers. The eleven guest rooms have different Vermont-themed motifs, with whimsical details like birch-bark wainscoting and a fully stocked fly-tying desk in the Trout Room, rendering each a destination in and of itself. And lovely creature comforts—Anichini linens; superbly outfitted bathrooms, some with walk-in steam showers; heated floors; and a wine cellar with private dining—help chase away the autumn chill.

With 106 **covered bridges**—most built between 1824 and 1902—Vermont has more per square mile than any other state, and these symbols of the past are now protected by law as historic landmarks. Stroll south on Main Street from the Pitcher Inn and you'll cross the short span of the Warren Bridge; to see an unparalleled three within a quarter



Handmade wares at Shackleton-Thomas.

mile, make the twenty-mile drive from Warren to Northfield's Cox Brook Road, where the classic red wooden structures of Station Bridge, Second Bridge and Third Bridge hover above the water.

"Eat local" is a Vermont mantra, and you'll have your chance at the **Waitsfield Farmers' Market** (*Mad River Green, Route 100; waitsfieldfarmersmarket.com*). More than fifty growers and producers converge there every Saturday morning, creating a vibrant scene that showcases local organic fruits and vegetables; naturally raised meats; maple syrup; flowers; and crafts. Hit the market just right (for lunch!) and you can nibble your way through award-winning cheeses by Consider Bardwell Farm and hearth-baked organic breads and pastries from the justly famous Red Hen Baking Company.

The whispered rumors among food critics that the best food in the country is currently found in the little town of Waterbury (pop. 4,915) seem far-fetched—until you sit down to a meal at **Hen of the Wood** (92 Stowe Street; 802-244-7300; *henofthewood.com*). The flavors in dishes like smoked Labelle Farms duck with buttermilk-and-chive spaetzle are so bright and fresh, they make eating feel like a revelation: so that's what duck is supposed to taste like! Wunderkind chef and owner Eric Warnstedt, just thirty-four, sources almost everything on the seasonal menu from nearby farms. Ask about the pâté and your waiter will tell you it was made at Traditional Trade Farm, fifteen miles away. The setting (an 1840 gristmill with a rushing waterfall outside the dining room's paneled-glass windows), the attentive service and the simple yet intensely savory dishes all conjoin to make a meal here hard to forget.

In Bridgewater, the modern chandeliers are a fitting match for the clean-lined, handcrafted furniture and pottery at **Shackleton-Thomas** (*The Mill, Route 4; 802-672-5175; shackletonthomas.com*). The pedigrees of husband-and-wife founders Charles Shackleton and Miranda Thomas—he's a direct descendant of the Antarctic explorer; she's



Locally raised lamb at Hen of the Wood.

the granddaughter of the architect who designed the Ritz in London—are as impressive as the commissions they've gotten from popes and presidents. You can dream of sleeping in a solid-walnut Seacoast bed finished with twelve delicately carved scrolls (queen size, \$9,815); tour the workshops, which are spread across three floors of an 1825 woolen mill; or pick up a Vermont-maple

bowl (\$290–\$320) that's miraculously thin.  
KATHRYN MATTHEWS AND MELINDA PAGE

## CARRY ON

The ideal bag for a long weekend? Longchamp's Boxford (\$360), made of lightweight yet sturdy luggage-grade canvas that's backed with vinyl and trimmed in leather. It's roomy enough for all the necessities but not so capacious that you risk overpacking. 866-LONGCHAMP; [longchamp.com](http://longchamp.com).

