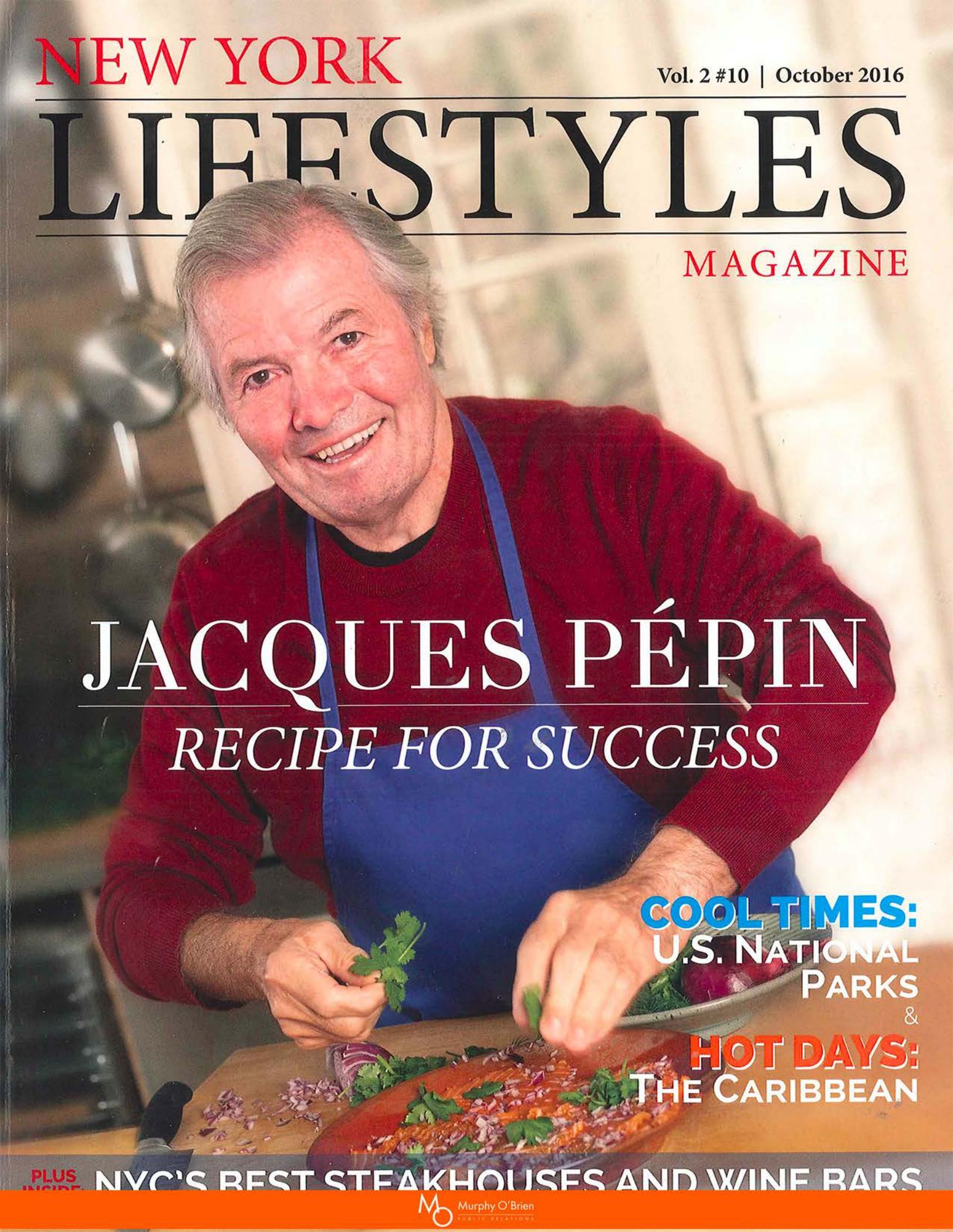


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LIFESTYLES

MAGAZINE



JACQUES PÉPIN
RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

COOL TIMES:
U.S. NATIONAL
PARKS
&
HOT DAYS:
THE CARIBBEAN

PLUS
INSIDE

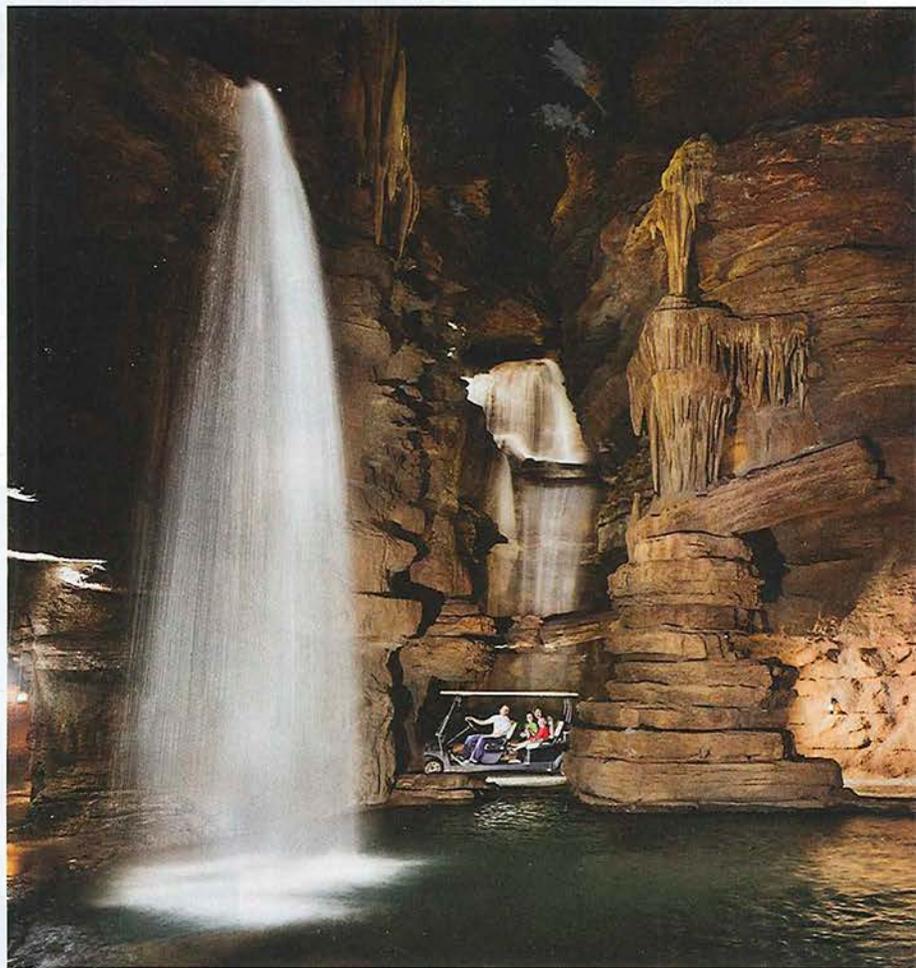
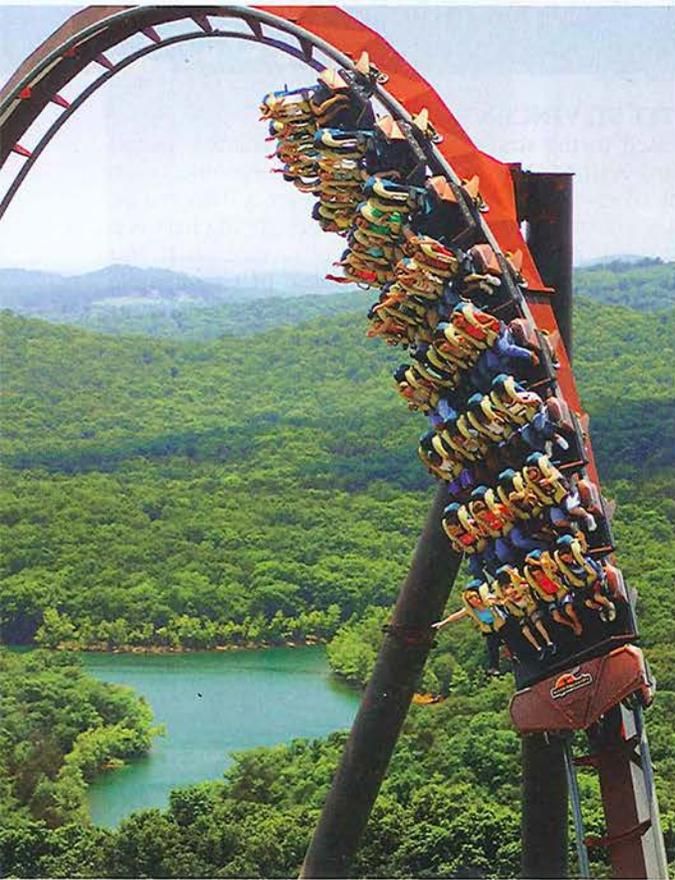
NYC'S BEST STEAKHOUSES AND WINE BARS

WELCOME TO BRANSON USA

BY CLINT BROWNFIELD

Perhaps it's time, more than ever, to think about spending your downtime right here in the good old USA. Someplace like the Ozark Mountains where it's perfect for all ages—and romantic, too. But sometimes New Yorkers are a bit fuzzy when it comes to world-class destinations west of the Hudson River and one place you might have overlooked is **Branson** (explorebranson.com).

If you put on a blindfold and made a stab at a map of America, chances are your finger would land in the lovely state of Missouri. If your aim were low, you would touch on the southern part of the state and hit the Ozarks, home to Branson. The Ozark Mountains, straddling the border between Missouri and northern Arkansas, are a beautiful, low, ancient range—much more manageable than their loftier counterparts—the Rockies, Himalayas or Andes. Let's call them huggable.

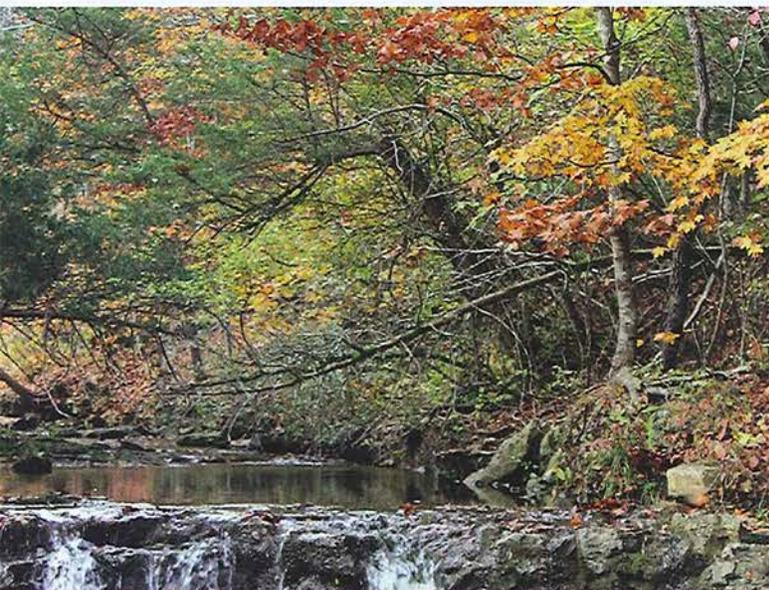
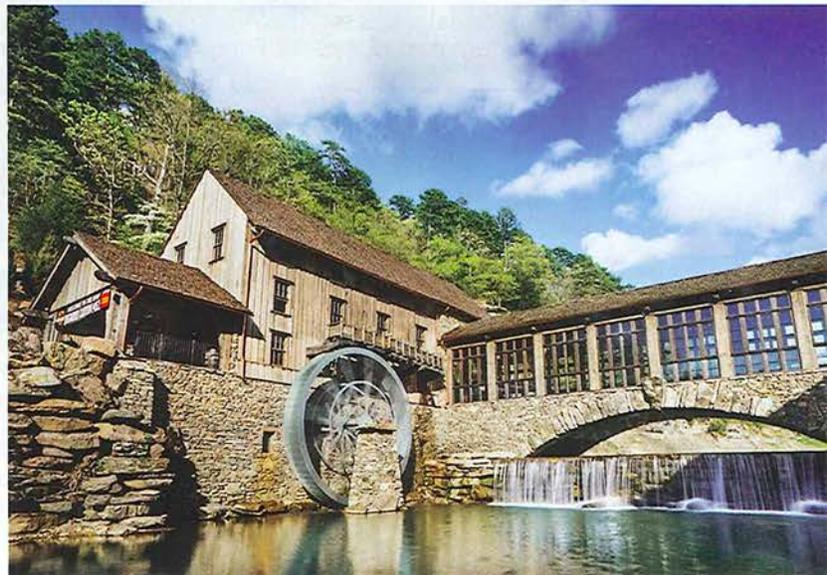
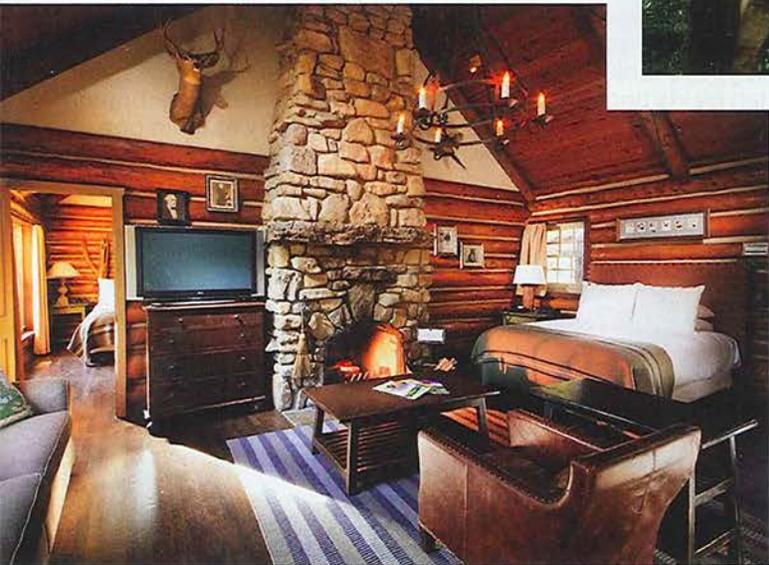


FALL IN LOVE WITH BRANSON

Autumn is a riot of color— oak and maple trees turn into gorgeous gumdrops that announce winter is just around the corner. Add in the aroma of wood smoke from a campfire, the mesmerizing rise of mist off the streams and lakes in the evening and you have the perfect place to relax and unwind. Every night you will most likely be lulled to sleep by the allusive whippoorwill.

Today, Branson is the self-proclaimed Live Music Capital of the USA with dozens of shows and attractions. From world famous headliners to smaller venues that provide some of the best fiddling, plucking and singing you will ever hear, it's round-the-clock entertainment. Along Highway 76 you'll find places to stay, from small B&Bs to large hotels and resorts. Shopping is also a sport in Branson, with outlet malls, a vibrant shopping scene downtown, and countless other opportunities to give your credit cards a workout. Had enough of retail therapy? Then head for the hills where adventure awaits: You'll find camping sites, plenty of fishing, zip lining, horseback riding and other outdoor fun activities.

A few miles to the west is **Silver Dollar City** (silverdollarcity.com), a 61-acre Ozark-themed amusement park that is also home to the spectacular Marvel Cave and is open March-December. Two million visitors, from toddlers to seniors, throng to the park each year. Rides, arts and crafts demonstrations and good ole country cooking round out the picture.



HEAVENLY HAVEN

Located eight miles south of Branson, **Big Cedar Lodge** (bigcedar.com) is a spectacular blend of luxury and rustic atmosphere and is the area's unrivaled choice for weddings, honeymoons, multi-generational family reunions, corporate outings and romantic getaways. Set on Table Rock Lake, the main lodge and cabins are surrounded by 3,000 preserved acres and its full-service marina on the lake. Every water sport imaginable is available. And, if you're into hunting, this is your place. All of this is the brainchild of Johnny Morris who owns and operates the resort. He also owns Bass Pro Shops, which is headquartered in Springfield. There is also a significant outpost in Branson.

Arriving at the resort involves a truly memorable sense of discovery. A secluded private mountain road brings guests through the woods and across a stream created by a dramatic waterfall. It is then that the main part of the resort is revealed. Magnificent lodges, restaurants, romantic log cabins, and a new world-class spa announce that you have arrived at Big Cedar. Rustic luxury may sound a bit oxymoronic but trust us, the two blend perfectly at this world-class resort where much of the construction has been carried out by local Amish artisans.

At Big Cedar the menu options are legendary, and guests can choose from a variety of menus drawn from local cuisine such as outdoor barbecues, cookouts, and fish fries on up to formal sit-down meals served in the gracious dining venues that dot the property. The Cedar Creek Spa features 18,000 square feet of treatment rooms (each with its own fireplace), a full-service beauty salon and a wide range of massages to relax the body and mind for your big day. A fitness center, two marinas, golfing at the championship courses at Top of the Rock, horseback riding, and myriad other activities will keep you and your family thoroughly entertained—Ozark style! •