

SPORTING CLASSES

Nov./Dec. 2012



A Woman's Place

By Susan L. Ebert

Georgia Pellegrini, a classically trained French chef, followed her love of food to its source, shouldered a shotgun and began to hunt.

For most of us, our love of hunting compels us to learn to butcher and prepare wild game – often, as a way to deal responsibly with the increasing cache of neatly labeled Ziplocs burgeoning in our freezers – with a series of trial-and-error attempts before achieving modest success. As a river flows from source to sea, we learn to hunt, then learn to butcher, then learn to prepare our game – taking it from field to table.

Georgia Pellegrini's river flows backwards, however, beginning at culinary school where she rekindled her passion for food on the plate and let it propel her upstream to her food's very source. Pellegrini fled the trading floor of Lehman Brothers for the French Culinary Institute, determined to nourish her soul with born-again appreciation for the artisan foods and bountiful produce of her upstate New York childhood.

In one of her first restaurant jobs, at a Rockefeller estate farm-to-table restaurant, the chef gestured toward a flock of turkeys on a nearby hill and ordered young Georgia and a handful of other cooks to slaughter five of them and bring them to the kitchen. As Pellegrini relates in her book, "There was indeed that proverbial window through which I momentarily peered and contemplated life as a vegetarian."

But Pellegrini, as we say in Texas,

"cowboyed up" to slaughter and butcher the birds as the chef commanded and in doing so, found it awaked a dormant appreciation for life in the food chain that stirred her to her soul. Taking care to use every edible morsel of her kill, she began a journey that would take her from table to field, across the nation and across the pond in a year-long road trip of hunting and culinary adventures that would form the backbone of the philosophical, spiritual, culinary and physical odyssey she describes in her groundbreaking book, *Girl Hunter: Revolutionizing the Way We Eat, One Hunt at a Time*.

"I didn't set out to write a book," Pellegrini tells me. "I set out to hunt. The idea of turning it into a book came later."

Part cookbook, part travelogue, part hunting adventure tale, all enrobed in her personal philosophy manifesto as subtly as if it is one of her veloutés, each of *Girl Hunter's* 11 chapters is anchored in a place. She travels from the Arkansas swamps to far West Texas, the Texas Hill Country, the Mississippi Delta, the wilds of Montana and Wyoming, England, Louisiana and back to her home woods of upstate New York. In each setting she delves into descriptions of the game she pursues – all based on a solid grasp of natural history and wildlife biology – while providing insightful and oft downright hilarious descriptions of her hunts and hunting companions, and concluding

with several of her divine original recipes for the animal she hunted.

That she throws herself headlong into these adventures comes alive in her no-nonsense, crackling prose, making it easy to imagine the delicate blonde portrayed on her book's cover hunkered down on the porch in the deep Delta backwaters, quaffing whiskeys and chomping cigars into the wee hours with a grizzled hunting mentor known only to us as "The Commish."

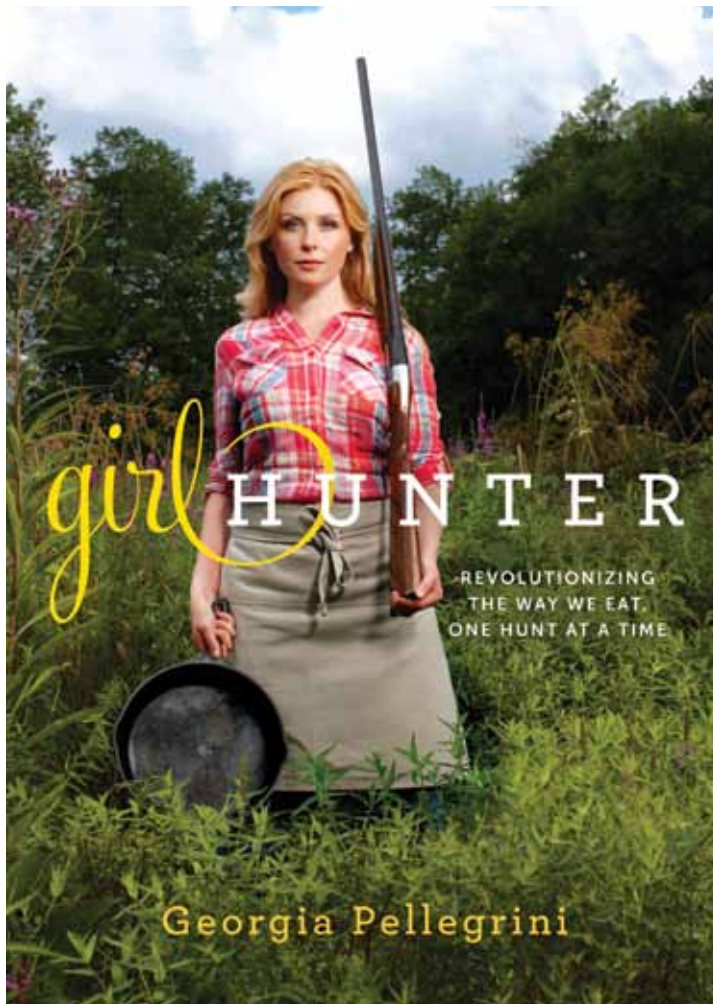
And the appendix alone – replete with instructions for gravies, stocks, marinades, brines, rubs and sauces; game animal/gamebird characteristics, and a guide to aging game – is alone worth the book's \$24 price.

"When I first began with the book, I thought it might appeal to hunters but not to mainstream folks," she tells me. "What's interesting to me is that it's turned out to be pretty much the opposite: The mainstream has responded really well, but I was met with some skepticism – and occasionally, even anger – from within the hunting community: I didn't fit their idea of what a hunter should look like.

"Of course," she's quick to add, "I also met many welcoming mentors from within the hunting community's ranks as well. Quite surprisingly to me, vegetarians and even vegans could relate to my quest to obtain my own meat in the most direct possible way.

"What strikes me most about the act of hunting is that it involves all of the senses," she continues. "It's really one of the few acts a person can do





ALL-IN-ONE AND
• ONE OF A KIND •



NEW

*Wingshooter's
 Field Kit*

A new addition to 100 years
 of innovative products

The shear features a ballpoint
 to prevent unwanted puncturing.

High-carbon steel blade takes
 and holds a great edge.

The knife can be carried separately
 for greater convenience.

It's tough, it's adaptable, and
 it's just right for bird hunting.



• DISCOVER SOMETHING •

FREE SHIPPING

No minimum order. No end date.

llbean.com

that involves using all of the senses at once. It takes me to a place nothing else can: I hear, see, touch, smell and taste differently when I hunt. This was my most surprising and vivid self-discovery in becoming a hunter.

“The act of hunting taps into our most primal instinct as human beings. We’ve become so civilized, with our tufted couches and hairless cats, that to totally become immersed in the natural world and become one with it can bring us to a level of self-awareness not obtainable any other way.”

No one can accuse Pellegrini of “preaching to the choir,” as do so many of us who find that in pursuing our passion of hunting- and fishing-related writing we are almost always writing for hunting magazines such as this esteemed one you now hold in your hands – ones in which nearly all of the readers are bonafide hunters – and sharing with each other our compelling need to attract new hunters to our ranks.

While we’ve been doing that, the barely 30-something Pellegrini is talking to the audiences of *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *Town & Country*, *ELLE*, *More*, *Food & Wine*, *Bitch Magazine* and a host of other newspapers and magazines; being interviewed on radio shows as diverse as *Martha Stewart Living radio*, *iWine*, and NPR’s *Leonard Lopate Show*, appearing on television shows including *Fox News*, *The Today Show*, *Iron Chef America* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live*; and contributing to countless online venues such as The New Yorker Culture Desk, CNN Eatocracy, *Saveur* and *Gilt City*.

Which is to say – as I glumly inspect my boots with downcast eyes – she’s walking the walk while we’re talking the talk . . . and to ourselves, I might add.

Share a copy of *Girl Hunter* with a non-hunting foodie friend; you just might be creating a new hunter. 🐾