

# Good Grit

The Character Of The South

EXPLORING SOUTHERN TASTES  
- WITH - **IRON CHEF**  
**DAVID BANCROFT**

LET'S TALK ABOUT  
**OYSTERS!**

**OUTER BANKS, NC**  
TRAVEL LIKE A LOCAL



**HARVEST**  
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

# Beyond the Bird

REMAINING IN THE MOMENT AT MERRILY PLANTATION



WORDS BY TOM SAWYER  
PHOTOS BY DANIEL SHIPPEY

An invitation to quail hunt on Merrily Plantation in Thomasville, Georgia, is one that you must say yes to. For wing-shooting enthusiasts, this small, remote part of the South could be compared to the Masters golf tournament. Imagine this: thousands upon thousands of virgin longleaf pines that have been nurtured for hundreds of years, every briar patch, thicket, and hedgerow being meticulously manicured with one purpose in mind—quail hunting. This piece of ground has not changed hands nor has a single tree been harvested for the past three generations. In regard to Thomasville itself, I found this truly Southern town to be the epitome of charm as I marked through my mental checklist of Courthouse Square, restaurants, clothier, farmer’s market, and bed and breakfast, all within walking distance of each other. (Side note: Go see Mrs. Carol at the Paxton House. This lady knows how to cook a mean breakfast.)

What amazed me most about Thomasville was the culture that the community there has created and, more important, maintained. It is an undeterred time capsule of the past. The lifestyle here could easily take you back to when Northern residents were hopping off the trains in the early 1890s to enjoy what was called the “Winter Resort of the South.” People in Thomasville are simply so genuine and intentional about their interaction with you. No agenda, no place to be, just in the moment, as if the brass gears in the watch on my wrist began to slow.

Once you leave the inner town limits of Thomasville, the pavement ends as you turn down countless miles of dirt roads that are unlike any other. In most small towns, dirt roads lead to favorite fishing ponds, crop fields, or in most cases, nowhere. However, on these particular dirt roads sit hidden some of the most beautiful scenic estates in the Southeast. As I mentioned, this is the Masters of quail hunting. It is known not only for the gorgeous greens, but also the accommodations and environment that create its ambiance. Now, it is one thing to hunt quail by foot, but it’s a completely different matter to hunt quail off horseback, especially if the last time you rode a horse was back when it was cool to have horses/ponies at your birthday party. It is safe to say that for David



*David Bancroft discussing the hunt with his host.*

Bancroft and me, after a day of bow-legged friction between our Levi’s and the leather saddles, our inner thighs were prepped and ready to be breaded in some of his cornmeal at Acre Restaurant in Auburn. Our gracious host, Ben McCollum, on the other hand, would dismount his horse, mount his firearm, and put two quail in his bag before I could get up off the ground after tripping over one of the stirrups.

Quail hunting is a social event that requires a group of people striving for the same goal with different parts to be played by each person. It amazes me that this sport can bring people who have never met one another to a place of friendship in such a short amount of time. The barriers created by the stresses

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As I got to know these men throughout our adventure, two things became evident. First, these are my type of people: One could cook, and one could throw a heck of a hunting shindig. Second, each of them is extremely aware and excellent at his craft. David, who can turn a pinecone into a fine dish, reminds me so much in his cooking style of my family's Sunday lunches after church, except his lima beans and crab claws are worthy of being served in establishments where Michelin stars have been awarded. Ben's gift of relating and gaining influence with people is so great that it would be of no surprise if a foreign country's flag hung in his home, displaying his ambassadorship.

On a random dirt road, in a random field, in a place with people whom I have never met, the connection of past, present, and future were congruent. Time was not a factor and the natural laws and parameters that hold it in place were nonexistent. As this past experience becomes present while reading these words, I hope you're inspired for the future. No matter how much we "continually progress," there is always time. Time for great places, for great people, and for great adventures. ■

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*Steve Parrish, David Bancroft, and Tom Sawyer at Merrily Plantation*