

# Special Holiday Food Issue

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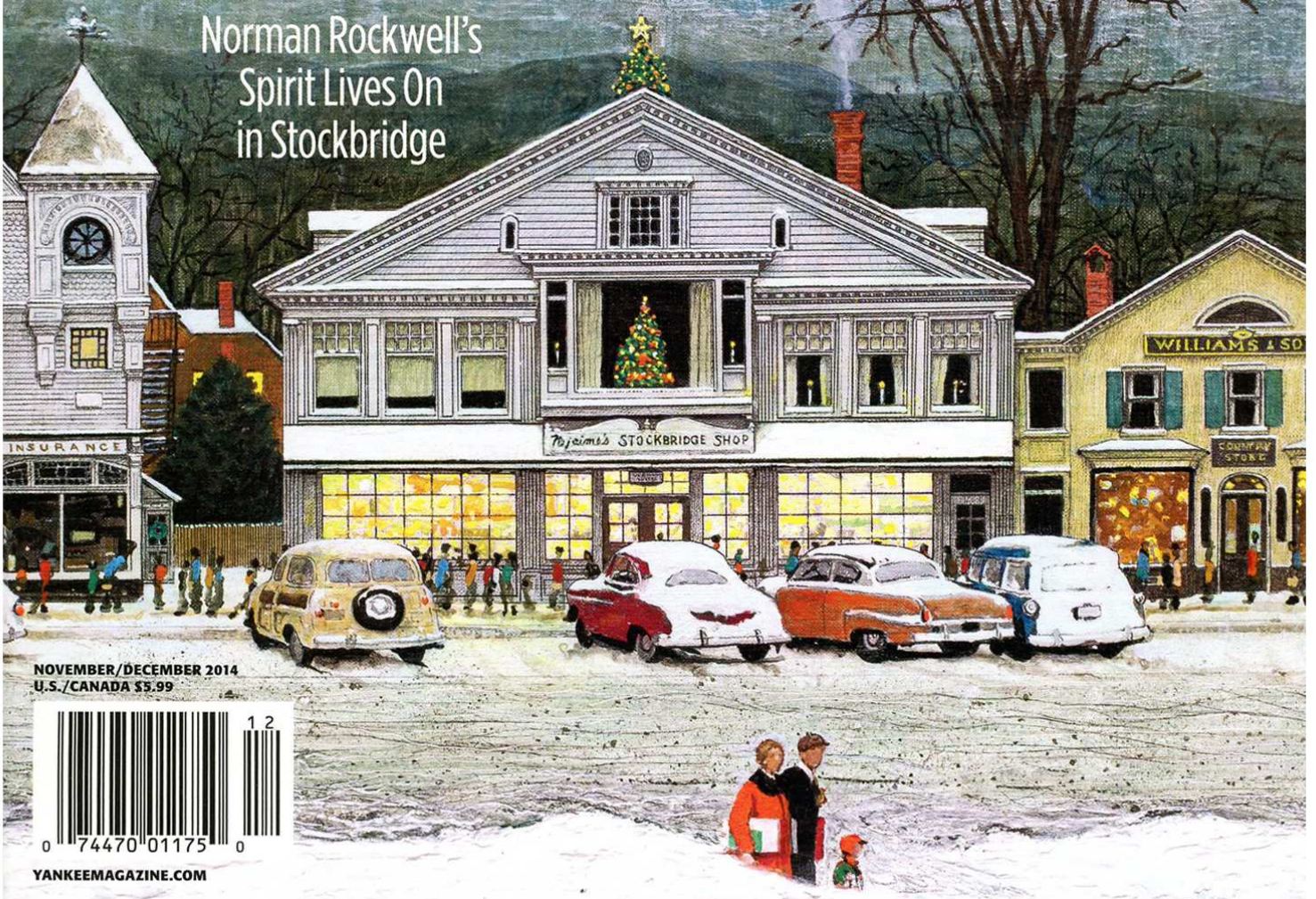
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# YANKEE

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## ASK THE EXPERT

## Cooking the Perfect Roast Chicken

Chef and restaurant owner Marjorie Druker lives in Newton, Massachusetts. "If you can make a great roast chicken," she says, "you can make any chicken recipe." **BY IAN ALDRICH**

**M**arjorie Druker was just a sixth-grader when she cooked her first roast chicken. "My mother went off to work and left me a recipe for dinner after I got home from school," she says. "I went into the spice cabinet and just went to town. Afterwards my mother couldn't stop talking about it." Druker has been perfecting the dish ever since. The Johnson & Wales graduate was only 21 years old when she developed the original recipes for Boston Chicken, now the well-known national chain Boston Market. Today, she owns and runs The Modern Rotisserie, a French-style rotisserie restaurant in Newton that she manages with her husband and daughter. "If you can make a great roast chicken," Druker says, "you can make any chicken recipe."

### The Right Bird

Prior to opening Modern Rotisserie, Druker did her research, cooking and tasting many different chickens. The results confirmed what she already knew: Organic, free-range birds taste infinitely better than those from large factory farms. But she doesn't believe you have to spend a fortune at expensive high-end stores to get one. "Most supermarkets now have their own brands of all-natural chickens," she says.

### Set Up

Druker believes in using a heavy, old-fashioned roasting pan. "I don't think you can get that great roasty taste when nothing sticks," she says, "and you want the skin to stick so you can create that delicious fond." For kitchen newbies, *fond* is the flavorful bits of meat and skin that cling to the pan. It forms the backbone of great pan sauces and stocks, which can then be used to flavor a host of other dishes.

### Lemon Wash

Working with a five-pound bird—Druker's preferred size—she unwraps the chicken and then, instead of washing it in the sink, which exposes her counter to bacteria, puts it directly into the pan. After removing the giblets, she then "washes" the bird with a lemon, rubbing the entire body, inside and out, with the citrus. "It's like an antiseptic," Druker says. "Plus, it imparts flavor, and the acid breaks down the fiber, which helps make the chicken more tender."

### Butter Up

Once she's cleaned the chicken, Druker then takes about three tablespoons of melted salted butter and, with a cooking brush, coats the entire chicken. "Butter browns the bird," she explains, "and gives it that shiny golden look that we all expect from the perfect roast chicken."

### Herbs & Spices

While a simple mixture of salt and pepper will boost a chicken's flavor, Druker likes to go further and mix in other spices. In a small dish she combines kosher salt, granulated onion powder, Hungarian paprika, black pepper, and finally, importantly, a tablespoon of sugar. "That little bit of sugar," Druker explains, "creates this wonderfully rich crust, sort of like those honey hams so many of us love."

### Roast & Rest

Druker likes to cook her birds hot. "You want between 425° and 445°," she advises. "Never go 350°. That's for baking cookies." For a five-pound chicken, expect a cooking time of about an hour and 40 minutes, or until a meat thermometer reads 165°. When it's done, let it sit at least 20 minutes, letting the meat rest before serving. "If you cut into it right away, the juices will just come pouring out," Druker explains. "You want them to settle into the chicken and get comfortable. That's what will keep it nice and juicy."

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