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## 80

**Gifts for the Holidays**  
**Furniture Design on Shelter Island**

**ENTERTAINING**  
**In a Holiday Mood with Christian Mir**

**DEEDS AND DON'TS**  
**Hamptons, Manhattan & Palm Beach Report**



ENTERTAINING

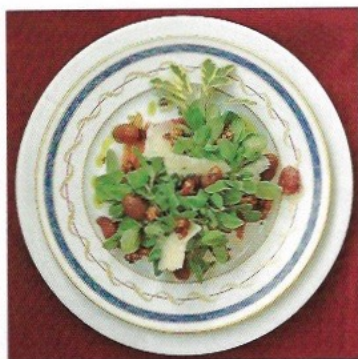
## In a Holiday Mood: Christian Mir

At the Stone Creek Inn in Quogue, owner and chef Christian Mir prepares a holiday feast that unites the best of the Old World with the traditions of the new.

BY PAMELA MORGAN  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC STRIFFLER







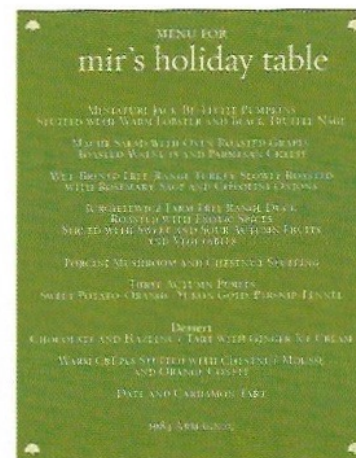
**THERE'S NOTHING LIKE** a holiday feast of familiar foods to summon the spirits of gatherings long past. But these celebratory meals also offer an interesting opportunity to heed the traditions of another culture and surprise your guests with a new set of tastes.

When chef Christian Mir sat down to plan a holiday dinner for a close circle of acquaintances at the Stone Creek Inn, the Quogue hotel and restaurant that he owns with his wife, Elaine, he realized turkey had to take center stage. He wasn't content, however, serving only the familiar bird as the main course, even though his years with Elaine—who manages the front of house for the inn—have helped him grasp the traditions of Thanksgiving (a thoroughly American holiday).

"The meals I design use the foods I grew up with," says Christian, a native of Villemur, France, a small town near Toulouse in the southwest region of the country. "Duck is a specialty of our region—it reminds me of myself growing up. I thought that offering duck and turkey together would give my guests an interesting choice."

As respondents to the *Zagat Survey* indicated when they named the restaurant the best in the Hamptons this year, any meal at the Stone Creek Inn is likely to be an interesting one. But when one's family and friends are to dine, the pressure increases to go above and beyond, even for a professional chef.

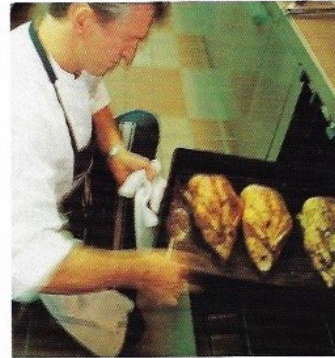
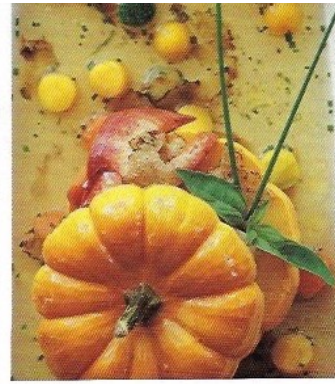
Mir met the challenge by creating a holiday feast that is by turns surprising and familiar. Besides serving a double main course of turkey and duck, he took cues from American Thanksgiving tradition, French holiday feasts and the harvests of Long Island farms. The result is a meal that shows how he creates what he terms "French-Mediterranean cuisine with a side of



**Salad Mache** | A *roasting salad* (see left) | **Holiday Blooms** | *The table comes alive with vibrant flower arrangements* | **Left** and **Previous Spread** | by *Williamson's Clare Dean* | **Creative Couple** | *Elaine and Christian Mir (below)* stand in front of the Stone Creek Inn, which they own | **Just Dessert** | *A chocolate and hazelnut tart* | **Previous Spread** closed the meal | *See Remover*







RECIPE

### JURGIELEWICZ FARM ROASTED FREE RANGE DUCK

**SERVES 8**

- 2 ducks (whole)
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tbsp. cardamom
- 1 tbsp. fenugreek seeds
- 1 tbsp. star anise
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 tbsp. Madras curry

In a sauté pan, add all spices and toast for one minute. In a mortar or coffee grinder, blend spices into a fine powder.

Rinse the duck and pat dry. Place the ducks on a baking pan and rub with

olive oil. Coat the ducks with the spice mix and place in the refrigerator to marinate for at least two hours, or overnight.

Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. Salt and pepper the ducks and begin roasting for 70 minutes at 400 degrees. Lower the oven to 250 degrees and continue roasting for 50 minutes. Remove the ducks and let rest in a warm place with a piece of aluminum foil draped over the ducks for 30 minutes.

Serve and enjoy.

Gascony" and a slice of Elaine's Americana, too.

Mir's holiday menu begins with a long—miniature Jack-Be-Little pumpkins stuffed with warm lobster and black truffle nage. The presentation is dramatic, demonstrating the chef's preference for local ingredients.

The next dish, a salad miche, would be more familiar on a French holiday table than an American one. "It's very delicate and not used so often in America, but I love it," Mir notes. Placing the salad second on the menu, instead of first, allows it to serve as a palate cleanser of sorts before the main courses.

Then come the main attractions, the turkey and duck. The wet brined free-range turkey is slowly roasted with rosemary, sage and cippolini (small wild onions). Mir recommends brining the turkey to not only keep it moist but also to flavor it, as spices seep into the turkey with the water as it marinates overnight.

The unexpected star of the meal is the duck. Three free-range ducks roasted with exotic spices are served with sweet and sour autumn fruits and vegetables, exciting guests with a new array of tastes. The mood is jovial, with laughter ringing

**Fall Colors** | "It's a very festive dish," says Christian Mir, referring to the miniature pumpkins stuffed with warm lobster and truffles (TOP LEFT) AND (MIDDLE LEFT). **Duck Hunt** | Mir checks on the progress of the ducks prepared for the evening (MIDDLE LEFT). **Simple Elegance** | One of the simple but elegant place settings (BOTTOM LEFT). See Resources.





throughout the room—the normal state of affairs at the Stone Creek Inn. Dinner guest Tom Jurgielewicz particularly seems to relish the mood—and the duck. After all, the duck comes from Jurgielewicz Farms in Moriches, where his family raises ducks without antibiotics or hormones.

Both meats are accompanied with stuffing—a porcini mushroom and chestnut concoction influenced by Mir's childhood in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Three autumn pieces of sweet potato, Yukon gold potatoes and parsnip-fennel round out the side dishes.

Dessert proves no less dramatic than what has come before. A chocolate and hazelnut tart (served with ginger ice cream) rests on a dramatic stand like a piece of post-modern sculpture. Mir also serves warm crêpes stuffed with chestnut mousse and orange confit. The meal is topped off by 1984 Armagnac, served in an array of colorful digestif glasses.

Tying the courses together are the flowers and table settings, which Mir considers as central to the experience as the food itself. "All the flowers and the wine glasses, it's kind of like a mystery of what's to come and what we're going to have," he says.

On this afternoon, Westhampton event designer Claire Bean works with Elaine to set a table that is a tour de force. Eschewing the expected harvest cornucopia and its orange-and-red color scheme, Bean draws floral inspiration from Elaine's Haviland Limoges plates. Clay-colored napkins accent the table with the casual elegance that's one of the inn's hallmarks.

The meal a success, family and friends leave with new memories—and, perhaps, new touchstones for holiday feasts to come. ❀

56 |



**Talking Turkey** | "We always had turkey for Christmas in France," Mir says of the festive bird. (USA TODAY) **Raise a Glass** | A playful group of digestif glasses (LEFT) await after dinner. Armagnac: **The Hostess** | Elaine Mir (ABOVE) handles front-of-house responsibilities at the Stone Creek Inn. **Candle Power** | Candelas set in holders of various heights (BELOW) enliven the table. *See Resources*



| 57