

ALL-NEW RECIPES

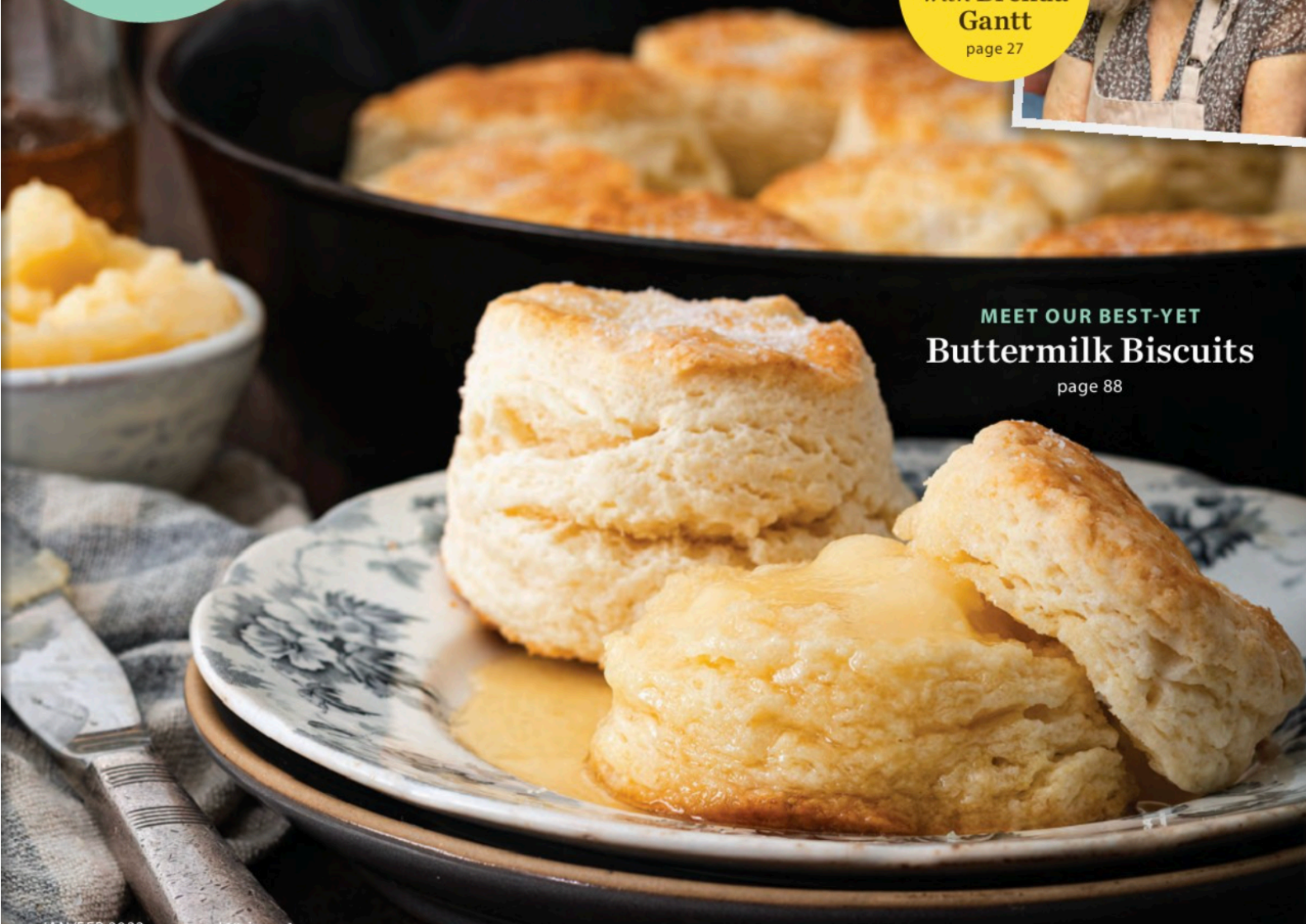
taste OF THE south

AUTHENTICALLY SOUTHERN, ALWAYS DELICIOUS

Cast Iron Biscuits *with* Homemade Honey Butter

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RECIPES
+ TIPS

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DISPLAY UNTIL FEBRUARY 8, 2022

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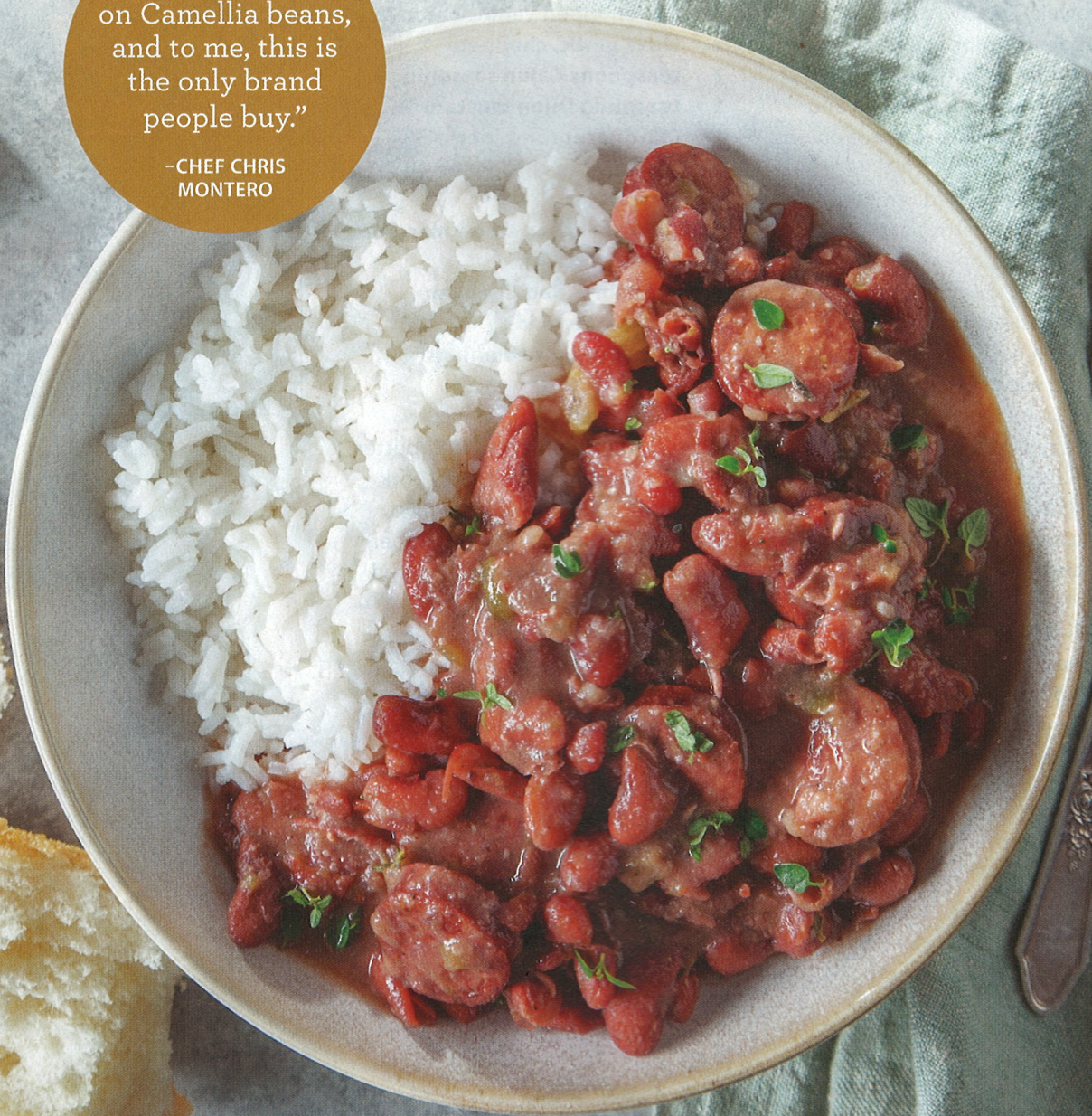
RAISING THE BAR

BY GEORGIA CLARKE

For almost a century, Louisiana-born Camellia Brand has been serving up one of the South's fundamental foods

"I was raised on Camellia beans, and to me, this is the only brand people buy."

—CHEF CHRIS MONTERO



IN LOUISIANA, there are as many variations of red beans and rice as there are king cakes during Carnival season. People experiment with heat levels and Cajun spice blends and debate whether andouille sausage or smoked ham is the superior protein, but no one sways too far from tradition. A classic bowl of red beans and rice starts with the trinity (chopped onion, bell pepper, and celery), is eaten on Mondays, and most importantly, most often stars bayou-born-and-bred Camellia beans. The oldest dried bean company in the country, Camellia Brand has fostered family meals and the Bayou State's love of red beans and rice for nearly 100 years.

"I was raised on Camellia beans, and to me, this is the only brand people buy. Comparisons aren't an option," says Chris Montero, executive chef at New Orleans' Napoleon House in the French Quarter.

The story of Camellia begins with a man named Lucius Hamilton (L.H.) Hayward Jr., who followed in his family's footsteps of becoming a traveling salesman. "He worked for the National Biscuit Company, which is now Nabisco, and drove a horse and buggy throughout New Orleans selling to merchants," says Vince Hayward, who is his great-grandson and currently leads L.H. Hayward & Company and Camellia Brand.

Before Camellia Brand was the household name that it is today, the company was a wholesale dry goods business called L.H. Hayward & Company. Following his career with National Biscuit Company, Hayward Jr. founded the company in 1923 on New Orleans' Front Street along the Mississippi River. "They were offering dried beans and peas and other fresh produce that they could bring in from around the area," Vince says. "But as time went on, they narrowed it down to dried beans, and we became known as the dried bean folks in the city of New Orleans."

Even centuries ago, beans were a hot commodity in New Orleans. When Vince's great-great-great grandfather, Sawyer Hayward, came to New Orleans from the West Indies in the 1850s, the first in the family, he got into sourcing and selling beans due to the demand from fellow immigrants from the Caribbean.

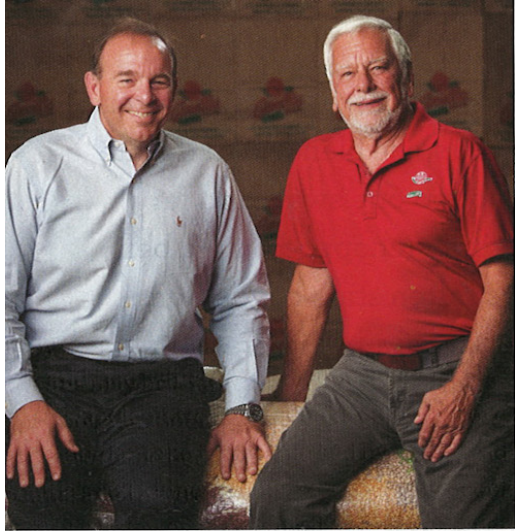


OPPOSITE PAGE A bowl of classic red beans and rice. **THIS PAGE** Hearty, creamy Red Kidneys are Camellia Brand's signature product; Chris Montero serves up red beans and rice at Napoleon House; Serve ham hock-enhanced lima beans with crumbly cornbread, and you've got the perfect meal.

Though it's not quite clear where New Orleanians' obsession with red kidney beans came from, whether it originated with enslaved people working on sugar plantations or with Acadians from Canada, the legume is woven into the fabric of the culinary South, especially in the form of Creole favorite red beans and rice. Passed-down tales explain that families would traditionally have large meals on Sundays that often included ham. Monday was laundry day, and because there were no washing machines to help with the task, it was a full day of work, which meant little time to spend in the kitchen. The solution? Make a big pot of beans, enhanced by leftover meat and ham bone from the day before, to simmer on the stove all day. Whether that's how it began or not, Mondays in Louisiana mean red beans and rice, and Camellia Brand is a major part of the tradition.

When supermarkets proliferated during the 1930s and '40s around the end of World War II, Gordon, Hayward Jr.'s son, saw an opportunity to bring

beans directly to consumers. They shifted from a wholesale operation to packaging their dried beans and peas in cellophane bags for retail, marking a new age and opportunity. Around the same time, the company also adopted a new name—Camellia—after the beautiful flowering plant found in much of the South. Not only was it Hayward Jr.'s wife's favorite flower, but as Vince explains, the camellia was meant to symbolize the company's promise of quality. "Of course, it's a Southern plant and flower, but it was also seen as sort of a luxury at the time to have this type of flower in your yard or home," Vince says. "It was meant to convey quality, a little step above the others." Today, the company's reputation in the industry is known as the "Hayward Standard," and that means they're incredibly selective when it comes to choosing the beans, peas, and lentils that fill their signature cellophane bags found in your local market. "We're not the least expensive product you can buy, but we're the best you can get," Vince says.



ABOVE Vince Hayward and Ken Hayward are today's owners of Camellia Brand, carrying on the family tradition for future generations.

Unsurprisingly, Vince ate his fair share of Camellia Brand beans and peas while he was growing up. He's the fourth generation in his family's long lineage of bean salesmen and has had a firsthand look at Camellia's rise to fandom in Southern kitchens. Every Monday, without fail, he says his family ate red beans and rice, always scarfing down the leftovers on Tuesday or Wednesday nights, if they lasted that long. He also remembers his mother making green split pea soup with a ham bone and chopped ham each year during Louisiana's first cold snap. "Whenever I smell split pea soup, it takes me back to those moments being with my mother in the kitchen," Vince says. Today, he carries on the tradition of cooking and eating beans and peas with his own family. His perfect version of red beans and rice involves a healthy dose of butter, smoked ham hock (the smokier, the better), plenty of bay leaves, and, you guessed it, Camellia Brand red kidney beans. It's a dish his whole family loves and one that takes some of the guesswork out of hectic Mondays. And Vince isn't the only Camellia Brand loyalist.

"No bean has done more for my cooking than Camellia," says South Louisiana-born chef Jean-Paul Bourgeois. Chef Chris Montero, who also hails from the Bayou State, says during his adolescent years, "Monday

"Whenever I smell split pea soup, it takes me back to those moments being with my mother in the kitchen."

—VINCE HAYWARD

nights meant one thing for dinner, red beans and rice, which I ate religiously." Now, at Napoleon House, he cooks up a wildly popular take that is marked by Camellia's red kidney beans.

"My version of red beans at Napoleon House harkens back to my grandmother's classic Creole cooking," Chris says. "I grew up sampling different red beans and rice styles. My grandmother preferred ham hock, pickled pork, and a spicy smoked sausage, while my mother rendered pork and sausage. I make it with chicken stock and, of course, Camellia red kidney beans."

Camellia Brand began with the dried beans and peas Southerners knew best—red kidney beans, white beans, and black-eyed peas, and today, they sell varieties from lady cream peas and lima beans to lentils and black beans. However, for the Haywards, their long-standing bean business is about much more than making a profit. "We don't just sell beans per se; we sell the opportunity for families to come together and enjoy a meal together," Vince says. The idea of cooking a big pot of beans to feed a family is a tale as old as time. Whether red kidney beans jazzed up with Cajun spices and served with white rice in Louisiana, pintos simmered into a creamy soup—Appalachia style—and eaten with cornbread, or any number of iterations found across the country, beans are a humble ingredient, transcending income levels and ethnicities, that have always encouraged community. During Mardi Gras, Vince says beans come into play in many of the season's family traditions. It's customary to find big Dutch ovens of red beans simmering on the stove (or, in this day and age, slow cookers and pressure cookers) to feed

folks who stop by between celebrations.

Cooking beans may be a labor of love, but it's one rooted in Southern tradition. "You picture the person cooking the beans, and they're spending time and putting in a lot of love and effort into that big pot of beans to feed their family and friends, and that's how beans are meant to be eaten," Vince says. "It's not an individual sport; it's sharing a meal."

For Camellia Brand, 2023 will mark 100 years of business, and with their fleet of fans expanding in numbers and geography, this Southern-born-and-bred company will be feeding families Monday-night red beans and rice for centuries to come. ■

RECIPES WITH CAMELLIA BEANS



APPALACHIAN SOUP BEANS

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Here at *Taste of the South*, we love cooking with Camellia Brand beans, peas, and lentils. Try a bite for yourself with the classic soup beans recipe in our Warming Winter Soups & Stews feature starting on page 59 or visit tasteofthesouthmagazine.com, where you'll find plenty of recipes that use their delicious products.