

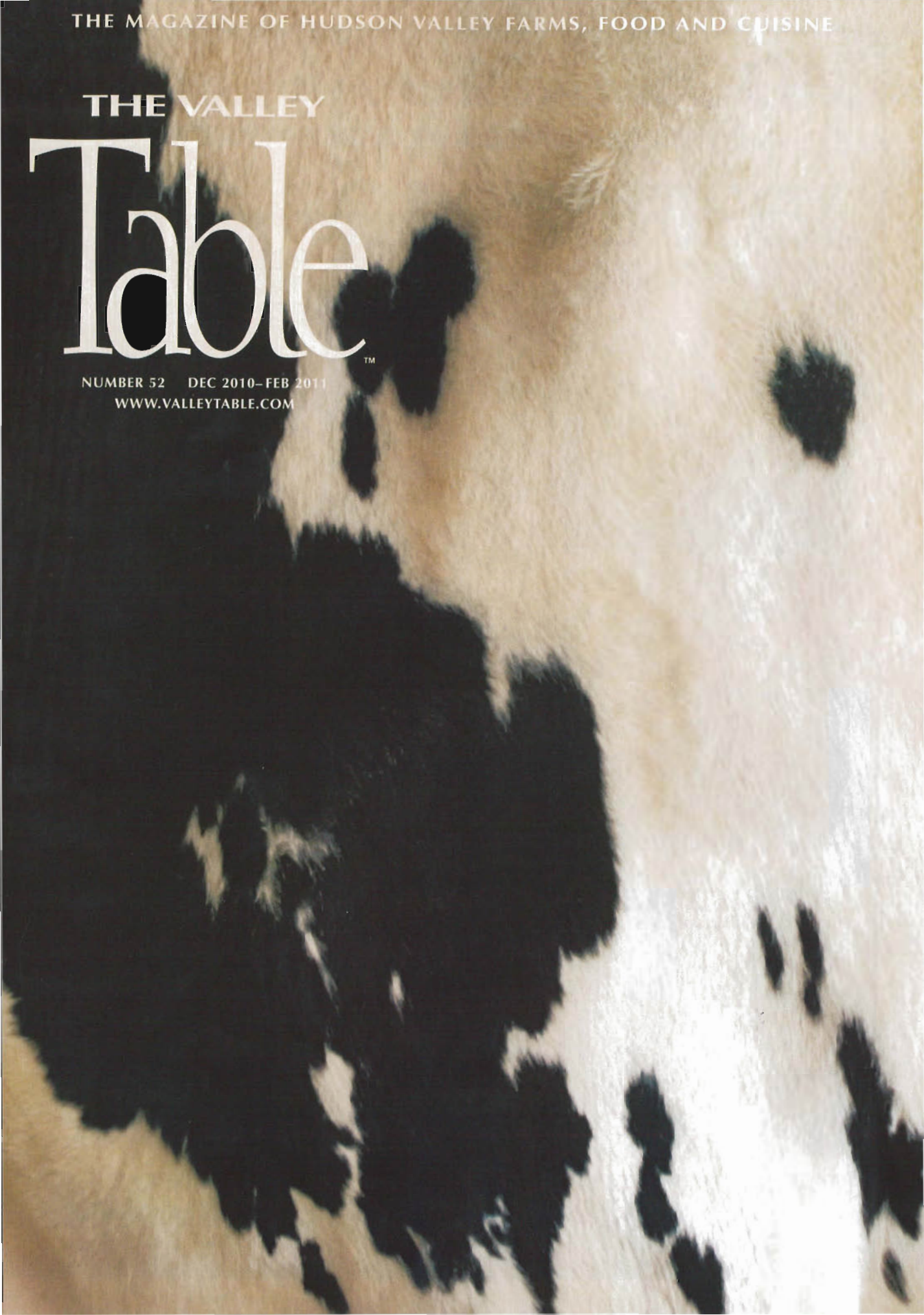
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SURIS IN STANFORDVILLE

Native to the high, remote Andean plains of South America, Suri alpacas are a relatively rare species. There are only an estimated three million alpacas worldwide, 90 percent of which are found in the southern regions of Peru. But more than 100 of them now live here in the Hudson Valley, thriving on a Dutchess County farm.

By a twist of fate, two sustainable businesses are now thriving on the young, 80-acre Alamilo Farm in Stanfordville: Adams Suri Alpacas, Inc., and Alicia Adams Alpaca, Inc. "We were living in Munich, looking for a farm-based business which didn't involve the destruction of animals," says Alicia Adams, the designer-owner behind her eponymous clothing and accessories collection. "We were seriously considering starting a vineyard in Australia."

While researching the potential Australian venture, Alicia's husband Daniel had a chance meeting on an alpaca farm. "Within two weeks of learning more about alpacas, particularly the Suri breed, we decided this is what we wanted to do," he says with a satisfied smile. A year later, the couple and their three young children relocated to Millbrook, based on its farm-friendly atmosphere, proximity to New York City, and recommendation of friends. For two years, they rented a farm and acquired 15 Suri alpacas to see if they could make a go of raising and breeding them. The family moved to their permanent home in Stanfordville in 2008.

The animals are docile and friendly, easy to keep and fun to farm, according to Daniel and Alicia, who employ one full-time and several part-time local farm hands. Since alpacas have pads instead of hooves, they are easy on the earth. They eliminate the need for lawnmowers by eating

the grass but leaving the roots. Resilient and adaptable, they acclimated well to the climate.

Initially, the sight of alpacas in Millbrook raised some eyebrows. "When we first moved up here, everyone was very curious about the crazy Germans raising alpacas here in horse country," Alicia says amusedly. "But as we live



here year 'round, we've become very friendly with our neighbors, and regularly invite the community to visit the herd. I love the respect people here have for the land and their animals."

The Adams's Suri herd is the largest in the Northeast, and they now operate one of the leading Suri breeding programs in the United States. All the animals are certified with the Alpaca Registry, Inc, which uses advanced DNA technology to validate parentage. There's a distinct pay-off for due diligence in pedigree registration—the sale price of an alpaca ranges from "several hundred dollars" for a gelded male (desirable to a hand-crafter wanting a steady wool supply), up to "six figures" for a sound and healthy animal with a documented high-yielding fleece of fine, lustrous wool. Daniel's breeding techniques maximize conformation, fleece and character, with the main goal of preserving the pure Accoyo bloodline. He also breeds for color; currently, Suri alpaca wool naturally comes in 24 different colors, including tones of ivory, beige, taupe, brown, and gray.

Realizing there was an opportunity to maximize the value of the wool, Alicia began her own business in 2009. "Alpaca wool is natural, not synthetic, and the earth's only naturally hypoallergenic fiber," she says. "Suri wool is shinier, longer, silkier and less crimpy than other alpaca wool." She sells the raw fiber once it's been washed and de-haired, as well as the roving, and spun yarn by weight.

Alicia began designing wool apparel on a small scale, with handmade baby items made locally by talented local knitters. She couldn't find alpaca wool looms domestically, so in order to expand the business she now ships raw wool to Peru, where working with alpaca fibers is a pre-Incan tradition passed down through generations. She's able to support Peruvian artisans by paying a fair, living wage for their skills. The clothing collection now includes softer-than-cashmere blankets and throws, knitwear such as sweaters and dresses, and accessories like scarves, hats and gloves. Adult clothing and outerwear has been added, and a children's line is next. Her customer base has expanded overseas by participating in trade shows in Germany, London and Tokyo. Online sales, promotion through social media, and winning product awards are also building a buzz.

An old hog barn is being converted into a showroom and farm store; it will be open several days a week to anyone wanting a first-hand look at their products. Or a peek at those adorable alpacas.

—Traci L. Suppa

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