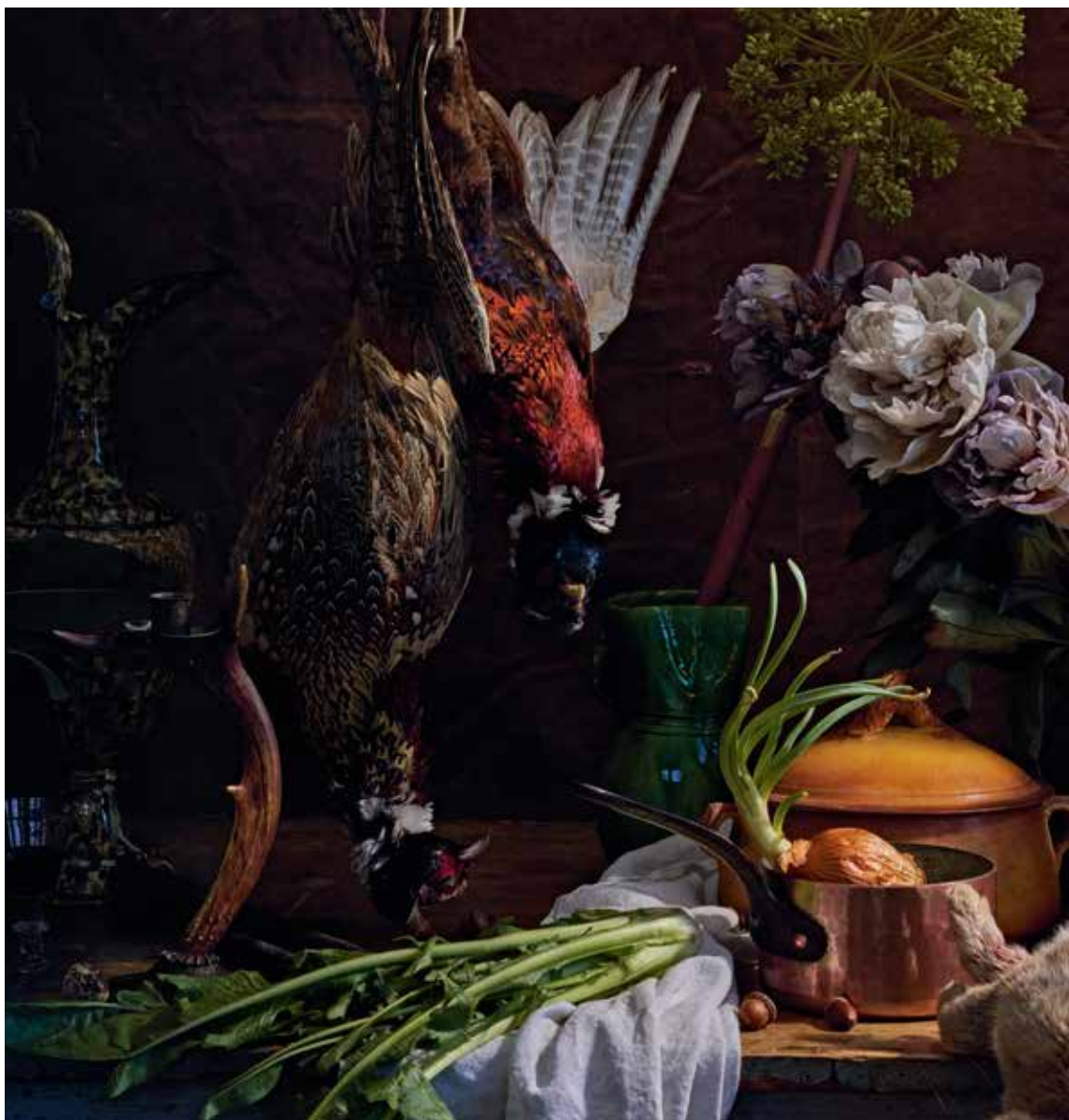


# SAVEUR

**Eat the World** ISSUE N° 203 Fall/Winter 2024



*Wild Game •* **MOROCCO** *• Blue-Ribbon Crab Cakes*  
**THE AMAZON** *• Indigenous Winemakers •* **ASTURIAS**  
*South Indian Coffee •* **ARGENTINA** *• A Filipino Feast*  
**DAKAR** *• Chocolate Hazelnut Cake*

REPORTER

# Sniffing Out Appalachia's Blue Ridge Truffle

*On the hunt with North Carolina's Mushroom Man.*

BY DAVID FARLEY

## ALAN MUSKAT HAS BEEN FORAGING

in and leading tours of the western North Carolina forests for over 30 years, helping others discover the wild edible treasures hiding in his proverbial backyard. Muskat, known widely as the "Mushroom Man," had long hoped to find truffles in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In 2007, his dream came to fruition when, while leading a small group through the woods, a young boy on the tour approached the forager with a golf ball-size object in his hand. When Muskat leaned down and sniffed, he immediately recognized the cinnamon-like funk.

There had long been whispers among locals about the possibility of truffles growing in the mountains, but until then, no evidence had been recorded, inspiring some to refer to it skeptically as the "Big Foot truffle." Now, Muskat has proof that the Blue Ridge Truffle is real. Mysteriously, the only other place on the planet where the *Imaia gigantea* has been found is northern Japan, which shares much of the same flora and climate as western North Carolina.

For a while, Muskat kept the discovery to himself, fearing that "there'd be a sort of gold rush" on the prized fungi. Truffle



hunting in the forests around Asheville is still mostly limited to in-the-know locals; but now, nearly 20 years since his first encounter with the elusive Big Foot truffle, the Mushroom Man has started sharing the wealth. He now leads tours demonstrating how he and his trained Lagotto Romagnolo truffle dogs unearth them.

For area chefs, *I. gigantea*'s sweet, spiced aroma, with hints of toasted hazelnut, parmesan, and pecorino, is highly desirable on everything from pastas to grilled cheese sandwiches. Thanks to their close relationships with foragers, restaurants are featuring these Blue Ridge beauties on menus in Asheville and beyond. ●