



## THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

ENTERTAIN LIKE A PRO • THE SEASON OF SAINTS AND KINGS

# FILLING ST. NICK'S SHOES

FOLLOWING IN THE STEPS OF SANTA'S ANCESTOR, THE GIFT GIVING ON DECEMBER 5 IS KEPT LOW-KEY AND WITTY.



While most American calendars mark the 25th day of the 12th month in red, many countries in Europe – and some places in the United States – savor a more mellow tradition that celebrates the spirit of the real St. Nicholas and his love of children. For them, the 5th of December is the red-letter day to honor the life and legend of an Asian bishop whose bones lie somewhere in Italy but who makes an annual pilgrimage to the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Belgium to fill children's shoes with sweets and toys.

Considering the scope of his legend, the facts of St. Nicholas's life are scarce enough. It's commonly agreed by historians that he was born of wealthy parents in the ancient city of Patara (located on the underside of what we now call Turkey) about 271. As a young man, he became a monk in a monastery near the port city of Myra (farther east along the coast of Turkey), where he eventually became the

Left: In the Dutch tradition, shoes set out for St. Nicholas are filled with hay and carrots for his horse. Above: A teenager's Happy Feet slippers are filled with gingersnaps and Dutch chocolate. The book *Little Miss Bossy*, by Roger Hargreaves, takes the place of the traditional witty poem. To keep communications open, there are pencils in an oilcloth bag from Black Ink in Cambridge and a Motorola V70 mobile phone.

BY SONJA HAKALA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE HENDERSON  
STYLING BY JON HATTAWAY