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lights up the CMAs

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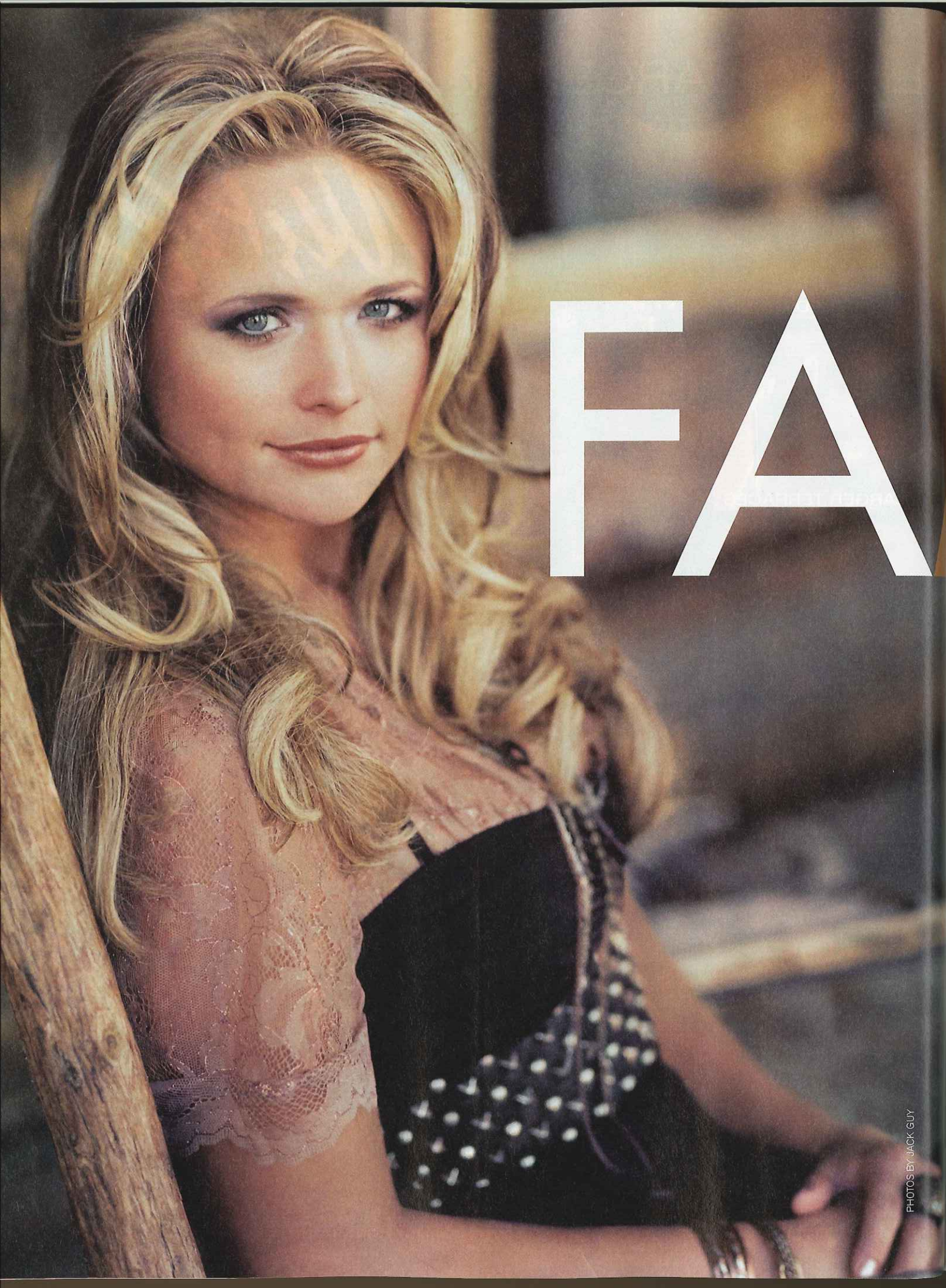
Crate and Barrel

Wine cellars are more common than you may think, and Nashville's got its share. From fledgling collectors to world-class connoisseurs, here's how Music City oenophiles are storing the good stuff

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FAMOUS

IN A SMALL TOWN

Country music superstardom hasn't changed Miranda Lambert's down-to-earth ways

BY STACIE STANDIFER

MIRANDA LAMBERT IS NOT THE KIND of girl you'll find looking for property on Belle Meade Boulevard. She may be a regular on awards shows these days, but what I find most endearing is just how "regular" she actually is. After making her rounds on *Nashville Star*, not winning and then making it big, she deserves her share of attention. She just doesn't require it.

This talented young woman may be tearing up the music charts—her first album, *Kerosene*, broke records and took the country charts by storm, and her latest CD, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, was an even bigger hit—but what she loves most about Nashville are the simple things. She loves to break away from "the Row" when her writing gets stale and escapes to the Red Door with her co-writers for a cold beer.

She also mourns the loss of the nearby Long Horn Steakhouse location that closed down just a few months ago, because it was near the studio she likes to work in and she loved their fried chicken salad. In fact, she told me she was actually heartbroken whenever she passed the site of the former chain restaurant. Surprising? Not really, when you consider that, far from being all "Gunpowder & Lead," as her recent hit suggests, she's really a small town girl who appreciates the simple things no matter what's going on in her world.

What most people may not realize about this brazen beauty is that she wrote most of her first hits prior to reaching legal drinking age. Now, at only 23, she's still writing most of her music—not only, her fans, but for herself. She credits legendary

“When I’m here, no one even looks twice when they pass me, and I love that about Nashville. The entire city is completely laid back, and I love that.”

[PROFILE]

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It's not hard to see her holding her own on the farm when you see the way she captures an audience when she's onstage.

artist Loretta Lynn as a mentor, but also includes more contemporary singer/songwriters like Patty Griffin and Allison Moorer on her list of artists who give her inspiration when it comes to her career.

No stranger to struggling, Miranda recognizes just how fortunate she is to have the opportunity to record and perform for country music fans, and sees the entire journey as a way to relate to a wide swath of people dealing with situations of their own. In fact, she addresses this on her current CD—while most listeners equate the album with the tough single “Gunpowder & Lead,” if you skip ahead a couple of tracks you’ll find “Easy From Now On,” a classic country tune reflective of the Emmylou Harris sound Lambert loves and mirrors. But don’t think she’s going soft—a mellow song for the most part, Lambert says her favorite line from “Easy” is “Don’t worry about me, I got a wild card up my sleeve.”

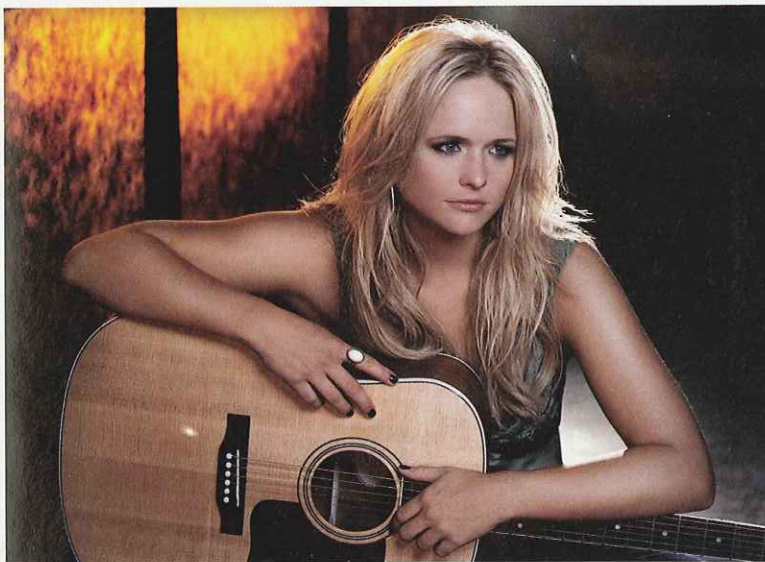
Still, for one of country’s fastest rising stars, there’s not a whole lot of time to be wild these days. What little time she’s got left over from being on the road and writing new material she plans on spending with her family in Texas, with her longtime boyfriend Blake Shelton’s family in Oklahoma and, of course, taking care of the small herd of animals she’s accumulated

on her ranch ranging from horses, donkeys and dogs on down to chickens.

In fact, running a farm and taking care of its animals probably captures who Miranda Lambert is as well as anything—she’s both sweet and as sharp as a razor blade. It’s not hard to see her holding her own on the farm when you see the way she captures an audience when she’s onstage. And this month, the stakes are even higher as she performs (and not for the first time) for millions of fans watching the CMA Awards. Not that that changes her approach any—she sees her job as serving her fans and nothing else.

When I asked her what she thought the most difficult thing about the upcoming holidays will be, she didn’t complain about travel or performing, but instead admitted that it was the food at her family’s table she won’t be able to resist. She loves nesting, she told me, and the entire family environment, especially all the great food, even if it does make her fear for her figure. (I told her she could probably relax about that.)

As for holiday music, it will mostly be her own, since she’ll be writing for her next release while she’s on the road. Other than that, Lambert cites Dolly Parton’s “Hard Candy Christmas” and, true to her regular roots, “Santa Baby”—no matter, she claims, who’s singing it. Let’s just hope it’s her.



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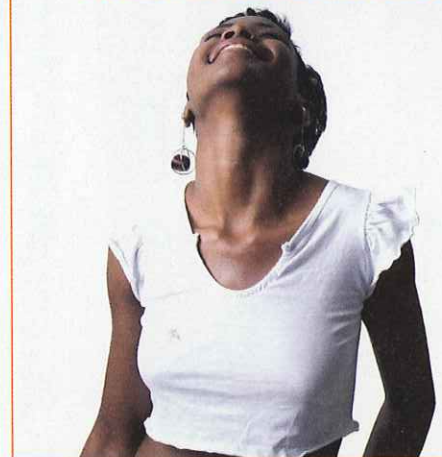
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