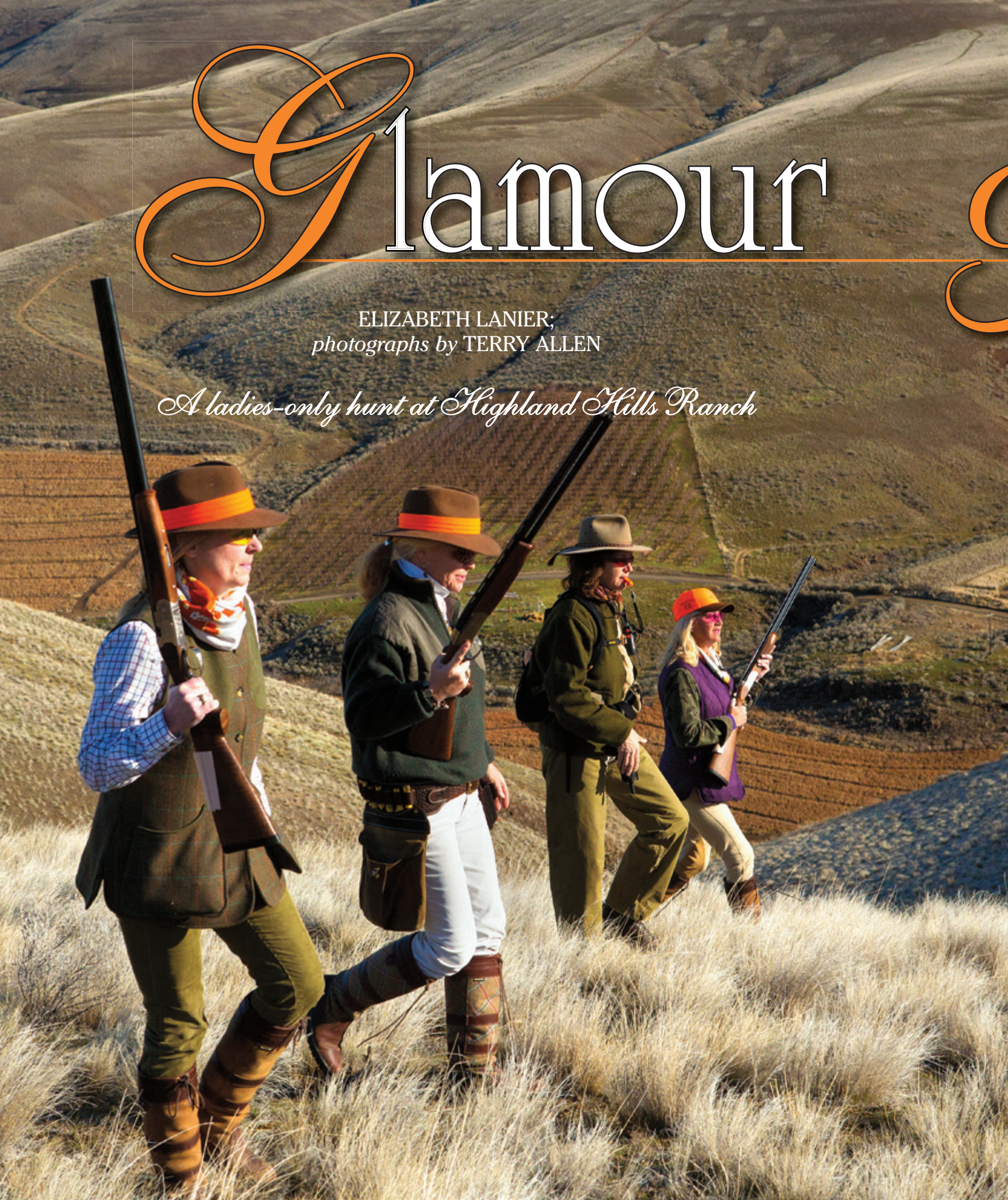


# Glamour

ELIZABETH LANIER;  
photographs by TERRY ALLEN

*A ladies-only hunt at Highland Hills Ranch*

# & Guns



Our lives are filled with many memorable firsts: our first day of school, our first crush, our first dance, even our first kiss. For those who love to shoot, we remember our first shotgun, first bird hunt and maybe a first great bird dog. For the guides at Oregon's Highland Hills Ranch who bravely volunteered to accompany the all-women's Glamour & Guns gathering this past January, memorable firsts were witnessing celebrations of not just first birds shot but almost *all* birds shot. The squeals of excitement could have been heard in Portland, and the amazing smiles that accompanied each "I got it! I got it!" brightened the days. Glamorous? Not really. Gregarious? Definitely. And this has been the spirit of Glamour & Guns events from the beginning.

Why Glamour & Guns? It was a tongue-in-cheek name for this women's-only wingshooting adventure conceived by Highland Hills co-owner Mindi Macnab. Do we often think of the two together? Not really, but in this case the "glamour" refers more to the intrinsic beauty of the entire experience than to the type of women attending—and, of course, the "guns" part is a given.

Next question: What compelled Mindi to create such an event? She began entertaining the idea after noticing that although many gentlemen who hunted at the ranch brought their wives to enjoy the amenities, the women seldom joined their husbands in the field. *Why?* she wondered. Many of the women had shot before. Did they not feel comfortable with their shooting abilities? Were they worried that their lack of experience would hinder the hunts? Were they nervous about shooting over dogs be-

cause they had never done it before? The "what ifs" and "I don't think I'm good enough" thoughts and maybe a little of the competitive nature of many men who hunt were enough to create some anxiety, and something needed to be done to change that.

Given these keen observations—and being a bit of a risk taker—Mindi decided to create a wingshooting adventure just for women. She wanted it to have a relaxed, stress-free atmosphere and be a confidence-building experience where women would be reassured that they, too, could enjoy the thrill of the hunt by increasing their skills and their understanding of wingshooting. She wanted to offer this to not only seasoned shooters but also those new to the sport. And she wanted a female instructor.

Mindi and I began discussing her idea several years ago at a tailgate party at the Southern Side by Side Championship, in North Carolina. As both a shooting instructor and avid wingshooter, I was thrilled with the idea of sharing my passion for the sport with other women. That opportunity combined with Highland Hills' excellent amenities and the ranch's "grand slam" of wingshooting (pheasants, chukar, Hungarian partridge and valley quail) meant we would have the whole "she-bang!" Certainly it was the perfect combination to draw women, and I was more than happy to help lead the charge. Glamour & Guns was born.

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### **All for one, and one for all.**

The all-ladies shoot at Oregon's Highland Hills Ranch provided many memorable firsts. From first points to first flushes to first birds in the bag, the hunt was an enthusiastic celebration of fieldsports by a non-traditional group of participants. And everyone had a blast!



Now, what is that old saying? Be careful what you wish for? Well, they arrived all right—the women, that is. They came from as close as Portland and Seattle and as far away as Virginia and Florida. They also came right out of the sunroof, bursting with excitement at the sheer thrill of seeing so many birds. Pheasants were running everywhere—all along the drive to the lodge. Holy cow, so many birds! “Dang, dang, dang! [Not exactly those words] Where are the guns?”

*Whew! Have these women never seen pheasants before?* Actually, they had, but never so many in one place. Soon it was time to sit back down in the car before getting any closer to the lodge. At least some of us needed to look respectable when we pulled in. Too late. “Dang, dang, dang!” again. In what would be one of those memorable firsts for co-owner Dennis Macnab, Mindi’s husband, and chef Keith Potter, they had just witnessed through binoculars (no fair) the first guests to ever make their way up the drive hanging out of a sunroof. (“Hootin’ and wishin’ they were shootin’” it was later confessed.) They shook their heads and agreed that the fun was probably just beginning.

We ranged in age from our late 40s to mid-70s. Several came knowing no one else in the group, a few knowing only one other. Some had received the trip as a Christmas gift from their husbands. A few husbands had simply encouraged their wives to go in hopes that it would ignite a love of shooting that they could share. Others just came to enjoy the company of like-minded women who enjoy the outdoors and the shotgun sports.

All arrived excited and probably a bit uneasy. Some had been to Highland Hills previously with their husbands and were thrilled to be back. But alone? With a bunch of women? A bunch of “glamour” women? That one simple word was enough to incite terror in some. But their real fears were rooted in anxiety. *Will I embarrass myself? What if I don’t shoot as well as the rest of the group? What if I can’t hit anything?* One guest told her husband that she would either be home in 24 hours or have a great time. Afterward she signed on for the following year . . .

There were other apprehensions. What do the different gamebirds even look like? What pace would the guides

set? What would the terrain be like? What is proper shooting etiquette? And, of course, the all-important concern: *What do I wear?* The list seemed endless. In anticipation, a few had decided, *If I can just shoot one bird, the trip will be a success.* After they arrived, it was revised to: *Even if I don’t shoot one bird, just being here is a success.*

Once we arrived at the ranch, the hum—well, actually, roar—of excitement was contagious. Suitcases were carried in (no small feat with 12 women), and guns were uncased and admired as we loaded into trucks to go have a little fun at sporting clays. When one of the ladies arrived late to the sporting course, she said she could hear laughter and encouragement the moment she opened the car door. She knew immediately that this was not going to be like a shoot with the guys.

Then it came: that first morning hunt and all of the frenzy getting out the door. Temperatures were going to range from the 30s in the morning to the mid-60s in the afternoon. Gathering up sweaters, vests, coats, gloves, hats, and then putting everything down to pull on boots. Women and gear—it’s all about the gear. Making sure each woman had her own gun and not someone else’s. Assigning shooters to guides and listening to the safety talk. Now we were about to go bird hunting, and you could feel the anticipation building. For several of the women, this was going to be one of those “firsts,” and I loved watching the dynamics unfold.

We divided into groups of two and three and headed to different areas on the 3,000 remarkable acres that Highland Hills calls home. Some ended up on the high bluffs, which are rocky and full of sagebrush and home to the large population of chukar and sometimes a pheasant or Hun. Also here were beautiful views of snow-covered Mt. Hood and the varying colors of the valley below. Others went to the lower grounds—into the milo fields and pastures of native grasses running along the river where the majority of pheasants, valley quail and Huns are found.

Wherever they unloaded, the hunters were accompanied by excellent guides and their talented pointing and flushing dogs, which were amazing to watch. Almost as soon as the dogs were out of the trucks they began finding birds. As the dogs held point, the guides took the time to get the ladies into the best positions for the flush and to remind them to shoot “into the blue.”

Reminiscing later, one shooter recalled that her heart was pounding so loudly on what would be her memorable first bird flush that she failed to hear her guide say, “Get ’em up,” to the cocker. As the bird flushed, she said she felt as if the world were spinning. It all seemed to happen so fast and at such close range that she froze. The bird was long gone before she even realized what had happened. The ever-patient guide assured her that there would be plenty more opportunities. And he was right. They found bird after bird. Soon she settled into the rhythm of the hunt and started remembering some of those gentle coaching words: “Remember, you have more time than you think,” “Relax,” “Keep your eye on the bird and take a moment to see it clearly,” and the ever true “Butt, belly, beak, bang.”

Before long the women were bagging birds left and right. On one afternoon hunt there were three ladies in the field. The dog went on point, and the guide lined up the ladies in anticipation of the flush. Up came a pheasant. The first shooter slowed it down, the second clipped a wing, and the third brought it to the ground. Who took credit? They all did!

This is the nature of women in the field. These ladies were not looking to compete or poach each other’s birds. They wanted to learn and to shoot well and to see each other do the same. They cheered for individual accomplishments and celebrated successes as a group. If a couple of guns went off at the same time and a bird went down, there would be no wondering who had shot it; everyone would be hollering! It didn’t matter whose shot had gotten there first.

OK, so you are wondering what else happens when a bunch of women are in the field together. Besides shooting, there is a lot of talking. And laughing. The conversations range from the pros and cons of waterproof mascara and the SPF levels in moisturizers and foundations to menopause, men and children.

And women listen. The group learned dog-training tips from the guides, how Pam cooking spray keeps burrs off of dogs’ coats, and how the

latest GPS collars work. Arriving at the lodge at day’s end, everyone laughed and marveled about all of the birds and their experiences in the field.

Now don’t be led to believe that this group did not know the meaning of “shut up and shoot.” These women were serious about their fun, but when a dog locked on point, they were serious about their shooting. In all honesty, after the triggers were pulled and the birds dropped, you would never know that we could possibly be quiet. Living in the hunting moment—each flush being very different and memorable—is what these women did.

I will never forget the first evening at the dinner table when Dennis Macnab decided to join us for dinner. He welcomed everyone, and then proceeded to say that there is a tradition at Highland Hills of letting the guests get to know each other through brief introductions. “Tell us a little about yourself: your name, where you’re from and anything else you would like to share with the group.” The operative word here was “little”—which happens to be a word women simply cannot relate to.

The introductions started just as appetizers were being served; as the desert plates were being cleared, we were on the third woman. Dennis was looking a bit dazed and half asleep, no doubt wondering, *What the hell was I thinking?* You see, what he did not realize (or had forgotten) is that women need no platform on which to speak, especially in a room full of other women. When given the floor, we are going to take full advantage of the audience. Funny thing is, when we shifted from the dinner table to the basement to allow the table to be cleared and set for the morning, Dennis mysteriously disappeared, emerging the next morning just in time for the safety speech . . .

It turned out that our group was quite diverse—a cross-section of women the likes of which I had not seen since high school. But for three days our varied backgrounds, opinions and political leanings paled in comparison to our joy and focus on wingshooting, camaraderie and our beautiful surroundings. We were sorority sisters in the end: “Kappa It Fly-a It Die-a.”

This hunt was designed for women

and by women, with a goal of getting ladies into the field to enjoy a sport traditionally enjoyed by men. Prior to the event, many of the women who joined this group had spent a lot of time alone while their husbands had gone off hunting. As summed up by one woman on the final evening: “I have learned to enjoy a sport I used to resent.” The realization of that statement and how profound the experience had been for her—and for all of the participants—was just one more of those memorable moments.

*Author’s Note:* The next Glamour & Guns event will take place at Highland Hills Ranch from January 30 to February 3, 2014. For more information, contact Highland Hills Ranch, 866-478-4868; [www.highlandhillsranch.com](http://www.highlandhillsranch.com).

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