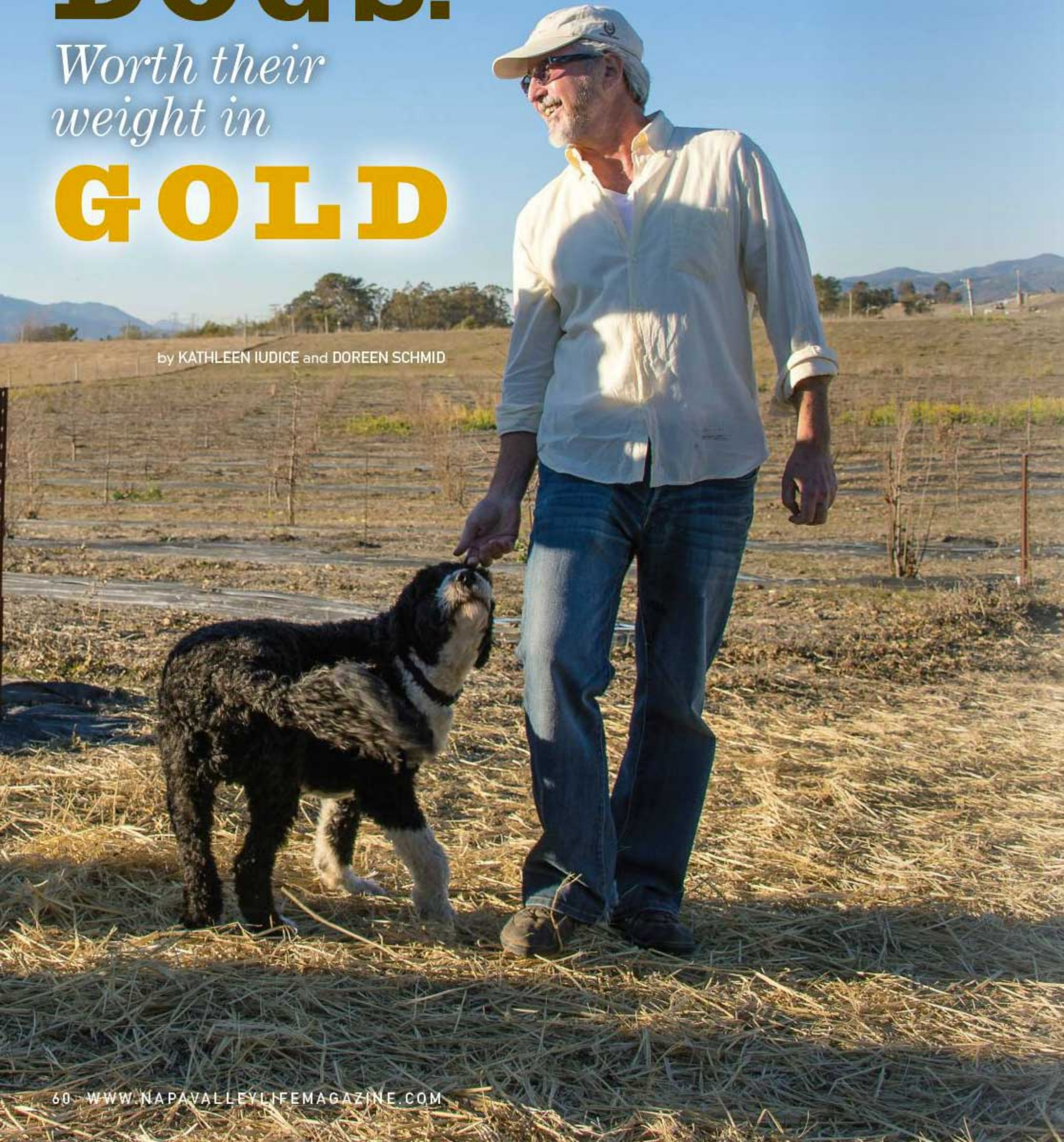


# TRUFFLE DOGS:

*Worth their  
weight in*

# GOLD

by KATHLEEN IUDICE and DOREEN SCHMID





Truffle farming has long been a lucrative enterprise in Europe—specifically the high end winter black Périgord and summer Burgundy truffles—and is rapidly gaining ground in other parts of the world. Australia has been successfully growing truffles for decades, and now the United States is getting close to harvesting its own crops. Similar to planting a vineyard, a truffle orchard takes about five to six years before truffles are produced. However, the good news for truffle growers is that once an orchard has been established, it requires very little maintenance and no inorganic/toxic practices to sustain. And a successful truffle orchard, planted in oak and/or hazelnut trees, can enjoy a long and healthy lifespan of up to sixty to eighty years—as long as the orchard is properly maintained.

To many growers, the real fun of growing truffles begins with the harvest. Equipped only with trusty truffle hunting dogs, harvesting truffles is a hands-on endeavor (no mechanical harvesting devices are used). Almost any dog can be trained to truffle hunt, but here in the burgeoning American truffle cultivation world, our foraging dogs are commonly German Shepherds, Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Belgian Malinois and other hunting breeds. However, in Italy, site of some of the most famed and prodigious truffle and wild mushroom growing areas, the official Italian hunting dogs are Lagotto Romagnolos, or “lake dog from Romagna.”

These dogs who hunt for “black gold” are seemingly worth their weight in real gold, fetching prices as high as \$13,000. While commonly trained to hunt for the most desirable truffles on an inoculated farm—the black Périgord (*Tuber melanosporum*), the white or Alba (*Tuber magnatum pico*), the summer Burgundy (*Tuber aestivum/huncinatum*), and the Bianchetto (*Tuber albidium pico*)—they can also be taught to hunt for mushrooms.

Along with dogs, female pigs have traditionally been used in truffle hunts in Europe, primarily because they’re attracted to the male pig pheromones similar to those found in certain types of truffles. What’s the difference between the two hunters? The most significant advantage to using dogs—as well as having the companionship of your friendly canine companion on the hunt—is that while they are excellent truffle hunters, they don’t eat them as do pigs. Another practical consideration is transport: a pooch, unlike a pig, is generally eager to jump into your car’s backseat.

Training dogs to hunt truffles starts early. Puppies are acclimated to truffle scent by being taught to fetch socks stuffed with mature truffles, then gradually work their way up to finding hidden truffle treasures.

Canine scent detection training specifically for the domestic truffle industry is the specialty of Master Dog Trainer and NTF presenter Alana McGee of Toil & Truffle and Truffle Dog Company. She presents two premiere truffle dog training sessions at the Napa Truffle Festival, January 16-19, 2015: *The Science of Canine Truffle Scent Location and Practical Implementation* during the “Scientific Grower Truffle Cultivation Seminar” on Friday, January 16, and *The History of Truffle Hunting: Pigs, Dogs, Robots and Common Misconceptions* during the Saturday, January 19, “All About Truffles” program. Both sessions include the truffle orchard tour at Sinskey Vineyards, a winery lunch (optional), truffle orchard tour and dog training demonstration on Saturday. Join us to learn about regional and recreational truffle hunting with dogs, how dogs locate truffles, beginning hands-on training, and much more!



A dish of black Périgord truffles ready for the kitchen

## 5th Annual NAPA TRUFFLE FESTIVAL

FRIDAY-MONDAY, JANUARY 16-19, 2015

Join in the fun, science and culinary adventure of a lifetime in pursuit of the rare and delectable black truffle—specifically the winter Périgord truffle: *Tuber melanosporum* (aka black diamond) - which will be discussed, examined, probed, prepared, demonstrated and, finally, paired with wines and feasted upon for breakfast, lunch and dinner!

[www.napatrufflefestival.com](http://www.napatrufflefestival.com)



Truffle dogs dig for hidden truffle treats—unlike pigs, they’ll root out, but not eat