

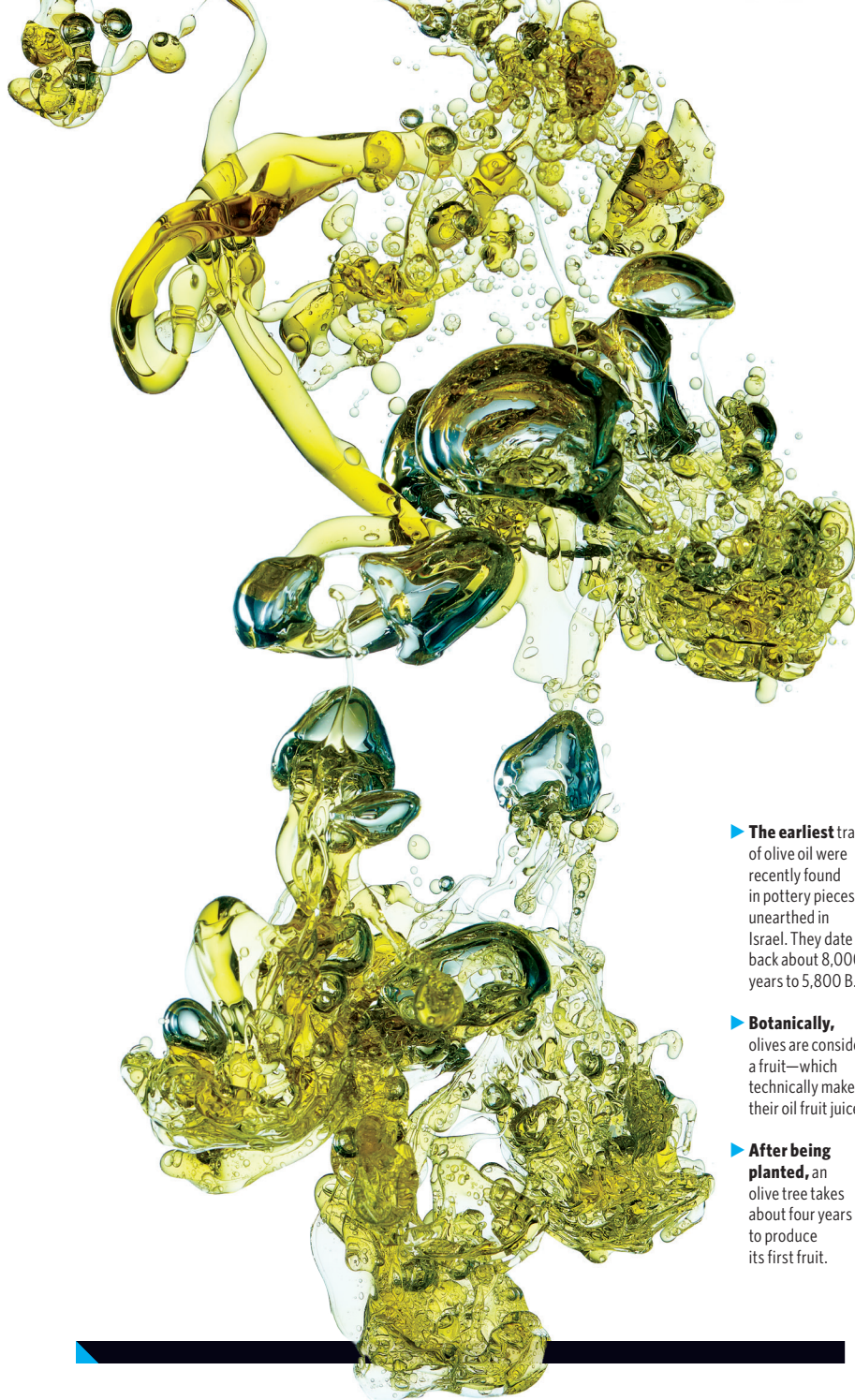


## LAURENT HALASZ

The charming French-born restaurateur is all about **olive oil**.

**WHEN LAURENT HALASZ** founded Fig & Olive in New York 10 years ago, the Mougins, France, native knew he wanted to focus on a piece of his Mediterranean heritage. “I grew up with a cuisine with olive oil,” he says. “We cook with olive oil and not with butter; it’s part of how you eat in the south of France.” That’s why the eatery also eschews butter in favor of the flavorful oil—and why every meal begins with a tasting of three varieties. “It’s our signature,” Halasz says. “We basically share this passion of olive oil.” At any one time, 12 to 14 oils can be found in the kitchen, dining room or retail shop at one of Fig & Olive’s now nine locations around the country. Each has a different profile, depending on the olives, and a different usage. Fish cooked en papillote should be paired with a delicate, fruity oil, Halasz says, while grilled lamb chops and steak need an assertive, peppery one. After all these years, Halasz still stands in awe of this antioxidant-rich ingredient. “It’s a superfood,” he says. “One of the best things you can do is really indulge and enjoy your olive oil.”

— JENNIFER BUEGE



▶ **The earliest** traces of olive oil were recently found in pottery pieces unearthed in Israel. They date back about 8,000 years to 5,800 B.C.

▶ **Botanically**, olives are considered a fruit—which technically makes their oil fruit juice.

▶ **After being planted**, an olive tree takes about four years to produce its first fruit.

### LIQUID GOLD

Strike oil in Italy, New York and Napa Valley.



1 At **Villa Campesti Luxury Olive Oil Resort** near Florence, Italy, enjoy an oil massage, a tasting or a walk through the olive grove.



2 Find out which oils will be crowned winners when the annual **New York International Olive Oil Competition** takes place in April.



3 December 3 is **Olio Nuovo Day** at Round Pond Estate in Napa Valley, when you can tour the olive oil mill and purchase just-pressed oils.