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WINE INTERVENTION

Sutcliffe Vineyards is making fine wines out of Cortez.



SIP

Grape Expectations

Southern Colorado wineries that are aging gracefully

BY KIMBERLY LORD STEWART

DRINK UP, COLORADO

The Governor's Cup, one of the state's most prestigious competitions for local winemakers, includes hundreds of wines from dozens of local wineries.

2014 WINNERS:

Best of Show/Best Red

Canyon Wind Petit Verdot 2012

Best White

Boulder Creek Winery,
Riesling 2013

Best Rosé

Creekside Cellars, Rosé 2013

Best Dessert Wine

Ptarmigan Vineyards, Muscat
Glacier, 2012

Best Fruit Wine/Cider

Branch Out Cider, Perennial
Dry Sparkling, 2012

Best Mead

Rocky Mountain Vineyards,
Great Catherine's
Spiced Nectar

While Palisade gets most of the attention, Southern Colorado is rife with wines and wineries that should be on your next road trip radar. Here are four worth the drive.

FIRE FOX FARMS

The arid and rural landscape on the drive from the Cortez airport to Fox Fire Farms in Ignacio is deceptive. Hidden amongst the oaks and scrub is the bucolic grandeur of a sheep and cattle ranch with a charming tasting room and vineyard. When you look south over the lush grasslands toward New Mexico, it's not hard to see why five generations of the same family have lived and worked this land since 1916.

Third generation owner Richard Parry, along with his wife, Linda, added vines to Fire Fox about 11 years ago. "It seemed like a crazy idea," he says. "It's a new learning experience."

Two of Fire Fox's stand-out wines are a reflection of Parry's dedication to transitioning from raising animals to winemaking. The 2013 Colo-

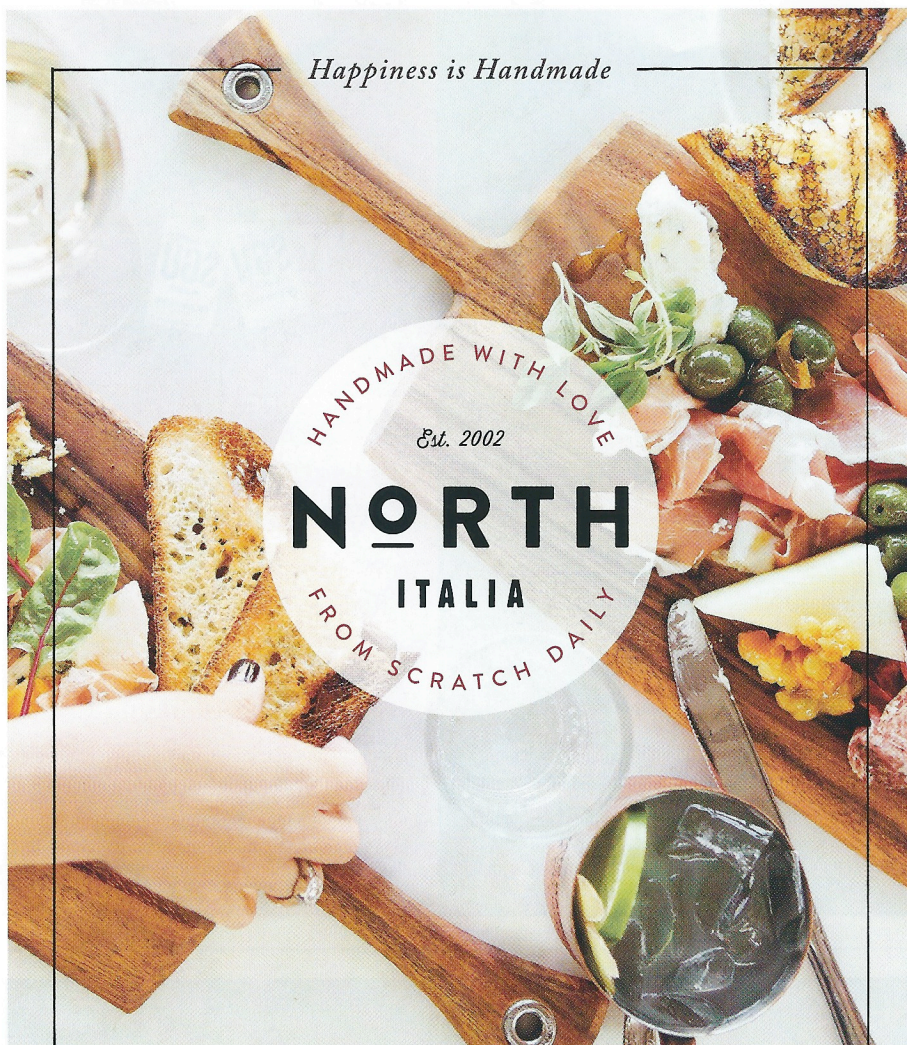
rado Marquette, made from estate grapes, is a merlot-lover's friend—a food-friendly red, with hints of ripe plum and red fruit. The 2013 Riesling features a bright demeanor, balanced acidity and low sugar to whet the appetite before dinner.

In addition to hosting events and weddings, Fire Fox Farms hosts live music on Friday nights with wine and food. The menu includes choices of charcuterie and cheese, a selection of antipasti, a sandwich or salad (for two) and chocolate-dipped strawberries. Visit the website for information on the farm's annual fall harvest dinner. The wine tasting room is open through October.

foxfirefarms.com

GUY DREW VINEYARDS

If a trip to Mesa Verde is on your calendar this fall, bookmark some extra time to visit Guy Drew Vineyards in McElmo Canyon. Guy Drew and his wife, Ruth, were inspired by the land known as the Anasazi trade route when they built a striking adobe home and tasting room on 155 acres. The



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vine-trellised patio is an ideal place to get to know the offerings.

Rieslings are a perennial favorite for the winery, as is the Metate Blanc, a blend of Riesling and Chardonnay. A wine that you shouldn't miss this season is Guy Drew Vineyards Baco Noir 2012. The Baco Noir grapes are grown in Yellow Jacket at 6,900 feet. It's a dry farmed region (with no irrigation), so the sting of drought can be very unforgiving. guydrewvineyards.com

THE WINERY AT HOLY CROSS ABBEY

You could say one of the Front Range's most popular wineries came about by divine intervention. After completing an exorcism at a Western Slope winery in 2000, Father Paul Montoya, of the Benedictine Order of Monks, Holy Cross Abbey in Cañon City, was inspired to build a winery on the grounds. The abbey is now vacant, but the winery is going strong, and winemaker Jeff Stultz recently was recognized for the winery's 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve, 2012 Cabernet Franc and 2012 Syrah.

The winery's tasting room, overseen by Sally Davison, is a haven for wine and food lovers. With a long bar for drinking and a patio for picnics, it's an ideal spot for some well-deserved R&R. The tasting room also includes a gift shop with cookbooks, kitchenware and wine gifts.

abbeywinery.com

SUTCLIFFE VINEYARDS

If you've dined at range, in Denver's Renaissance Hotel, you may know Sutcliffe wines, which are served at the restaurant as part of its local Western drink menu. Owner John Sutcliffe, who has a strong restaurant background, says he likes to make wines, such as "big muscular California reds," that don't fight with the food on the plate.

Sutcliffe's wines, out of Cortez, are among the biggest award winners in the state. Standouts include the Cinsaut 2012, with warm clove and raspberry undertones, that will work as well as any soft, light Pinot Noir; and the 2012 Syrah, a favorite grape for winemaker Joe Buckel, with a long peppery finish, caramel and blackberries.

"We are really working hard with our growers to exceed expectations," Buckel says. sutcliffewines.com **DLM**