



# Colorado's Grand Valley

Where 'Purple Mountains Majesty' Might Be Heaps of Grapes

BY RICH MAURO

**E**very time I approach the Grand Valley I am affected by the dramatic way the valley reveals itself. The surprise arrives about four hours west of the Front Range along I-70.

Travelers emerge from a narrow opening between the buttes of the Book Cliffs to the north and the Grand Mesa to the south to behold a lush, fertile plain following the Colorado River for about 25 miles or more to the foot of the Colorado National Monument. It seems a fitting metaphor for the discoveries awaiting the adventurous visitor to this valley.

Of course, Colorado's Grand Valley has long been recognized for its succulent peaches and other fruit. In recent years, though, wine grapes have become nearly as important. And certainly, wine tourism has surpassed anything this diverse region has seen in generations.

In 1990, there were only five licensed wineries in Colorado, four of them in the Grand Valley. By the end of 2012, there were 105 wineries statewide, 25 in the Grande Valley (plus a meadery). Also in 1990, the Grand Valley AVA (American Viticultural Area) became the first in Colorado recognized by the federal government. (There is now a second AVA just to the south near Delta called West Elks.) Today, about 80% of the state's wine grapes are grown in the Grand Valley.

Many Coloradans like to visit the well-known wine regions of California, such as Sonoma and Napa. The Grand Valley offers more of a boutique and certainly more affordable experience.

"Relatively speaking, all of the wineries are small. You will most likely meet a winemaker or owner at most wineries in and around Palisade," says Paula Mitchell, author of *Exploring Colorado Wineries—Guidebook and Journal*.

Most wineries are family owned and an owner often is also the winemaker. Most have their own vineyards (although most also buy grapes from other growers) and the winemaking facility on-site. Picnic areas and gift shops with wine accessories are common; some even offer bread, cheese and other wine-compatible foods for sale, which pair beautifully with local produce from roadside stands to create a picnic among the vineyards.

When visiting wineries, Brooke Webb of Mesa Park Vineyards advises, "Try Bordeaux-style reds and unique blends that are available. The wines are reasonably priced, usually from \$10 to \$30 per bottle."

I would add that I have tasted many admirable Syrahs and several winemakers have told me they are excited about the potential for Cabernet Franc. Among the white wines, although there are some good Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs, I am generally more impressed with the Viognier and Riesling wines.

Not surprisingly, a vibrant wine tourism industry has developed over the last decade. In fact, the Grand Junction Visitor & Convention Bureau now actively promotes the area as "Colorado Wine Country." And Grand Junction is a good base from which to launch your next visit to the valley. As the largest city (around 147,000 population), it is home to several good restaurants and a pleasant downtown main street, with shops and an excellent farmers' market on Thursdays. My

favorite places to eat here are 626 on Rood, Bin 707 Foodbar, and Bistro Italiano.

Although most of the wineries are farther east in the valley, there are two near Grand Junction I recommend you don't miss. Reeder Mesa Vineyards is situated just south of Grand Junction on Highway 50 in the foothills of the Grand Mesa at an elevation of 5,600 feet. Doug and Kris Vogel have operated the property since 1993 and now have been joined by their son Hank. The winery/tasting room offers a range of wines but don't miss the Riesling, Sangiovese, Zinfandel and Port. Take a glass outside on the deck and enjoy your wine with spectacular views of the Grand Mesa.

In the Redlands area west of Grand Junction near the gateway of the Colorado National Monument, Two Rivers Winery, established in 1999, is a special property. In addition to producing a range of worthy wines, the property includes The Chateau, a popular conference/event center and inn that offers upscale lodging.

If you prefer to enjoy your wine country experience from within wine country itself, check out Palisade (population about 2,700) located a short distance from that eastern mouth of the valley. Named for those nearby cliffs, Palisade was incorporated in 1904, though white settlers arrived over 20 years earlier and Ute Indians inhabited the area long before that. Palisade still considers itself the peach capital of the West but also has embraced the local wine industry. It literally is in the heart of the valley's vineyards and offers easy access to most of the wineries.

A number of B&Bs are available for overnights—good choices include the Bookcliffs Bed & Breakfast, Palisade Wine Valley Inn, and Dreamcatcher Bed & Breakfast. If you want to feel more like you're basking in the Napa Valley, consider staying at the Wine Country Inn, a larger, modern property surrounded by vineyards and wineries.

For meals, Palisade Brewery and Palisade Café are two good options in downtown, while the Wine Country Inn offers fine-dining options. And if you are there on Sunday, check out the Palisade Market, a good source for picnic fare.

Webb adds, "The Grand Valley is a very special place; my husband and I fell in love with it after a trip from Denver in 2008. We loved it so much that we bought a vineyard and winery and now call Palisade home!"

About a mile and a half east of Palisade near the mouth of the valley, Canyon Wind Cellars is a great place to begin a tour of the valley's wineries. Founded in 1996, Canyon Wind is a family-owned, estate winery named for the breezes channeled through the mouth of DeBeque Canyon that moderate the climate of the valley's high-altitude vineyards. The winery and vineyards were a labor of love for geologist and Colorado native Norman Christianson and his wife, Ellen. Now their son, Jay, is now the winemaker and his wife, Jennifer, run the

operation. The winery produces mostly Bordeaux varietals and is notable for the use of sustainable and low-intervention practices.


Return west about a mile past Palisade to Grande River Vineyards, which made its first wine in 1990 and was Colorado's largest grape producer until 2006 when most of the vineyards were sold to local fruit growers to concentrate on making traditional French Bordeaux and Rhone-style wines.

A mile to the south of Grande River is Plum Creek Cellars. Founded in 1980 by (still practicing) attorney Sue Phillips and her late husband Doug, Plum Creek was among the pioneers producing wines exclusively from grapes grown in Colorado, with most of the grapes actually coming from the two vineyards they own. Drink outside the box here and try the Sangiovese, Riesling and dessert wines.

Then head south to cross over the Colorado River and continue west. As you approach mid-valley you will come to Colorado Cellars. Owners Richard and Padte Turley, operate the winery and vineyards, with Padte as the winemaker. Enjoy one of the widest varieties of wines, including Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Grigio, mead, fruit wines, sweet red wines and sparkling wine.

On your way back to your B&B in Palisade, stop by Garfield Estates. Garfield released its first wines in 2002, all of which are produced using only estate-grown grapes. At Garfield, this means the mostly French varietals are grown using sustainable practices in the vineyard. But be sure to try the new, slightly sweet Moscato under the West Slope Wine Company label.

If you are like me and you believe in supporting local farmers and artisan producers, you have been delighted to see the number and quality of such producers improving. Don't stop with supporting Colorado food. Colorado's wine producers also deserve your support.

A trip to the Grand Valley is the best way to introduce you to these dedicated entrepreneurs. As Mitchell says, "There really is no better way to understand and appreciate Colorado wine than to drink the wine at the source." 

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Rich Mauro became interested in wine while working in wine shops during college, where he became fascinated with the magical transformation of grapes into wine. Ever since, he has explored wine as a connection to the earth and culture. He has been writing about wine since 1994. His work has appeared in *Out Front Colorado*, the *Denver Post*, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, *Beverage Analyst*, *GabbyGourmet.com* and his own website, *RMPeoplesPalate.com*. He also was awarded a fellowship to the Symposium for Professional Wine Writers in 2006.



# 16 Wines

## Lauded at Statewide Competition

The only statewide winemaking competition exclusively for Colorado wines, this year's Governor's Cup Wine Competition drew 241 entries from 37 local wineries, and was judged by a panel of sommeliers, winemakers, writers and wine experts from around the country. The judges awarded 16 prizes.

Judges voted to award the 2015 Governor's Cup "Best of Show" to two wines, both made from Syrah grapes. When the sweepstakes tasting was complete, Canyon Wind Cellars' 2013 Anemoi Lips and Turquoise Mesa Winery's 2013 Syrah were tied. The 15 judges preferred to name both wines as Best of Show rather than break the tie with a vote.



Also presented with awards were:

### **2015 Governor's Cup Case (12 top-scoring grape wines)**

Bonacquisti Wine Company (Denver) – 2013 Malbec, American

Bookcliff Vineyards (Boulder) – 2014 Viognier, Grand Valley AVA

Bookcliff Vineyards (Boulder) – 2012 Cabernet Franc Reserve, Grand Valley AVA

Boulder Creek Winery (Boulder) – 2012 Syrah, Colorado

Canyon Wind Cellars/Anemoi (Palisade) – 2013 Lips (Syrah), Grand Valley AVA **BEST IN SHOW (tie)**

Canyon Wind Cellars (Palisade) – 2013 Petit Verdot, Grand Valley AVA

Creekside Cellars (Evergreen) – 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, Grand Valley AVA

Creekside Cellars (Evergreen) – 2012 Petit Verdot, Grand Valley AVA

Guy Drew Vineyards (Cortez) – 2012 Sweet Riesling, Montezuma County

Turquoise Mesa Winery (Broomfield) – 2013 Colorado Crimson (Rhône-style blend), Colorado

Turquoise Mesa Winery (Broomfield) – 2013 Syrah, Colorado **BEST IN SHOW (tie)**

Whitewater Hill Vineyards (Grand Junction) – 2014 Sweetheart Red, Grand Valley AVA


### **Governor's Cup "Niche" Case (top ciders, meads and fruit wines)**

Colorado Cider Company (Denver) – "Grasshop-ah" hopped cider

Redstone Meadery (Boulder) – "Nectar of the Hops" hopped mead

Carlson Vineyards and Winery (Palisade) – Peach

Aspen Peak Cellars (Bailey) – "Mocha Zinsation"

The competition was organized by the Colorado Wine Industry Development Board (CWIDB), part of the Colorado Department of Agriculture. 





# Where To Stay In Colorado Wine Country

## Crawford

### Smith Fork Ranch

970-921-3454; [SmithForkRanch.com](http://SmithForkRanch.com)  
45362 Needle Rock Rd., Crawford 81415  
A secluded, luxurious ranch situated on three miles of the Smith Fork River Valley. Activities include wine tasting as well as private fly fishing, horseback riding, hiking, archery, skeet shooting and mountain biking. The spa offers massages, facials and the "ultimate treat for tired feet." The Farmstead at the ranch offers organic farm-to-table cuisine. Call for reservations or make them through the website.

## Palisade

### Palisade Wine Valley Inn Bed and Breakfast

970-464-1498; [WineValleyInnPalisade.com](http://WineValleyInnPalisade.com)  
588 W. 1st, Palisade 81526  
An intimate, relaxed and fun inn set in the heart of Palisade fruit and wine country. The rooms are decorated with fun and comfort in mind. Adults only and non-smoking. Call for reservations.

### Colorado Wine Country Inn

970-464-5777;  
[ColoradoWineCountryInn.com](http://ColoradoWineCountryInn.com)  
777 Grande River Dr., Palisade 81526  
Package options include Sweet and Simple Romance, Ski and Stay Package, Girl-friends' Getaway and Cruzin' the Vines. They offer a spa, workout room and heated pool. Farm-to-table dining is available at the on-site restaurant, Caroline's. Pets are allowed in designated rooms under certain conditions.

## Grand Junction

### Two Rivers Winery

970-255-1471; [TwoRiversWinery.com](http://TwoRiversWinery.com)  
2087 Broadway, Grand Junction 81507  
The Chateau is a conference/event center and inn offering upscale lodging for business meetings, corporate retreats, reunions, weddings, receptions, parties and more. The outdoor pavilion and grounds are surrounded by the CO National Monument, the Bookcliff Mountain Range and the Grand Mesa. For reservations call or email [reservations@tworiverswinery.com](mailto:reservations@tworiverswinery.com).



### Willow Pond Bed and Breakfast

970-243-4958;

GrandJunctionColoradoBedAndBreakfast.com  
662 26 Rd., Grand Junction 81506

Located on the Western Slope, Willow Pond is a beautiful 1916 farmhouse offering eco-friendly lodging with pastoral views. A full complimentary breakfast is included in your stay. Book online or call for reservations.

### Los Altos Bed and Breakfast

888-774-0982; LosAltosGrandJunction.com  
375 Hill View Dr., Grand Junction 81507

A unique seven-room B&B with spectacular views of the Grand Mesa and the CO National Monument. And with its proximity to downtown Grand Junction guests can also take advantage of visiting the Art Center and the Grand Junction farmers' market. Special packages include a limo tour of the wineries, bike tour of wine country and a spa package. Book online or call for reservations.

### Camping options near Grand Junction

#### Black Canyon of the Gunnison

NPS.gov/blca/planyourvisit/camping.htm

#### Colorado National Monument – Saddlehorn Campground

NPS.gov/colm/planyourvisit/saddlehorn-campground.htm

#### Grand Mesa National Forest Campgrounds

ForestCamping.com/dow/rockymtn/  
gmsa.htm

## Hotchkiss

### Leroux Creek Inn and Vineyard

970-872-4746; LerouxCreekInn.com  
12388 3100 Rd., Hotchkiss 81419

Leroux Creek Inn is a new Southwest-style adobe inn, nestled on the southeastern flank of Grand Mesa in the CO Rocky Mountains and high desert. There are hiking trails on the property and wonderful biking trails from the inn. The site and design encourages renewal of body and spirit complemented by luxurious accommodations and delicious food.

## Montrose

### Montrose Manor Bed and Breakfast


970-240-6960; MontroseManorBAndB.com  
60169 La Salle Rd., Montrose 81403

Montrose Manor is located on the Western Slopes just outside the city limits of Montrose in a quiet country setting with 360° views of the surrounding countryside. Montrose Manor was built in 2006 and is a unique blend of elegance and country. Guests have access to a beautiful dark-wood library with a fireplace, a chess set ready for play, a collection of National Geographic magazines dating back to the 1950s and a variety of other books and magazines. Wine tasting is approximately an hour away, but the views to Grand Junction are well worth the drive. Book online or call for reservations.

## Paonia

### Fresh and Wyld Farmhouse Inn and Garden

970-527-4374; FreshAndWyld.com  
1978 Harding Rd., Paonia 81428

Tucked into a serene corner of Colorado's North Fork Valley—near charming little Paonia and 10 million miles from city life—the restored 1908 farmhouse inn and four-acre estate is a great way to de-stress and decompress while enjoying a rural lifestyle in total comfort. Innkeeper Dava Parr (a renowned Aspen chef) prepares cutting-edge comfort food for breakfast and weekend dinners from fresh, local, organic meats and produce grown right onsite or from one of the many farms in Colorado's most active natural farming region. Activities include wine tours, horseback tours, bike tours, yoga classes, cooking classes and more. Well-behaved pets are allowed, but must be pre-arranged with the innkeeper. To reserve email, call or use the automated system via the website. 

**Note:** Parts of these descriptions were borrowed from the respective websites.

—Compiled by Amelia Alpaugh



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