



I have been an enthusiastic wine drinker since a semester spent in France as a college student.

This sense of appreciation was reinforced by subsequent work and travel throughout Europe, including a number of years spent employed by an Italian company in the Veneto region — home to the carefree,

easy-to-drink Soave, the round and luscious Valpolicella and the dark, intense

Amarone. What made a strong impression on me was the commitment — no, the natural assumption — that one



Christina Holbrook

drank one's local wine.

It was not until a trip to Palisade two years ago that I got my first hint at what seems to me an all-too-well-kept secret: Here in our home state of Colorado, we have our own robust, distinctive and intensely-creative local culture of wine-making.

“People think of Colorado as a ski destination,” says Sue Phillips, owner of the award-winning Plum Creek Winery in Palisade. “But, the fact is, this is a state that has been producing wine since the late 19th Century.”

Then, things hit a bit of a



PHOTOS BY ARMANDO MARTINEZ / COLORADO WINE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

TOP: Visitors to Palisade can't miss majestic Mt. Garfield, which rises up behind the Grand Valley vineyards. **ABOVE:** Jenne Baldwin-Eaton has been winemaker at Plum Creek Winery for over 20 years.

snag in the early 20th century with Prohibition. More recently, however, Phillips said, “Today in the Grand Valley, there are knowledgeable, experienced winemakers who've been making wine for

decades. At Plum Creek, we have the expertise of Jenne Baldwin-Eaton, who has maintained the quality and consistency of our wines for more than 20 years.”

Currently, there are over 125

winemakers in the state.

The Grand Valley, which is a designated American Viticultural area (AVA), has a climate that supports the growth of the vitis vinifera grapes, those with a longstanding history

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a charcuterie board under shady trees in the outside courtyard.

Big-time player Grande River Vineyards is a name many will recognize here in Summit County.

“Our wine is 100-percent grown, produced and bottled from fruit in Palisade — either from our own estate or from neighboring vineyards in Palisade,” states Naomi Smith, owner of Grande River.

Asked why she thought Colorado wines might have gotten a bad rap in the past, she scoffs: “I beg to differ that today wines are better than they used to be — I think many Colorado wines have been good for a long time! In fact, back in 1997,

Grande River Vineyard’s award-winning wines enjoyed by visitors to Palisade’s wine country.

our Meritage Red got higher points than an Opus One in a California wine competition. I think its part snobbery, part lack of education. But, thanks to the ‘locavore’ movement, there’s a greater motivation now to eat fresh, eat local and that is extending to wine.”

Plum Creek’s Phillips noted another reason locals are gravitating towards Colorado wines these days: fewer pesticides and chemicals.

“There are just fewer creepy crawlies on our vines than in damp locations like Oregon and California,”

she said. “The Palisade sun is so intense that most of us winemakers in the Grand Valley use very few pesticides.”

The Colorado Wine Industry Development Board agrees, notes executive director Doug Caskey.

“The low humidity precludes disease and pests that necessitate the extensive use of chemicals required in most of the major wine growing regions,” he said. “Colorado viticulture is about as low impact as anywhere in the world.”

Traditional winemaking

is not all that’s happening in downtown Palisade. Some producers are experimenting with ciders, meads and wines aged in barrels used for spirits. Newcomer Red Fox Cellars offers ciders, and “wines that move freely between tradition and innovation” and are aged in Breckenridge Distillery bourbon barrels. Glenn Foster, whose family founded the California Ravenswood Winery, is both winemaker and falconer — and founder of the company Talon Wine Brands. Talon offers an eclectic mix of traditional

up front.

wines, fruit and botanical wines as well as meads. Through their brand “Meritage of the Rockies” Talon is “the original Colorado Meadery,” states Glenn, “mead popularity seems to be accelerating. It is both new and different — and ancient.”

Favorites for the season: The wine-makers weigh in: Naomi at Grande River suggests “for whites, I’d say our voignier. For red, HAV A Cow, which is a new Bordeaux blend.”

Palisade Festival, a blend of sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and reisling, is a favorite of Phillip’s at Plum Creek. She also observes customers loving the Somers

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