



# Worth the SQUEEZE

A wine renaissance is underway in the state's most breathtaking landscapes and urban settings. Garnering international recognition and critical acclaim, Colorado wines are worthy of a second sip.

by **Simone FM Spinner** | edited by **Stephanie Wilson**

## Explore the Pours

"There has been a paradigm shift in what the consumer is seeking these days. Guests with adventurous palates visit our tasting rooms, ready and willing to be educated on new varieties and production techniques. It's gratifying to watch someone new to the Colorado wine experience have an ah-ha moment. With a smile, they say, 'Wait, this is Colorado wine?!'"

—Ty Wharton, head winemaker  
at Carboy Winery



## This is where the magic happens,”

Tyzok Wharton, who along with Webber and Craig Jones cofounded the Colorado winery brand in 2015 and has since helped put the state's wines on the global map of emerging wine regions to watch. From the start, they've had a mission to bring great Colorado wines to consumers while leaving the pretense at the door.

Inspired by a kitchy Italian winery famed for servicing clients by refilling their wine carboy jugs via filling station pumps, Carboy employs a similar method at its primary flagship location off of Santa Fe Drive. Carboy made a name for itself in Denver with a bar decked with wine taps fueled by kegs. But to leave consumers with the impression that the wine that flowed out of those taps was more than just a gimmick, the Carboy team knew it all comes down to the grapes on the vines.

If you had asked me a decade ago what it would take for Colorado wines to garner such attention from oenophiles around the world, “magic” would have been the gist of my reply. I know wine—I've got a doctorate in the subject. I'm a multi-credentialed sommelier and global wine educator leading courses on three continents. My recent research focuses on the effects of climate change on wine, and I'm in the throws of writing a book that will present the information through a cultural lens. And I'm a Coloradoan, raised here since I was four, which is among the reasons I'm also a judge for the Colorado Governor's Cup winemaking competition. Until very recently, I wasn't too keen on the wines being made in my home state. Sure, they were drinkable, even likable enough. But they weren't very interesting; they didn't excite the palate with an undeniable sense of place. My, how times have changed.

### ELEVATING HIGH-ELEVATION WINES

The proof is in the glass. You don't have to take my word for it, or even the words of venerable publications like *Decanter*, *Wine Spectator*, *Food + Wine*, *Vogue*, and many others, all of which have noted Colorado to be a wine region on the rise. Instead, you can taste for yourself what has all the personalities of the wine world buzzing about the Centennial State with a visit to Carboy.

The Colorado brand operates two Front Range wineries—the flagship campus and primary production facility off Santa Fe Drive in Littleton, and Carboy Winery at Governors' Park in Denver's Capitol Hill neighborhood—as well as the Carboy Winery at Mt. Garfield Estate in

says Kevin Webber as he leads me through Carboy Winery's Littleton crush pad. I'm here for a tasting led by Carboy's head winemaker,



“We are a state where every industry is innovative. Colorado is the Wild West of wine; experimenting with techniques and grapes is key. For this industry to grow, we've got to get more vines in the ground.” —Kevin Webber, CEO of Carboy Winery

Palisade, which entails a 4,000-square-foot production facility and a tasting room with panoramic rooftop patio. (There's also a Carboy location in Breckenridge that focuses on the brand's cider project, Ten Mile Cider Company.) Stop by any one and sip your way through the distinctive wines of Carboy's award-winning portfolio, each one further evidence of the success of Webber and Wharton's mission to produce high-quality wines with Colorado-grown grapes.

Which, given the growing conditions, takes quite a bit of magic indeed.

# Sip Outside the Box

Why have a California Cabernet when you can have a Colorado Marquette or Teroldego instead? Get to know these under-the-radar cultivars under vine in the Grand Valley and West Elk AVAs.

### If you like...

**Merlot** (plummy and velvety)...try Chambourcin (fruity and well-balanced with a full body).

**Sauvignon Blanc** (crisp and dry)...try Grüner Veltliner (zesty, peppery, and dry with green apple flavors).

**Chenin Blanc** (dry and fruity)...try Itasca (light-bodied and dry, with pear and melon notes).

**Riesling** (light, crisp, and sweet)...try La Crescent (aromatic with tropical and citrus flavors).

**Cabernet Franc** (medium body with dark fruity flavors)...try Marquette (complex with dark fruits and peppery spices).

**Syrah** (bold, full-bodied, with black fruits and spice)...try Petite Pearl (full-bodied, balanced acidity and tannins, with notes of black cherry and pepper).

**Zinfandel** (jammy, high alcohol, spicy)...try Verona (medium-bodied, with notes of red and black fruits, and a hint of spice).

**Sangiovese** (medium to full-bodied, with cherry and earthy flavors)...try Teroldego (deeply colored, full-bodied, with blackberry and earthy undertones).

**Gewürztraminer** (aromatic, spicy, and exotic)...try Traminette (a Gewürztraminer hybrid with floral and spice notes).

**Pinot Noir** (light to medium-bodied, fruity, earthy)...try St. Vincent (medium-bodied with ripe red fruit flavors and a spicy finish).

**Sémillon** (dry to sweet, honeyed)...try Vidal Blanc (fruity and crisp, often used in sweet wines).

**Muscat** (aromatic and sweet)...try Vignoles (sweet, with tropical and citrus flavors).

**Malbec** (fruity, herbal, cocoa, berries, and cherries)...try Maréchal Foch (lush and herbal, with hints of cocoa and dark berries; can range from dry to off-dry).



# SIP, NIBBLE, REPEAT: A Curated Guide to Colorado Wine and Charcuterie

Explore the harmony of Colorado's wines with a bounty of local and international flavors. For dry whites, try Ashley cheese and pickled veggies. Off-dry whites shine with strawberries and peach jam. Reds meet their match with bold meats and Gorgonzola. The best part? There are no rules. Mix, match, sip, and savor.

**Wine type** White (Dry): Grüner

Veltliner, Itasca

**Ideal Pairing** MouCo Ashley cheese, pickled shallots, pickled carrots, grapes

**Wine type** White (Off-dry): La Crescent, Vignoles, Aromella

**Ideal Pairing** Beehive Promontory cheese, strawberries, peach jam, candied pecans

**Wine type** Rosé: St. Vincent

**Ideal Pairing** Diablo Salami, Gorgonzola Dolce, grapes, strawberries

**Wine type** Red (Light to Medium): Chambourcin, Verona, Marquette

**Ideal Pairing** Lemongrass salami, Beehive Promontory cheese, strawberries, edible flowers

**Wine type** Red (Full Body): Teroldego, Petite Pearl

**Ideal Pairing** Coppa, Diablo Salami, Gorgonzola Dolce, chorizo salami

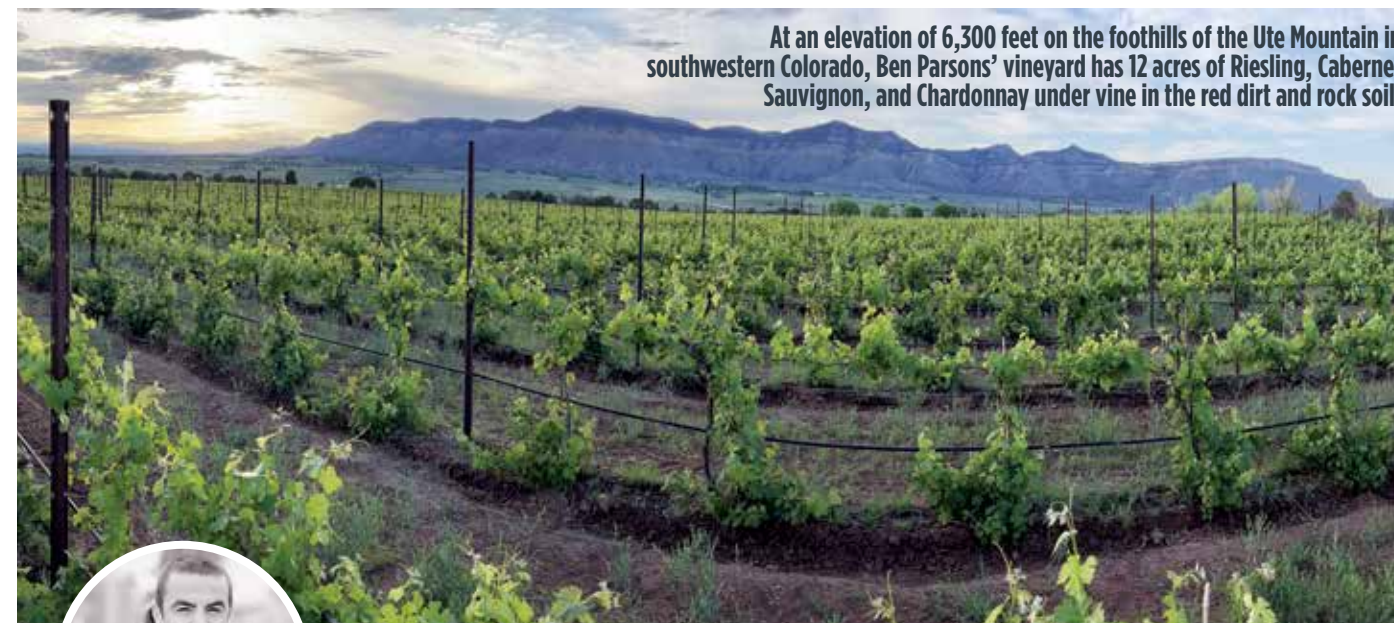
**Wine type** Fruit Forward: Traminette, Vidal Blanc

**Ideal Pairing** Strawberries, peach jam, MouCo Ashley cheese, candied pecans

So good you could taste it. Il Porcellino. Salumi specializes in hand-crafted house-made artisanal charcuterie boards like this one. The delicatessen and butcher shop in Denver's Berkeley neighborhood is the spot for hand-crafted salami, fresh butcher cuts, hand-cranked sausages, artisanal cheeses, and other such things to elevate your high-elevation wine tasting experience to an artform.



**IL PORCELLINO SALUMI**  
4324 W. 41st Ave.  
ilporcellinodenver.com



At an elevation of 6,300 feet on the foothills of the Ute Mountain in southwestern Colorado, Ben Parsons' vineyard has 12 acres of Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chardonnay under vine in the red dirt and rock soil.



## The Change Maker

Ben Parsons sauntered into the wine shop I was manning in 2006 toting a bag of surprisingly delectable Colorado-grown wines produced in Cortez. He deftly wove his story with that of the wines as he poured sip after surprising sip. Between his absolute confidence in his wines and his nonchalant approach, he landed more than a few fans. A

daring visionary in Colorado's winemaking world, Parsons pioneered the urban winery movement in 2008, opening The Infinite Monkey Theorem, where he skyrocketed to international fame for his disruptive foray into canned wines. After a decade at the helm, Parsons uprooted his family, for the pastoral vineyard-scapes of Palisade. He converted the

United Fruit Growers Co-op peach packing warehouse into a rustic, feel-good winery and tasting room. Named after a pub in Parsons' native England, The Ordinary Fellow Winery opened in 2021. Here, ordinary is a good thing, Parsons says. "Ordinary offers everyone a chance to experience fantastic wines and decide for themselves if they are extraordinary."

Webber and Wharton are quick to remind us that great wines are born in the vineyard. While Carboy sources some of its grapes from its vineyards in the acclaimed Horse Heaven Hills AVA in Washington, Carboy owns and operates two Colorado vineyards with 30 acres under vine near Palisade on the Western Slope in the Grand Valley AVA—one of Colorado's two federally designated American Viticultural Areas. (West Elks AVA, home to the highest-elevation vineyards in the Northern Hemisphere, is the other.) Palisade is a thriving agricultural region, best known for its prized and plump eponymous peaches.

A single bite of one of those peaches was all it took for Wharton to recognize there's something magical about the fertile region. "In 2016, upon experiencing my first Palisade peach," Wharton says, "it was evident that there was something special about the Grand Valley. There is a lively acidity in the fruit, one that envelops the senses."

In wine, we call that special something terroir, a French term that refers to a blend of elements such as soil, climate, sunlight, and the prevailing winemaking culture that collectively lend distinctive character to wine grapes. In the expansive Grand Valley AVA—stretching over 75,990 acres along the Colorado River and nestled at the foot of the Colorado National Monument—the terroir is sculpted by a symbiosis of geological and atmospheric factors. Elevations here fluctuate between a little over 4,000 to 4,500 feet, with the valley's vineyards cradled between the green oasis at Palisade and the lush terrains of East Orchard Mesa and Orchard Mesa. The fruits born from the sun-drenched, low-humidity locale peppered with cool, breezy nights give birth to wines of distinct personality, charming in their complexity, with vibrant flavors, appreciable acidity, and a touch of sweetness born from the short, intense growing season.

The great wine regions of the world are noted for their terroir-driven wine styles, and the reason behind the ongoing elevation of Colorado wines is thanks to modern winemakers embracing our climate and geography while taking risks on grape varieties best suited to our truncated growing season. And, as the team at Carboy has discovered, the best grapes for Colorado are not the grapes that consumers know best.

## TEROLDEGO IS THE NEW CAB

As the adage goes, necessity is the mother of invention. This seems to be particularly true when considering the wine industry in Colorado, a pioneering state rethinking and remaking traditional wine production to stay in stride with the capricious dance of climate change. Among the grapevines of the Western Slope, winemakers aren't just fighting against environmental uncertainty; they're harnessing it to deliver unexpected and unique wines.

The genesis of this rebellion traces back to the Western Slope's fertile soil, where traditional European grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay first took root. Yet, as Colorado's climate has grown increasingly unpredictable, traditional grape varieties have faced challenges taking (or keeping) root. To adapt, local vineyards are increasingly turning to cold-hardy and hybrid cultivars. These grapes are the result of careful genetic manipulation, combining European grape characteristics with those of native North American species. The aim? To foster a new generation of cultivars that can

BOX BAR VINEYARD PHOTOGRAPHY, BEN PARSONS



# A CUT ABOVE: Hand-Selected Cheeses for Wine Lovers

To bring out the best in Colorado wines, pair them with these artisanal cheeses from So Damn Gouda that are as unique and diverse as the state’s vineyards.

**Ashbrook**  
A clean, fresh semi-soft cheese with hints of oyster mushrooms and clotted cream finds its match in floral wines like Pinot Gris, Viognier, Riesling, or a St. Vincent rosé.


**Paški Sir**  
A semi-salty, sharp sensation from sheep’s milk. Its vivid acidity enhances the flavors of a dry rosé.

**Roquefort**  
Creamy yet tangy, with a spicy bite and earthy notes. Pairs robustly with rich Port, Madeira, Sherry, and tête de cuvée sparkling rosé and brut wines.

**Pur Brebis Du Val d’Oc**  
Creamy, subtly tangy, with floral and nutty whispers. Pairs with sturdy reds and whites like Pinot Noir, Tempranillo, Chambourcin or lively Pét Nat and Basque-style ciders.

**Payoyo**  
Its floral-herbal profile and briny edge enhance the zesty notes in wines like Riesling, St. Laurent, and Pinot Noir.

**Wyfe of Bath**  
Dances delightfully with Teroldego or Cabernet Franc. Perfect harmony with the Cabernet family’s distinct pyrazine tones.

 **SO DAMN GOUDA** | 2432 W. 44th. Ave. | 303.455.2221 | [sodamngouda.com](http://sodamngouda.com)

withstand Colorado’s occasional frosty events, while also capitalizing on its warm periods to ripen without losing their acidic touch.

Winegrowers, including Carboy, are progressively turning to lesser-known vinifera grapes from the world’s wine region. “I find myself working with grape varieties that I never knew existed,” says Wharton. “There has been a tremendous learning curve. Although it is an arid climate, the sporadic frost events are the motivation to seek out grape cultivars that can withstand colder environments.”

Teroldego is one of those *Vitis vinifera* cultivars, and growers are finding it is quite well-suited for the Colorado environment. Teroldego is akin to an inky purple wave that has splashed the Colorado vineyards and become a testament to the resilience of local growers. This hearty grape varietal, mostly native to Northern Italy’s mountainous terrains, has found an adoptive home in the state’s fertile soil and challenging weather conditions. Seizing the crown from classic “noble grapes” like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay, Teroldego is demonstrating that the rule book of wine is constantly evolving. Rich, full-bodied, and infused with alpine-fresh characteristics, this red wine variety has a distinct personality that has won over even the toughest wine critics. Carboy’s Teroldego has earned “Best in Show” at the Governor’s Cup for two years running.

The introduction of these robust grapes has been an unexpected boon for Colorado’s wine industry. The flavors and complexities they bring to the table are rivaling the best of the classic wine grapes, and their ability to withstand the rigors of Colorado’s weather puts the future of local winemaking on more stable ground.

A wine grape that can bear the scorching heat of summer and the biting cold of winter is the Holy Grail in the unrelenting quest for Colorado’s signature wine. It’s no wonder why more and more growers are diversifying their vineyards with these hardy hybrids. Hybrid grapes currently constitute approximately 19% of Colorado’s wine grape acreage—a number that towers over the global average of less than 5%. The secret lies in Colorado’s unique climate, a challenging mélange of extremes that hybrids appear to relish. This intriguing paradox of our terrain not only enhances the grapes’ ripeness but also preserves their acid levels, offering a complexity that rivals even the most high-profile varieties.

These days, with 170 wineries and 1,000 acres planted to grape vines, the Colorado wine scene is booming with experimental creativity and adventure. A new generation of winegrowers and enologists, with fresh insights into technology, hybrid grape varieties, and Colorado’s challenging terroir, are elevating Colorado wines into ones worthy of attention and praise.

“It’s invigorating and inspiring to be part of a wine-growing community with such an exploratory Wild West spirit,” says Wharton. “The continuous uptick in the quality of Colorado wine is testament to the tireless efforts of the growers and producers who partake in the collective ethos of wanting to create and share the best that this state has to offer.”

But the appeal extends beyond the wines’ flavor profiles, reaching a new generation of wine drinkers. “There has been a paradigm shift in what the consumer is seeking these days,” says Wharton. “Guests with adventurous palates visit our tasting rooms ready and willing to be educated on new varieties and cutting-edge production techniques. It’s a gratifying feeling to witness someone new to Colorado wine experience an ah-ha moment. With a smile, they say, ‘Wait, this is Colorado wine?!’ We strive to create those moments.”

The fusion of Colorado’s wilderness with the industry’s exploratory spirit is a potent catalyst for innovation. Weather, that unpredictable foe, has become an unlikely muse, inspiring new strategies and techniques to navigate frost and heatwaves. Winemakers are mastering different harvest times, yeast varieties, fermentation methods, and aging techniques to bring out the best in these cold-hardy hybrids and obscure varietals thriving in our state.

“We are a state where every industry is innovative,” says Webber. “Colorado is the Wild West of wine; experimenting with techniques and grapes is key. For this industry to grow, we’ve got to get more vines in the ground.”

By doing so, they’re not merely creating wine; they’re capturing the essence of Colorado in each bottle. The audacity to try unconventional grapes underscores Colorado’s modern crop of winegrowers and makers’ willingness to break boundaries. It’s a gamble, but Webber puts it like this: “Whatever you do, the juice has to be worth the squeeze.” **OLM**

## Urban Wineries

Denver’s home to some great spots where you can sip, sample, and nibble your way through the bounty of Colorado’s agricultural regions where the green and red grapes grow.

**Deep Roots Winery**  
Family-owned, Deep Roots makes its wine on location using grapes sourced in Colorado and beyond. Visit the new location for a flight and a few small plates designed to align with the wine menu.  
**2875 Blake St. | [deeprootswines.com](http://deeprootswines.com)**

**Attimo Wine**  
In an 8,000-square-foot winery, tasting room, and event space in LoDo, Attimo imports pressed wine-grape juice from its properties in Piedmont, Italy, then ages, nurtures, and bottles it into a dozen different varieties.  
**2246 Larimer St. | [attimowine.com](http://attimowine.com)**

**Bigsby’s Folly Craft Winery**  
The RiNo winery sources great juice and wines from across the globe for its wine offerings. Stop by to taste and tour, or try mixing, bottling, and labeling your own blends.  
**3563 Wazee St. | [bigsbysfolly.com](http://bigsbysfolly.com)**

**The Infinite Monkey Theorem**  
Under new, women-led ownership, TIMT boasts a low-key and inclusive vibe. With a pared-down offering, TIMT serves bottled, kegged, and canned wines in its industrial-chic winery and taproom and for takeaway.  
**3200 Larimer St. | [theinfinitemonkeytheorem.com](http://theinfinitemonkeytheorem.com)**

**Bonacquisti Wine Company**  
Devoted to everyday drinkers with an Italian soul, Bonacquisti is a perennial favorite. This family-owned winery in a funky warehouse space creates small-production award-winning wines from Colorado-grown and international grapes.  
**4640 N. Pecos St. | [bonacquistiwine.com](http://bonacquistiwine.com)**

**Blanchard Family Wines**  
Blanchard Family Wines, based in Sonoma, California, hosts a wine bar and tasting room in Denver’s Dairy Block. Taste a selection of wines from Sonoma and Colorado.  
**1855 Blake St. | [bfwcolorado.com](http://bfwcolorado.com)**

**Creekside Cellars**  
Since 1996, Creekside Cellars has been crafting exceptional wines in downtown Evergreen. Stop by the picturesque creek-side restaurant and winery to sample a flight of 100% Colorado-grown wines while taking in the fresh mountain air.  
**28036 CO-74, Evergreen | [creeksidecellars.com](http://creeksidecellars.com)**

**Spero Winery**  
With a nod to its Italian roots, the family-owned boutique brand crafts award-winning wines from Colorado and California-grown fruit.  
**3316 W. 64th Ave. | [sperowinery.biz](http://sperowinery.biz)**