

Front Range Wineries Don't Take Back Seat

By Tom Crosby Posted: May 7, 2007, WRAL.com/Travel

Julie Balistreri knows Denver's main attractions are the majestic mountains that surround the western city and lure 5 million people annually to the 850 [ski slopes](#) within a four-hour drive.

With [Denver](#) International Airport currently the fourth busiest in the nation, Julie hopes some Denver arrivals will begin adding an extra day to their mountain vacation to explore a burgeoning local industry -- the Front Range wineries.

Using Colorado grapes to sate the nation's increasing thirst for new, unique wines, the number of wineries statewide has doubled to 60 in the past five years.

Spending an afternoon visiting wineries in and around Denver is a testament to the resilience of wine entrepreneurs and the quality of Colorado grapes. Two sections of the state are viticulture classified, meeting strict standards relating to sunshine, soil, temperature and rainfall.

On a sunny Saturday in spring, even a first-time Denver visitor can sample different wines, aging and bottling techniques with unique marketing tie-ins at five wineries diversely located on a former truck farm, in an historic small downtown, a residential neighborhood, a college town and an industrial park.

Except for the Balistreri winery, which grows some grapes down the road from its wine-tasting facility, all of the wineries use Colorado grapes grown in the viticulture areas.

"Our Front Range wineries provide a wide sampling of Colorado wines," said Balisteri, who suggested a one-day, five-winery Denver tour.

Any winery can provide maps of all 14 Front Range wineries within an hour of Denver:

- Balistreri Vineyards comes first, located at 1946 E. 66th Ave., and in operation since 2000. Handcrafted wines are individually produced in barrel lots with annual production of about 3,000 cases. Sometimes released "young," wines age well, with each bottle hand-dipped in wax to provide extra sealant. Fermentation is all natural with no sulfites added.
- Spero Winery, which produces about 1,500 cases a year, is found at 3316 W. 64th St. in a residential neighborhood previously zoned agricultural. *Vino e Buono* is the trade name. Locally grown cherries, however, are hand-cranked to make a fruit wine tasty enough to serve separately, over ice cream or to just sip for its natural taste. Ask about "cherry-pie-in-a-bottle."
- Old Town Winery is located at 7505 Grandview Ave. in Arvada, a historic farm town. A walk around town sets the stage for a sampling visit to this micro-winery, which makes about 800 cases a year. Depending upon the time of year, you can actually watch them bottle the wine.
- Bookcliff Vineyards combines its retail space with the Belgian Chocolate Shop, 1468 Pearl St. in Boulder, the home of the University of Colorado. It pairs wine samples with chocolates for a unique experience. The 2002 Merlot, for example, is paired with a dark chocolate hazelnut heart. It's fun to experiment, although not for those on a diet.
- Boulder Creek Winery is also in Boulder at 6440 Odell Place, an industrial park located off Diagonal Highway. Take a self-guided tour and talk to the owners, Jackie and Mike Thompson. Says Jackie in describing which wines they choose to make: "You make the wines you like to drink yourself." The 2004 Zinfandel Port will redefine what you want in a port wine.