ZONE 4 DINES AT CLAUDIA’S MESA
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The Wine Country Inn (WCI) definitely lives up to its name. Like a good wine, it’s the perfect blend, combining the comforts of an old-fashioned Victorian inn with the contemporary amenities of a first-class hotel, all conveniently located in the center of Colorado fruit and wine country. “We want guests to feel welcomed and relaxed, like they’re in our home,” says Jean Tally, who along with her husband, Richard, own the 80-room inn located in Palisade, Colorado, a small agricultural community on the Western Slope.

The rugged Grand Mesa towers over this pristine inn tucked in the middle of 20 acres of grapevines. Rose bushes dot the well-manicured grounds, reminding you of an earlier time when country gardens flourished. And white rockers and comfy wicker chairs line the front porch and back patio that overlooks the swimming pool. Inside, restored historical photos depicting 19th century life in Colorado’s Grand Valley hang in the guest rooms and hallways. Plus, you’ll find amenities like a small gift shop, business center, and fitness room. Guests expect that today, but they don’t expect to see photos of their relatives hanging in their room. “We had one guest who recognized his great grandparents in one of the old photos,” says Joe Scanlon, WCI general manager. “He was amazed.”

COMBINING THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS

The Tallys built an inn that reflects their childhood memories of Texas, as much as the best of the places they loved visiting California’s wine country and the wine regions of France and Italy. “Growing up, we always had a garden and I grew tomatoes and had flowers that were mine. Roses were my favorite,” says Jean, a 73-year-old retired business writer. Richard, also 73, is a retired medical equipment sales executive who grew up on a family farm and would come to Colorado to escape the heat of the Texas summer. “I’ve always had a love for the land,” he says.

Every morning guests enjoy a robust complimentary breakfast buffet and every afternoon a crowd gathers in the lobby to sample wines from local vineyards as well as the WCI’s own Ten Acre varietal wines. In the evening the Tapestry Lounge offers tapas and light dining in a casual atmosphere, and if you prefer more formal, fine dining, Caroline’s Restaurant recently opened. There you’ll find favorite Colorado dishes like rainbow trout, lamb, and beef as well as a range of recipes prepared with locally grown produce, such as the signature dessert, Peach Bread Pudding. “Our preparation is classical,” says daughter Anne Tally, who is learning the hospitality business from her parents. “It’s sort of Alice Waters meets Paul Bocuse, with the freshest products we can buy. Then we marry the food with local wines. Whenever we can, we support our local farmers.”

Besides sourcing food locally, they recycle paper products, use solar panels to generate electricity, have heat and cool sensors in guest rooms, and use hotel key cards made from sustainable wood instead of plastic. The Tallys didn’t want to build a vanity hotel; they wanted it to be profitable and earth-friendly. “We do what we can. We want to be responsible,” Jean says.

Both Jean and Richard came from big families where entertaining was a way of life. The tradition continues at the WCI. On Mother’s Day and Christmas the inn hosts a Victorian high tea, complete with homemade scones served to the soothing sounds of a harpist. And in the summer and fall live music fills the air as the sun sets and guests enjoy the local artists who perform in the courtyard on weekends.

Facing page: Surrounded by 20 acres of grapevines, the Wine Country Inn, complements the local Victorian farmhouse architecture in Palisade. A Denver architect designed the inn to honor the local history of this small, agricultural community.

Above: Richard and Jean Tally, owners of the Wine Country Inn, built Colorado’s first wine-themed hotel in 2008 and modeled it after wine resorts in California and Europe. The wraparound porches lined with rockers invite guests to sit back, rock, and relax.

Overnighting in the Vineyard

At the Wine Country Inn in Palisade, the goal is to make you feel at home

Janet Henderson Schoniger | Text & Photographs
A VISION REAPS A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

The vision for the Inn emerged 15 years ago when the Tallys were living in Vail. Palisade vintner and owner of Grande River Vineyards, Stephen Smith, approached the Tallys about the idea of building an inn and developing Palisade into a popular destination that would bolster the Colorado fruit and wine industry. After extensive research and travel to well-known wine resorts, the Tallys felt ready to combine their experience in the hospitality industry with the romance of the wine business. In 2006 they purchased land from Grande River Vineyards and began construction. In 2008 WCI opened its doors.

Today WCI hosts weddings, family reunions and corporate events, as well as welcomes guests who are among the thousands of visitors who attend Palisade’s September Colorado Mountain Winefest. In fact, there are more than 20 wineries within minutes of WCI, and three within easy walking distance.

Grande River Winery, located adjacent to the Wine Country Inn, press the grapes and bottles wine for the Inn’s own label. Palisade is home to more than 20 wineries and hosts the annual Colorado Mountain Winefest on September 20-22, 2013.

A STOMPING GOOD TIME IN PALISADE

With the Colorado River as the perfect backdrop, more than 5,000 people will gather at Riverbend Park in Palisade, Colorado, to sample the state’s eclectic wines on September 21, 2013. For the 22nd year, the Colorado Mountain Winefest, organized by the Colorado Association for Viticulture and Enology (CAVE), will provide a full schedule of seminars, demonstrations, live entertainment, winery tours, chocolate-and-wine tasting, VIP events and...
Beyond fall grape harvest there are bountiful summer harvests like the August Peach Festival and the July Lavender Festival.

About 85 people work at WCI during high season, according to Joe, who has been with WCI for three years. He adds that they’re always looking for ways to improve the guest experience. For instance, they’re exploring the idea of offering cooking classes as part of their winter room package.

Jean chimes in. When describing what it takes to ensure a memorable guest experience, she references an expression they use in eastern Texas and Louisiana. She says it’s about giving your guests a “lagniappe” (pronounced LAN-yap; a small gift given a customer).

“We want to provide that little something extra,” Jeans says. It’s all part of the Tally family’s philosophy of making you feel at home.


The inn’s complimentary breakfast buffet, which includes such items as herb-and-cheese scrambled eggs, cinnamon French toast, fruit strudels and enchiladas, is popular with guests.

Left: It’s only fitting that the inn’s signature dessert is Palisade Peach Bread Pudding. Topped with local peaches, warm caramel, prosecco-peach schnapps glaze and ice cream, it’s a year-round favorite. It’s available at WCI’s Tapestry Lounge and Caroline’s restaurant.

Right: Diners love the Inn’s Colorado-raised rack of lamb, served with sage butter and glazed julienne carrots, and wild and black rice. Caroline’s restaurant offers fine dining choices in the classic French tradition, ranging from trout almandine and beef tenderloin to vichyssoise and crème brûlée.

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