

COURTESY FENCELINE CIDER



MANCOS, COLORADO

WHERE ART MEETS AGRICULTURE

Words by Katherine Peach | Photos courtesy of Steve Fassbinder, Mancos Creative District

Plenty of time outdoors feeds a certain type of creativity. Mancos offers this type of creative inspiration by the pound thanks to its unique intersection of growers, makers, ranchers and outdoor recreation opportunities. This small community, previously overshadowed by larger neighbors, is worth a weekend stay for anyone looking to explore arts, adventure and a growing food scene in the Southwest.

FRIDAY: MANCO'S CIDER TRADITION

The first stop is Fenceline Cider's riverside taproom. The family-friendly gathering space is fostering a sense of community with live music, food trucks, an outdoor patio and drinks over a board game. Stimulating the Southwest's forgotten apple industry, Fenceline founders

Sam Perry and Neil Wight use heirloom varieties dating back 100 years. The name is a nod to the region's many wild apple trees growing as a result of birds dropping seeds while sitting on fence lines.

"Southwest Colorado is unique because we have varieties no one is working with," says Sam Perry, Fenceline co-founder. "We have varieties that have been propagated by the birds. They are essentially mutts."

Reviving this forgotten economic driver, the founders convinced local ranchers to sell apples from trees forgotten and unused on their property. Now selling nationwide, visitors will find 10 rotating ciders and wine on tap. Don't miss the Pollinator, a rose-inspired cider, ideal for sipping on a warm day, and Fenceline's signature Seedling, a modern American cider.

Sourcing from nearby growers speaks to the town's larger heritage of perseverance and determination.

"Mancos is the type of place and type of people who believe it can be done," says Sara Syverson, a local artist and producer.

Syverson shares how Mancos benefits from collaboration between farmers and artists as a result of a "can-do" attitude within the community. Whether sourcing unused apples or finding land for outdoor theatrical installations, such as her one-time production of the *Purple Fox Conundrum* last fall, putting creative ideas into action can be as simple as thinking outside the box about the wealth of natural resources found in the area.

A mover and connector, Syverson calls the intersection of agriculture and arts a gift to Mancos. There is still a space here for art. Check out local art and events at the taproom, such as the *Raven Narratives*, a Moth-style event presenting live true stories at the taproom.

SATURDAY: WALK THROUGH HISTORY

The Mancos Creative District spans several downtown blocks of galleries, businesses and several buildings from the late 1800s to 1900s. Historic walking tour maps are available at the kiosk on the corner of Main and Grand Avenues or from the Chamber of Commerce. The maps direct visitors to 18 locations, including the restored Bauer House built by the town founder in 1890.

Head to the former *Mancos Times-Tribune* building on Grand Avenue, now the *Mancos Common Press*. The restored letterpress design and print studio doubles as a museum, with equipment and newspaper archives dating back almost 140 years. Printing workshops are also taught onsite by a local artist through the nonprofit Mancos School of the West.

Downtown is also host to several artists cooperatives: Artisans of Mancos, Raven House Gallery and The Painted Turtle Studio, a community center featuring art for sale and a studio where visitors of all ages can make ceramic artworks. For authentic western items,



Kilgore American Indian Art houses a collection of rare Native American rugs, pottery and jewelry. Visitors can easily spend the day visiting boutiques, so fuel up at Absolute Bakery & Café on Main Street.

After risking being condemned, Mancos Opera House was rehabilitated as a theatre and arts hub by efforts spearheaded by residents Philip and Linda Walters. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the ground floor served as a drug store and butcher shop, while the second floor of the opera house provided a place for cultural pursuits, including the first motion-picture theater in the county and a ballroom.



MANCOS COLORADO AT THE INTERSECTION OF ART & ADVENTURE

Discover Mancos! Nestled between the majestic La Plata Mountains and the grandeur of Mesa Verde, we are home to a myriad of cowboys, craftsmen, artists, musicians, brewers, chefs, farmers, makers, ranchers, adventurers, and more. Don't miss our historic downtown featuring random cattle drives, our Historic Opera House and Mancos Common Press, and many late-1800s buildings.





Mancos 101

- Mancos is about a 4-hour drive south of Grand Junction, and is located between Dolores and Durango.
- **LODGING** Willowtail Springs visitors can enjoy private lakeside cabins, including the Bungalow, with space for up to four people. Opening for the season in May, Echo Basin offers rustic A-frames, larger cabins and an RV park on its forested grounds. Each are located six miles from downtown Mancos.
- **BREAKFAST + LUNCH** Operating as a family-owned business since 2007, Absolute Bakery & Café sources local ingredients and bakes bread in-house for lunch and breakfast. Grab take-away at Fahrenheit Coffee Roasters and Zuma Natural Foods — sandwiches, soup and natural grocer options.
- **DINNER** Visitors will find elevated dining and art at Olio, featuring a weekly menu based on local available ingredients and a new local artist on the walls every other month. Mancos Brewing Company has rotating craft beers brewed onsite and a small menu using ingredients sourced from local farmers. Ideal for a nightcap, the Columbine Bar is a down-home bar on Grand Avenue, established in 1910.
- **EXTEND YOUR STAY** Nearby archeological sites and world-class bike trails attract outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs alike to the region. Plan ahead for your visit to Mesa Verde National Park, as certain sites are accessible only through ranger-guided tours, including the Cliff Palace, which opens for the season April 12.

The historic building is scheduled to open to the public for the presentation of “The Blacksmith,” a comedic opera composed in 1762. Speaking to the region, the May 2 and 3 performances integrate folk songs and audience participation. Even without seeing an opera, it’s worth a look inside the place where two ranchers took a leap of faith in 1910 to build a community space in a small western town.

SUNDAY: SEEK OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

For the final day, choose your own adventure (depending on the weather) in the desert. While night skiing at the mom-and-pop Hesperus Ski Area closes in early March, sister mountain, Purgatory Resort, near Durango, allows for daytime skiing from its 11,000-foot summit through mid-April.

Alternatively, starting in late April, decent snowpack and warm temperatures equal opportunities for a scenic float down the Dolores River, one of the longest-flowing river canyons in the country. Local outfitters can provide gear and guidance. For the self-led option, use one of the ultra-light inflatable Alpaka Rafts handcrafted and sold in downtown Mancos. The brand also released the two-person Oryx, a packraft canoe ideal for McPhee Reservoir’s flatwater. +