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Wine Time

Blend your own in Boulder

 By [Jason Sheehan](#)

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This has been a good year for Colorado's oenophiles. First, **Wine Experience Cafe** (reviewed this week) brought the pleasures of both the bottle and the table to those neglected souls living in the south suburbs. Before it opened, I'd talked to owner **Eldon Larson**, who told me that one of the big reasons behind the venture was that people doing the extreme-commuter shuffle had no place to go if they wanted a decent bottle, a decent plate and an environment that didn't offer balloons, chicken wings or some kind of godawful "theme" experience along with dinner. He knew for a fact that a lot of folks living out in the 'burbs were spending their green at downtown wine shops or staying late in the city for dinner rather than doing the same close to home — and in that, he saw an opportunity.

And while there's never really been any shortage of grape juice up in Boulder, the **Blending Cellar**, which opened June 7, gives the

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Republic's serious winos a unique place to gather. Located at 946 Pearl Street, the Cellar allows people with a DIY spirit who've never been happy with the kind of bottles they can buy in stores to make their own. Yup. You read right: The Cellar offers "a winery-like environment for experiencing high-end Napa Valley varietals," which can then be combined and blended into custom bottles. "Many people are not aware that the vast majority of Cabernet Sauvignons are blended using three to five Bordeaux varietals," explains **Jeff McEachern**, owner of the Sonoma-based Blending Cellar business. "Our focus is to allow people to make their own blend or to simply stop in to experience a glass of Chardonnay or Cabernet."

The Cellar offers blending sessions at \$15 a pop, with customers able to buy their own custom-blended bottles afterward for \$25 each, minimum of three. It will do wine flights for tasters, sells blending kits and offers seminars for the completely clueless, like yours truly, at \$30 per person. **Brian Graham** is on staff as the company winemaker, and he knows a thing or two about the grape, having been trained in Bordeaux and sourcing the grapes himself from a variety of Napa's best vineyards.

And this fall, Boulder will get another worthy addition: **Larkburger**, a fast-casual offshoot of Vail's **Larkspur Restaurant**. The first Larkburger opened in Edwards in December 2006; the second outpost will be at 2525 Arapahoe in Boulder. "October, that's the sunny-day scenario," partner **Adam Baker** told me when I got him on the blower last week. That's provided they get all their permits and the construction finished, and that once word gets out, the spot isn't immediately stormed by a mob of

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• Blue Bonnet

angry vegetarians crying about the plight of cows.

Larkburger got its start in the dining room of Larkspur, where the burger commands about a third of the lunch business each day. "Just about everyone loves a good burger," Baker explained, and Larkspur has a great one. That's because owner **Thomas Salamunovich** resisted all entreaties to fancy up the burger, refusing to add frizzled onions or stuff the thing with foie. "Everyone was trying to make a hamburger that was a fine-dining item," Baker said. "And he wasn't going to do it." Instead, "He said, 'Let's open a hamburger restaurant,' so we did."

The Larkburger in Edwards quickly made a name for itself by holding fast to the guiding principle of the place, which is to do one thing right all the time rather than doing a lot of things pretty well most of the time. The menu is simple: plain burger, turkey burger, truffle burger, portabella burger. The menu also lists one salad, a milkshake, a choice of fries or soy beans — and that's pretty much it. And while an argument could be made that a burger with truffle aioli ain't exactly simple or plain, Baker defended that option: "Truffle is just *good*, you know?"

Things went so well in Edwards that the three partners (Baker, Salamunovich and his wife, **Nancy Sweeney**) turned their eyes to Boulder. It made sense, since the Larkburger menu is filled with Boulder buzzwords: all-natural, sustainable, compostable. The meat is Coleman Natural, the buns all-natural. The cups for the fountain drinks are made from corn, the cutlery used in the dining room from potatoes. Bury the restaurant in mud for a month and it would probably completely disappear, biodegraded straight back to nature. "We want to give people a cheap burger, a milkshake and some fries, if that's what they want," Baker told me. Or a turkey burger wrapped in lettuce and some soy beans. Or a truffle burger and truffled fries. "But I think what we offer will resonate in Boulder."

And I think he's probably right.

Bye-bye, Brix: Looks like **Brix**, Cherry Creek's most infamous anti-bistro, will soon hit the bricks. How do I

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know? I just got an invite from **Charlie Master** — who five years ago opened the place at 3000 East Third Avenue, staggering distance from his dad's model bistro, **Mel's**, and then later extricated himself from the partnership — to a farewell shindig on Friday, June 23, at buddy **Jesse Morreale's Tambien**, at 250 Steele Street.

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