

*WanderFood Wednesday: Boise Will Be Boise*

by Lauren Van Mullem

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As I walk in [A Tavola Gourmet Marketplace](#), a European-inspired bistro 5 minutes from the city center, it feels like I'm in Santa Monica, California. With its French cheeses, Italian gourmet rosemary crackers, and gluten-free toast, it could fool anyone into thinking they were in a trendy city on either coast, though there are just enough Idaho craft beers and fresh baked bread from Boise's [Le Cafe de Paris](#) bakery to remind me, gently, of where I really am.

I'm here to meet with a print and radio reporter who has lived in both California and New York, and spent a year reporting on Idaho's food scene. As he finishes his "rustic" sandwich on focaccia with a lightly vinaigretted side salad, I tell him about all the great restaurants I've tried in Boise, and how impressed I am with the [spirit of collaboration](#) I've observed among the larger and smaller businesses. He's less impressed, pointing out that you can't find a menu without sliders and some variation on mac n' cheese. He's tired of reporting on sliders – they get old, he says.



Boise

The reporter's right. There have been sliders on nearly every menu (as well as a memorable "Stinky Rainbow" slider served off a bright pink food truck featuring a giant unicorn). Red meat is everywhere in this red state, as are sweet potato fries and bacon. Comfort food is the order of the day, though you can also find kobe beef tacos (at [Bardenay](#), with killer craft cocktails made from their own gin and vodka) and mind-blowing Banh Mi with house-made pickled carrots and onions (at [10 Barrel Brewing](#), where they cure their own pancetta and bacon in back). I can see why displaced coastal residents gravitate to places like A Tavola, but for me, when I come to Idaho, I don't want to have the same gastronomic experience I could find in California.

Bring on the sliders. And where's my darn potato?

Boise's culinary scene isn't backwards – it's Boisean. And it's an exciting time to go explore it. The craft beer industry is exploding, prompting the creation of the "[Boise Ale Trail](#)" through places like the Ram Restaurant & Brewery, Payette Brewing, 10 Barrel Brewing, Crooked Fence, Sockeye and Table Rock (to name a few). And, Idaho's wine industry is quickly finding its feet. Although the fields along the Snake River AVA still bristle with corn stalks, rather than hills staked solid with vines, it's only a matter of time before Idaho's wine region mirrors those of Washington, Oregon and California. Hopefully, when Idaho wines – and their winemakers – mature, they'll keep the sense of experimentation they have now. For me, that's what defines them.



Koenig Winery and Distillery has award-winning cabernet sauvignons, chardonnays and viogniers, and a pear brandy that tastes like biting into a crisp fruit. Bitner Vineyards, down the road, serves sweet reds and dry whites out of their tasting room that overlooks a bucolic valley of green, gold and brown furrowed fields. Sure, Idaho wineries don't have it all figured out – I tasted a riesling that smelled and tasted exactly like wet paint from a new winery that shall remain nameless – but I also bought two bottles of viognier from Cinder (at 44th Street Wineries) and had them shipped back home. I've never had a viognier I've liked so much.



As for food – where do I even start? Maybe with the [peach and vanilla jam](#) I won't let my husband touch (I'm NOT sharing), found at the Boise Farmer's Market. Or, perhaps, with my new friend Bob Bushnell who leads small culinary tours out of his historic home, beginning with choosing ingredients at the farmer's market in the morning, and ending with an elegant home-cooked dinner at the Regan House – one of the most outstanding experiences I've had anywhere (including Rome and Tokyo). Don't make the mistake of wishing Boise were more like San Francisco, or Seattle, or Portland. Boise is Boise, and I think that's for the best.