

Restaurant Review

Latest Update—Spring 2011

This review is a long overdue update from our previous one. Each restaurant has a notation of **New**—first time visit to either established or new restaurant, spring 2011

Update—repeat visit

Unchanged—review is same from prior visit several years ago. Didn't visit but haven't heard anything new from friends, family or locals.

Unrated—Haven't been there, but may have heard something from friends or locals.

Since our first visit to Crested Butte, we have always been amazed at how well one can dine in such a small town, enjoying the lack of national chains and delighting in even having some big city gourmet fare at less than big city prices. We'd like to share a little of our knowledge of CB dining with you. (Unless otherwise noted, all are in Crested Butte proper, not Mt. CB at mountain.) There is a restaurant menu booklet published and if the copies we've left in our units are not found, then try to pick up a copy at Chamber office or one of the stands with brochures and the CB News. The CB news also publishes a restaurant guide periodically and a listing weekly. And most if not all have websites. Suggest also reading reviews online from the several sites that carry reviews. Google the name of restaurant and pick a site or two.

This review is intended for the use of the Akers guests at our Treasury Point townhomes and Black Bear Lodge condo as well as visitors to our website. As with most folks, we tend during our short visits to go back to the tried and true so there are some restaurants that we don't get to too often and a few not at all. We will so indicate. Our views, of course, are strictly subjective but having eaten out in CB since 1992, we have a pretty good idea of what you might enjoy. For those of you who have been to CB before, you can compare your evaluation with ours, and maybe find a few spots you haven't been to. For those coming to CB for the first time, this review might help you select the places to try in the few days and nights you have available. In either case, we hope you find it useful. After your visit, we'd appreciate any feedback, esp. if your findings vary from ours.

Summary

Our favorites: Avalanche, Le Bosquet, Marchitelli's Gourmet Noodle, Slogar, Ryce

Can't Go Wrong:

Gourmet—East Side Bistro, Soupcon

Western/American: Maxwell's, West End, Wooden Nickel

Pizza: Avalanche, Secret Stash

Seafood: Lil's

Breakfast: Avalanche, McGills, Paradise Café

Lunch: Avalanche, McGills, Pitas in Paradise, Teocalli Tamale

Note: Some higher end restaurants also open for lunch. Rated for dinner only.

Specialty: django's, Ginger Café

Unrated but popular: Lobar

Eating adventure-worth a try?: Sherpa Cafe

An opening comment— it's still a good idea to make reservations as the popular places do fill up. We'll start with the three gourmet/continental restaurants which couldn't be more different—one small with a small menu changing weekly, one seasonal cuisine, one long standing menu tried and true. You should try to hit at least one so you get a feel of what CB has to offer at the high end, whether for a splurge or last nite in town grand finale. All three have excellent wine selection. None especially kid friendly, unless your kids are well behaved and you don't mind spending a bit more than chicken fingers. Bosquet may have a kids menu. Dress can be casual at any and all restaurants including these—jeans included.

Soupcon—Unchanged: in a small house (worthy of Hansel and Gretel) in an alley just off of the far end of Elk Ave. (main street). Unlike any setting you're likely to have seen or will see. Only a few tables, with seatings at 6 and 8PM. A small list of entrees 6-8, likewise desserts are written on a blackboard and change every week. Very, very good. Desserts sometimes awesome. Probably the priciest of the three but no one ever says they didn't get his/her money's worth. When we have friends visiting, we usually go here for our grand finale. Highly recommended. Summer '06: Ad in CB news says under new ownership. Format, menu presumably the same. Update: August 2006 visit—format of limited menu still the same, still pricey and still good with new dishes by new owner Chef Jason. Felt portions a bit too small, and appetizers a bit pricey too. Had no salad on the menu and all appetizers \$10 and over and all entrees \$30 and over. Suggested to Jason that he needed a few less expensive items on menu so that one could escape for less than \$50, and he has presumably taken our suggestions to heart.

Le Bosquet—Update:in shopping center near supermarket. Owners/chef Victor and wife Candy after 27 years or more have put the restaurant up for sale. But with no buyers to date, they continue to servethe same delicious favorites on a menu that has changed very little over the years. Try the hazelnut chicken, the duck breast in berry sauce or any of the others. This is one of those placeswhere you can't go wrong on anything you order. Consistency, above all. Daily specials often interesting. Their Hungarian mushroom soup might be best soup we've ever had! (When we took a large group once we asked to have it that night, and when we had to change the date they graciously moved the soup to the new date too!) Recently, has been added to menu permanently. House salad dressing, sesame based, is so good we used the recipe at our daughter's wedding a few years back. Quiet, subdued ambiance. Highly recommended. Two visits in Spring 07—still consistent. They've added a small plate menu—interesting and tasty items. A few of these and a salad and you have a meal. And still the same in Spring 2011. A best bet. Recommended.

East Side Bistro—New Next to Alpineer at the 4-Way Stop at the beginning of Elk Ave, ESB occupies space that has gone through several resurrections (Buffalo Grille, Harry's Fine Dining). Small, with a few tables with nice décor and quiet atmosphere, ESB replaces the now out of business Timberline as the third gourmet restaurant. A small menu but very interesting and creative, changes seasonally. (Best check website) Our group ordered only the two daily specials during our visit and both were excellent (chicken mole and rack of lamb). Was the priciest meal of our Spring 2011 visit but also the best. Tied with Soupcon in price category. Bosquet a bit less. Recommended.

9380 Prime (in Elevation hotel)—Unrated: the hotel for several years was a Club Med, different hotels before. Bought by Florida developer and some rooms being run as hotel by CBMR (resort owner) while others being turned into condos. CBMR running restaurant as of winter '06/07 but not visited yet. 2011—CBMR has made a high end steak house out of the hotel restaurant. Haven't visited. The outdoor patio popular during ski season for lunch when weather permits.

Marchitelli's Gourmet Noodle—Update:New owners of a few years ago Michael and Jennifer turned a mediocre Italian restaurant into a good one. One of the places we almost always go to when we only have a week in town. Kid friendly. Lively atmosphere. Spring 07—big group was well satisfied. Crawfish and mussel appetizers both popular. Spring 2011—still same excellent food. Probably the most popular restaurant and reservations highly recommended. Recommended.

Bacchanale—Unchanged: another Italian with solid fare. Don't get there too often for no particular reason so can't evaluate fairly.

Brick Oven Pizzeria—Unchanged: another Italian, obviously pizza oriented. Large outdoor patio popular in summer. Indoor décor rather retro. Almost no experience here and summer visit poor due to surly waitress, but that's no criterion. Suggest Secret Stash or Avalanche for pizza, see below. Kid friendly. New location but no return visit since 2007.

The Secret Stash—Unchanged: at the end of Elk Ave. Very popular pizza place. Funky, fun décor. Seating on chairs, pillows, floor etc. Delicious, exotic pizza creations as well as the usual. Very kid friendly, but suggest going early or carry out with small kids as wait for table and wait for food can be lengthy. Many carry out orders compete with oven space for dine in orders. But after a few drinks you won't notice—or care! Very popular. Recommended.

Avalanche—at the mountain. Update: Mentioned here because it also has great pizza, but great all around fare—salads, burgers, chicken pot pie (our favorite if you like cpp). Great place for lunch but busy. All you can eat specials at dinner during the week (ribs one day, forget which). Great for carry out on the day you arrive or any nite when the gang is too pooped or just can't get motivated/together to go out. Very kid friendly. Update: same menu, same as always, good as always. Breakfasts, lunch and dinner (daily specials, sometimes all you can eat.) Recommended.

Maxwell's Steakhouse—New—A couple from out of town about two years ago took over the restaurant/microbrewery occupied for a long time by originators of Idlespur and then after it closed for a short time by unsuccessful Calypso. It's been a big success ever since. The expected fare of steaks, chops, chicken, burgers with seasonal dishes and appetizers. Kid friendly. Western décor. Very good reviews on several websites. And our meal was excellent. Recommended.

Donita's Cantina—Unchanged. Tex-Mex cuisine, good and large portions, reasonably priced. Very popular and can be a wait as they don't take reservations. Very kid friendly. Haven't visited in a long time.

Wooden Nickel—Update :next door to Maxwells. Old time Western bar décor. Similar kind of steaks, chicken menu to former Idlespur. Some say best burger in town. Long established and very popular and very kid friendly. Hamburger, buffalo burger and trout (unusually big, thick and delicious) recommended. Usually visit at least once each trip. Recommended.

Slogar—a must stop. Unchanged. Old bordello décor. Family style skillet (not deep) fried chicken dinner. Very popular and reservations recommended. Really delicious meal—almost an all you can eat—and everyone leaves having overeaten (you will too-guaranteed). And at \$16 plus or minus for adults (kids less), probably the best value west (or even east) of the Mississippi. Very kid friendly. (A nephew of ours claims it's the best meal he's ever had. That might be a bit of an overstatement but it is good. Occasionally we'll get a take out order to bring back to family the nite before we depart but it's not quite the same as having it live and in living color at the restaurant.) They do have a steak option but no one ever takes it—at least we've never seen anyone do so. Spring 07—new owners, thankfully same fare. Recommended.

The Last Steep—Unchanged--not much experience here. (formerly home of Bacchanale now across the street). Standard and lighter fare, good the few times we have tried. Modest décor. Kid friendly. Reasonably priced. A favorite of locals we know when they don't want too fancy or too expensive. Some love it. Some don't. We're neutral.

Lil's Land and Sea— Unchanged: We've been there since September 2007 fire had put the restaurant out of business for the entire winter season but not in our 2011 visit. A solid choice for seafood. We usually stop once each trip when we tire of big and/or fancy meals. Getting generally good reviews from online sites. Our one hesitation which may have changed by now was that the fresh catch selection is usually only 4-5 items, usually salmon, rainbow trout and one or two others. Spring '06 update: good, homemade sushi. Spring 07—new owners. Improved menu, We're not sushi eaters but two sushi chefs observed working busily as it seemed majority of diners were ordering same. Must be good.

Paradise Café—Unchanged: breakfast and lunch. If you want to eat breakfast out one day, this is a top choice. Try the buckwheat pancakes with everything—nuts, berries, the works. But busy and crowded with not a lot of tables. Patio in summer is a delight. Closes between breakfast and lunch.

Pitas in Paradise—Unchanged: unbelievably good wraps. Very popular and busy. If you're in town for lunch or taking a day off from the slopes, a can't miss choice. Big take-out business so wait can be a bit long if you don't hit it right. But worth the wait. Update: moved to new location next door to old one. Patio dining in summer both front and back. Nicer indoor dining area. Still very busy and very good. Spring update—had a good thing going, moved to new quarters next door to old, and they blew it. Two visits—waited forever for food. Same good food, but with only one person in the kitchen and expanded capacity, long wait ruins the experience. Update: **2011** Haven't visited but ad in CB News says new ownership, new items. Suspect they may have solved the wait problem. If wraps remain as good as before, then still a hit.

Woodstone Grille—Unchanged:--in the Grand Lodge (formerly Sheraton)at the mountain—haven't visited in several years but was solid all-American menu. Suspect it's still a good choice. Nice atmosphere in the evening. Hotel guests use for lunch and breakfast. Spoke with local realtor who said food, menu good. Spring 07 update—went with large group. Food just fair. 2011—haven't been since 2007. Too long to give current evaluation, rating.

Butte 66—Unchanged: 2007--on the second floor of the Treasury Bldg. at base of mountain. Bought out by the resort a year ago, who just bought the building as well which according to local paper says they plan to re-do and upgrade bldg. Restaurant has had several names and owners and checkered past. Service and food spotty last winter season. Great deck for sitting out on sunny days but service on deck was poor. 2011—CBMR has made improvements in menu and service. Solid, typical mountain lunch and dinner fare. Next best alternative for lunch if Avalanche is too crowded.

Princess Wine Bar—Unrated--no experience but always seems busy for appetizers, sushi, drinks, desserts and drinks, whenever we happen by. Also open for breakfast. Quiet relaxing atmosphere, live music on occasion. Not kid friendly.

Ginger Café—Update: limited experience but very good asian cuisine, some on the spicy side. Very small, hard to get tables. Also carry out. Not space nor cuisine that kids would likely enjoy. Spring '06 update—return visit. very good, but again space limited and food spicy. 2011—has since moved to larger space but have not visited.

Lobar—Unrated: formerly Black Whale, in basement of Company Store building. Sushi restaurant opened by wife of couple that started Secret Stash, during 05-06 season. Have not attended but heard favorable comments. Apparently dancing, entertainment at times. Understand sushi flown in daily, not made on premises, but that doesn't seem to deter. 2011--As above, we're not sushi fans and have never visited. However friends said you have to try the "crack" fries—french fries so good you become addicted to them. A variety of non-sushi items on the menu.

Sunshine Deli—Unrated: ad in June CB News announcing new spot at 214 Elk Ave. Says open for breakfast and lunch, outdoor patio, 8a.m.-4p.m. Have not been in CB since this place has opened. Update: former Pitas employees opened this spot in old Pitas building, next to new Pitas. Good looking breakfast and lunch menu, although we didn't get a chance to try. Nice to have another alternative for breakfast and lunch. Patio dining out back, summer. 2011—one website said it has been sold. Believe it's still operating.

McGill's—Update: new spot summer '06. Denver woman Mary McGill bought property as investment, then decided to open her own restaurant. Instant hit for breakfast and lunch. Had great breakfasts, lunch menu looked good. Larger capacity than other places and doesn't close

between breakfast and lunch. Think they will take away business from Paradise Café. No outdoor dining. With open kitchen and no ceiling fans was a bit stuffy in summer, but hardly a drawback. Recommended. 2011—several visits. Great breakfast and lunch food.

The Ice Bar—Unrated; mid mountain restaurant with just what it says—an outdoor bar made of ice. The resort turned the small adjacent snack bar into a small gourmet restaurant for lunch. Very popular and reservations usually a must. Hear good reports, but not being ones for wining and bigger meal dining mid-day we haven't tried. Winter 2011—still there and popular.

The Old Croatian—New: Good news/bad news. A family took over the un occupied restaurant in the Forest Queen hotel in Winter 2011 and we enjoyed several of the Old World dishes. Some great desserts. But we heard it didn't last. Then heard from family member that new operators took over in Summer 2011 but on visiting said food wasn't very good. Too bad. The first crew deserved a better break. Can't blame it strictly on unusual fare as other restaurants are a bit far out too. The Bakery, another Winter 2011 startup, didn't make it until summer either.

West End—New: Owned by same owners of East Side Bistro at other end of Elk Ave. Eclectic menu of moderately priced items. Our group sampled many items and was satisfied with all. Occupies attractive space formerly occupied by Timberline (a former favorite that went downhill and eventually closed.) Recommended.

Ryce Asian Bistro—New: Terrific Asian cuisine from several countries. Have visited several times since it opened and each time excellent. Big birthday group ordered a wide variety of dishes and all were very good. After several other mediocre at best Chinese restaurants have come and gone, this one was a big surprise and a big hit. Popular and reservations usually necessary. Garage doors which make up back wall open in Summer for dining riverside. Recommended.

Sherpa Café—New: an interesting cultural experience, as waiter—the son of owner who was sitting at the bar reading the newspaper—whose English was just passable had a difficult time explaining the menu items. With some luck and help of locals seated at next table (who said this was their favorite place) we ordered one of the breads (naan) which was delicious and two entrees (can't remember which), one very good, the other so so. Would like to return to sample the many other dishes on the menu. Hope it survives until we return. Occupies space vacated after Ginger Café moved to larger quarters. Recommended for the adventuresome.

django's—New: on the mountain in Mountaineer Square. Beautiful décor. Features excellent small plates menu. Not too kid conducive. Recommended.

Teocalli Tamale—New: Been around forever but we made our first visit in Spring 2011. Small place with limited seating or take-out. A varied selection of tacos and burritos, or design your own from list of very fresh ingredients. Very popular with locals and with Pita's and McGills comprise the top 3 lunch spots in town.

Tequila's—Unrated: a new Mexican restaurant taking over space occupied for many years by Powerhouse (also Mexican—more upscale than Donita's) and then for a short time (mercifully) by the poor Cowboy BBQ. Didn't visit but passed by a couple of times. Menu looked good but don't know if it will develop a following.

Gas Café—Unrated—Gas station as you leave CB and head up the mountain has a small café serving breakfast and lunch. Friends tell us it serves the best hamburger and fries in town. Who knew? Haven't visited yet.

Marchitelli's Firehouse Grill—Unrated—in the Plaza Condominium building. Space has seen many operators come and go. Marchitelli's having a go at it. Haven't visited. As good as their Gourmet Noodle is in town, we hear the opposite about this effort. Not good. Might be ok for a carryout pizza but can't comment further.

Camp4Coffee—Unrated. We don't drink coffee. Those who do swear this is some of the best. Several locations—CB, Mt. CB, and on mountain (winter). Pastries, hot chocolate also.

Not rated/reviewed—Would you believe there are some places we never get to, including: Izzy's, Eldo, Karolina's Kitchen, Dogwood Cocktail Cabin, Rubens New Mexican Cuisine (CB south). You're on your own!
(An attempt at **Karolina's Kitchen** for breakfast a few years ago proved to be a zero—dark, and smokey, even in non-smoking section suffering from adjacent bar—caused us to walk out. Almost no other customers present. Unless they've done something to change it, avoid.)

Gunnison—Restaurants and Groceries—Unchanged from prior edition 2007

The Trough—had a late pickup at the airport and heard about and tried this large restaurant about 3 miles west of Gunnison on route 50 (keep going—when you think you've probably passed it is where you'll find it). Was quite a pleasant surprise. Nice décor, several dining rooms and excellent seafood and steak menu at reasonable prices. We had fish entrees but steak and prime ribs at adjacent tables looked quite good. Good place to try if you're in Gunnison late afternoon or evening. Would rate it equal to all the CB spots except the 3 gourmet restaurants which are in a different category. 2011—no repeat visits. Not sure if prior review still viable.

Also in Gunnison, on route 135 a couple of miles north toward CB, is **Garlic Mike's**—a popular Italian restaurant. Only visit several years ago, we found good food, but owner gave us a bit of a hassle about seating as we showed up with no reservations. The **Firebrand Café** and other spots in town and one near the City Market, **Palisades**, are decent lunch spots.

Shopping note: If you're driving up from Gunnison, you may want to stop at **City Market** next to the Wal-Mart (smallest in the US) where you'll find much bigger selection and better prices than at the small market in CB. City Market owned by Kroger, so if you have a Kroger frequent shopper card you can use it there.

Bon appetit!

The Akers Family
jakers@bright.net