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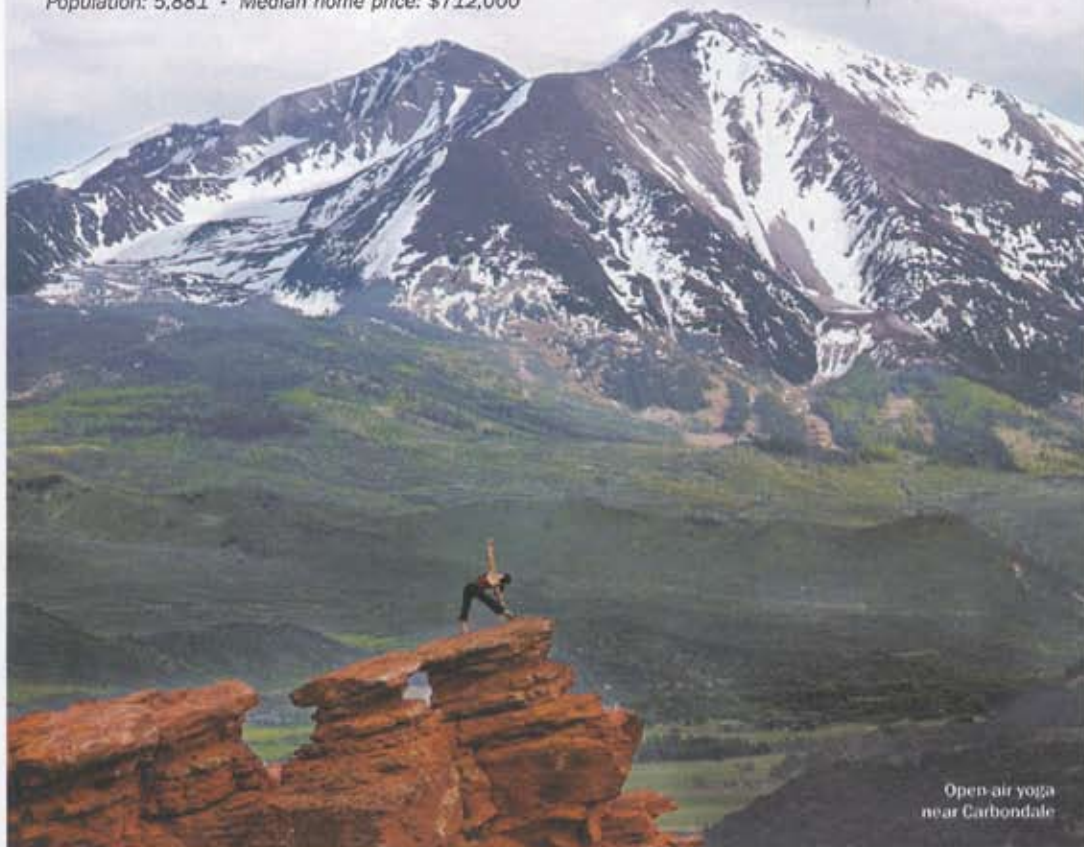
A Power Player Breaks Out

Carbondale **COLORADO**

Carbondale's urban expats take their city's name as a literal eco-challenge. In the morning, commuters line the bike paths on their way to a growing pack of local environmental companies, like Solar Energy International, Greenspot, and Inpower Systems, and the new rec center and police and fire departments are all solar powered. • The occasional cattle drive still passes down Main Street, but it's clear that the town's ranching days are long gone. While still partly in the shadow of Aspen, 30 miles up the road, it's forging its own identity as a self-sustained base for Patagonia-clad Ph.D.'s happy to stay close to home in the White River National Forest—all beneath the 12,000-foot twin peaks of Mount Sopris.

• For the full perspective on Carbondale, mountain bike or hike up Red Hill to Mushroom Rock, a precipice with views of downtown and the Roaring Fork Valley. On the water, the Colorado Rocky Mountain School has been organizing the Crystal River Kayak Races every spring for the past 44 years, giving weekend warriors the rare chance to race against the handful of world-class whitewater paddlers who live in the area. More serious foam surges on the nearby Roaring Fork, which is now connected to Carbondale by the Rio Grande paved bike path—yet another carbon-free option to do the locals proud.

Population: 5,881 • Median home price: \$712,000



Open-air yoga
near Carbondale

THE GREEN ADDRESS

Colorado Springs

COLORADO

Apparently Pike National Forest—a million-acre spread of sky-piercing peaks and mythic fly-fishing waters—wasn't enough green space for Colorado Springers. So in 1997 the city created a conservation program that has preserved 5,575 more acres. The newest tract is rugged Red Rock Canyon—already a local climbing favorite. Population: 384,876
Median home price: \$259,629

Hailey IDAHO

Hailey is only a 14-mile drive (or kick-and-glide on the Wood River XC Trails) to Sun Valley, but there's nothing Gucci or Prada about this Mayberry town in the two-million-acre Sawtooth National Forest. Locals volunteer at the 395-foot ski hill—serviced by a rope tow and platter lift—and opt to work out on the area's vast Nordic trail network instead of in the posh health clubs up the road. Population: 7,751
Median home price: \$757,000

Prescott ARIZONA

Folks have flocked to Prescott recently (the population has grown 27.3 percent since 2000), but the city is working to protect what drew everyone here in the first place: access to the pine-capped mountains, granite cliffs, and alpine lakes around town. Population: 43,217
Median home price: \$226,000

Reno NEVADA

Reno and Tahoe are making a serious joint bid for the 2018 Olympics, but the smaller sister city has enough chops to merit consideration in its own right. Parked next to the aspen-fringed Mount Rose Wilderness, Reno has a wealth of hospitality jobs, a refurbished downtown, and a new \$1.5 million whitewater park—all reasons enough to stick around. Population: 259,856
Median home price: \$316,900

WEEKEND RETREAT

Pagosa Springs

COLORADO

Deep within the 2.5-million-acre San Juan National Forest, this Rockies outpost shares much of the same terrain as Durango, 45 minutes east—with fewer crowds. So chances are good you'll find room in the new Pagosa Hut and Trail System, a 36-mile network of back-country paths. Bonus: Pagosa averages 300 sunny days a year. Population: 1,684
Median home price: \$346,800

Red Lodge MONTANA

Set beside Yellowstone National Park in the wooded Beartooth Mountain foothills, Red Lodge is the toned-down Jackson alternative—complete with a smaller (and less intimidating) ski resort on its 9,416-foot signature peak. The town's epic 71-mile Peaks to Prairie triathlon every April shows outsiders what they're missing. Population: 2,455
Median home price: \$290,760

Best for: CYCLISTS

Tucson ARIZONA

Thanks to an aggressive transportation program, this Sonoran Desert oasis is quickly becoming the Amsterdam of Arizona, with more than 500 miles of pedal-pusher routes linking 128 city parks. Meanwhile, the Coronado National Forest on the edge of town encompasses 9,100-foot Mount Lemmon: a ski destination in winter (with more than ten feet of snow annually) and a rock climbing, biking, and mountain biking magnet in summer.

Population: 547,546 • Median home price: \$201,000