

# Rolling Stone

(9.4.18) - <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/dierks-bentleys-seven-peaks-festival-10-best-things-we-saw-718750/>

## Dierks Bentley's Seven Peaks Festival: 10 Best Things We Saw

From sets by Miranda Lambert and the festival host to the stunning scenery of Buena Vista, Colorado



Labor Day weekend's inaugural Seven Peaks Festival was all about the details. "Attention to details — that's everything," **Dierks Bentley**, the festival's headliner and de facto presenting artist said Saturday afternoon while lounging in "Dudeville," the backstage area for he and his band. "The devil's in the details — isn't that what they say? As a fan, you go to something like this and you notice things."

Bentley was on "detail detail" all weekend, as anyone who peeked at his Instagram could tell — he joined Clint Black and Brothers Osborne onstage, helped out with the Cadillac Three's guitar setup, and even accompanied showgoers when the festival gates opened on Friday morning. "Everyone just walked in with us very calmly," Bentley recalled. (He was on the move then, too: He spoke to *Rolling Stone Country* shortly before he hit the festival's daily Somewhere on a Beach Party, a makeshift shore set up in the campgrounds and presided over by his DJ Aydamn.) "It was so surreal to have a thousand people behind me, just walking together. And they notice the way the path leads over this bridge — it's pretty narrow, then it opens up, and then you see the Whiskey Row Stage, and the craft beers and the concessions, and the signage." Three signs welcomed revelers to the grounds, placed in a way so they framed the mountains looming behind the festival site. "It can't just be a big open space, 'cause then it just feels lost," he said. "It has a nice flow to it."

“Flow” was a big theme of the weekend, from the bodies of water surrounding the festival to the easy-breezy vibe to the mix of acts, which included harmonizers Dan + Shay, upstart Lucie Silvas and bluegrass titan Sam Bush. “Being a first-time festival, there’s a lot of trust that comes into play for the artists that you’re asking,” he said. “There’s no history. ... So I go to my friends. I’m like, ‘Hey, trust me. I need you to take a chance on me.’ You start with your friends, whose music you love, and whose energy you like being around, and then it kind of branches out from there. Sam Bush and Del McCoury are my top two bluegrass guys, so we have them involved. It was a no-brainer for me.”

The festival wound up being a no-brainer for attendees, too, with its smooth three-day run being full of jaw-dropping natural sights, Instagram-worthy backdrops, football-watching at booths that echoed sports bars — and, of course, music. Here’s the 10 best things we saw.



### **Best Cool Cucumber: Miranda Lambert**

Lambert’s brisk, sometimes-deliciously-snarky headlining set on Saturday night was a master class in no-nonsense hitmaking, with her detail-rich songs opening up thanks to her band’s willingness to get weird (spaced-out guitars that gave “Vice” extra uneasiness) and get big (the double-guitar solo that lit up “Highway Vagabond”). “My goal is to make you feel somethin’ before you leave,” she proclaimed after a raucous “Mama’s Broken Heart”; following that up with her description of why she wrote the aching “Tin Man” (“I had a real shitty year in 2015,” she said after her band had departed). It was her way of threading that particular needle for all but the most, well, heartless types.



### Best Throwback: Clint Black

Friday's main-stage lineup was a salute to two decades ago, with David Lee Murphy, Terri Clark, Sawyer Brown, and Clint Black taking the stage. "That's a big part of what I love," Bentley told *Rolling Stone Country* on Saturday. "On [Bentley's bus] Goldie, we've listened to so much Nineties country music, it's crazy." The "Where Are You Now" hitmaker saluted classic country ideals through the prism of the Nineties and invited Bentley onstage to cover some Merle Haggard songs, a moment that made the weekend's host proclaim Friday to be "the best day of my life." "I'm just a huge Clint Black fan," Bentley said the next day. "He was one of the people that really turned me on to country music, and now I'm onstage singing a song with him — not one, but four [songs] — at our festival. It was a very surreal moment."



### Best Daredevil Experience: Lanco's White-Water Rafting

The views from the campground during the day were breathtaking enough, but for those who wanted to explore more deeply, Seven Peaks set up group excursions to take in the area's outdoor-sport offerings, including ziplining and kayaking. On Sunday morning, before the music kicked back into action, we went white-water rafting down a stretch of the Arkansas River with rowdy romantics Lanco (who delivered a bombastic set at the festival), trying to not wipe out while marveling at the giant rocks, huge expanses of sky, and Hooded Mergansers — ducks with small peaks that look like Mohawks. (Very punk rock.)



### Best View: Every View

Buena Vista is a charming, shop-and-bar-filled town on the Arkansas River that pronounces the “u” in its name’s first word in the long way. (Think “Byoo-na Vista.”) Located southwest of Denver and right in the Rockies, its official elevation is 7,950 feet. That seems high, until you realize that the town is surrounded by what locals call “14ers” — peaks that break the 14,000-foot mark. “I love the mountains,” said Bentley when asked about deciding on a locale for the festival. “It’s my place — over the beach or over anything. For me, [finding a venue] was a matter of finding a place that actually felt like mountains.” The towering structures provided a dramatic backdrop for the twisty creeks, pockets of wildflowers and soaring trees closer to Earth



### Best Guitar God: John Osborne

Brothers Osbornes’ Saturday-night set was punchy and fun, with Bentley joining them for their *The Mountain* collab “Burning Man” (the first time they’d done the song with the Osbornes’ backing band). But John Osborne’s fluid, arpeggio-filled guitar playing stood out: It seemed made for the mountains, with his gorgeously winsome “Hey Jude” filling the air and his interplay with the mandolin on “Stay a Longer” cresting to a careening finish. “He’s the most underrated guitar player out there!” one security guard near the front would say excitably to anyone nearby. Not for long.



### Best Fashion Statement: Lucie Silvas

Lucie Silvas' kicky opening set on Saturday was highlighted by "Black Jeans," a sorta-hesitant, sorta-sassy kiss-off to a lazy lover that is a standout of her superb new album *E.G.O.* Its potent chorus made every lyric-appropriate outfit of the weekend — of which there were many, since the forecast had temperatures ranging from near-80s in the daytime to low 50s at night — summon its hook in this writer's brain.



### Best Hair: Hot Country Knights

After Black's set, Hot Country Knights — the Bentley-fronted Nineties-country tribute band that blends winking music-biz comedy with commanding performances of John Michael Montgomery's "Rope the Moon," Brooks & Dunn's "Boot Scootin' Boogie," and other old-school smashes — took the stage, their magnificently period-appropriate wigs, eye-popping outfits and synchronized moves adding some self-referential humor to boisterous and well-executed homages, including a raucous finale of Bentley's own "What Was I Thinkin'." "We have a rehearsal-to-gig ratio of, like, 30-to-1," said Bentley (whose pitch-perfect outfit Friday was topped by a hat emblazoned with the old logo for the now-defunct the Nashville Network). "We've learned from watching some other bands that play covers, that the music has to be perfect. They'll listen to the record and be like, 'In that session it sounds like he was playing it more of just a regular A.' They really dig in exactly. ... We really put in a lot of time and make sure the music's totally right. It's a lot of rehearsals — and then it's just a lot of jackass-ing the rest of the time."



### Best Badass: Elle King

Festivals can be a tough place to debut new music, but that didn't stop whiskey-voiced belter Elle King from devoting the bulk of her Sunday-night set to new music that amps up the acid quotient of her 2015 smash "Ex's and Oh's" while also adding a straight-talking vulnerability that gave emotional heft to standouts like the rebellious "Baby Outlaw" and the defiantly conflicted set closer "Little Bit of Lovin'" ("I don't need nobody / I don't need no one / But I still got a little bit of lovin left in me"). Her charisma and the songs' catchiness made the set delectable, and the possibility of new music from her tantalizing.



### Best Piece of Nashville In the Mountains: Whiskey Row

A makeshift version of Whiskey Row, Bentley's gastropub chain, slung drinks (including cocktails made with spirits from the local Deerhammer Distilling Company) and offered up a more intimate atmosphere for newer and local acts. The rock-club feel was most evident on Sunday night, when power-trio leader Cody Canada's exit from the stage inspired the crowded-toward-the-front audience to break out in "one more song" chants. Canada, who also jammed on some Haggard with Bentley, came back with unfinished business: "I want to play a Pearl Jam song," he drawled, and his encore eventually landed on "Not For You," a gnomic, riff-heavy 1994 track from the grunge titans. His feedback-heavy soloing was dynamic and commanding, causing the crowd to lunge forward en masse and hang around long after he and his band had cleared the stage.



### **Best Jam: Dierks Bentley with Travelin' McCourys, Elle King and Trombone Shorty**

Bentley was all over Seven Peaks, posing for selfies, guesting with his pals, and, of course, leading Hot Country Knights on Friday night and his own festival-closing set on Sunday. While temperatures were dipping into the low 50s as he took the stage for the weekend's finale, Bentley was fired up, turning "I Hold On" into a spirited rallying cry and sprinting down the catwalk and back during the guitar solo of "Free and Easy (Down the Road I Go)." Midway through his set he invited Elle King out for "Different for Girls," showcasing their tender chemistry; New Orleans jazz hero Trombone Shorty dropped by to add his superlative lung power (no oxygen bar for him) to "Mardi Gras"; and then the Del McCoury Band joined all for a feisty cover of Johnny Cash and June Carter's "Jackson." King — having filled in for June Carter Cash beautifully — left, but the collaborations weren't done. Promising "a version of this song that's never been done before," Bentley, Shorty, and the McCoury Band remade Bentley's "Up on the Ridge," with Shorty tossing off a solo that made Bentley drop his jaw. The night's final cover was another stunner: Avicii and Aloe Blacc's EDM-country smash "Wake Me Up," with Ronnie McCoury on mandolin and lead vocal. While the arrangement was reworked for the McCoury Band's traditional instruments, the structure of the song mostly remained intact — a testament to how well the original was crafted. Bentley bid the McCourys adieu and finished with a string of hits, closing things out with "Drunk on a Plane," a huge smile on his face, plans for next year's edition clearly whirling through his mind.