

# World-Class Willamette: Entrees and enology

By Kerry Newberry

**T**here's an old Italian saying, "Grow grapes for your children and olives for your grandchildren." When olive farmer and miller Paul Durant says this, we are standing in the middle of a sun-soaked olive grove—but not in the Tuscan countryside. We are just outside the tiny town of Dayton (population 2,535) in the heart of Oregon's Willamette Valley at Red Ridge Farms. Durant's parents, Ken and Penny, planted Pinot Noir vines here in 1973 that are now harvested by Durant Vineyards at Red Ridge. In 2004, Paul and Ken planted 13,000 olive trees on their land, now a shimmering ocean of silvery green to be farmed and pressed for generations to come.

**I'm visiting today** with an old friend in town from Chicago. She has never walked through an olive grove and didn't imagine olive trees as part of the Oregon landscape. But that's what I love most about Oregon, the unbounded sense of possibility. Oregon Olive Mill at Red Ridge Farms is the only estate olioteca in the Pacific Northwest, and began because the father and son had a dream that they turned into a reality. I've found this a common thread in the food and wine stories unfurling across the Willamette Valley.

The valley is home to more than 500 wineries—a significant leap from 1970, when there were only five, started by now-famed Pinot Noir pioneers. Today, a visit to any of the surrounding wineries yields a rich backstory and an undaunted, inventive spirit.

Stoller Family Estate Winery, for example, can trace its roots back to a turkey farm, when the valley was a mosaic of wheatfields, hazelnut orchards and small family farms. After a successful business career, Bill Stoller planted grapevines in 1995 on family land and established the first LEED Gold Certified winery in the world. Today, we relax in the Adirondack chairs overlooking leafy vineyards and time slows down. We each savor a glass of crisp, strawberry-scented rosé.

Our next stop for the day is Winderlea Vineyard and Winery, where my Chicago friend loves hearing about owners Donna Morris and Bill Sweat. They took that intrepid leap—the one many urbanites fantasize about—and left careers in bustling Boston to live in a place where time moves to the



**Left:** Freshly harvested Arbequina olives. **Below:** Stoller Family Estate Winery Reserve Pinot Noir, served on the winery's scenic grounds. **Right:** Red Ridge Farms' owner and master miller Paul Durant in the olive oil tank room. **Below Right:** A private tasting with cheese and charcuterie, at Trisaetum Winery.





rhythm of the vines. Out on the deck, their plucky vineyard dogs bask in late summer sun while we sip the bold, earthy Weber Vineyard Pinot Noir.

Eight miles north at Trisaetum Winery, owner-winemaker James Frey marries his two passions of winemaking and art. After we sample wines such as his standout 2014 Estates Reserve Riesling, a fragrant white that bursts with ripe peach and pear flavors, we wander through the adjacent gallery and marvel at how he incorporates vineyard cuttings and soil into his large-scale tactile, abstract paintings.

Since I'm traveling with an

art lover, we cross hillsides over to Saffron Fields Vineyard, another destination that infuses art with wine. Throughout the tasting room, owners Dr. Angela Summers and Sanjeev Lahoti highlight avant-garde pieces from their personal collection, such as Leo Villareal's light sculpture *Coded Spectrum*. We taste their 2013 Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir, a silky wine with ripe plum notes, then stroll the surrounding gardens brought to life by renowned landscape designer Hoichi Kurisu.

In the Willamette Valley, it's not just the winemakers who have adventurous spirits.

Tonight we are staying in the renovated grain silos at Abbey Road Farm Bed & Breakfast—a beautiful 82-acre farm—which owners John and Judi Stuart modeled after *agriturismo*, or farm stays, from their European travels. The Stuarts left careers in Las Vegas to settle down in the Willamette Valley, where they opened their B&B in 2005.

Another valley lodging full of character is the McMenamins Hotel Oregon in downtown



McMinnville. The building dates back to 1905 and, in line with the McMenamins suite of hotels, pubs and restaurants, has a colorful history. In past lives it was a bus depot, soda fountain and beauty parlor. Now, with a lively rooftop bar, it's the summertime spot to raise a glass of ale and watch the sun go down.

And high on the bucket list of where to stay in the Willamette Valley is The Allison Inn & Spa, a wine country resort with a state-of-the-art spa. Set on 35 acres of hillside property in Newberg, the resort has a light-drenched modern design that brings in the beauty of the outside. An extensive art collection throughout the hotel features more than 500 original works from 100 Oregon artists such as Romona Youngquist.

ANDREA JOHNSON, COURTESY: WINDERLEA



Winderlea Vineyard and Winery founder Bill Sweat walks along rows of vines with one of his dogs.

## WILLAMETTE VALLEY CHOCOLATE AND CHEESE

"Wine and cheese are ageless companions," said famous food writer M.F.K. Fisher. That's one reason Sarah Marcus built her destination creamery in the middle of wineries and vineyards. Visit the tiny but tasty **Briar Rose Creamery** in Dundee on weekends for bites of aged goat cheese and creamy spreadable chèvres (like lemon-dill and spicy chipotle). Neighboring wineries include the father-and-son-run **Lange Estate Winery**, with panoramic views of the Dundee Hills, and **Torii Mor Winery**, where the grounds include a beautiful Japanese garden. For sweet cravings, **Honest Chocolates** always hits the spot—and shops in Newberg and McMinnville mean you can easily pop by for a taste of their signature dark chocolate ganache made with blueberries soaked overnight in Pinot Noir. —K.N.



Briar Rose Creamery Goat Milk Feta.

SARAH MARCUS

We are excited to dine at the resort's on-site restaurant, Jory (named after the Willamette Valley's volcanic soil). We take two seats at the chef's counter, where executive chef Sunny Jin, an alum of The French Laundry and El Bulli, prepares dishes such as cedar-plank Oregon salmon with fresh garden tomatoes, and razor clam chowder with smoked mussels. The restaurant houses one of the most robust cellars in the valley, with more than 1,000 Oregon labels and 40 wines poured by the glass.

Without a doubt, now is the time to wine and dine in the valley. We also have favorites such as Red Hills Market, where wood-fired pizzas are paired with Pinots made just down the road. And at Recipe in downtown Newberg, Chef Paul Bachand smokes his own fish, cures his own bacon and makes his own cheese. For

once-in-a-lifetime meals, I send visitors to the esteemed Joel Palmer House, a rite of passage for mushroom lovers, and the Painted Lady Restaurant, an exquisite fine-dining experience.

No matter how many times I visit the Willamette Valley, I always leave with a sense of wonder. All of these food and wine attractions can be traced back to Pinot Noir. When I ask Thomas Houseman, winemaker for Anne Amie Vineyards, about this, he says: "Pinot fits the region—if you think about our local food—salmon, truffles, hazelnuts and cheeses, they all

## WINE FLIES FREE

On Alaska Airlines, check your first case of appropriately packaged wine free of charge for flights from Oregon wine country destinations; for details, see [alaskaair.com/wine](http://alaskaair.com/wine).

## WILLAMETTE VALLEY HAPPENINGS

**Oregon Wine Country Half Marathon:** A destination race that begins around sunrise at Stoller Family Estate Winery and finishes in historic downtown Carlton, with a post-race celebration hosted by the renowned Ken Wright Cellars. Aug. 13; [destinationraces.com/runoregon](http://destinationraces.com/runoregon).

**Bounty of Yamhill County:** A three-day food-and-wine celebration led by chefs, vintners and farms throughout Yamhill County, with alfresco feasts, and side adventures including hot-air balloon rides, horseback riding, yoga in the vines and a scenic paddle along the Willamette River. Aug. 26–28; [bountyofyamhillcounty.com](http://bountyofyamhillcounty.com).

**¡Salud!:** This premier Oregon Pinot Noir Auction is a rare opportunity to sample with winemakers, preview the 2015 vintage of Oregon's foremost Pinot Noirs and bid on one-of-a-kind cuvées. Nov. 11–12; [saludauction.org](http://saludauction.org).

### Olio Nuovo Festa at Oregon

**Olive Mill:** Marking the end of the olive harvest, this festival offers the chance to sample freshly pressed, limited-release extra-virgin olive oil and tour the only estate olioteca in the Pacific Northwest. Nov. 18–20; [redridgefarms.com/rr-event/olio-nuovo-festa](http://redridgefarms.com/rr-event/olio-nuovo-festa). —K.N.



ANDREA JOHNSON, COURTESY, BOUNTY OF YAMHILL COUNTY

pair wonderfully with Pinot Noir. Also, the grape itself is known for being unpredictable, and if we Oregonians are nothing else, we are that.”

Unpredictable, yet filled with a sense of possibility. That's the Willamette Valley. 🍷

*Kerry Newberry is a Portland-based wine and food writer.*

*Alaska Airlines offers daily service to Portland and Eugene. To book tickets, visit [alaskaair.com](http://alaskaair.com) or call 800-ALASKAAIR. To learn more about wine country, see [willamettewines.com](http://willamettewines.com).*

PINOT  
PERFECTION  
YOU CAN SEE  
FROM A  
MILE HIGH

PENNER-ASH WINE CELLARS, PHOTO BY ANDREA JOHNSON



WILLAMETTE VALLEY  
WINERIES ASSOCIATION

The Willamette Valley is home to more than 500 wineries and known for its world class Pinot noir. [willamettewines.com](http://willamettewines.com).