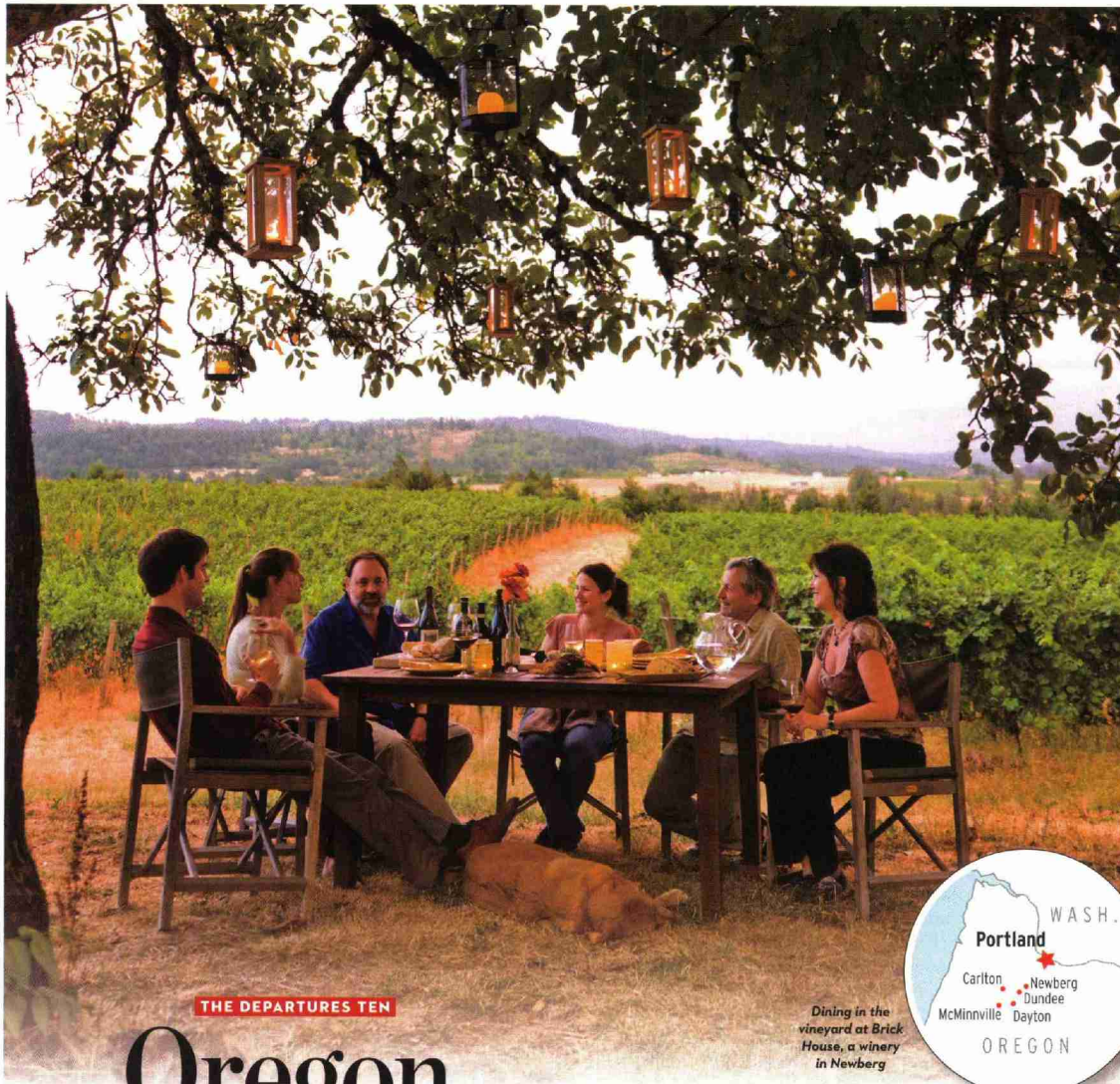


**BLACKBOOK** | *Willamette Valley, Oregon*



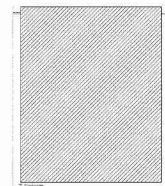
THE DEPARTURES TEN

*Dining in the vineyard at Brick House, a winery in Newberg*

# Oregon Wine Country

The acclaimed 2008 vintage has put Willamette Valley Pinot Noir in the spotlight. As **CHRISTIAN DEBENEDETTI** finds, the region itself is coming into its own as well.

Home to nearly 250 producers, with verdant rolling hills that recall the South of France, the Willamette Valley—the heart of Oregon wine country—is a soul-stirring beautiful place to explore. About an hour southwest of Portland along the banks of the Willamette River, the region is centered around the towns of Newberg, Dundee, Dayton, McMinnville and Carlton. Within the valley, several sub-appellations have sprung up, from the Chehalem Mountains in the north to the Dundee Hills a bit farther south. In a good year, the wines—especially Pinot Noirs—are dangerously drinkable; in a great one, like the current-release vintage of 2008, they rival the best of Burgundy, with lashings of mushroom and earth amid incandescent fruit. Best of all is the valley's genuine



SUSAN SEUBERT



The pool at The Allison

lack of pretense, even as it has blossomed into a world-class destination, with accomplished farm-to-table eateries, a new spa hotel and a nascent truffle industry. Those once-in-a-decade 2008s are almost entirely spoken for, but the best way to find out for sure is to search in person.

1

**The Allison Inn & Spa**

Time was, the region was limited to a few choice B&Bs—the Tuscan villa-like **Black Walnut Inn & Vineyard** (rooms, from \$295; 9600 NE Worden Hill Rd., Dundee; 503-429-4114; blackwalnut-inn.com), popular wedding spot **Wine Country Farm** (rooms, from \$150; 6855 Breyman Orchards Rd., Dayton; 503-864-3446; winecountryfarm.com) and the tiny **Inn at Champoeig**

(rooms, from \$150; 8899 Champoeig Rd. NE, St. Paul; 503-678-6088; innatchampoeig.com) remain strong options—that were always booked. But this changed two years ago with the opening of **The Allison Inn & Spa**, a chic 85-room hotel with an excellent restaurant, **Jory** (see no. 10). Located 45 minutes from Portland, it's set amid 35 acres of towering firs, manicured lawns and flower gardens. The Pacific Rim–styled rooms feature gas fireplaces and balconies with vineyard views. Rooms start at \$305; 2525 Allison Ln., Newberg; 503-554-2525; theallison.com.

2

**Archery Summit**

A former ski racer and a brash personality, Archery Summit's founder, Gary Andrus, was the first Oregon producer to cross

the \$100-per-bottle threshold—a game changer for the region. Andrus passed away in 2009, but under vintner Anna Matzinger's watch, Archery Summit still turns out some of the state's most assured wines. Matured in underground basalt caves akin to those in the Côte d'Or, they're consistently excellent, especially the Red Hills Vineyard bottling. *Tasting tours start at \$40; 18599 NE Archery Summit Rd., Dayton; archerysummit.com.*

3

**Brick House**

Using only certified organic and biodynamic practices, Doug Tunnell's acclaimed Brick House Vineyards produces 3,500 cases a year of superb Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Gamay Noir—what he calls “the black sheep

of Burgundy.” In the late 1980s, Tunnell, an Oregon native with a basso voice and placid demeanor, gave up a career as an Emmy Award-winning CBS reporter covering the war-torn Middle East to become the Willamette Valley's first serious organic winemaker. The true original still makes some of the best: Look for the Cuvée du

Tonnellier (from the estate's oldest vines) and the meaty, bright Gamay Noir, sturdy enough for a decade in the cellar. 18200 Lewis Rogers Ln., Newberg; 503-538-5136; brickhousewines.com.

4

**J.K. Carriere**

In 2009, Jim Prosser moved his acclaimed winery from a 100-year-old hazelnut barn to a 7,000-square-foot facility on Parrett Mountain, featuring caves reinforced with repurposed highway culverts. Prosser, who spent several years apprenticing with some of the state's top winemakers (and a few abroad), debuted his own label, J.K. Carriere, in 1999, with a serious Pinot Noir. The wines are superb; the winery's style is refreshing. “We didn't want a French château,” Prosser says, “nor an Italian villa. We wanted an Oregon experience.” 9995 NE Parrett Mountain Rd., Newberg; jkcarriere.com.



6

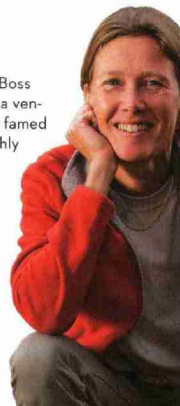
**Eyrie Vineyards**

Every great wine region has its pioneer, and the Willamette Valley's was David Lett, the founder of Eyrie Vineyards. In 1966, outside the town of Dundee in what is now the Dundee Hills sub-appellation, Lett planted the valley's first Pinot Noir grapes (and America's first Pinot Gris), betting that the area's cool, wet climate,

5

**French Touch  
DOMAINE DROUHIN**

Fourth-generation winemaker Véronique Drouhin-Boss oversees the 225-acre Domaine Drouhin Oregon, a venture launched in 1987 by her father, Robert, of the famed Maison Joseph Drouhin in Burgundy. Look for highly allocated wines, like the 2008 Louise Pinot Noir, which recently merited a rare 94 points from Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate*. “Some people ask, ‘Is this your premier cru or your grand cru?’” says general manager David Millman. “But what we make is a delicious Oregon wine, with balance, finesse and lot of length on the palate. Oregon is a place where you get a sense of the earth, and these are wines that age very well.” But a visit is even better, sipping the Pinots or the crisp, mineral Chablis-style Arthur Chardonnay with unfettered views of snowy, 11,240-foot Mt. Hood. 6750 NE Breyman Orchards Rd., Dayton; domainedrouhin.com.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BARBARA KRAFT/COURTESY THE ALLISON INN & SPA; COURTESY OF OREGON WHITE TRUFFLE OIL; COURTESY DOMAINE DROUHIN OREGON



Archery Summit's Red Hills Estate vineyard, near Dundee

After all, many 2007s were underrated—harvest-time rains fewer deleterious effects than were originally feared—and the 2009s (in early release) hinged on a gloriously hot summer, similar to that of 2008. At **Beaux Frères** (15155 NE N. Valley Rd.; 503-537-1137; [beauxfreres.com](http://beauxfreres.com)), winemaker-proprietor Michael Etzel, with the help of his brother-in-law, critic Robert M. Parker Jr., makes three Pinots of varying pedigree and intensity, each more deep, lush and fruit-forward than the last, available on wine lists as august as the one at

porous volcanic soil and moderate summers of hot days and cool nights would result in top-tier wines. "Papa Pinot" was right: By 1979 and 1980, Lett's 1975 South Block Reserve Pinot Noir notched impressive showings against several *grand cru* Burgundies in a pair of prestigious French tastings. The rest is history. Lett passed away in 2008, and his son Jason now oversees the operation, which includes a charming tasting room in central McMinnville. **935 NE 10th Ave., McMinnville; [eyrievineyards.com](http://eyrievineyards.com).**

Soter was a fixture in Napa, as both winemaker for his vaunted Etude winery and a consultant for others, before he and his wife, Michelle, relocated to the Willamette Valley and founded Soter in 1997. Tastings are by appointment only, but the winery's array of supple, spicy and exceptional Pinot Noirs, as well as its sparkling rosé, are absolutely worth the trouble. *Tastings start at \$20; 10880 NE Mineral Springs Rd., Carlton; [sotervineyards.com](http://sotervineyards.com).*

8

**Newberg: The Next Napa?**

Highly acclaimed vintages of Oregon reserve wines, like the 2008 bottling, tend to sell out, and fast. But clustered in and around the town of Newberg are some serious wineries to seek out for tasting appointments no matter what's left.

7

**Soter Vineyards**

Some of the valley's best views—and best wines—are found at the 240-acre Mineral Springs Ranch, home of Soter Vineyards, which recently opened a lovely new tasting room there. Oregon native Tony

All About the Grape

9 **PINOT POWER**

The Willamette Valley's star grape (right) is fêted lavishly each summer at the IPNC, or International Pinot Noir Celebration. Marking the festival's 25th anniversary, this year's event, held July 29-31, features tastings from more than 70 international Pinot producers, grand four-course dinners and seminars with industry icons. Tickets, \$975; 800-775-4762; [ipnc.org](http://ipnc.org).



The French Laundry. Meanwhile, at **Chehalem Winery**, Harry Peterson-Nedry's operation (which celebrates its 25th harvest this year) includes superb, angular Rieslings and a celebrated reserve Pinot Noir from the

Ribbon Ridge AVA, where the witty, influential Southerner planted his Ridgecrest vineyard in 1982. The tasting room, in downtown Newberg, also has a variety of Chehalem wines on tap, available to go in reusable bottles (106 S.

Center St.; 503-538-4700; [chehalemwines.com](http://chehalemwines.com)). Across town, Josh **Bergström** crafts high-end Burgundy-style Chardonnays and Pinots with a flair that borders on the theatrical (**18215 NE Calkins Ln., 503-554-0468; [bergstromwines.com](http://bergstromwines.com)**). ■

10 **AT TABLE**

Area restaurants have taken rustic wine-country cuisine to the next level. At the 20-room **Inn at Red Hills** (rooms, from \$130; 1410 N. Hwy 99W; [innatredhills.com](http://innatredhills.com)) in Dundee, chef Shiloh Ficek's **Farm to Fork Restaurant** (1410 N. Hwy. 99 W.; [farmtoforkdundee.com](http://farmtoforkdundee.com)) is pure fat of the land—and sea—offering Puget Sound clams and grilled pork loin from nearby Carlton Farms. Just down the road, the **Red Hills Market** (155 SW 7th St.; [redhillsmarket.com](http://redhillsmarket.com)) is the place for stocking the be-all, end-all picnic basket. At Newberg's **The Painted Lady** (201 S. College St.; [thepaintedladyrestaurant.com](http://thepaintedladyrestaurant.com)), chef Allen Routt's market-driven dishes include beet and goat cheese terrine and local hazelnut-crust halibut. To accompany the menu of local ribeye and steelhead trout, the wine list at The Allison's **Jory** features an impressive selection of half-bottles and 150-plus Pinot Noirs. In Dayton, the famed, mushroom-centric **Joel Palmer House** takes full advantage of Oregon's—pardon the pun—growing fungus scene (600 Ferry St., Dayton; [joelpalmerhouse.com](http://joelpalmerhouse.com)).



A vegetable tart at Jory, in Newberg

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY ARCHERY SUMMIT (6); BARBARA KRAFT/COURTESY THE ALLISON INN & SPA