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COUNTRY LIVING Clockwise from top left: Owners Eric Ferguson and Carmen Peirano at Nick's Italian Café, in McMinnville; a rabbit dish at Farm to Fork, in Dundee; fall foliage at Domaine Drouhin Oregon, in Dundee; a classic truck displays some local spirit at Eyrie Vineyards, in McMinnville; a view of the Allison Inn & Spa, in Newberg; Pinot Noir grapes await the crush at Domaine Drouhin Oregon.



VINTAGE NORTHWEST

OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY HAS LONG REVELED IN ITS STATUS AS THE ANTI-NAPA. NOW ITS BOUTIQUE VINEYARDS HAVE BEEN JOINED BY A LUXURIOUS NEW HOTEL AND A CROP OF AMBITIOUS CHEFS. BRUCE SCHOENFELD VISITS AN UNSPOILED REGION RIPE FOR DISCOVERY.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEVE KEPPLER



"THIS ISN'T NAPA VALLEY." FIFTEEN YEARS LATER, I CAN STILL hear the words of the manager of one of Oregon's best wineries.

I'd asked, innocently enough, why he didn't allow visitors. His response was shorthand for all the ways in which the Willamette Valley, a bucolic stretch of rolling farmland that begins some 140 miles southwest of Portland, wanted to distance itself from America's most successful wine region. Napa had given itself over to wine tourism, lock, stock, and new oak barrels, but grapes are merely one of 225 cash crops in the Willamette. Here, combines and harvesters far outnumber tour buses. Vineyards aren't vast but small and irregularly shaped, threaded between strawberry patches and fields of ryegrass. Wineries are owned by fledgling grape farmers and self-taught enologists who came here looking for a quiet, comfortable life. To them, *Napa* was a four-letter word. As for tourism, they didn't really care if you came to see them or didn't. They certainly didn't want to sell you a corkscrew.

But I cared. I wanted to drink the wines, and the ones I liked best weren't sold in my local wine shops, or anywhere I traveled. The Willamette Valley didn't have a single producer that could be called large. (Even today, the average

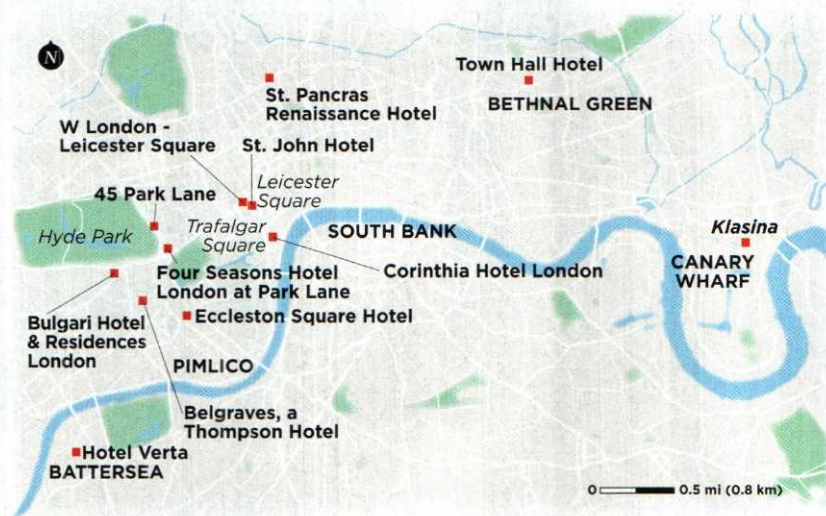
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London Hotels

into the hotel without ever being seen. The remote location, in a commercial district a long, lonely walk from the Tube, presumes you have a car and driver, so Verta is not for the casual London traveler. Privacy freaks, especially sports figures, come here "to chill-ax," an employee told me. Masculine, leathery, and very built-in, the rooms are beautifully detailed and the windows—just to be clear—quadruple-glazed.

Moored in the Docklands, a few minutes' walk from Canary Wharf, is an old barge called *Klasina* with one bright, cozy guest room in the stern for perhaps the most individualistic visitor of all. Your hosts—Polly Dickens, the former creative director of Conran, and furniture designer Mark Gilbey—live on the boat in rela-

tively spacious quarters and can be convinced to rent out the whole thing. Dickens and Gilbey spent a lifetime working as stylists, so there's not a wrong moment anywhere. Charm, charm, charm. Technically this isn't a five-star establishment, but then it's not easily classified. Dickens, who has a real passion for food, cooks your Columbian blacktail eggs and ginger bacon in the morning, which you take in the wheelhouse with a view of the docks. Bring your iPad outside and sit on the deck awhile; the water is very calming. It's not for everybody—you'd better like their dogs, you might bump your head, and Piccadilly Circus is a good 30 minutes away by Tube—but in a very short time it has found a following among young business travelers chafing at their suspenders. Carrying their own luggage does not seem to be a problem. +



GUIDE TO LONDON HOTELS

Belgraves, a Thompson Hotel 20 Chesham Place; thompsonhotels.com; doubles from \$605.

Bulgari Hotel & Residences London bulgarihotels.com.

Corinthia Hotel London Whitehall Place; 877/842-6269; corinthia.com; doubles from \$544.

Eccleston Square Hotel 37 Eccleston Square; 44-20/3489-1000; ecclestonsquarehotel.com; doubles from \$441.

45 Park Lane 45 Park Lane; 800/650-1842; 45parklane.com; doubles from \$637.

Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane Hamilton Place, Park Lane; 800/332-3442; fourseasons.com; doubles from \$799.

Hotel Verta Bridges Wharf; 44-20/7801-3500; hotelverta.com; doubles from \$295.

GREAT VALUE Klasina Blackwall Basin, Canary Wharf; 44-20/7515-1372; klasina.com; doubles from \$179.

St. John Hotel 1 Leicester St.; 44-20/3301-8069; stjohndotellondon.com; doubles from \$321.

St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel Euston Rd.; 888/236-2427; marriott.com; doubles from \$484.

Town Hall Hotel Patriot Square; 44-20/7871-0460; townhallhotel.com; doubles from \$300.

W London - Leicester Square 10 Wardour St.; 877/946-8357; whotels.com; doubles from \$555.

Oregon

(Continued from page 170)

Buchanan Benson at Tyee Wine Cellars, an under-the-radar property founded by her parents, who first planted grapes in the valley back in 1974. We sat under 400-year-old oaks, ate a picnic lunch, and drank a 1999 Pinot Noir. It was salmon-colored, typical of light-bodied Pinots (Continued on page 190)

GUIDE TO OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY



HOW TO SAY IT

IT'S WILLAMETTE, DAMMIT! the T-shirts proclaim. Pronouncing the name correctly (willam-it) is the first step toward gaining the trust and appreciation of locals.

WHEN TO GO

Western Oregon's rainy season usually starts in October and continues into June. The valley can be breathtaking in the mist, but most travelers will prefer the sunshine of late spring and summer. One of America's oldest and best-run wine events, the **International Pinot Noir Celebration** (ipnc.org) takes place each July.

STAY

Allison Inn & Spa 2525 Allison Lane, Newberg; 503/554-2525; theallison.com; doubles from \$310; dinner for two \$125.

GREAT VALUE

Inn at Red Hills The Willamette's first boutique hotel opened in 2009 between a busy road and a parking

lot. But the rooms are gorgeous, and **Farm to Fork** has some of the region's best food. 1410 N.W. Hwy. 99W, Dundee; 503/538-7666; innatredhills.com; doubles from \$139; dinner for two \$75.

EAT

Nick's Italian Café 521 N.E. Third St., McMinnville; 503/434-4471; dinner for two \$80.

Recipe

115 N. Washington St., Newberg; 503/487-6853; dinner for two \$50.

Thistle

228 N.E. Evans St., McMinnville; 503/472-9623; dinner for two \$70.

TASTE

Bethel Heights Vineyard

6060 Bethel Heights Rd. N.W., Salem; 503/581-2262; bethelheights.com.

Elk Cove Vineyards

27751 N.W. Olson Rd., Gaston; 503/985-7760; elkcove.com.

Tyee Wine Cellars

26335 Greenberry Rd., Corvallis; 541/753-8754; tyeevine.com.



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