

Sip the Pacific Northwest

By David M. Brown

Portland, a center for gastronomic delights, is also a gateway to spectacular wines.

Just short of an hour's drive southwest of Oregon's most populous city is the distinguished Willamette Valley, the viticultural area known worldwide for its sustainable agriculture, family-owned vineyards and innovative winemakers.

"Portland is an exciting culinary destination, made so by its creative chefs and proximity to the Willamette Valley," says Jeff Miller, president and CEO, Travel Portland. "The peacefully picturesque vineyards in wine country are just a 30-minute drive from the city's vibrant urban center."

More than 300 of these wineries are producing — in particular, outstanding Pinot Noirs. In fact, the November 2012 *Wine Spectator* said that Oregonian Pinot Noir is the best in the U.S.

Although wine has been made in the area since the 1800s, it was not until relatively recently that pioneer winegrowers moved here to begin the trade.

Early leaders followed David 'Papa Pinot' Lett and his wife Diana, who began their Dundee Hills vineyard in 1966; Dick Erath, 1968; David and Ginny Adelsheim, 1971; Susan Sokol and Bill Blosser, also 1971; and Myron Redford, Amity Vineyards, 1976. The area also produces good Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Merlot and Chardonnay.

"The Willamette Valley is home to many small family-owned wineries," says Sue Horstmann, executive director of the Willamette Valley Wineries Association, which represents 185 of the local wineries and promotes the area as a travel destination for wine consumers seeking world-class Pinot Noir. "Wine tourists will experience unspoiled vistas and unassuming tasting rooms where they might find the winemaker/owner pouring their wine."

She adds that although the majority of the wineries have tasting rooms year round, not all do, so the area's two major annual events are opportunities to visit



A couple enjoys a local Pinot Noir and romantic summertime dinner at The Allison Inn & Spa in Newberg, Ore. Courtesy The Allison Inn & Spa

these smaller wineries, taste their wines and meet the people behind the labels.

These are Memorial Day in Wine Country and Wine Country Thanksgiving — both opening 150-plus wineries to the public. Last year, in fact, the state's governor, John Kitzhaber, announced that May will be Oregon Wine Month in perpetuity.

This July, one of the oldest area wineries, the 120-acre Sokol Blosser, will open an environmentally sensitive tasting room, continuing a family tradition of organic winemaking in a sustainable environment. The company previously built the first LEED-certified winery building in the United States and also installed a 25kW photovoltaic solar system, which furnishes 20 percent of the company's energy needs.

The 2009 opening of the 85-room/suite Allison Inn and Spa in historic Newberg has provided the Willamette Valley with the area's first full-service luxury hotel. The Allison exemplifies commitment to luxury, regional history, community and environmental stewardship, as it has been awarded the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification by the United States Green Building Council.

Local residents and owners Ken and Joan Austin named the hotel for Ira. S. Allison, a 20th-century Oregon State University geologist, the first to describe the area's unique silt soil and boulders — called "erratics" — washed into the area from the glaciers.

Overseen by Executive Chef Sunny Jin, the Allison's 100-seat JORY restaurant focuses on garden-to-table food as well as local wines, microbrews and hand-crafted distilled spirits. Recalling the distinct glacial soil that conduces to the production of premier Pinot Noir, the restaurant features an 800-label *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence list, with more than 40 wines by the glass.

In conjunction with this oenological commitment, the Allison is growing Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris grapes in vineyards on the property, and nearby Adelsheim Vineyard will be producing the hotel's first proprietary Pinot Noir this August, available only at the hotel.

"The Allison Inn and Spa is the best thing to happen to the Willamette Valley since they started making Pinot Noir here almost 50 years ago," Horstmann says.

In the Newberg area, you can enjoy excellent restaurants and shops, the 18-hole Chehalem Glenn Course and the Hoover-Minthorn museum, celebrating the life of the country's 31st president, Herbert Hoover, who lived in the house when he was a young man.

Throughout the Willamette Valley are farmers markets, rolling-countryside backroads and endearing small towns. Children will especially enjoy the spectacular Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum, home of Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose, in nearby McMinnville, about 40 minutes from Newberg.

Among the city's fine restaurants in town is Nick's Italian Café, whose owner, Nick Peirano, has actively promoted the area wineries since the opening in February 1977.

For events, locations and activities in the area, see www.travelportland.com and The Willamette Valley Wineries Association Web site, www.willamettewines.com, call 503.646.2985 or write info@willamettewines.com. Another good source: the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, 503.682.4422 | 800.462.0619 and info@OregonRLA.org. ■



Sokol Blosser in the Willamette Valley outside of Portland is one of the area's oldest vineyards. *Courtesy Sokol Blosser*



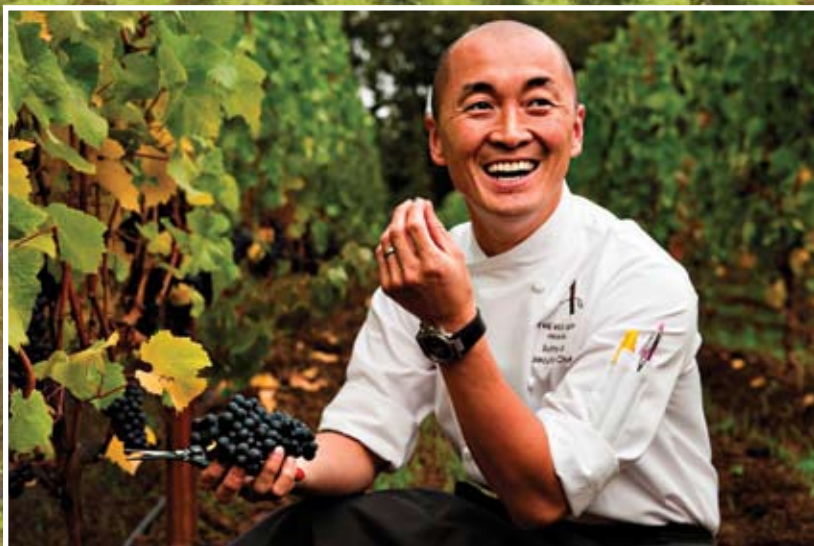
Guests can enter the spa at The Allison through a bridge over a calming water feature. *Courtesy The Allison Inn & Spa*



The lush burger at JORY restaurant at The Allison pairs beautifully with a local Pinot Noir. *Courtesy The Allison Inn & Spa*



Sokol Blosser is well known for its outstanding Pinot Noir wines and is opening an environmentally sensitive tasting room this summer. *Courtesy Sokol Blosser*



Known for his commitment to seasonality and local produce, Executive Chef Sunny Jin oversees JORY at The Allison. *Courtesy The Allison Inn & Spa*

