

Exploring

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

From the desert to the coast,
a six-day road trip reveals what
makes the region's wines and
cuisine unique By Harvey Steiman

Washington now stands as the No. 2 wine producer in the United States. Oregon has become the insider's choice for Pinot Noir. Yet the bright, juicy red wines and lively whites from the Pacific Northwest remain largely undiscovered. Visiting the vineyards, the wineries and the towns connects the character of the wines to the places and the people that produce them.

Mount Hood, the highest peak in Oregon, looms over Cascade Cliffs Vineyard in neighboring Washington state. Right, from top: Cougar Crest Winery, in Walla Walla; Wine O'Clock Wine Bar, in the Yakima Valley; top Willamette Valley Pinot Noir producer Domaine Drouhin.



In six days you can get a surprisingly complete taste of the key regions. From the high desert of Walla Walla in eastern Washington, drive mostly west and south along the mighty Columbia River, then into the rolling hills of the Willamette Valley, ending up in warm, wooded southern Oregon. In all, the itinerary covers about 600 miles.

Along the way, you'll see the landscape evolve from dusty brown to deep green, and the vineyards change from long rows of Cabernet and Merlot to tightly spaced plantings of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. (For more on how *terroir* translates here, see "ABCs of the Pacific Northwest," page 66.) The towns range from truck stops to hippie havens, the food from steak house simple to creative and eclectic. But everywhere you go you'll find wineries that pour delicious samples, and folks who welcome you with smiles. People from all over have emigrated here, seeking something different, and transplants mingle easily with local talent, creating a unique vibe.

There are exciting cities here too. If you want an urban adventure, start with a few days in Seattle, which has some of the Washington's biggest and best-known wineries. But they all get their grapes from vineyards in eastern Washington, a 50-minute flight—or a picturesque half-day's drive—over the Cascade Range. The town with the most accommodation and dining options is Walla Walla, which also has excellent wineries. It is a good place to start.

1 Day One: Walla Walla

Not much about the town of Walla Walla says wine country. Whitman College anchors the center. Grain elevators pierce the horizon, and wheatfields dominate the landscape. But you can feel the impact of the wine culture in the growing number of ambitious restaurants and tasting rooms in town, and in the crop of architectural wineries springing up in the vicinity.

Head south, toward the Oregon border, where the largest and most-established vineyards in the area are rooted. Pepper Bridge and Seven Hills supply red Bordeaux varieties, Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc grapes from their rolling hills to notable local wineries such as Woodward Canyon, Leonetti and L'Ecole No. 41. Pepper Bridge bottles some of its own wines, available in a tasting room in the midst of the vineyards. Seven Hills Vineyard, about 10 miles farther south, is actually on the Oregon side.

Between the hills, apple and cherry orchards stud flatter terrain, and an occasional vineyard offers a glimpse of the cobblestone-filled soils of an old riverbed. Cayuse Vineyards grows its highly sought-after Syrahs in this *terroir*.

Back in Walla Walla, enjoy a late lunch at Saffron, perfect because it's open from 2 p.m. until 10 or 11. It excels at French Mediterranean food. Afterward, check out some of the in-town tasting rooms, including those of Seven Hills Winery, Waterbrook and Fort Walla Walla. Not far away, in the old airport business center, the roster includes Dunham, Buty, Tamarack and Five Star Cellars. Or roll out west of town, where a string of excellent winery tasting rooms beckons, L'Ecole No. 41 and Woodward Canyon among them.

The Fat Duck Inn, run by a Seattle restaurant couple who wanted a place in the *country*, occupies a lovely old Craftsman-style



The tasting room of Seven Hills Winery, in Walla Walla. The eastern Washington city is home to several tasting venues.



Charles Maddrey and Alexa Palmer ventured from Seattle to Walla Walla wine country to offer fine cuisine at the Fat Duck Inn.



Col Solare Winery, in Washington's Red Mountain district, is fronted by vineyards that are rooted amid the stark desert terrain common to the landscape east of the Cascades.

residence a few blocks from downtown. It has four rooms plus two separate cottages and serves a convivial multicourse dinner around its one large table daily. You can also dine well at Whitehouse Crawford or the more casual Creektown Café, both offering local wines to go with fresh, modern, farm-driven food. For a more traditional hotel, choose the Marcus Whitman.

Any corner of Napa Valley would dwarf Walla Walla's count of 60 wineries, which are much less slick than their cousins in California. The same is true of the restaurants. On the flip side, the prices are lower, and both the wines and the food have abundant charms.

2 Day Two: Yakima Valley and Red Mountain

Departing Walla Walla, stop at Cougar Crest's new winery, completed in April 2008. Lying just outside of town, it is striking evidence of the region's recent progress. Until last year, the wines were made in a converted warehouse in the airport business center, but the snazzy new building has a spacious tasting room hung with amusing artwork, and offers a sampling of four reserve red wines for \$5.

Head west over low hills toward the Columbia River. The day's drive takes you to Columbia Valley, past the blue-collar towns of Pasco, Benton City and Prosser and the appellations of Red Mountain, known for its dense, powerful reds, and Yakima Valley, with its cool-climate whites.

The road meets the river where it makes a big turn to the west and flows toward the Pacific Ocean. Head upriver, toward

Tri-Cities, where the Snake River joins the Columbia from Idaho to the east and the Yakima River comes in from the west. The weather gets progressively cooler and drier as you leave hilly Walla Walla and head up any of these rivers, and that's especially true for Yakima Valley, which can struggle to get Cabernet or Merlot ripe. The low-lying parts of the valley grow more grapes for fruit juice than for wine, but the good vineyards produce vibrant Syrahs.

Even with a winery stop or two, you should get to Prosser, in Yakima Valley, in time for lunch at Wine O'Clock, the new wine bar and pizzeria owned by Ron and Susan Bunnell of Bunnell Cellars. It is in Prosser Vintner's Village, a cluster of small to medium-size outfits that includes up-and-comers Airfield, Milbrandt and Thurston Wolfe.

Once the red wine maker for Chateau Ste. Michelle, Bunnell now produces a raft of outstanding wines under his own name and his family's RiverAerie label. He sources grapes in response to what their *terroir* gives him; he turns to Wahluke Slope, a warmer region in the Columbia Valley, for his best Cabernets and Merlots, but bottles some special Syrahs and whites from Yakima vineyards.

The wine bar strives to showcase the Bunnells' more than two dozen different wines. Susan designs her pizzas to frame specific ones. An improbable topping of fresh pear slices, lardons and white Cheddar aims to show off the Gewürztraminer, but it tastes great with the Viognier too. The Syrah from Boushey Vineyard does well with the onion soup pizza, which relies on all the ingredients of French onion soup minus the broth. Even better, these creative pies are only \$12 each.

Red Mountain, perhaps the state's most celebrated subregion, is about 25 minutes' drive away. At the very tip of Yakima Valley,

just before the Yakima River empties into the Columbia, rises Red Mountain, on a wide and wind-blown south-facing slope. The stony soils support some of Washington's most famous vineyards, including Ciel du Cheval, Klipsun, Tapteil and Kiona. They specialize in Bordeaux varieties, and produce firm, tannic, ageworthy wines made by such labels as Quilceda Creek, DeLille, Andrew Will and Gorman. Cadence and Quilceda have their vineyards here, but transport the grapes across the Cascades to Seattle to make the wines.

Fidelitas and Hedges have simple tasting rooms in their wineries here, but by far the most prominent name in the AVA is Col Solare. This joint venture of Antinori and Ste. Michelle planted a vineyard near the top of the slope and built a gravity-flow winery that overlooks the whole appellation and takes in stunning sunsets over Yakima Valley beyond. The tasting room brings a touch of Italy, with tastings by appointment of the signature red wine with five kinds of cheese, three salami and even some sweets.

Accommodations tend toward highwayside motels, such as the Inn at Horse Heaven Hills, and modest bed and breakfasts. The charm is in the desertlike landscape, as seen from Sunset House Inn, a four-room B-and-B perched on a hill in Prosser overlooking the valley. Picazo 7Seventeen, a casual bistro, is a good choice for dinner. As an alternative, Richland, just east of Red Mountain, has several midrange hotels and a fine outpost of Seattle-based fish restaurant Anthony's.

3 Day Three: Horse Heaven Hills to Willamette Valley

For all the attention lavished on Red Mountain, Horse Heaven Hills, an AVA just to the south with 6,000 acres under vine, has produced some of Washington's most luscious and supple Cabernet Sauvignons and Merlots. Our route steers past Columbia Crest, the state's largest winery, whose tasting room overlooks the Columbia River at Paterson. Farther on is Champoux Vineyard, which holds the oldest vinifera vines in the state and sells its grapes to top wineries. From late spring to mid-autumn, the visitor center organizes tours of the vineyard and offers tastes of the wines from the grapes growing outside the door. This makes a nice stop before heading down the Columbia Gorge toward Oregon and Willamette Valley.

This is the longest one-day drive on the itinerary, about 4½ hours, following a good portion of the route Lewis and Clark took along the Columbia River. You can break it up with a couple of stops. Near the bridge where U.S. Highway 97 crosses the river, the Maryhill Museum houses a small collection of Rodin sculptures and drawings and offers stunning views of the river from a bluff. Or, a few miles farther on, stop to watch the gushing Multnomah Falls.

At about the halfway point, stop for lunch in Hood River, Ore., a semi-hippie, semi-ski-bum town in the Columbia Gorge AVA, which extends into both Oregon and Washington. The surroundings have grown lusher and greener, and the best wines tend to be the crisp Chardonnays and Gewürztraminers. Several wineries have tasting rooms in Hood River. At the Celilo Restaurant, chef Ben Stenn's farm-driven food does well with a fine collection of Washington and Oregon wines; his vibrant lentil-and-potato soup and house-made grilled sausage pair beautifully with a refreshing glass of Bergström Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2006, itself a fine introduction to the wine country you're entering.



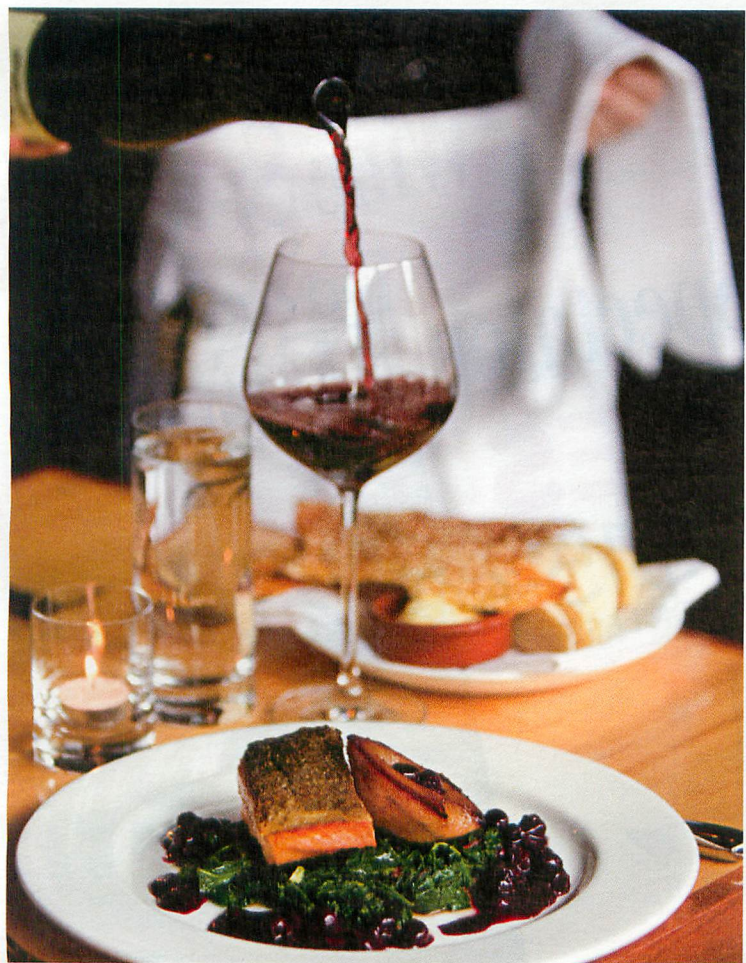
Multnomah Falls, east of Portland on the Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge, drops in two major steps. A footbridge allows visitors to cross above the lower cascade.



The Painted Lady, situated in a vibrantly restored Victorian house, offers a modern menu that emphasizes organic ingredients.



University House, a three-bedroom bed-and-breakfast in Newberg, is convenient to some of the Willamette Valley's best-known wineries.



In the town of Hood River, Celilo pairs a cuisine of local provenance with Oregon and Washington wines. Above: Pacific salmon over ruby chard with blueberry brandy sauce.

Navigate through the gorge toward Portland, nicknamed *the Rose City*; in spring, dogwood trees bloom pink and azaleas and rhododendrons flash their purples, reds and blazing whites. Humid air and leafy flora testify that you have left the arid climes of eastern Washington for something different: the wetter, milder Willamette Valley.

Skirt Portland and head southwest to reach Newberg, this evening's destination. It's at the northern end of the Willamette Valley, and many of the area's best-known Pinot Noirs grow within a few miles of town. Of the valley's sub-AVAs, Chehalem Mountains, Ribbon Ridge, Dundee Hills and Yamhill-Carlton are within easy reach. The others, McMinnville and Eola-Amity Hills, are only 30 to 45 minutes away.

For now, your lodging choices are chain motels or bed-and-breakfasts. Among the best of the latter category is University House, a three-bedroom Victorian in Newberg that can rent the entire house for less than \$200 a night. In Dundee Hills, the Black Walnut Inn provides a traditional B-and-B experience.

Soon, however, Newberg will boast luxury digs, the only ones in Oregon wine country. The upscale, 100-plus-room Allison Inn & Spa, scheduled to open in September, will include a restaurant, called Jory, helmed by San Francisco chef Nathan Lockwood (formerly of Fork). It will even have its own vineyard, managed by David Adelsheim, one of Oregon's wine pioneers. Jory will challenge the current dining champion, the Painted Lady. There, in a charmingly remodeled Victorian house, Northwest cuisine is lifted to refined heights by chef Allen Roult, and the Award of Excellence wine list focuses on hard-to-find local bottlings.

4 Day Four: Willamette Valley

Meander through the valley and read the messages in the architecture of the vines. Unlike the wide spacings of eastern Washington, these plantings huddle dense and close to the ground, mirroring Burgundy, Pinot Noir's ancestral home. And as in Burgundy, the real action is in the hills. The vineyards drape over clusters of hills poking up from the otherwise broad and flat Willamette Valley, where you'll find filbert orchards and trout farms.

This is the heart of Oregon Pinot Noir country, and the list of great places to visit is endless. Although many smaller wineries require appointments, wineries within 15 minutes' drive of Newberg with tasting rooms open to walk-ins include Rex Hill, Adelsheim, Bergström, Penner Ash, WillaKenzie, Elk Cove, Argyle, Erath, Domaine Drouhin and the group of small-production vintners at Carlton Winemakers Studio. If time is short, focus on Argyle, Carlton and Drouhin for an overview of the region and a variety of wine styles.

One diversion to consider here is the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum, just outside McMinnville. The museum displays Howard Hughes' famous plane, the Spruce Goose, and its Imax theater shows 3-D flight films.

For dinner, try Tina's, a warm, casual spot in Dundee across the street from the Argyle winery. Not only is the food good, but the wine list has been around long enough to have accumulated some nicely aged older bottles from wineries such as Archery Summit, Argyle, Eyrie and Chehalem, among others, at moderate prices.



The Eola Hills lie in the heart of prime Pinot Noir country in northern Oregon, which benefits from the moderating effects of breezes that flow from the Pacific Ocean.

5 Day Five: Eola-Amity Hills and Eugene

In contrast to the extensive vineyards around Newberg, Carlton and Dundee, the drive south glides past dairy farms and orchards. Eventually our route ascends into a cluster of hills covered with vineyards, special because an ocean wind cuts through a gap in the Coast Range to keep temperatures on the cool side. This is the Eola-Amity Hills AVA.

Bethel Heights pioneered in the area and makes some of the appellation's most refined and compelling Pinots. The tasting room looks out over the estate vineyards. Up the road lie Cristom and St. Innocent, who champion the same restrained style in their own distinctive wines.

In Salem, the Wild Pear serves up outstanding soups and fresh sandwiches and makes a satisfying lunch stop before pushing south for a look at the rest of Willamette Valley. Vineyards are more scattered here, but an hour past Salem, look for Benton-Lane Winery, whose owner, Californian Steve Girard, swapped Napa Valley Cabernet to take on Oregon Pinot Noir some two decades ago.

Benton-Lane's 80-acre vineyard sits in a small rain shadow. The sheep farm that occupied the land was called Sunnymount because, Girard says, it basks in the sun while surrounding areas suffer rain. The tasting room has multiple bottlings for sampling, and in summer the staff fires up the wood-burning pizza oven and invites visitors to create their own special pies to pair with the wines.

WINESPECTATOR.COM

BONUS VIDEO: Some of Washington's best wines get all or part of their grapes from the smallest appellation in the state, Red Mountain. Join Harvey Steiman as he tours the region and talks with some of the winemakers at www.winespectator.com/073109.

Eugene, home to the University of Oregon, lies another 20 miles south and is a strategic stopping place for the night. The riverside rooms at Valley River Inn are a treat. The approach to the hotel is through a big shopping mall, and the façade lacks distinction, but don't hesitate—decks outside the rooms overlook the wide Willamette River. If you have an extra day to spend exploring, enjoy Eugene's more than 100 miles of walking, jogging and biking trails along both sides of the slow-moving, tree-lined river.

At dinnertime, head downtown to Marché. This fine practitioner of Pacific Northwest cuisine offers memorable dishes such as wood-oven roasted steelhead with morels and hazelnuts, and its *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence wine list pays equal attention to Burgundy and Oregon.

6 Day Six: Eugene to Southern Oregon

About 40 minutes' drive south of Eugene, King Estate sprawls over several hillsides and grows fruits and vegetables as well as grapes. One of Oregon's largest vineyards and wineries, it makes very good Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir at around \$20 or less per bottle, and some of its wines consistently score in the outstanding range.

In addition, King Estate now has the most ambitious full-fledged winery restaurant in the Pacific Northwest. It's a good one, serving lunch and dinner in the kind of elevated bistro-style cuisine that shows off the wines, including older vintages. The Pinot Gris Signature 2003 folds seamlessly with the flavors of sea scallops with estate-cured pancetta and spring onions, and a remarkably fresh and lively Pinot Noir Signature 1999 gets even better with grilled salmon with estate-pressed apple cider and cumin.

As Interstate 5 snakes south over a range of mountains, the climate changes again. You've entered southern Oregon, which is more akin to California's warmer coastal regions. Pinot Noir is no longer king. Here Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah rule.

Or, in a possibly quixotic moment, the Spanish grape Tempranillo is the buzz. That's what vineyard owner Earl Jones wanted to grow when he and his wife, Hilda, started hauling boulders and stones off their land so he could plant the vines for their "retirement project," Abacela winery, in 1995. A tireless experimenter, Earl planted some of every variety he imagined possible, from Albariño to Zinfandel. In recent years he's made some nice Syrah and respectable Malbec. Stop at Abacela's rustic tasting room and make your own judgment as to how well these varieties do here.

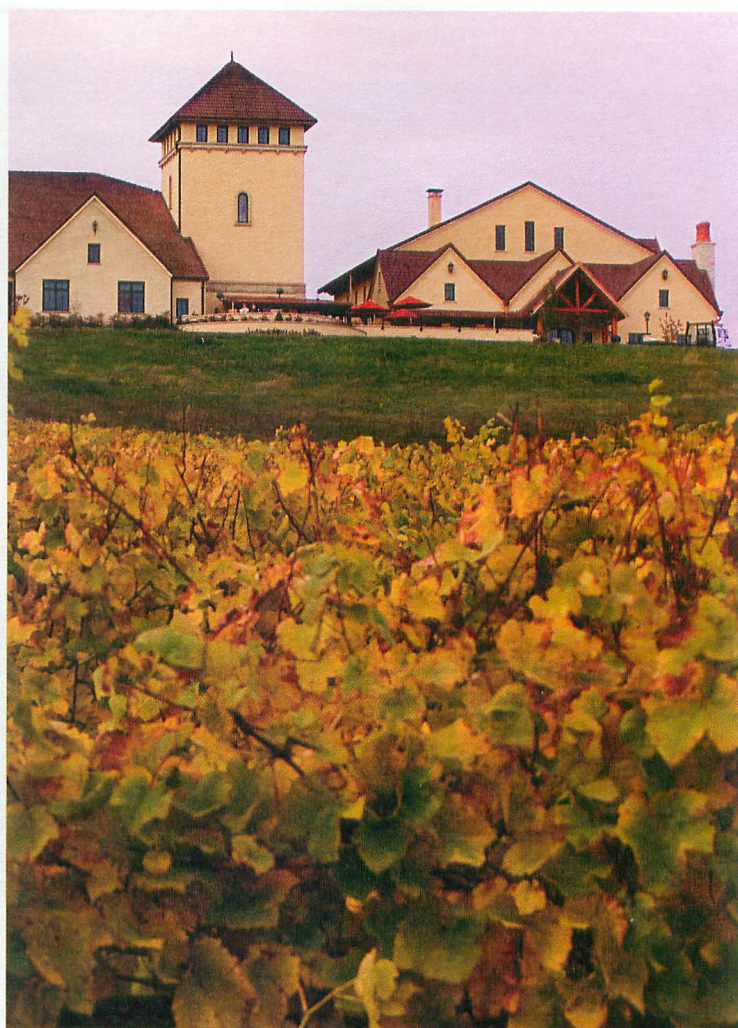
At day's end, arrive in Ashland, which is enough of a tourist base to provide fine accommodations. One good choice is Lithia Springs Resort. Grouped around gardens and gazebos, the individual cottages have their own jetted tubs for enjoying the hot, aromatic mineral waters. In town, there's the historic Ashland Springs Hotel, two blocks from the theaters (home to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which runs from February to October), and Winchester Inn, which has a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence for its restaurant's wine list.

For this final night of the trip, make reservations at one of the quirkiest fine-dining restaurants in America, New Sammy's Cowboy Bistro. New Sammy's owners Vernon and Charlene Rollins, who those with long memories may know as the former owners of Hotel Boonville in California's Anderson Valley, have been delighting adventurous gourmets and wine aficionados here for 20 years now. For most of that time, the restaurant looked like nothing but a roadside shack. Recently expanded and with a new façade, it attracts the West Coast foodie crowd that comes for the Shakespeare Festival.

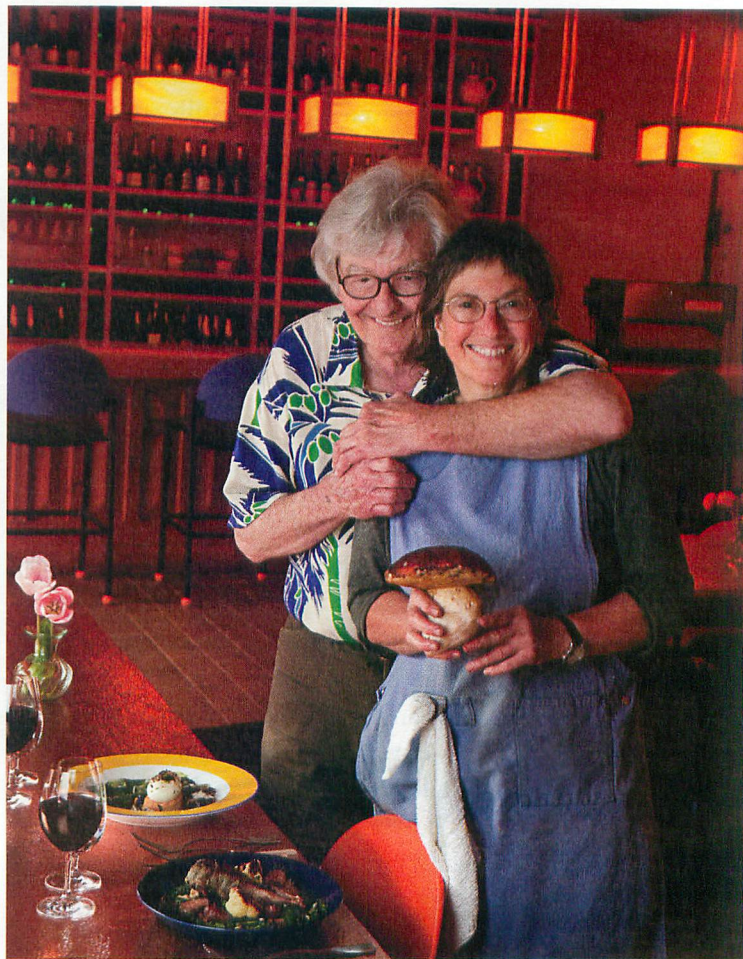
A brilliant chef, Charlene favors complex dishes that capture the freshness and vitality of great ingredients. Vernon once imported wine in Berkeley, Calif., and he has amassed an eye-popping wine cellar here. The list of more than 2,000 choices bulges with superb Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhône and southern French wines from the 1980s and 1990s, plus a few Pacific Northwest bottles from the restaurant's early years that never sold and never were added to either; markups at New Sammy's are modest, based on the original price, not what it would cost to replace the bottle.

"I have too much wine," Vernon complains. "I need to reduce the inventory." But he is clearly conflicted about wine aficionados plundering his cellar. "I hate it when people come in and immediately ask for the big wine list," he says. "I know they're going right to one of the big Bordeaux." Vernon would rather diners decide what they want to eat, then let him help pick something perfect with his wife's food. And he's pretty good at that, knowing Charlene's cooking so intimately.

This great food, like the other fine meals you will encounter on this itinerary, offers more proof that the region no longer deserves to fly under anyone's radar. The reason goes beyond geography. It's the people. Some are natives, while others were visitors who came looking for something different and stayed, having found a (sometimes offbeat) niche in this Pacific Northwest. With its varied and dramatic scenery, compelling wines and accommodations from rustic to refined, it delivers an experience you won't find anywhere else.



Sprawling over several hillsides in the country south of Eugene, King Estate grows fruits and vegetables as well as grapes and is home to a restaurant and wine bar.



Vernon and Charlene Rollins' restaurant, New Sammy's Cowboy Bistro, boasts a menu of fresh-flavored dishes and a wine list of 2,000-plus choices.

TOURING NORTHWEST WINE COUNTRY



Notes on the Region

Alaska Airlines' Horizon Air serves Walla Walla from Seattle, and United Airlines' United Express connects Medford, Ore., to Portland and San Francisco.

As of press time, hours and fees for winery visits are current through harvesttime of this year. Some wineries are closed to visitors during the winter and early spring months; others are open on weekends only or by appointment. Calling ahead to confirm hours and tour options is highly recommended.

1 Day 1: Walla Walla

Wineries to Visit

Cougar Crest 50 Frenchtown Road, Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 529-5980 **Web site** www.cougarcrestwinery.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$5 (refunded with purchase); reserve tasting \$5 (no rebate)

Pepper Bridge 1704 J.B. George Road, Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 525-6502 **Web site** www.pepperbridge.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for tastings; tours by appointment **Cost** Tours free; tastings \$8 (refunded with purchase)

Seven Hills 212 N. 3rd Ave., Walla Walla **Telephone** (877) 777-7870; (509) 529-7198 **Web site** www.sevenhillswinery.com **Open** Thursday to Saturday, Monday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment **Cost** Tours free; tastings \$5

Where to Eat

Creektown Café 1129 S. Second Ave., Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 522-4777 **Web site** www.creektowncafe.com **Open** Lunch, midday meal, dinner, Tuesday to Friday **Cost** Entrées \$21–\$28 **Corkage** \$15 **Credit cards** All major

Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen 125 W. Alder St., Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 525-2112 **Web site** www.saffronmediterraneankitchen.com **Open** Tuesday to Thursday, Sunday, 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. to 11 p.m. **Cost** Entrées \$22–\$38 **Corkage** 750ml \$20–\$35; magnum \$40 **Credit cards** Visa, MasterCard

Whitehouse-Crawford Restaurant 55 W. Cherry St., Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 525-2222 **Web site** www.whitehousecrawford.com **Open** Dinner, Wednesday to Monday **Cost** Entrées \$16–\$39 **Corkage** 750ml \$20; magnum \$30 **Credit cards** All major

Where to Stay

The Fat Duck Inn 527 Catherine St., Walla Walla **Telephone** (888) 526-8718; (509) 526-3825 **Web site** www.fatduckinn.com **Suites** 5 **Guest houses** 2 **Rates** \$125–\$250

Marcus Whitman Hotel & Conference Center 6 W. Rose St., Walla Walla **Telephone** (509) 525-2200 **Web site** www.marcuswhitmanhotel.com **Rooms** 122 **Suites** 25 **Rates** \$129–\$369

2 Day 2: Yakima Valley and Red Mountain

Wineries to Visit

Col Solare 50207 Antinori Road, Benton City **Telephone** (509) 588-6806 **Web site** www.colsolare.com **Open** By appointment **Cost** Tours and tastings \$15–\$55

Fidélitas 51810 N. Sunset Road, Benton City **Telephone** (509) 588-3469 **Web site** www.fidelitaswines.com **Open** Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., or by appointment **Cost** Tastings free–\$5

Where to Eat

Picazo 7Seventeen 717 6th St., Prosser **Telephone** (509) 786-1116 **Web site** www.picazo717.com **Open** Dinner, Tuesday to Saturday **Cost** Entrées \$18–\$34 **Corkage** \$15; Calif. wines \$25 **Credit cards** All major

Wine O’Clock Wine Bar 548 Cabernet Court, Vintner’s Village, Prosser **Telephone** (509) 786-2197 **Web site** www.bunnellfamilycellar.com **Open** Friday and Saturday, noon to 7 p.m.; Sunday and Monday, noon to 5 p.m. **Cost** Entrées \$12–\$16 **Corkage** Free with matched purchase from list; call ahead to arrange **Credit cards** Visa, MasterCard

Where to Stay

Inn at Horse Heaven 259 Merlot Drive, Prosser **Telephone** (800) 688-2192; (509) 786-7977 **Web site** www.bestwestern.com **Rooms** 85 **Suites** 6 **Rates** \$139–\$179

Sunset House Wine Country Inn 1401 S. Kinney Way, Prosser **Telephone** (800) 941-2941 **Web site** www.sunsethouseinn.com **Rooms** 4 **Suites** 1 **Rates** \$139–\$179

3 Day 3: Horse Heaven Hills to Willamette Valley

Wineries to Visit

Chateau Champoux 524 Alderdale Road, Prosser **Telephone** (509) 894-5005 **Web site** www.chateauchampoux.com **Open** By appointment, June to November **Cost** Tours \$15; tastings \$10

Columbia Crest Highway 221 at Columbia Crest Drive (between MM 1 and 2), Paterson **Telephone** (509) 875-2061 **Web site** www.columbia-crest.com **Open** Daily, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **Cost** Free

Where to Eat

Celilo Restaurant and Bar 16 Oak St., Hood River **Telephone** (541) 386-5710 **Web site** www.celilorestaurant.com **Open** Lunch and dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$15–\$22 **Corkage** \$20 **Credit cards** All major

The Painted Lady 201 S. College St., Newberg **Telephone** (503) 538-3850 **Web site** www.thepaintedladyrestaurant.com **Open** Dinner, Wednesday to Sunday **Cost** Four-course tasting menu, \$60; with wine pairing \$100 **Corkage** 750ml \$25–\$30; magnum \$50; available only for wines not on the house list **Credit cards** All major **Award of Excellence**

Tina’s Restaurant 760 N. Highway 99W, Dundee **Telephone** (503) 538-8880 **Web site** www.tinasdundee.com **Open** Lunch, Tuesday to Friday; dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$22–\$36 **Corkage** \$20 **Credit cards** All major

Where to Stay

The Allison Inn & Spa (to open September 2009) 2525 Allison Lane, Newberg **Telephone** (877) 294-2525; (503) 554-2525 **Web site** www.theallison.com **Rooms** 65 **Suites** 20 **Rates** \$295–\$1,100

Black Walnut Inn 9600 N.E. Worden Hill Road, Dundee **Telephone** (866) 429-4114; (503) 429-4114 **Web site** www.blackwalnut-inn.com **Suites** 9 **Rates** \$295–\$495

University House 401 N. Meridian St., Newberg **Telephone** (866) 538-8438 **Web site** www.universityhousenewberg.com **Rooms** 3 **Rates** \$150 inclusive of all 3 bedrooms

4 Day 4: Willamette Valley

Wineries to Visit

Argyle 691 Highway 99W, Dundee **Telephone** (503) 538-8520

Web site www.argylewinery.com **Open** Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$2.50–\$10

Carlton Winemakers Studio 801 N. Scott St., Carlton **Telephone** (503) 852-6100 **Web site** www.winemakersstudio.com **Open** Tasting room, Thursday to Monday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; tours by appointment **Cost** Tastings \$5–\$18

Domaine Drouhin 6750 Breyman Orchards Road, Dayton **Telephone** (503) 864-2700 **Web site** www.domainedrouhin.com **Open** Tasting room, Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; tours by appointment **Cost** Tours \$20; tastings \$10

5 Day 5: Eola-Amity Hills and Eugene

Wineries to Visit

Benton-Lane 23924 Territorial Highway, Monroe **Telephone** (541) 847-5792 **Web site** www.benton-lane.com **Open** Tasting room, Monday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; tours by appointment **Cost** Tastings free

Bethel Heights 6060 Bethel Heights Road N.W., Salem **Telephone** (503) 581-2262 **Web site** www.bethelheights.com **Open** Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** Tastings \$5 (refunded with purchase)

Where to Eat

King Estate Winery Restaurant 80854 Territorial Road, Eugene **Telephone** (800) 884-4441; (541) 685-5189 **Web site** www.kingestate.com **Open** Lunch and dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$20–\$40

Corkage Non-estate wines \$25 **Credit cards** All major

Marché 296 E. Fifth Ave., Eugene **Telephone** (541) 342-3612

Web site www.marcheprovisions.com **Open** Lunch and dinner, daily

Cost Entrées \$20–\$34; prix fixe \$25 **Corkage** \$15 **Credit cards**

All major **Award of Excellence**

Where to Stay

Hilton Eugene and Conference Center Hotel 66 E. Sixth Ave, Eugene **Telephone** (541) 342-2000 **Web site** www.hilton.com **Rooms** 254 **Suites** 15 **Rates** \$122–\$209

Valley River Inn 1000 Valley River Way, Eugene **Telephone** (800) 543-8266; (541) 743-1000 **Web site** www.valleyriverinn.com **Rooms** 245 **Suites** 12 **Rates** \$129–\$169

6 Day 6: Eugene to Southern Oregon

Wineries to Visit

Abacela 12500 Lookingglass Road, Roseburg **Telephone** (541) 679-6642 **Web site** www.abacela.com **Open** Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Cost** \$5 (refunded with purchase)

King Estate Winery 80854 Territorial Road, Eugene **Telephone** (800) 884-4441; (541) 942-9874 **Web site** www.kingestate.com **Open** Tasting room, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily; tours, noon to 5 p.m., or by appointment **Cost** Tours free; tastings free–\$5

Where to Eat

New Sammy’s Cowboy Bistro 2210 S. Pacific Highway, Talent **Telephone** (541) 535-2779 **Open** Lunch and dinner, Wednesday to Sunday **Cost** Entrées \$21–\$27 **Corkage** \$6 per person; waived with purchase from list **Credit cards** Visa, MasterCard

Winchester Inn 35 S. Second St., Ashland **Telephone** (800) 972-4991; (541) 488-1113 **Web site** www.winchesterinn.com **Open** Breakfast and dinner, daily **Cost** Entrées \$14–\$36 **Corkage** \$15 **Credit cards** All major **Award of Excellence**

Where to Stay

Ashland Springs Hotel 212 E. Main St., Ashland **Telephone** (888) 795-4545; (541) 488-1700 **Web site** www.ashlandspringshotel.com **Rooms** 70 **Rates** \$139–\$229

Lithia Springs Resort 2165 W. Jackson Road, Ashland **Telephone** (800) 482-7128 **Web site** www.ashlandinn.com **Rooms** 9 **Cottages/Suites** 16 **Rates** \$179–\$299

ABCs of the Pacific Northwest

Washington and Oregon, the two coastal states of the Pacific Northwest, share a similar geography. The lofty Cascade range runs north to south through both states, separating a wet, rainy coast from a dry, desertlike interior. The Columbia River cuts through the mountains, providing most of the border between them.

But while the bulk of Oregon's vineyards are tucked into the state's mountain valleys, virtually all of Washington's grapes grow in that dry interior, using water from the Columbia to survive. The relatively cool summer and autumn weather in coastal Oregon favors grapes such as Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. The warm, dry conditions in interior Washington have proved best for Bordeaux varieties, Syrah and Riesling. Washington also grows a lot more grapes, with 33,000 acres in production compared with Oregon's 14,500 (though a rush of recent plantings will increase Oregon's total vineyard acreage to nearly 20,000 by 2011).

Washington

Washington's signature Cabernet Sauvignons, Merlots, Syrahs and Rieslings come from the dry eastern side of the Cascades, where the vineyards are protected from the Pacific Ocean's sweeping rains by ever-snowy peaks such as Mount Rainier and Mount Adams.

Among the state's more than 600 wineries, few follow the estate model, which requires making the wines in the same AVA as the vineyards from which they're sourced. Many of the best wineries are in the populous Seattle area. Quilceda Creek and Betz, for example, truck grapes over the Cascades. Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, the state's largest wine company, makes its Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest and Snoqualmie wines in facilities in eastern Washington, but maintains estate wineries at Col Solare on Red Mountain and Northstar in Walla Walla. Though the traits of specific vineyard districts are gradually coming into focus, some of the state's best wines blend grapes from several areas.

Columbia Valley, the largest and most comprehensive appellation, spreads over 18,000 square miles, essentially covering the dry part of the state, where 95 percent of the grapes grow. Labels carrying the Columbia Valley designation range from basic, everyday wines to some of Washington's finest.

Due to cool temperatures in Yakima Valley, which has 11,000 acres under vine, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot ripen well only in certain vineyards. But when they succeed, the wines can have nerve and power. Syrah here tends to be crisp and fragrant, and



Yakima Valley in the desertlike climate of eastern Washington is only one of the many distinctive winemaking regions that cover the diverse terrain of the Pacific Northwest.

white grapes thrive. Yakima has three sub-AVAs: Rattlesnake Hills, Snipes Mountain and Red Mountain, the region's star, counting 700 acres at the eastern tip of the valley. Vintners prize the warm, windy, south-facing slope for its dense, often tannic wines. Some of the best producers in the state, such as Betz, Gorman and DeLille, use Red Mountain grapes exclusively or as core elements.

The 6,000 acres of Horse Heaven Hills, a low range facing the Columbia River, produce relatively gentle, supple Cabernets and Merlots. Wahluke Slope, a

south-facing table that tilts toward the river as it makes a big northward bend, now has 5,000 acres in production, mostly independent vineyards that produce appealingly broad, supple wines. Walla Walla Valley, pioneered by Leonetti and Woodward Canyon, numbers 1,000 acres in the southeast corner of the state.

Oregon

Oregon's top wines come from vineyards clustered in the coastal hills. Unlike Washington, Oregon loves its single-vineyard wines, not surprising for a state known for Pinot Noir. Most wineries make several single-vineyard bottlings, often buying grapes from prominent independent growers—Ken Wright is the most prolific, typically bottling a dozen or so—while others, such as Beaux Frères and Soter, may concentrate on a single estate bottling.

Home to 300 of the state's 395 wineries, Willamette Valley is Oregon's largest AVA. Though it covers 3.3 million acres in the northwest corner of the state, fewer than 15,000 of them are planted. The Willamette River starts in the mountains south of Eugene and winds 100 miles northward before emptying into the Columbia at Portland. Pinot Noir, the state's signature grape, flourishes here. As in Burgundy, the top vineyards hug south-, west- and east-facing slopes at moderate elevations, typically less than 1,000 feet.

Clumps of low hills dot the northern part of the valley, recently divided into six sub-AVAs, each with its own mix of soils and climatic peculiarities. The jury is out on how distinctly the *terroir* shows in the wines, but there's no doubt that most of the best Pinot Noirs come from these areas.

Heading south from the Willamette Valley, the appellations of Chehalem Mountains, Ribbon Ridge and Dundee Hills are each home to some of the state's top producers. Yet the weather gets significantly warmer in southern Oregon, where Pinot Noir achieves less distinction in districts such as the Umpqua Valley. The weather in the Rogue Valley is more conducive to Syrah and, in very good years, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

—H.S.