

Portland's The Allison Inn & Spa

Written by Written by David M. Brown

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Call of the Vines



Just short of an hour's drive southwest of Portland in historic Newberg, 85-room/suite The Allison Inn & Spa is the elegant gateway to Oregon's distinguished Willamette Valley, known worldwide for its sustainable agriculture, family-owned vineyards (producing some of the finest pinot noirs in the world) and innovative winemakers. The area's first full-service luxury hotel, The Allison exemplifies commitment to luxury, regional history, community and environmental stewardship—contemporary hospitality both welcoming and with-it.

Woods Lovely, Dark and Deep

On 35 hillside acres of a sustainably master-planned 450, the four-level boutique hotel includes a vanishing-edge swimming pool with floor-to-ceiling glass doors opening to the south gardens; 100-seat locavore restaurant, JORY; and The Allison Spa, whose nearly 15,000 square feet offers 12 treatment rooms including a private suite.

To the east, west and south of The Allison is the undulating topography of Parrett Mountain, the Chehalem Mountains and Dundee Hills. These cool hills and mountains, with their abundant fall and winter rains, also help produce excellent white wines: pinot gris, riesling and chardonnay.

The pastoral campus features lush seasonally varying flowers, groundcovers, trees, hedges, sedges, shrubs and lawns: in summer, Daylilies, white rugosa roses and English daisies. Hummingbirds and song birds are abundant. Groves of deciduous (river birch) and conifer trees (Douglas fir, Oregon oak and Pacific madrone) provide a get-away-from-it-all setting and a habitat for bald eagles, white-tailed deer, great-horned owls and western bluebirds. In addition to the native trees, more than 1,000 have been planted. And, just outside the resort's north-facing rooms, five acres of pinot noir and two acres of pinot gris vineyards begin producing grapes for the resort's proprietary wines this year.

The Allison immediately impresses with its sense of place and contextuality. Its four stories, for example, are built into a landscaped slope—not towering above the property but engaging its flow. Vegetated swales, flower gardens, herb and chef's gardens, for JORY, intensify the aesthetics and reaffirm the environmental concern.

As a result, you are equally pulled outside as into The Allison's transparent lobby, including a four-story glass-enclosed circular staircase, stone walls, a waterfall and indoor-outdoor water feature. Here, the hotel's unfussy staff treats you like respected family members.

Regardless of season, footpaths, bluestone details and stone terraces inspire strolls through the grounds—carefully designed to preserve the streams, wetlands and habitat, in place since glaciers and floods carved the valley during and following the last ice age. Allison Lake describes the deep body of water that once covered the area before the ice melted and the rich local soils waited for the farmers and winegrowers to discover their vinicultural magic thousands of years later.

Green Gets Gold

Eco-tourists will enjoy knowing that less than a year after opening in fall of 2009, The Allison Inn & Spa was awarded the LEED Gold certification by the United States Green Building Council. In designing and constructing their inn, Ken and Joan Austin demanded this sensitivity to the area, as their families have connections through seven generations in Oregon, a bellwether state for environmentalism.

Green features include solar-powered hot water; photovoltaic rooftop cells, which generate seven percent of the inn's electrical needs; thermally broken double-pane low-e windows; south-facing orientation; Variable Refrigerant Volume heating and cooling; energy-efficient lighting and controls; extensive daylighting; stormwater retention and a greywater irrigation system; and more.

Spacious Rooms . . . and Leave Room for Food and Pampering

All guest rooms and suites have bay window seats, gas fireplaces and terraces or balconies with views to the vineyards, woodlands and meadow garden. The largest room is the 1,575-sq.-ft. two-bedroom Grand Penthouse Suite.

Also regionally inspired, The Allison Spa is a well-equipped full-service facility known for its "Pinotherapy" treatment, a pinot-inspired botanical and biological therapy using wine and grape seed extracts from the property's vineyard.

Overseen by Executive Chef Sunny Jin, the 100-seat JORY focuses on garden-to-table food as well as local wines, microbrews and

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hand-crafted distilled spirits. The restaurant features an 800-label award-winning wine list with more than 40 wines by the glass. On the menu, you'll find items like pan-seared lamb loins, which chef plates with rotisserie leg, lamb bacon, chickpeas, green garlic, Castelvetro olives and roasted Piquillo coulis.

Finishes That Just Don't Stop

With all of the boutique charm, luxe amenities, sustainability and downhome hospitality of The Allison, you will equally appreciate its architectural achievement and interior design details and finishes. Throughout the rooms and public areas, the design celebrates the area's farmland legacy, with earthtones of the hills and vineyards, and colors recalling lichen, bark, berry, pear, beet and squash. Groves of aspens at the hotel entries are repeated in the aspen-branch patterns in the corridor carpets.

The resort features a 500-plus piece private art collection showcasing Oregonian artists. Curated by the owners' daughter, local artist and gallery owner, Loni Parrish, the collection includes six commissioned works.

Joan Austin took five years just to plan The Allison Inn & Spa, so that it would not only be a destination itself but a worthy hospitality centerpiece for the Willamette Valley her family loves. She told everyone some 10 years ago: "Just do it right." And so it is.

Cheers to the Willamette Valley

Forty-three years ago, Bill Blosser and Susan Sokol, just graduates of Stanford, pulled up in a '68 Volkswagen Camper to a disused prune orchard in the Dundee Hills and put down roots in the Willamette Valley. They planted the actual ones in 1971.

Eight years on, their pinot noirs won golds at the International Wine & Spirits Competition in London. One of the area's wine-family pioneers had helped to establish it as a leading pinot noir producer in the United States and the world.

For the family, then as now, wine-making is agriculture. This means touching the vines, tasting the clusters, picking them with the workers. Today, under their second-generation stewardship, the 120-acre property also produces pinot gris and boutique Single Block Pinot Noirs as well as the excellent Evolution white and red blends.

A proponent of organic winemaking in a sustainable environment, Sokol Blosser built the first LEED-certified winery building in the U.S. and also installed a 25kW photovoltaic solar system, which furnishes 20 percent of the company's energy needs. The family continues this tradition in July when it opens an environmentally sensitive tasting room. www.sokolblosser.com.

Out of the Inn

With a population of just more than 22,000, Newberg, Ore., has excellent restaurants and shops and is developing a quaint, unassuming tourist ethos. And, the nearby Willamette Valley has more than 300 wineries for touring and tasting, and you can also enjoy helicopter, cycling and even equestrian winery tours. Golf is nearby at the 18-hole Chehalem Glenn Course, and there are farmers' markets, rolling-countryside backroads and small towns. Children and their elders will especially enjoy the spectacular Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum, home of Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose, in nearby McMinnville, about 40 minutes from The Allison Inn & Spa. www.willamettewines.com.