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# OREGON WINE COUNTRY'S NEW LUXURY HUB

Wine, food, and small-town charm combine  
in McMinnville to create a memorable experience

BY GREG FREITAS AND NATALIE COMPAGNO

# we've been

coming to the Oregon Wine Country since the aughts, making the trek from Seattle to visit family near Hillsboro. Back then, McMinnville was a sleepy little town — a convenient stop for coffee or a quick bite on the way to somewhere else. Fast forward to today and it's transformed into a destination all its own, managing to pull off an improbable mix of old-school charm and upscale luxury without losing its homey, farmland soul.

Nowhere is that evolution more evident than on Northeast Third Street. At one end, there's **McMenamins Hotel Oregon** with its signature quirks and comfortable, well-worn vibe. Down the block, you'll find boutiques and cute cafés such as **Alchemist's Jam & Preserves**, with lines out the door for cardamom jam and oat milk lattes. It is the kind of town that has an excellent independent bookstore (Third Street Books), great thrifting (Vintage on Third), and, of course, an organic grocery, Harvest Fresh, that just celebrated its 30th birthday.

So, when we heard that there was a new **Relais & Châteaux** property in McMinnville, at first we did a double take. Then we decided to investigate.

Relais & Châteaux is a prestigious designation signifying that a hotel or restaurant meets high standards of luxury, personalized service, and exceptional hospitality. These independently owned properties are known for their unique charm, gourmet cuisine, and strong connection to local culture and heritage. Widely respected in Western Europe, the designation is lesser known here. There is only one such hotel property in the entire Pacific Northwest, and it is located in downtown McMinnville.

**Tributary** feels like it was airlifted straight from Sonoma, where the owners are from. It opened in 2023, and is the kind of place that makes you want to check in and never leave. Housed in a beautiful century-old brick building, the hotel has just eight luxury suites — each named after an Oregon waterway. The rooms combine warm textures with natural materials, soft lighting and ridiculously high thread counts, giving the space a grounded elegance. The books on the shelves are curated carefully, not left behind or chosen at random. Service is downright regal, with every guest greeted and treated like a visiting dignitary.

Every morning breakfast arrives at the door, an artful spread of farm-fresh eggs, handmade pastries, and hyper-local accompaniments from Tributary's own farm and neighboring purveyors. It's indulgence without an ounce of pretension, and it sets the

## COME HUNGRY

Falconer Kort Clayton uses his birds to keep pests from eating the grapes at Soter Vineyards. Below, Soter's Mineral Springs Provisions tasting room.



tone for a day spent exploring the valley.

The magic doesn't end at the hotel. Tributary's farm is just outside of town — a bucolic retreat led by Chef Larry Nguyen, whose resume includes stints at culinary titans like Noma and Willows Inn. It's equal parts working farm and culinary laboratory, where ingredients grown on-site make their way onto the hotel's breakfast menu. The focus on fermentation and local produce means every bite feels like a love letter to the valley's terroir. The hotel's

DAVID LAURIDSEN; JOSH CHANG



**A LOT TO OFFER**  
CHO Vineyards has a laid-back, intimate atmosphere and some truly standout pinot noir, while Hayward in the Mac Market elevates the dining scene with casual elegance.

through our most pleasant dreams. Paired with the estate pinot noir, life doesn't get much better. We had thought we would go to dinner after the lunch tasting menu, but that was a foolish ambition.

For something a little more under the radar, **CHO Vineyards** has a laid-back, intimate atmosphere and some truly standout pinot noir. And if you're more of a spirits person, don't miss **Killdeer Distillery**, where the Kamut whiskey — a quirky grain with alleged ties to a pharaoh's tomb in ancient Egypt — is worth both the sip and the story.

McMinnville has earned its new reputation as a destination worth the drive, balancing sophistication and authenticity in a way that feels organic and unforced. It's grown up without growing pretentious, and whether you're there for the wine, the food, or just total relaxation, it's worth slowing down and taking it all in. ■

on-site restaurant is closed for now, but judging by the breakfasts we had, when it returns it will be excellent.

We drove there, but you don't have to. If you really want to treat yourself and a loved one, inquire about the Sip & Soar package. Besides three days in the blissful hotel, exclusive private food and wine tastings all over the Willamette Valley, a private fishing trip, access to the members-only **Multnomah Whiskey Library** in Portland, and a chauffeur-driven Rivian — you also fly to the local airport on a private plane with Triumph Jets. The cost depends on where you fly from, but as we all know — avoiding the traffic on I-5 is priceless.

McMinnville's dining scene has evolved alongside its accommodations. At **Hayward in the Mac Market**, casual elegance meets local flavors with dishes like handmade pasta tossed with roasted chanterelles or braised short ribs with heirloom carrots. It's elevated but approachable, with a wine list that reflects its surroundings. Just down the street, **Thistle** leans into its rustic, cozy vibe with inventive cocktails and a seasonal menu from oysters to lamb shank. Beer pilgrims should not miss **Heater Allen Brewing**, just a few blocks away.

Once you're ready to explore beyond town, the countryside rewarded us with more surprises. **Soter Vineyards** is a must-visit (21 and over, by appointment only), offering sweeping hilltop views and tasting menus that pair beautifully with its signature wines. Even on a road trip bursting with culinary splendor, it was the most memorable meal of the weekend. The Mineral Springs Ranch beef, on brassica with cranberry beans, still dances