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Inns and Outs of Willamette Valley's Future

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Planning a visit to Oregon's Willamette Valley to hobnob with the top Pinot Noir producers and their wineries? To date, finding a place to stay has been a challenge. The area lacks the kind of accommodation infrastructure familiar to visitors to California's notable regions. Many people I know stay in Portland and drive 45 minutes to the nearest winery.

Here's a quick update on various plans for upscale inns. None of them will be open before 2009, but at least it's encouraging that something looms on the horizon.

The issue first jumped into the news when a developer announced plans last year for a wine country resort adjacent to Domaine Drouhin and Domaine Serene in the Dundee Hills. That ran into vociferous objections from locals, especially wineries on the two-lane road that provides access, not to mention those who hated the idea of building something on potential vineyardland.

That project is stalled, but two others seem to have clearer sailing because they lie within town limits.

Just this month, developers broke ground on what they're going to call the Allison Inn and Spa. It's part of a large residential and commercial development called Springbrook, on the northeast edge of Newberg. Lots of vineyards and wineries surround Newberg and, for now, the only places to stay there (other than a few small bed-and-breakfasts) are chain motels. The Allison will overlook rolling hills and vineyards, but being within the Newberg city limits, it won't put any pressure on vineyard resources. It's scheduled to open in 2009.

There are also plans for a country inn in Dundee from another developer, who is currently building a pair of commercial buildings at the west end of town, where doctors and real-estate agents will occupy some of the space, and a couple of restaurants will occupy the rest.