

OREGON

EPICUREAN ADVENTURES By Tina Lassen

MAKING YOUR OWN PINOT NOIR

It's harvest time in Dundee, Oregon, and the pungent smell of promise wafts through the air. Actually, it's the aroma of Pinot Noir grapes, just snipped from the vines striping the hills of the Willamette Valley. Forklifts move bins of grapes from vineyard into winery, where workers gently guide them through sorting, de-stemming, crushing,

and eventually into fermentation tanks and barrels. It's a delicate and precise production conducted under the watchful eye of Laurent Montalieu, a Bordeaux-bred winemaker who owns several wine ventures—including Soléna Cellars, Northwest Wine Company, and the Domaine Danielle Laurent vineyard—in the Willamette Valley.

On this day, Christopher Hermann watches it all intently, too. An attorney with Stoel Rives LLP in Portland who specializes in wine industry law, Hermann and his firm are members of Montalieu's Grand Cru Estates wine club. Members buy in for as little as a quarter barrel, which currently

runs \$5,000 annually, along with a one-time \$5,000 joining fee. Then they participate in the winemaking process with Montalieu, yielding their personal barrel of wine, which will be bottled and labeled just for them. Members can join in the harvest, help sort the fruit, be there for the crush, taste through and choose which of 10

vineyards' grapes they want, even craft their own signature blend. "It's as experiential as you want it to be," says Montalieu.

Montalieu began the club in 2009, inspired by a similar program in Napa Valley.

Hermann joined that first year. "You get to be a par-



Winemaker Laurent Montalieu delights in helping customers make their own wines.



GRAND CRU ESTATES

"Grand Cru," Laurent Montalieu explains, is a French designation given to a region's very finest vineyards. "We give our members access to the best of the best wine grapes in Oregon," Montalieu notes. "At the same time, we want to demystify wine and make it approachable. We encourage our members to trust their palate, to exercise the freedom to say 'I know what I like.'" Thus members craft their own, personal vintages.

participant in the Oregon wine industry," he says eagerly. "This club allows you to be a part of their ecosystem in a way you can't do anywhere else. And it's really wide open—you can do as much or as little as you'd like."

And the same is true for the broad menu of culinary adven-

tures in Oregon, starting from the ground up. **GNW**

Tina Lassen lives in Hood River.

GETTING THERE: Alaska Airlines (800-ALASKAAIR, alaskaair.com) offers frequent service to communities throughout Oregon. Visit alaskaair.com and traveloregon.com.