



NEW IN TOWN



They may not have arrived by covered wagon, but these modern settlers fell hard for Eastern Oregon.



BY LORA SHINN



What could make a person pick up and move from a vibrant metropolis like New York City to the humble little town of Milton-Freewater? Or switch gears from the rush of the fast lane to a “see you when we get there” pace? The folks you’ll meet here know, because they did just that. Whether it was a tantalizing job offer or a simple desire for change that prompted their relocation to Eastern Oregon, all of these people possess a newcomer’s enthusiasm for their recently adopted home region. They also have an insider’s scoop on what to do, eat, and see—so read ahead and follow in their pioneering footsteps.

SWEET SURPRISES

Lan Wong
Milton-Freewater

Five years ago, Lan Wong was working for a New York City chocolatier when she decided to find an affordable yet appealing location to start her own chocolate business, **Petits Noirs Chocolates** (www.petitsnoirs.com). She found the ideal

combination in Milton-Freewater, population 6,500. Located eight miles south of Walla Walla, Wash., in the picturesque Blue Mountains, the town offers big skies, a booming wine industry, and a bounty of local produce. “For foodies, this is heaven,” says Wong, whose shop specializes in European-style chocolates.

The region’s wine-country focus was a particularly big draw for the 38-year-old Wong. She now provides travelers with a map to local vintners and recommends the best chocolate-vino pairings. A delicious example: one of her popular rose truffles with a glass of rosé.

This mom of a toddler daughter is thrilled that she made the move to Milton-Freewater, and she rejoices in the accessible delicacies of the region. Wong often heads out on one of the local two-lane highways, pulling over at the produce stands that dot the roadsides. Depending on the season, week, or day, a farm may offer pick-your-own apricots or bags of fresh apples (on the honor system); or a farm house may boast a simple sign that announces, “We’ve got zucchini!”

“It’s something you can read about in a book, but it’s a hoot to experience it yourself,” Wong says. “You can get produce in the city, but it’s just not the same. Out here—seeing the animals and smelling the earth—it’s an adventure.”



WONG’S TOP TIPS

- 1 Engage in a long-standing Pendleton tradition by tucking into a succulent, hand-cut steak—along with other great regional, seasonal fare—at **Hamley Steakhouse** (www.hamley.com).
 - 2 Drink from one of Oregon’s signature fruits at **Blue Mountain Cider Company** (www.drinkcider.com), an artisan-style hard cider company.
 - 3 Enjoy a diverse variety of thought-provoking pieces—and perhaps purchase one to take home—at **The Pendleton Center for the Arts** (www.pendletonarts.org).
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