

# EXPERIENCE

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JONATHAN OPPENHEIMER CHANGES COURSE + MEET THE NEW CHALLENGER 650  
CHILEAN WINE COUNTRY + FOGO ISLAND DESIGN + ABLE FLIGHT TRAINING

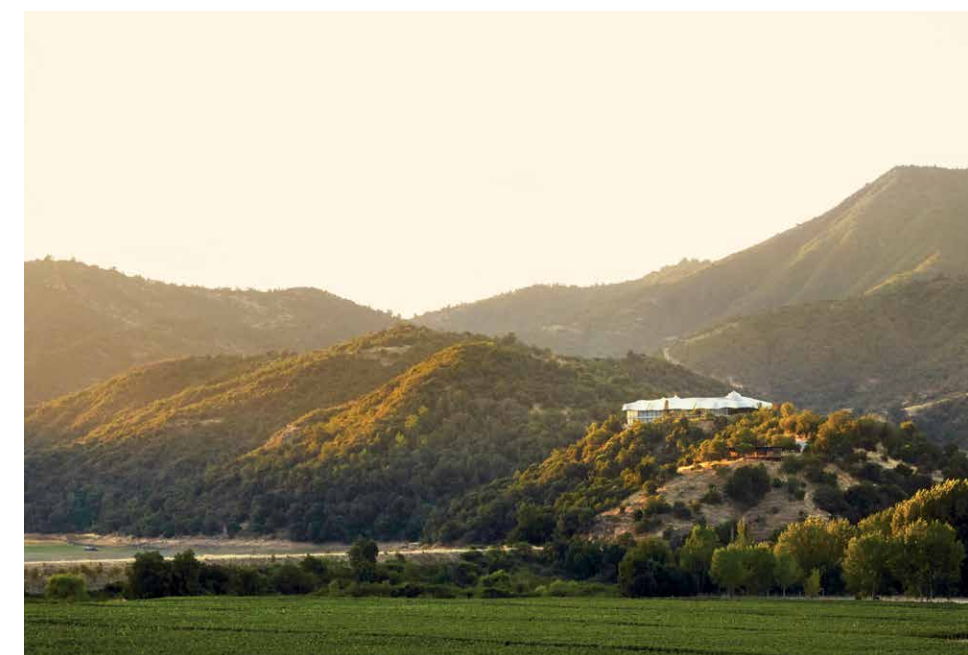
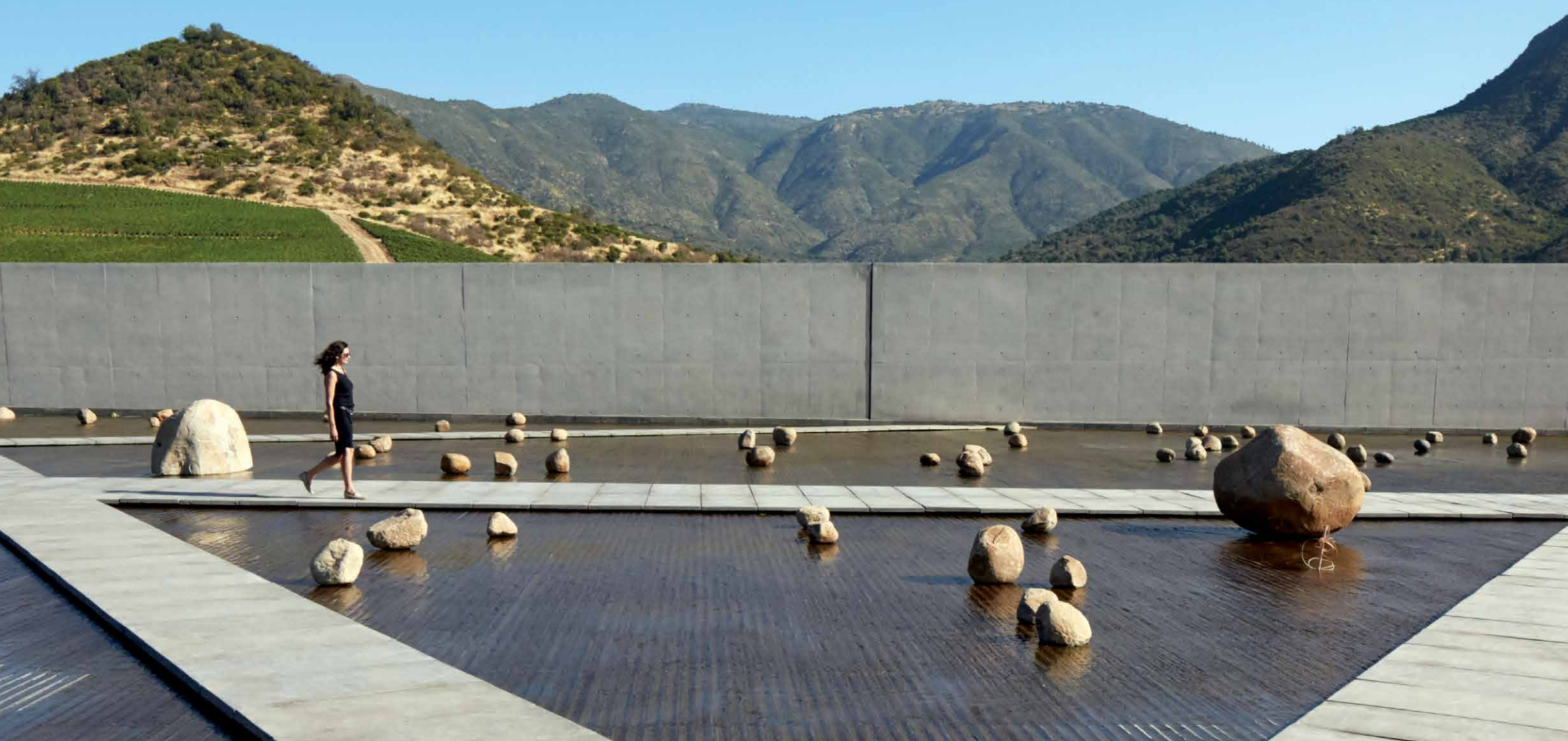


# GRAND DESIGNS

As Chile's wines grow more sophisticated, so too do its wineries. We look at some of the growing region's most remarkable examples of modern architecture, all delivered with the appropriate pairings.

BY NATASHA MEKHAIL | PHOTOS BY CRISTOBAL PALMA

**BOARDWALK EMPIRE**  
A serene pathway leads guests to the Winery at VIK; (right) the bronzed titanium roof of Viña VIK Retreat appears to float on the hillside.



As we set out through the vineyard under a baking Chilean sun, Gonzague de Lambert warns me that no one is ever quite prepared for their first sight of the Winery at VIK. I certainly am not as I follow the 15th-generation vintner towards an opening in a low stone wall. But once past the unassuming entrance, a dramatic sight appears: The vast arched winery looms at the end of a stone plaza, where concrete footpaths crisscross a floor of rippling water. Boulders, the color of the surrounding hills, punctuate the geometric landscape, while a central walkway bridges the serene expanse to the facility's doors.

*Is this a winery – or a temple?*

“The walk here prepares your mind,” says de Lambert as though reading my thoughts. “You enter and forget everything from before.”

If this is a place of worship, it's for the adulation of one label alone. VIK's inaugural wine, an eponymous Bordeaux-style blend, was released in 2012. It was the vision of Norwegian financier Alexander Vik, who, with his wife Carrie, also runs three boutique hotels in Uruguay. Vik engaged de Lambert (of Bordeaux's Château de Sales) and winemaker Patrick Valette (of Château Pavie) to find some exceptional terroir in South America. The search took them to Argentina, then on to Chile, where in 2006 they dropped the pin on this former fruit farm 100 miles south of Santiago in the sun-drenched Cachapoal Valley.

Overlooking the winery, the just-opened Viña VIK Retreat skims the hillside like a cloud of silver and gold. Bronzed titanium forms its undulating roof – an ode to Frank Gehry and Richard Serra, whom the Viks referenced when they dreamt up the hotel and commissioned architect Marcelo Daglio to realize it.

If such examples of breathtaking modern architecture were once unprecedented in rural Chile, they are now becoming de rigueur. VIK's two new showpiece >



Winery at VIK  
[vik.cl](http://vik.cl)

**The pairing**  
VIK – While it may be Chile's rookie label, the Bordeaux-style blend, with its superb balance of fruit, alcohol and tannins, ensures a veteran flavor profile.



**ASIAN FUSION**  
Montes' architecture follows the principles of feng shui. In the barrel room, Gregorian chant plays to the maturing wine.

Montes is credited with having helped introduce premium wines to Chile. But I'm here as much for the myth of the place as for the tasting.



buildings are the most recent examples of how the country's top producers are heralding their winemaking achievements with bold architectural statements. For just as Chile's big Cabs and crisp Chardonnays are coming into their own, so too are the spaces that give rise to them.

Unlike other VIK hotel sites, the 10,600-acre property was about wine first, hospitality second. It took six years to produce the first vintage. "We had to prove that we could make the wine before making the winery and hotel," says Carrie Vik, seated in the hotel's haute-bohemian lobby-slash-living-room. Mismatched Italian sofas, a vintage Brunswick billiard table, lamps in the shape of dress forms and pop art coffee tables (one made of circuit boards; the other of thread spools) make up the chic mix.

Each of the 22 guest rooms was individually designed: some include works by Chilean artists for whom the suites are named, others are inspired by the Viks' own personal tastes – from street art to "Adam and Eve" plate painter Piero Fornasetti.

My suite, fittingly called Chile, stands out immediately with its door of pocked cactus-wood and finca-style decor, but the eyes cannot help but be pulled towards the floor-to-ceiling windows and the sunbaked hills that drew the winemakers here to produce a French-school red.

Chile's reputation as a serious wine-producing nation has long been overshadowed by its mass-produced exports – the Gato Negros, the Casillero del Diablos. But

consider that many of the country's original vines, imported from France nearly 200 years ago, shielded by the Pacific to the west and the Andes to the east, have never fallen victim to that fatal vineyard insect, phylloxera. So while French vines the world over are grafted Frankenstein-style to pest-resistant roots from the Americas, ironically Chile's are the last to be truly French.

What's more, the country's calling-card grape, the Bordeaux-born Carménère, was considered extinct until 1994, when French ampelographer Jean-Michel Boursiquot discovered it growing unnoticed amongst the Merlot. Carménère never fared exceptionally well in Bordeaux, but here on the arid slopes it thrives, almost as if destiny had spared it for the New World.

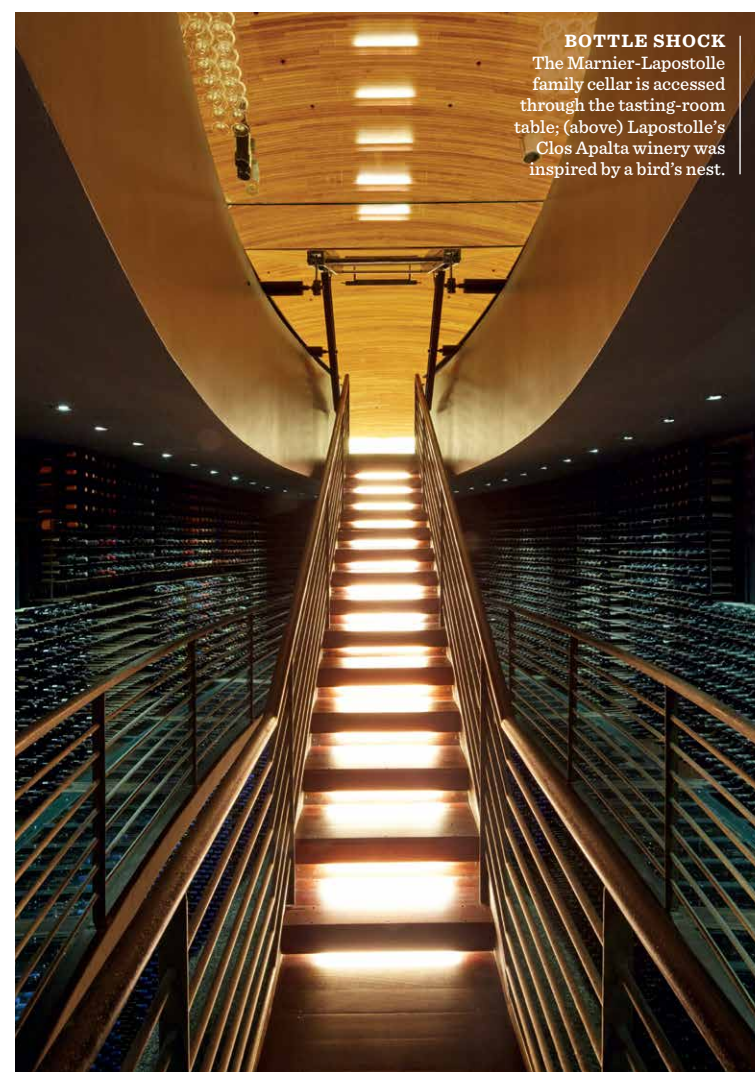
The narrowest foothill range separates the Cachapoal and Colchagua Valleys, but with no road going over, we must go around. My travel companion and interpreter Francisca takes the wheel for the hour-long drive to Colchagua's Apalta region.

We stop in front of La Finca de Apalta Montes estate. Founded 27 years ago by four seasoned Chilean vintners, Montes is widely credited with having helped introduce premium wines to Chile, including Folly, Alpha M and its flagship Carménère Purple Angel. But I'm here as much for the myth of the place as for the tasting. Montes' late cofounder Douglas Murray was a proponent of two beliefs: feng shui and angels. Legend has it that after surviving a series of car crashes, he wanted to further entice



**Montes**  
[monteswines.com](http://monteswines.com)  
—  
**The pairing**  
Purple Angel – Chile's flagship grape makes up the estate's flagship wine, which critic James Suckling has called the country's best Carménère.

**BOTTLE SHOCK**  
The Marnier-Lapostolle family cellar is accessed through the tasting-room table; (above) Lapostolle's Clos Apalta winery was inspired by a bird's nest.



the seraphs' favor with the design of the winery.

To create the minimalist building, Chilean architect Samuel Claro incorporated feng shui tenets such as a rectangular east-west configuration, water flowing from outside in and no right angles. The angels come in on the monastic feel of the walk to the cellar. A sequence of archways gives way to the low-lit cave where Gregorian chant plays continuously to the wine aging in its barrels. An angelic chorus to mingle with the angels' share.

Back on the road, there was one more stop I wanted to make. Though Viña Las Niñas isn't a premium wine producer, its grande dame Sabine Dauré was among the first in Chile to seek a modern form for her winery. In the late '90s, she enlisted then-little-known architect Mathias Klotz to design something fundamentally different from the ornate Tuscan-villa and finca-style facilities that dominated wine country. In other words, "a box." Klotz, who went on to become one of Chile's most celebrated architects, took the commission and created a wooden cube with a clear polycarbonate face so the fermentation tanks could be visible from the road.

Nearly 20 years later, it's still a head-turner. And though it was never meant to host visitors, the building is so popular among wine tourers that management finally relented and in March opened an outdoor tasting room in a repurposed shipping container – another nod to the box. Standing outside the winery's now slightly time-weathered façade, I marvel that this is where the wine-country architectural revolution began. ➤



**Lapostolle**  
[casalapostolle.com](http://casalapostolle.com)  
—  
**The pairing**  
Clos Apalta – Notes of red fruit, spice and rosemary delight the palate in this Carménère, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend, produced start-to-finish at the estate.



## CASK STRENGTH

The barrel-like design of Pérez Cruz is quake-resistant; (opposite) the glass bottom of the fountain at Haras de Pirque becomes a skylight in the underground tasting room.



Apalta means “bad soil” in native dialect. But the qualities that normally plague agriculture – sand, clay, stony terrain, lack of moisture – provide ideal grape-growing conditions and ultimately the flavors of terroir.

I contemplate this from the patio of Lapostolle vineyard, looking out over the neat rows of vines carpeting the Apalta slopes. It’s dinnertime and winemaker Andrea León and I are sipping Chile’s de facto aperitif, the pisco sour. This one has a kick of something extra and I learn that it’s Grand Marnier. Not a surprise, given that Lapostolle is the personal project of Alexandra Marnier Lapostolle, the great-granddaughter of the orange liqueur’s creator.

The 1,600-acre estate is devoted to the production of Clos Apalta, a silky blend of Carménère, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. It’s also home to a Relais & Châteaux residence, the smallest R&C in South America, with four casitas and a capacity of eight. But there’s nothing small about the design of the accommodations, whose long, horizontal glass-and-wood structures fuse as naturally to the hillside as the rows of grapevines.

There is a mystical feeling here that is palpable. It begins with the winery’s elliptical construction of smoky glass encased in a framework of vertical wood spokes: 24, to mark the 24 months of wine production. Its inspiration, when conceived by Roberto Benavente, was a bird’s nest.

Marnier Lapostolle saw in the Chilean-born, France-based architect a mind who could bridge the spirit of the two countries. And she wanted something more, a physical representation of the vineyard philosophy. Not only is the estate fully organic but, since 2011, certified biodynamic. The idea (equally jeered and cheered by the wine community) is to practice agriculture as it was done before the industrial revolution. This means not only incorporating biodiversity (the estate is also an animal farm) and applying homeopathic “medicine” to the vines, but also falling into step with the movements of the sun, moon and planets.

León produces a calendar that summarizes ideal harvest dates for the Southern Hemisphere. Aside from those for fruit and vegetables, I discover the best times for haircuts and nail trims. “Just as the cycle of the moon affects the tides,” León explains, “it affects all living things composed of water.”

That idea is represented in the elliptical winery – a form that mimics the movement of the cosmos – and its alignment with the Southern Cross constellation, South America’s equivalent to the North Star. Inside, a spiral staircase winds dizzyingly downward with a Foucault pendulum tracing the length of its six-story core. We make the descent, past the sorting floor where grapes are hand-plucked during the harvest. Down past the vinification room, which echoes the elliptical shape. Past the first-year cellar and a section of wall where the raw

granite bedrock was left exposed for dramatic effect. On the final floor, 80 feet (25 meters) below the earth, we find the second-year barrel room. This cellar and tasting area conceals something very special.

Through the thick glass top of the oval tasting table, one can just make out the shapes of bottles below. León runs her hand along its side and disables an invisible lock. Out pops a hatch revealing a narrow metal staircase. It leads into the Marnier Lapostolle family’s private cellar, a two-story cave containing 7,000 bottles.

On the ground floor, we find a wall of blue: It’s the rack containing the Clos Apalta archives. Topped with azure foil, the bottles celebrate *el azulillo*: a hardy blue flower that, like the wine, gets everything it needs from Apalta’s bad soil.

The drive back to Santiago along Ruta 5 runs through the wine-rich Maipo Valley, which surrounds the city on three sides. At Paine, Francisca and I veer off for a stop at Pérez Cruz. Designed by José Cruz Ovalle, the 65,000-square-foot (6,000-square-meter) winery was finished over a decade ago, but has only accepted visitors by appointment since 2012. Our host María José Mena greets us outside the building, whose rounded shell is made of bleached, laminated pine – the architect’s signature material. The building’s profile was modeled after a wine barrel. But the curvature serves more than an aesthetic purpose. Its slatted framework allows the cool Andean and coastal breezes to pass through, eliminating the need for air conditioning. At the same time, in this country of frequent earthquakes, the flexible structure is designed to sway in place before settling back on its foundations – a premise successfully “tested” during the 8.8-magnitude shaker of 2010.

Stacked around the building’s outer perimeter is a wall of sun-bleached rocks woven together without mortar. “A *pirca*,” Mena tells us. “The stones are pulled from tilling. They are what gives minerality to the soil.”

The winery produces 10 labels, each more interesting than the last. Among them are Chaski, a distinguished Petit Verdot; Cot, a creamy Malbec; and Pircas de Liguai, a single-varietal Cabernet Sauvignon.

The estate is owned by the Pérez Cruz family, a clan who made their fortune in energy and farming. But Mena is quick to point out that this former orchard, in the family since 1968, is the “heart of their business.” Patriarch

These buildings are more than just structures, they are symbols of where Chilean wines are right now.



Haras de Pirque  
[harasdepirque.com](http://harasdepirque.com)

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**The pairing**  
Albis – A joint venture with Italian vintner Marquis Piero Antinori, the first wine ever created at Pirque was an immediate success, scoring 90 points in *Wine Spectator*.



Pérez Cruz  
[perezcruz.com](http://perezcruz.com)

—  
**The pairing**  
Liguai – Closest to the Pérez Cruz family’s heart is their very first premium wine, a blend of the three grapes (Syrah, Carménère and Cabernet Sauvignon) that grow best on Liguai, their family farm.



Don Pablo Pérez Zañartu died in 1984 without ever having known that his barely workable farm would one day produce some of the country’s top reds.

Neither could Eduardo Matte have imagined the winemaking potential of his property when he purchased Haras de Pirque, a 600-acre stud farm, in 1991. Wine export was just getting off the ground in Chile and, as an experiment, he planted 346 acres along the steep hillsides where his horses feared to tread.

The subsequent years brought successful harvests and high-quality fruit, which he simply sold on. Then, in 2002, he received a visit from the Italian marquis and renowned vintner Piero Antinori, who was in Chile on a reconnaissance mission. After tasting the stud-farm grapes, Antinori made Matte an offer he couldn’t refuse: “Would you care to make a wine like Almaviva?” he said, referencing the famed joint venture between France’s Baron Philippe de Rothschild and Chile’s Concha Y Toro.

And so, together they produced Albis (80 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 20 percent Carménère). It was a success from the start, scoring 90 points from *Wine Spectator* in its inaugural vintage. Such an achievement deserved a suitable home and Matte, inspired by a silver horseshoe keyring, had just the idea.

The entrance to Haras de Pirque is almost concealed behind a wall of fuchsia bougainvillea. Inside, I spot bottles of Albis on a high shelf. Their label design – intertwining rings of gold and copper – represents the two families and the two hemispheres.

Hospitality manager Gail Turner leads us to a rooftop vantage point where we take in the full 57,000-square-foot (5,300-square-meter) scale. Tiered descending sections form the distinct horseshoe shape. Built onto the slope, the harvest yard stands 36 feet (11 meters) higher than the cellar and bottling floor, allowing gravity to move the wine. In the inverted “U” of the horseshoe lies a grassy courtyard with a fountain at its center.

This water feature, we learn, hides a secret: Its glass bottom is actually the ceiling of the tasting room. Underground, the fountain, supported by a concrete column, becomes a skylight. Pillars and arches add to the grandeur of the subterranean space and the horseshoe motif carries through in the shape of the bar.

In August 2014, Matte sold the stud farm to focus exclusively on wine, so it seems that the metaphorical interpretation of his horseshoe has superseded the literal: He may have entered the wine business by accident, but luck has clearly been on his side.

His architectural legacy will forever enrich this landscape. And, as with all of Chile’s modern wine sanctuaries – in which fountain becomes window, table leads to hidden cellar and stone wall conceals wine cathedral – it’s full of surprises. These buildings are more than just structures, they are symbols of where Chilean wines are right now. They are substantial. They are dynamic. And given the chance, they will reveal themselves. ■