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EXPLORE | TRAVEL



LUSCIOUS URUGUAY

An elegant winery provides an unmatched
 vinocentric experience.

By Becca Hensley

Atop a hill that overlooks 524 acres of undulating vineyards, inside the just-opened, impossibly sleek Bodega Garzón, I speak to entrepreneur Alejandro Bulgheroni about his swathe of fertile terrain in southeastern Uruguay—just a stone's throw from the sea. “At first it was the sunsets that drew me in,” he says. “I saw them, and I knew this would be a magical place.”

Bulgheroni's landscape, which sprawls over more than 10,000 rippling acres, is planted with grapes, olives, almonds and blueberries. Like an intricately woven carpet, it spreads across bucolic farmland. With both pine and palm trees aplenty, the property harbors ponds, pampas, valleys and pointed hilltops that seem drawn by an overimaginative child. With cows, sheep and horses that boast a regal lineage dating back to the equines of the conquistadors, the terrain still



FINE VINES From top: More than 500 acres of estate-grown grapes at Bodega Garzón yield limited-production premium wines. Unique in the region, the vineyard leads the charge in winemaking innovation, varietal experimentation and sustainability. With contemporary design by Argentine-based architects Bérnida & Yanzon, the destination has an abundance of intimate spaces, which are both functional and aesthetically pleasing; within temperature-controlled storage treas, prize wines, such as the 2014 Tannat, await consumption.



requires the skills of beret-capped gauchos (Uruguayan cowboys) to tame it, their technique little changed for decades. Throughout the vineyards and orchards, storybookworthy animals roam—furry carpincho (also called the capybara, it's the largest rodent in the world), the brightly hued roseate spoonbill bird and the squat rhea, a diminutive emu.

Bulgheroni, who now owns vineyards from Australia to Napa, Calif., bought this land in 1999 with his wife, Bettina, but waited until 2008 to plant grapes, after a battery of tests proved the soil to be ideal. Joining forces with Italian winemaker Alberto Antonini (recognized by *The Drinks Business* magazine as among the top five wine consultants in the world), he discovered the advantage of the Atlantic's maritime wind, which brought an ideal balance of warm and cool temperatures. Grape varieties like plum-hued tannat, a Uruguayan staple, flourished, and Bodega Garzón experimented with other species, such as zesty albarino and a perky sauvignon blanc. Bottling olive oil, harvesting nuts and making wine, Bulgheroni began to dream of the ultimate winery, one that proved worthy of the Uruguayan landscape that had taken root in his heart.

At last, in March 2016, Bodega Garzón opened its 205,000-square-foot state-of-the-art winery to great fanfare. Conceived by acclaimed Argentine-based architects Bórmida & Yanzón, whose work includes Bodega Vistalba and The Vines Resort & Spa, it crowns a hill, overlooking a verdant expanse seemingly as infinite as the sea. Shaped to meld into the multitiered rocky environs, the winery is

bright with panoramic windows. Contemporary interiors envisioned by San Francisco Bay Area-based Backen, Gillam & Kroeger exude the swank of Napa, with gleaming metals, leather-sheathed furnishings, warm wood and a slew of soul-touching Uruguayan sculptures and paintings.

"Bodega Garzón is an amazing work of modern architecture. Working on this project, we took into account the connection with the land and created the design with very warm, simple and elegant interiors that draw the eye equally in and out. We designed the spaces to stay fluid with a soft transition between them, integrating the landscape and vineyards during the day, then transitioning into an intimate layered glow in the evening," explains Cristof Eigelberger, former associate architect of Backen, Gillam & Kroeger. Throughout smaller rooms, nooks and crannies provide portals of intimacy with sweeping hospitality spaces mimicking the largesse of the outdoors. A stunning open-space restaurant, conceived by three-Michelin-starred chef Francis Mallmann, known for his mastery of grilled meat, invites lingering over lunch and dinner. In the next few years, an upscale hotel will complete the compound.

Visually, the architecture of Bodega Garzón manages to not only stand out as an homage to au courant style, but also fuse harmoniously into the natural setting. But beneath all the glamour, this Goliath-size, high-price-tag project has a conscience. Under the tutelage of Carlos Hartmann, head of global construction developments for Alejandro Bulgheroni and architect with Samconsult, Bodega Garzón is the first winery in the world to

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GRAPE ESCAPE Clockwise from top left: Argentine billionaire-turned-winemaker Alejandro Bulgheroni and his son survey the rich, rolling terrain; the 120-seat restaurant at Bodega Garzón serves traditional South American cuisine in a large lounge area built around open-fire wood grills and surrounded by terraces. Expansive windows provide views of the vineyards, fields, brooks, mountain ranges and wildlife; with interior design by San Francisco Bay Area-based Backen, Gillam & Kroeger, the elegant foyer features a tree-form table and Uruguayan art.



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OENOPHILES' UTOPIA
From top: Seating in the spacious hospitality area invites guests to linger, taste and learn about wine; multiple private dining rooms, reception areas and meeting halls are ideal for weddings and special events.

eco-inspirations, such as green roofs developed from native plants, buses for commuting personnel for a minimized carbon footprint, on-site renewable energy generation that offsets consumption, a water supply harvested on-site and outdoor landscape lighting designed to minimize light pollution and its impact on the night sky and the ecosystem," says Hartmann. A smart mix of passive and active thermal control manages maximum indoor air quality and energy efficiency, benefiting both the people and the wine. And 100 percent portland cement fermentation tanks, cast in place from



...CONTINUED seek LEED certification for its entire facility, including the winemaking and hospitality areas and the vineyards. "With a commitment to sustainable agriculture and green farming practices, the winery actively pursues

one batch, allow for temperature control and the micro-oxygenation of wines.

Down dusty, bumpy roads, Bodega Garzón stands as a destination in itself for anybody who loves wine and food. But visitors are attracted to Maldonado, the part of Uruguay in which the winery is located, for other reasons, including beach towns and artsy, rural hamlets. Punta del Este, 45 minutes away, has been called the Saint-Tropez of South America. With glitzy hotels and a social scene to match, it contrasts completely with the sleepy soulfulness of the countryside. Its sliver-moon beach, thronged with surfers and sunbathers during the summer season, brims with restaurants and nightclubs. A little more mellow, nearby José Ignacio remains an unpretentious fishing village. Today, the glitterati who stay here during the season love its less ostentatious vibe, galleries, yoga studios, beachside eateries and friendly boutiques. In the quiet village of Garzón, just 10 minutes from the winery, amid the livestock pastures, Francis Mallmann operates his famous restaurant El Garzón (set within his hotel of the same name) on the main square, where a bonfire roars each evening, showcasing his gaucho-style, indigenous cuisine.

Two hours from Montevideo, the nation's capital, this region offers visitors something unique in a homogenous world. Like a sustaining heartbeat, Bodega Garzón embodies the area's roots and culture, but spins a dose of modern dazzle into the mix. As a fine wine comes to fruition, the winery complex brings a gift to both locals and visitors. "Wine is about two things: wine and people," quips Antonini. At Bodega Garzón, you'll find both. bodegagarzon.com ■

STAY AT

THE CONRAD & CASINO PUNTA DEL ESTE

Amid the heart of the action, this 302-room high-rise vaunts the only Las Vegas-style casino in the area. Across from La Mansa Beach and overlooking Gorriti Island, the fully equipped hotel will fulfill your city-slicker cravings. Room rates from \$250 per night, conradpuntadeleste.com

EL GARZÓN

In the undeveloped village of Garzón, chef Francis Mallmann has created the iconic country inn and ultimate foodie stay. He cooks dinner over a fire that roars just outside the inn's doors. The all-inclusive price covers breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus lodging in one of five stylish rooms, bike rental and laundry. A swimming pool and an open bar occupy the central courtyard. \$200 per person per night, restaurantegarzon.com

ESTANCIA VIK

Romantic, rustic and referencing the traditional, Estancia sits on 4,000 acres near José Ignacio. Classic Spanish architecture flaunts white adobe walls and red roofs, with 12 coddling suites in gardens that feel more like a ranch.

Room rates from \$440 per night, estanciavikjoseignacio.com



PLAYA VIK

Drop-dead gorgeous, Playa Vik lords over a perfect coastline, where six houses encircle a central building. Ubercontemporary, it features artworks by the likes of James Turrell and

Zaha Hadid. Don't miss the 75-foot cantilevered black Absolute Nero granite pool. Room rates from \$700 per night, playavik.com

BAHIA VIK

The Premier Collection's newest hotel, Bahia Vik spans 10 acres of beach dunes along laid-back José Ignacio. Eleven artsy beach bungalows, constructed from diverse materials, snuggle up to the sand. Room rates from \$550 per night, bahiavik.com



CASA SUAYA

A funky beach-bungalow boutique hotel, steps from an inviting crescent of sand, this friendly place proffers sea views, cool-kid decor and barefoot elegance. Room rates from \$250 per night, casasuaya.com