

It wasn't until I arrived to Argentina's wine country amid Mendoza's majestic Andes Mountains that my breath was truly taken away. Among some of the country's newest winemakers, in the regions of Luhan de Cuyo, Chacras and Uco Valley, I finally found the makings of true, genuine passion — as much for winemaking as for life itself.

If you're looking for to meet some of the most flourishing examples of Argentinian vibrancy, here are three must-see wine destinations when booking your trip.

Finca Adalgisa
www.fincaadalgisa.com.ar

Gabriela Furlotti's passion for her family history helped save one of the last operating vineyards in Chacras, Mendoza. The recently opened "hotel rural" known as Finca Adalgisa is the first one of its kind in the area with both a winery and an operating vineyard, and is already attracting an international clientele.

While her family vineyard was developed long ago as part of a neighborhood of porteño summerhouses, recent years have seen the charming region grow into a gated community, pushing an aggressive sell-off of old vineyards to make room for new development and housing. "I opened the hotel so I can save the vineyard," explains Furlotti.

Her sense of history is wonderful and resilient. She tells me how her grandmother bought the property as a summer home back in 1936 and how her great-grandfather emigrated from Italy "with nothing," and started working the land to create what became one of Mendoza's biggest wineries. The last bottle, she tells me, was produced at this very winery before the company was sold in the early 70s. "People from Buenos Aires still remember the name," she adds.

Finca Adalgisa has a wonderful "old soul" feeling that's hard to miss. From her grandfather's library, to the original kitchen and old rooms leading to the galleria, and even beautiful touches like hundred-year-old walnut trees still



Finca Adalgisa owner Gabriela Furlotti (above) creates a modern ambiance around timeless values. A lofty, breezy wine tasting lounge (opposite top) is built around a hundred year-old vineyard, while an old dining area (opposite below) is rekindled like many areas in Furlotti's ancestral home.

growing within some rooms, Furlotti decided to keep her grandmother's summer house as untouched as possible.

The hotel, built as an addition around the vineyard has lofty, private, cavern-like lodges which are cozy, spacious and impeccably designed and come complete everything from crystal glasses to wi-fi connection.

The Finca Adalgisa vineyard is still following many of the traditional methods, using the old wooden press, irrigation with water that comes pure and clean from the snow thawing on the Andes mountains and even the French method using egg whites before bottling. Less than two hectares, the small Malbec vineyard is almost a hundred years old and produces just over 5,000 bottles a year — most of which are exported to clients in Arizona; the remaining sold at the hotel.

Her business thriving, Furlotti is currently working with partners to help develop fair trade for small wine producers to help make sure they keep their vineyards.

O. Fournier
www.ofournier.com

So devoted was José Manuel Ortega Gil-Fournier to his passion for winemaking

that he left a successful banking career in Spain and moved his young family to Mendoza, investing along the way, all his savings, taking out two mortgages and several personal loans.

Not more than seven years later, Bodega y Viñedos O. Fournier is considered one of the country's top wine producers. Located just south of Route 40 (yes, the same one Che Guevara takes in *Motorcycle Diaries*), at the foothills of the Andes Range in the Uco Valley's La Consulta region, the company is attracting the attention of some of the world's most reputable wine connoisseurs, from *Decanter Magazine's* Steven Spurrier to the UK's Tom Stevenson, all the while garnering consistently high ratings with *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Enthusiast* and *Wine International*.

Fournier comes from a long line of ambitious visionaries. His family's printing company was a household name in Spain for over two centuries, and was even entrusted, during the Spanish Civil War, to print the country's currency. (The company was later sold in the 70s to U.S. Playing Cards Inc.) It's the kind of ambition that's hard to miss driving up to O. Fournier's estate where a life-size UFO-style building stands mystically amid the valley's vast



stillness. (The unique architecture, I later learn, reflects some of the winery's image branding of an earth-sky union. Even O. Fournier's top wine labels, Alpa Crux and B Crux are based on the stars of the Southern Cross, an astral constellation visible only in the Austral hemisphere.) The structure is also ingeniously designed to house some of the most state-of-the-art winemaking technology in the country, from microvinification labs to an impressive array of stainless steel, oak and cement vats — some of which are the only ones of their kind in South America.

While the winery was founded only a few years ago in 2000, Fournier has already had over 250 hectares planted and plans to grow that number to 600 within a few years to include not only Malbec and Tempranillo but also Merlot, Cabernet, Syrah and even experimental varieties like Stravinor, Riesling and Merdello. With affiliate wineries already in Spain and plans for expansion to Portugal and Chile as early as next year, Fournier intends to grow his company into a multinational group of high-end wineries located in different parts of the world.

And it doesn't stop there. Fournier also plans to build a luxury hotel by June of next year, giving out to the gorgeous view of the vineyard along the Andes Mountains. Rustic countryside cabins are already available, if you don't want to wait until then, and come complete with an ensuite laundry, a fully stocked kitchen and even that all-important *maté* tea.

In the meantime, Fournier's unshakeable devotion to technology and research as part of the winemaking process continues to turn heads. "We tend to take technology quite seriously," says Fournier. "It's a very controversial view because old-school winemakers tend to think of wine in terms of very old-fashioned methods," he says. But Fournier insists his method doesn't betray that sentiment in the least. "Our purpose is to make the best wine possible. We are in the 21st century and it is possible to use technology without losing the love for wine and winemaking as an art."



Local artisanal works are celebrated amid luxurious comforts at Cavas Wine Lodge (opposite top). O. Fournier's winery at the foot of the Andes Range (opposite bottom) is equipped with some of the country's latest technology. Founder, José Manuel Ortega (above).

Cavas Wine Lodge www.cavaswinelodge.com

"There comes a time in life when you have to decide if you still want to keep leading the corporate life," says Cecilia Díaz Chuit. And with that, she and partner Martín Rigal left their day jobs, gathered some of their dearest friends and, over a year and a half, passionately planned out what has now become Cavas Wine Lodge — a little paradise amid Mendoza's wine country, and by far one of the best ways to experience the area.

Located in Lujan de Cuyo, one of Mendoza's premium wine regions, Cavas Wine Lodge has already received nods from the likes of *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Wallpaper* and *Travel + Leisure*.

Visitors can enjoy any one of its incredible *vignettas* tailor-made to pamper you silly, from king-sized beds to satellite televisions, heated plunge pools and even rooftop terraces with stone fireplaces that leave you surrounded by a blanket of vineyards. And with luxury amenities like a Moroccan-style spa, a workout facility and even the occasional surprise of a live sunset concert by local musicians, guests may never want to leave the premises. Yet Chuit and her staff insist on encouraging visitors to get out

and see the area — something you don't expect to see in a competitive burgeoning market. With as much passion for the region as for a life well-lived, Chuit and her team often arrange personal packages that allow guests to experience Mendoza's wine country at its best. Unlike other local winemakers, Cavas Wine Lodge is less interested in winemaking than it is in encouraging visitors to explore the surrounding wine region. (Only a small portion of the vineyard's grapes are kept for the Lodge's "boutique" wine, Cavas Bonarda; the rest are sold to surrounding wineries.)

"We don't want to keep people tied here," says Chuit. "What we want is for people to have a nice base where they can explore the region — like a home. We want visitors to try different cuisines and trends." The three- and four-day packages that are offered are indeed as wonderful as they are flexible, taking into account everything from visitors' interests to their allergies and health conditions. They range from wine tours, picnics and trekking expeditions to bike riding, special restaurant reservations and spa treatments. It's the kind of attention to detail you would only expect from the most dedicated and passionate of hosts.

