

# EXPERIENCE

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TRAVEL: CHILE

## 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.

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.