

LA NACION

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Science at the Service of Pleasure

An Institute dedicated to achieving the perfect blend and balance

By Sebastián Ríos

“In the mid 90s when I returned from the US to work with my father in Argentina, we had brought in consultants from the US, France and Italy. Each of them had offered different views based on their own experiences from their respective countries. One day as I was accompanied by one of them in the vineyards, I was given the following advice: ‘We should remove leaves in this vineyard so that the grapes have better sun exposure,’” says Laura Catena from Bodega Catena Zapata, a Harvard and Stanford graduate physician and biologist.

Said advice was dutifully followed – consultants are usually known as flying winemakers – and two short weeks later the detrimental results were in. “To my surprise, all the grapes were burnt. Right then I realized that our climate and Malbec are different from other parts of the world, and that we should carry out our own research.”

Born from the necessity to understand one’s own land, climate and vines to produce high quality wines, the creation of the Catena Institute of Wine followed.



“Our goal was to make great wines that could hold their own with the best in the world in terms of concentration, elegance and aging... high quality wines that could at the same time carry their own identity as a reflection of Mendoza’s terroir. Moreover, wines that could be truly expressive of each specific Mendocinian region, such as Gualtallary (Adrianna Vineyard), Lunlunta (Angélica Vineyard) or San Carlos (Nicasia Vineyard),” adds Laura. “In order to make truly distinctive wines, we needed to carry out our very own research with a lot of patience since vineyard growth cycles happen slowly: for example a vineyard may not necessarily be viable to produce high quality wines until it is seven years old, and in some cases it may take up to twenty years to achieve perfect balance.”

The Catena Institute of Wine is not the only winery research department in existence, however it’s goals remain a distinguishing factor: “Other wineries do research to lower costs and raise production”, explains Laura. “Our goal is to produce wines that can compete with La Romaneé Conti or French first growths. I don’t know for sure if we will succeed, but we will die trying.”