

# DEPARTURES



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**THE**  
**HOPPING**  
**ISSUE**  
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## Profile

family. A decade ago Etchart sold his winery to the Pernod Ricard conglomerate. He kept another prized parcel, however, and now makes wine under the San Pedro de Yacochuya label. With his business partner, French vintner Michel Rolland, he has produced some of the best bottles in Salta. Rolland believes 8,500 feet is probably the upper limit for proper vine growth. "What's important is to make good wine, whether it be at ten thousand feet or at sea level," says Etchart's son, Marcos, who manages the business. "Without a doubt, Altura Máxima is a long shot."

Up north Hess is hoping to prove him wrong. Hess first planted at Altura Máxima in 2002—fortunately, only a little more than an acre, because it all had to be torn out. Last March he harvested another test vineyard, where the previous owner had grown Indian corn and squash. Hess used clones of Pinot Noir, as well as Malbec and Tempranillo. The yield was smaller than he anticipated. "The birds were faster than we were," he says.

While he declares that the vineyard has proved viable, Hess won't be able to assess the quality of the grapes without a larger crop. And even if the Altura Máxima fruit is great, it will be a long time before the vineyard generates income. "If you start from scratch, it takes two years for the soil preparation, one year to set up the drip irrigation, five years to have a sixty percent crop," he says. "That makes eight years. Then another two aging in the winery, three for a reserve wine. So it's a decade before you get your first money back."

Nevertheless, Hess is forging ahead. In November he was scheduled to plant another 27 acres, some with Sauvignon Blanc. Nearly 26 of the acres will be just below the test vineyard, but a planting of 1.2 acres at slightly over 10,000 feet will be the highest yet—the highest, almost certainly, anywhere in the world.

During lunch one day at Colomé, Ursula asks her husband, "So when are we going to build this winery at Altura Máxima?"

"First we have to see the fruit," he replies.

"If it isn't great?" I ask.

"Then we might blend it into the Arenal," Hess says. A pause. "That would be a big disappointment."

"That is the risk," Ursula says. "Then you would know not to go so high up."

"Or," he adds, "go higher."

## WHERE TO STAY IN SALTA

Argentina's northern Salta province is a land of llamas, tamales, and Incan ruins. The landscape varies from wildlife-rich cloud forest to arid, polychrome canyons and salt pans. A clutch of sophisticated hotels have sprung up in the wine-producing area around Cafayate, in the Calchaqui Valley. To get there, you take a two-hour flight from Buenos Aires to the provincial capital, also named Salta, plus four (breathtaking) hours by car or 30 minutes by helicopter.



**ESTANCIA COLOME** Some 7,500 feet up in the Andean foothills, Donald Hess converted the Spanish colonial main house at Argentina's oldest working winery into nine suites. Rustic chic with terracotta tiles, local stone, and llama-wool rugs, each opens onto a private veranda commanding spectacular views. A gallery opening next year will display a first-rate collection of artworks by James Turrell, assembled by Hess. Guests can do a two-hour guided walk through the prephyllloxera Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon vines or tour the winery with Colomé's winemaker, Thibaut Delmoite. Alternatively, they can opt to ride horses or bicycles, or simply admire the landscape from the splendid pool. *From \$260 to \$330; 54-3868/494-200; estanciacolome.com; bodegacolome.com*

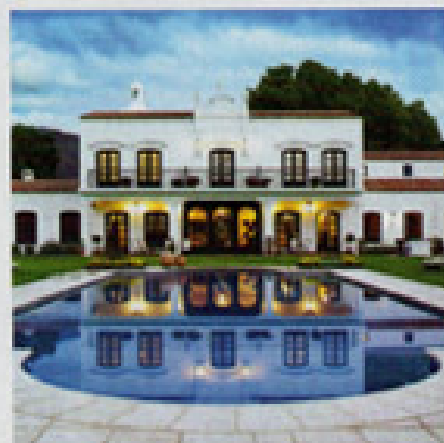
**HOUSE OF JASMINES COUNTRY INN & SPA** Swirls of the aromatic shrub that give this cozy *hotelito* its name abound on the



300-acre property, located a dozen or so miles from the city of Salta. Owned by actor Robert Durvall and his Argentine wife, Luciana Pedraza, the 117-year-old adobe-walled farmhouse has seven suites, all bathed in white, with four-poster beds. There's a modest spa and a pool, and visitors may roam on foot around the rambling grounds, which have grapefruit and lemon orchards, as well as a vegetable patch that supplies fresh produce for the kitchen year-round. *From \$150 to \$180; 54-387/497-2002; houseofjasmimes.com*

### PATIOS DE CAFAYATE HOTEL & SPA

French brothers David and Salvador Michel built this Spanish colonial-style mansion among their treasured vineyards, which they first planted in Cafayate in the late 19th century. The winery is now owned by Bodega El Esteco, and in 2005 Starwood Hotels converted the property into an elegant 52-room resort. Its labyrinthine interior features intriguing corridors leading to cobbled courtyards



and jasmine-draped gardens, while the mustard- and ochre-colored rooms feature rustic furniture and touches of Andean tapestry. A well-equipped spa offers a range of treatments. The excellent restaurant serves regional specialties such as llama, quinoa, maize, and goat, while the dark, tannic wines come from the bodega next door. *From \$260 to \$500; 54-3868/421-747; starwoodhotels.com*

**PAPYRUS** Four years ago *salteño* owner Rogelio Salinas converted his sprawling home into this intimate 12-room guesthouse with a pool and a carefully tended garden. Perched on the slopes of Mount San Bernardo, it enjoys abundant sunshine and commanding views of the city of Salta. Inside, the decor combines vibrant walls with sober-hued leather-and-wood furniture. The restaurant serves well-crafted dishes such as rabbit braised with soy sauce and honey, Pacific salmon dressed with olives, and steak simmered in a Malbec reduction. *From \$280 to \$300; 54-387/422-7067; hotelpapyrus.com.ar*

—COLIN BARRACLOUGH