

Viña Vik Hotel — Chile

Hacienda Vik, Millahue, San Vicente de Tagua Tagua, Chile

Chile's most ambitious winery started out in 2006 with the aim of creating the country's first 100-point wine. Now it has extended its hand to the creation of one of the country's best hotels.



New as of late 2014, Viña Vik hotel quite literally reigns over the Millahue Valley. Designed to resemble a gold ring (Millahue translates as "place of gold" in the native Mapuche language), the hotel's titanium roof glows forth from its privileged position overlooking rolling hills lined with green vines and a large lagoon.

The 11,000-acre plot of land was bought by Norwegian-Uruguayan entrepreneur, Alexander Vik. With a clear aim of creating one of the world's best wines, Mr. Vik spent a year testing the soil before committing to the plot — 6,000 soil testers later and he was convinced that this was the place to sew his vines.



Before the opening of the Viña Vik hotel, accommodation took the form of a rustic and charming four-bedroom lodge (which is still available to rent as a private unit). The new hotel, in contrast, is far from rustic. In fact, it is more akin to a modern art gallery: no two pieces of furniture are the same, and the 22 bedrooms range in theme from Hermes, to hessian walls, and hyperrealism.

Forty minutes from Santiago by helicopter, or two-and-a-half-hours by car, the bedrooms are split across two floors — 18 upstairs and 4 downstairs — each one with large windows framing the views over the vines.



Whichever room you happen to have, it is well worth asking for a tour of some the others. There's the patriotic Chile room with its cactus wood furniture and adobe bathroom; the modern Redondo room where bedside tables take the form of women down on hands-and-knees; and the historic Louis Louis with its Napoleonic paintings of destruction-ravaged Europe in winter. It has dead horses and soldiers scattered among burned-down farm buildings, off set with classical French furniture.



The bathrooms are fascinating in their own right. From Norge, which is entirely covered in slate, including the sinks and the bath; to Vik with its hanging fiberglass bath and titanium walls with a gold tinge; and Hermes where the walls are lined with magazine shots of models, as well as a large photo of Mr and Mrs Vik themselves.

The Viks like to make an appearance, and in Azulejo there's a blue-and-white scene painted on ceramic tiles and depicting the wine harvest. At first it looks like a reproduction of some Bacchic revelry, but look closer and you may recognize head wine maker, Patrick Valette, alongside Alexander and Carrie Vik.



The most contentious room has to be La Marcela with its large portrait of a transsexual homeless woman pushing a trolley full of junk. Three crushed oil drums are positioned in the opposite corner so you can perch to admire the painting. And the most memorable has to be Vicky Money in which every square inch of the bathroom is covered with bright, shiny Euro cent coins.

Communal areas include a wonderful granite infinity pool (a Vik trademark also seen at Playa Vik in Uruguay) with a map of the southern hemisphere stars in LEDs on the bottom. Positioned so that it looks like it's overhanging the lagoon below, the sun lounge deck backs on to a gym, yoga room and games room. The lower floor is home to the spa with its five massage rooms and sauna. As well as massages and facials using grape-derived products, hair care treatments are also on the menu.



Which brings us to the food. Viña Vik has a "zero kms" policy meaning that produce comes from local providers in the surrounding region. There are no menus and every meal is different. It may be, for example, mushroom soup with blue cheese and cured ham made on the estancia, followed by wagyu beef with risotto, courgettes and bacon, then red berries in crème anglaise for dessert.

Chef Rodrigo Acuña Bravo, a Chilean who has worked in Canada and most recently held court at Lapostolle just down the road, collects flowers and herbs from the surrounding hills, sources seafood from Pichilemu on the coast (just 60km away) and gets much of the meat from the estancia, including rabbit. No less than 70 percent of ingredients come from the Vik organic kitchen garden.

Days are spent wine tasting and exploring the vineyard on foot, bicycle, or horseback with the wonderful huaso (horseman), Nano. One thousand of the 11,000 acres are sewn with vines — demanding a workforce of 400 people since almost everything is done by hand — and the grapes take the form of five varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenera, Merlot, Syrah and Cabernet Franc.



The bodega was designed by Chilean architect Slamij Radic and has an impressive entrance with galvanized iron covered in water and scattered boulders. The water keeps the temperature nice and cool for the barrels directly below. There is also a restaurant down at the winery for both day guests and hotel guests (the hotel restaurant is just for use of hotel guests).

For several years now Chile has been a serious player in the world of wine: today it is the world's eighth largest wine producer and the fifth largest exporter. So it is no surprise that the central region is dotted with wineries. What are not plentiful, however, are fine wine hotels. That's not to say they don't exist, but the really high-end ones can be counted on one hand.

The neighboring **Relais & Chateaux Lapostolle Residence** is one of Chile's best winery hotels, but its design and size (just four rooms) cannot be compared with the epic project that is Viña Vik. Injecting a slice of color and panache, this new hotel is an exciting development for the long thin country.

Web Address: www.vinavik.com

Total Number of Rooms: 22 Suites

Published rates: Rates start at \$800 per night per person including taxes, buffet breakfast, lunch with soft drinks, and dinner with a glass of VIK wine.

Review and photos by **Gabriel O'Rorke**.