

# *Meat & Malbec: Bodega Catena Zapata Winery, Mendoza*

## *USAToday Travel.com*

### *Comments By Chris Gray Faust*



A Mayan pyramid in the middle of Argentina? Huh? That's the first sign you have that Bodega Catena Zapata winery sees itself a little differently than the other Mendoza wineries.



Luckily when you turn around, you get a sweeping view of the Andes....and the vast holdings of the Catena family. The winery, started by an Italian wine family in 1902, is widely credited with bringing modern European and Californian techniques to the Argentina wine industry in recent decades; owner Nicolas Catena has been called "the Robert Mondavi" of Argentina.. Catena's Chardonnays, Malbecs and Malbec/Cab blends regularly receive high scores from Robert Parker and the Wine Spectator.



Bodega Catena Zapata is still owned and run by Nicholas Catena and his daughter Laura (who is also an ER doctor in San Francisco, in addition to helping run the wine empire and write books on Argentine wine. She also has degrees from Harvard and Stanford. Damn overachievers). As part of the Park Hyatt Masters of Food & Wine Festival, we sampled the winery's top vintage, the Nicolas Catena Zapata (which retails for about \$90 a bottle), with head winemaker Alejandro Vigil. A blend of Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, it tasted smoother than most of the cheaper Argentinean reds, with tobacco and leather notes.



Catena doesn't have a restaurant. But it does boast that pyramid. Nicolas modeled it after pyramids he saw in Tikal, Guatemala, as a way to honor Argentina's New World terroir. The building faces the Andes to pay homage, Laura Catena writes in her excellent guide, *Vino Argentino*. A glass cone atop the pyramid allows a shaft of light to beam down into the cellars.

You can tour Catena Zapata, in the Luján de Cuyo region about an hour outside of Mendoza City, with a small group if you make a reservation. It's open every day except Sunday. The tour and a tasting of the brand's lower-priced brand is free; you can try other wines for a per-glass charge.



It was hard for our group to tear ourselves away from the view. Whether or not you believe that a Mayan pyramid belongs in Mendoza, it does provide a monument that's almost regal in its unusualness. And for a winemaking family that changed the economic landscape for many in the region, perhaps it's appropriate.