



Stairway to heaven? Steps at the Séptima Winery in Mendoza, Argentina—designed by the author's firm—seem to ascend into the Andes beyond. Flat lands (below) extend eastward.

Daughter of the Andes

Celebrated for its world-class wines, the Argentine province of Mendoza also serves up an array of world-class attractions. BY ELIANA BÓRMIDA

Say “**Mendoza**” to a Mendozaan, and we will automatically add “land of sun and good wine.” That line from our state song, “Hymn of the Grape Harvest,” sums up this region of soaring mountains, vast plains, sparkling lakes, and award-winning vineyards in central-west Argentina.

I was born in Mendoza and have lived here most of my life. As we like to say, I am “*Mendocina de pura cepa*”—Mendozaan of pure stock.

Mendoza is called the daughter of the Andes, tucked as it is along the foot of that prodigious mountain range that is dominated by our own Mount Aconcagua, at 22,800 feet the highest of all Andean peaks. This mountainous western side

of our province flattens eastward into a vast sedimentary plain called the pampa, an arid territory furrowed from west to east by great riverbeds that surge in summer with meltwater from Andean glaciers and snowpacks. The meltwater gives birth to natural oases lush with grasses, cattails, and reeds. In these small environments nature expresses itself in unexpected ways; oases are sons of the desert, and know how to coexist with it.

Over the centuries a regional culture developed here that fostered a distinctive landscape-based architecture, which made use of adobe, stone, and *quinchas*—walls of clay and cane. Acre after acre was sowed with indigenous potato and maize plants. In the 16th century Spanish colonists began

VITAL STATS Location:

Central-west Argentina, along the Chilean border

• **Population:** 1,692,000

• **Climate:** Summers (Dec.-Mar.) climb into the 90s F, winters (June-Aug.) fall into the 30s F

• **Activities:** Touring the Wine Route, hiking, golf, river rafting, skiing, biking, horseback riding

• **Notable:** Mendoza is closer to the capital of Chile than to Argentina's capital of Buenos Aires; the province is named for Spanish explorer Pedro de Mendoza; it boasts 1,500 wineries.

GARCIA & BEAN/COURTESY BÓRMIDA & YANZÓN ARCHITECTS

KIERAN SCOTT/GETTY IMAGES

to travel and settle here, and these local crops were soon joined by fruits from Spain—especially wine grapes, which became a real pillar of our economy. Today Mendoza is ranked among the eight great wine capitals of the world.

The architectural firm my partner Mario Yanzón and I co-founded has designed the majority of the principal wineries in our region, intent on giving each a memorable cultural and “local” character representative of that winery's specific terrain, wine, and people. Mendoza's wine culture is much more than a business; it is expressed in our activities, our customs, our festivals, even in the way we mark time. Here the grape harvest, which we celebrate with the internationally renowned *Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia*—Harvest Festival—is as fundamental as the celebration of the New Year: The passing of the months are measured around it.

Every Mendozaan is enthusiastic about wine,

everyone enjoys harvest time, and everyone is proud of our many vintages. Winemaking is a labor-intensive activity that requires passion, patience, perseverance, discipline, respect, teamwork, and a lot of creativity. I believe these values have become part of the very fabric of our society.

I have traveled the Andean regions in all of their variety, from the wooded peaks and verdant jungles of Colombia to the glaciers and ice fields of Patagonia. I have also traveled much of the world, focusing on places and their cultures. But my most profound experiences have always been in this magnificent, complex region of the Andes. And always my central reference point has been here, in my Mendoza.

Award-winning architect Eliana Bórmida specializes in the design of wineries. She and Mario Yanzón are partners in the design firm Bórmida & Yanzón.

