

It's a family affair

Laura Catena carries on vintner's legacy



Laura Catena and her father, Nicolas, have created world-class wines in Argentina.

ABOVE PHOTOS COURTESY OF BODEGA CATENA ZAPATA WINERY

By Annette Alvarez-Peters

HOW MANY people do you know who are truly exceptional? Someone who has it all together, is international in scope, wears many hats with an incredibly busy schedule and excels at every turn? My pick is Laura Catena, owner and president of Bodega Catena Zapata winery in Mendoza, Argentina.



MICHAEL PALCO

Catena has an impressive list of responsibilities that keeps her moving at an exhaustive pace. Besides heading up the leading high-end winery in Argentina, she oversees several boutique wineries under the Catena family ownership. Impressed yet? She is also known as Dr. Catena, a practicing physician and professor at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center (having earned degrees from Harvard and Stanford).

Catena is also a devoted wife and mother of three with a zest for life and a very down-to-earth demeanor. And just for fun, she's an accomplished tango dancer. A definitive wine-industry role model, Catena has added author to her long list of credentials, releasing her first book, *Vino Argentino* (www.vinoargentino.com), this year.

Bodega Catena Zapata is one of Argentina's most prestigious wineries, consistently producing award-winning wines. It all began in 1902, when Catena's great-grandfather Nicola, an Italian immigrant, planted his first vineyard. The wines were typical of the time,

cheaply made in bulk for consistency rather than quality. It was Catena's father, Nicolas, who had a vision to change the quality of wine produced in Argentina.

In the early 1980s, Nicolas was a visiting professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, running the family wine business from California. He spent time in the Napa Valley and was impressed by the wines there, particularly from the Robert Mondavi Winery. On his return to Mendoza, Nicolas vowed to produce wines as remarkable as those from the Napa Valley and Bordeaux.

The Catena family began a quest for quality, conducting extensive research in the vineyards and experimenting with a number of vineyard management and winemaking methods. Through much hard work and trial and error, Nicolas helped transform the fifth-largest wine-producing country into a world-class contender for quality wines.

"At the start, no one knew if the wines would be good or bad," recalls Laura Catena. "We wanted to be respected at the high end, provide extraordinary quality and value."

I have vivid memories of the winery when I first visited in 2008. A modern Mayan-inspired building surrounded by manicured vineyards, it is one of the most beautiful bodegas in the area. The grapes are estate grown and the wines are made in a classic style.

The focus is on Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay wines: Catena Classic is a blend of single varietals from different vineyards, Catena Alta features great concentration and complexity, and Catena Zapata is their top-of-the-line, single-vineyard wines.

"Each wine project starts with passion and commitment," notes Catena. "We want to show individual personalities on every label produced. Personalities are made up of regional differences, vineyard plots and different winemaking styles."

Such diversity can be found in Luca, a small artisanal winery created in 1999. The goal was to work with old vines. Catena tapped small family growers with fewer than five acres each. She knew how special these old-vine vineyards were and worked with the families to create low-yield, high-quality fruit.

Catena feels some of the best wines are a result of thinking outside the box, while maintaining balance between innovation and tradition. She says her father always encouraged her to follow her dreams, and I can't wait for her next dream to come to fruition. I am sure it will be amazing, like everything else she does in life. Salud! 🍷

Annette Alvarez-Peters oversees Costco's wine, beer and spirits program.



Featured at Costco

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- Catena Malbec
Item #472719
- Luca Laborde
Double Select Syrah
Item #397692
- Catena Alta Chardonnay
Item #460300
- Tikal Patriota
Item #225032



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