



A Winery and a Family Grow

LAURA CATENA JUGGLES MAKING GREAT WINE AND SAVING LIVES

by melissa gonzalo.

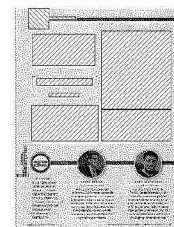
Laura Catena is the quintessential Renaissance woman. Born in Mendoza, Argentina, she grew up surrounded by vineyards in a family with a prestigious winemaking reputation. Her great-grandfather founded the Catena winery in 1902 after emigrating from Italy. As a little girl, she watched as her father, determined to bring expertise and quality to the family business, catapulted Argentine wine from a connoisseur favorite to a worldwide staple.

Yet despite being a fourth-generation member of the Catena winemaking family, Catena decided to carve her own path. She attended Harvard University, graduating Magna Cum Laude as biology major. After graduating, she traveled with her father to Bordeaux, France to explore the art of French wine-making, and continued to study the intricacies of viticulture throughout her enrollment at Stanford University's medical school in California.

By the time she finished her doctorate, Catena was quite involved in her father's winery, Catena Zapata, taking over its research and development program in 2001. Her science degrees came in handy, helping her to select the finest high altitude vines needed to produce world class Malbec, a red grape of French origin now synonymous with Argentina.

She also put her medical degree to use and became an emergency room physician in San Francisco. That's where she met her husband, also a physician, with whom she has three children.

Catena could never make a choice between the vineyard and the hospital, and frankly didn't have to. She splits her time between Argentina and San Francisco, working four to five days a month at a bay area hospital. As president of Bodega Catena Zapata, the fifth largest producer of wine in the world,



she is also responsible for cultivating the company's brands. They include Alamos here in the U.S., which marries quality and affordability. **Catena** also produces her own wine, Luca, from aged vines often forgotten. Her Luca Malbec 2007 was named one of the world's 100 best wines in *Wine Spectator*.

Passionate at heart, Catena loves being a mother and says her family comes first. Yet working at the hospital helps keep her grounded, she says.

"When you're running your own business, you're shouldering the responsibility of this whole business, of all your employees, and when I go to the hospital and I take care of sick people, it really brings me down to earth," she says. "It makes me remember what's really important in life."

In this sense, the hospital has become a source of spirituality for Catena's heart and soul. She appreciates the instant results medicine provides because in business you almost never know if what you're doing is going to work. "There is the instant reward of taking care of someone's pain, or sewing up somebody's wound," she says.

Her first book, *Vino Argentino: An Insider's Guide to the Wines and Wine Country of Argentina*, explores Argentina's rustic wine country and gives travelers suggestions on everything from where to stay to what to eat. The book is a rare and insightful guide to a region that combines the colors, flare and taste of Tuscany and the dramatic landscape of New Mexico. "What I realized was that there has to be a book that combines the wine, the food, the culture, so that people would understand where we come from." The book is also available in Spanish and is currently being translated into other languages to be sold in Europe and Asia.

So how does Catena manage it all? Technology helps. So does a workspace filled with prolific grape vines and clean mountain air set against an inspiring backdrop of snow capped mountains. "I do think a lot about my goals and I like to accomplish them, but I also believe in living life with spontaneity and in enjoying the spontaneous moments, which are really very precious," she says.

Enjoying her wines definitely helps make every moment that much more pleasurable. Salud! ■

[Laura Catena juggles her passion for her family, medicine and wine as an emergency room doctor and president of Bodega Catena Zapata, the fifth largest wine producer in the world.]

