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PLAYAVIK

by José Ignacio

Punta del Este gets all the ink, but insiders know to head straight to the fishing village of José Ignacio and its 19-suite Playa Vik. Only a few years ago, the bohemian beach town was barely on the jet-setter's map, but Norwegian-Uruguayan investor Alex Vik and his American wife, Carrie, are changing all that. They found a secluded *calma*, commissioned the most out-there artists, then hired Carlos Ott to design an architectural marvel dubbed The Sculpture. His livable piece of art is built around the Viks' collection, be it a canvas, a massive geode or even a statement chair. (The Fuerteventura Suite, in the main house, has a rocking chair named The G-Spot.) To make it all work, Ott didn't bother sticking to one genre. There are slate buildings as well as one in titanium. If you added wings, the whole cantilevered pool might take flight.

Feelings for the overall effect are mixed, but the location and cuisine are unmatched. Chef Marcelo Berancourt has been known to meet boats as they come in with the morning catch, and Argentine star Francis Mallmann often pops by to visit the spot where he opened his first restaurant, in 1978. More than 30 years later, the Viks are finishing what he started. Rooms start at \$900; Calle Los Cisnes y Los Horneros; 598-94/605-212; vikretreats.com.

