

# PALM BEACH ILLUSTRATED

## diversions



### first class ♦ ART OF ESCAPE

Alex and Carrie Vik blend art and wine, Uruguayan-style.

BY MARK SPIVAK

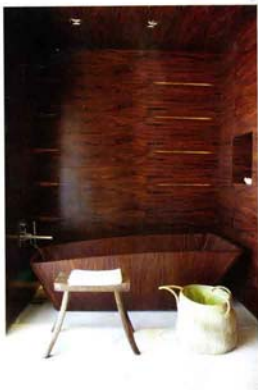
"The idea is to live in the art and with the art," says Alex Vik, "to experience it rather than just observe it."

We're standing in the Sculpture, the remarkable public space of the Playa Vik hotel outside Jose Ignacio, Uruguay. The striking building contains a sliding wall of glass 33 feet wide, as well as a one-ton bronze door created by Uruguayan sculptor Pablo Atchugarry. The walls are lined with pieces from Alex and Carrie Vik's extensive art collection; they change periodically as new objects are acquired.

Step outside the Sculpture, and you find yourself in a tranquil beach resort. An infinity pool and wraparound deck provide a perfect vantage point to view



Clockwise from above: Musso Suite, Estancia Vik; Casa Raices Exodus living room, Playa Vik; the asado area, Estancia Vik; wooden tub in the Vik master suite; entrance to the living room at Estancia Vik. Previous page: Playa Vik exterior



the semicircular beach of Playa Mansa. José Ignacio began as a fishing village, and from the deck it's possible to watch small boats launch in the early morning and return in the late afternoon with their catch.

Playa Vik and its sister property, Estancia Vik, are not so much hotels as gracious private homes. At the Playa, six large *casas* surround the Sculpture in an L-shaped pavilion. Each has a separate design theme, such as *Mar* (Sea), *Raíces* (Roots) or *Tierra* (Earth), and all are liberally decorated with local art. Even though the hotel contains only 16 rooms, it does not lack luxury amenities, such as a fitness center and full-service spa. Service is personal and intuitive, and staff members always seem to materialize just when needed.

Inland at Estancia Vik, the setting is even more dramatic. Set in the middle of a 4,000-acre estate, the Spanish-style colonial ranch features a sprawling living room with a billiard table, two large fireplaces and a centerpiece sculpture by Atchugarry. The Viks commissioned a different Uruguayan artist to design each of the 12 suites. Guests may read or relax in the peace of several interior courtyards, indulge in guided nature walks or take

one of the resident polo ponies out for a spin.

Not all of the art at the two hotels is visual. Marcelo Betancourt, the youthful chef who presides over both kitchens, went to cooking school in Uruguay and France. On the delicate end of his range, he's capable of turning out an eight-course tasting menu, with the subtle flavors of each dish carefully paired to a different Uruguayan wine. On the more robust end of the spectrum, he's a master of *asado*, the traditional mixed grill of the country, cooked over a huge fire pit in the barbecue room, featuring a seemingly endless procession of *chorizo* and blood sausage, beef, pork, sweetbreads and lamb.

Several hours south of Santiago, Chile, a totally different project is unfolding. In 2004, Alex Vik purchased a vineyard at Millahue, in the valley next to Casa Lapostolle's Clos Apalta. Under the direction of Bordeaux native Patrick Valette, the winemaking team has planted 750 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Carménère and Syrah in dozens of individual

The Sculpture building  
at Playa Vik; Barea Suite  
(below) at Estancia Vik



blocks. The goal is to produce a wine that is holistic, harmonious, balanced and seamless. A hotel is currently under construction along with a state-of-the-art winery.

Although the wine has not yet been released, we had the opportunity to taste the finished 2009 vintage, as well as a dozen separate components of the 2010 blend. They ranged from full-bodied, powerful Cabernet Sauvignon to rich, ripe Cabernet Franc, along with some remarkable Syrah that was mineral-infused and peppery. The vintage will spend 18 months aging in new French barrels. When the final blend is assembled, it promises to be an exceptional and memorable wine. ([vikretreats.com](http://vikretreats.com), [vik.cl](http://vik.cl)) ♦

