

## The Vintage

By Gina DeCaprio Vercesi



# Oh! Susana

**Groundbreaking Argentine winemaker Susana Balbo continues to push boundaries with creative wines—and a destination hotel**

After 40 years of breaking down walls in Argentina's wine industry, Susana Balbo decided to build some walls—and in the process bring more visitors to the South American country's wineries.

In 2022, Balbo, Argentina's first female winemaker, and her daughter, Ana Lovaglio Balbo, converted a family home in the leafy Mendoza suburb of Chacras de Coria into SB Winemaker's House & Spa Suites, where guests are immersed in art, wellness, and, of course, wine. (The soaking tubs in the suites evoke the concrete eggs used for aging and fermentation of wine.) Balbo says she undertook the development as a way to move the region forward.

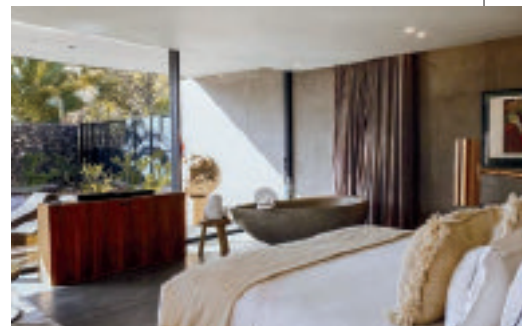
"I believe Mendoza has a unique future in tourism, but there aren't enough investments," says Balbo, who, in addition to being a winemaker, has served as president of Wines of Argentina, represented Mendoza in the country's National Congress, and chaired the



W20 Argentina summit. "As a congresswoman, I realized that I am more useful to my country as a businesswoman, making those investments and creating jobs—and I am really excited to do that."

This is hardly the first time Balbo has made an impact on her country's wine industry. Back in 1981, the Mendoza native graduated magna cum laude from Universidad Don Bosco with a degree in enology and horticulture but endured months of rejections—in those days, women worked in labs, not cellars—before landing a job as winemaker for Sucesión Michel Torino in Cafayate. There, she set out to transform torrontés, Argentina's signature white varietal, from a rustic table wine into something more delicate and refined.

Torrontés grapes had been notoriously difficult to press, resulting in tannic wines that didn't pair well with food. Tapping into a knowledge of horticultural engineering she picked up during her university days, Balbo employed enzymes typically used in apple juice production and discovered she could obtain fresh juice from the grapes without the prolonged skin contact that gave the wine its typically bitter edge. "Studying fruits and vegetables as well as enology gave me a 360-degree overview of the wine industry that other winemakers didn't have," she says. "I completely changed



the style of torrontés, and that put me on the winemaking map."

Today, the "Queen of Torrontés," continues to push boundaries in a country that remains known for juicy, fruit-forward malbecs. She has devoted nearly 40 percent of her eponymous winery's production to whites and rosés; at the company's newest vineyard, which sits at an elevation of 4,500 feet in the San Pablo sub-region of Mendoza's Uco Valley, she focuses entirely on white varieties, planting chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, sémillon, and torrontés. "The wide range of terroirs in our Andes Mountains enables us to grow high-quality white grapes,"

Balbo says. "We can show consumers that Argentina is about more than malbec—and it's our desire that many other Argentinian wineries join us in this revolution."

**From top:** Susana Balbo walks one of her vineyards; a guest room at SB Winemaker's House & Spa Suites; Balbo with her daughter, Ana Lovaglio Balbo



Courtesy of Susana Balbo (vineyard); courtesy of SB Winemaker's House & Spa Suites (room); Josefina Lopez (portrait with Ana)