

JUNGLE LUXE
INDIGENOUS STYLE HOTEL AND REMOTE
RESORT DESIGN AROUND THE WORLD
JUSTIN HENDERSON

76 88 : HOTEL EXPLORA,
SAN PEDRO DE ATACAMA
88 100 : HOTEL SALTO CHICO
TORRES DEL PAINE

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hotel explora en atacama

SAN PEDRO DE ATACAMA, CHILE



The Hotel Explora en Atacama lies outside a small town, San Pedro de Atacama, in the remote, sparsely populated Atacama Desert of northern Chile, one of the driest places on earth. The town was founded by Spanish conquerors in the center of a 34,000-acre (13,765.18 hectare) cultivated oasis inhabited by indigenous peoples for over 3000 years. According to Chilean architect German Del Sol, designer of the hotel, the siting of the building about one kilometer outside of the town follows a pre-Columbian tradition of placing buildings in open spaces away from towns so that they relate directly to the landscape rather than to the grid of streets, as they do in the European tradition.

Del Sol's approach to planning this hotel was inspired by the power of the Atacama landscape as well. He notes, "When I asked the owner of a field in San Pedro for a measurement, he warned me that the measurement could be very imprecise, for he understood his possession to be richer than a piece of land that could be measured. Later, I realized that to allow the culture and nature of Atacama to influence my architecture, I should

not approach it logically but rather poetically. [In the hotel,] natural and cultural life of the remote are reunited and made hospitable through architecture, revealing something meaningful for visitors."

Made primarily of wood, reinforced concrete, and ceramic brick—concrete and brick have the same aesthetic qualities as adobe but can withstand earthquakes, notes the architect—the sculpted, elegantly minimal hotel offers a uniquely poetic vision of remote hospitality. It is at once strikingly modern, unpretentiously comfortable, and fully in tune with the rugged beauty of the desert and the indigenous architecture. Situated in the ayllu (neighborhood) de Lareche, one of the myriad ancient ayllus that dot the San Pedro oasis, the hotel's two-story main building contains the significant public spaces: fifty-two guest rooms of 108 square feet (33 square meters) each are housed in a series of linked one-story wings extending from the ends of the main building. The wings enclose an angular open plaza at the core of the property. A separate building contains stables



OPPOSITE This two-story, 70-meter-long (229.6-foot) structure houses the hotel's lobby, dining room, bar, shop, and lounge. The palette balances the purity of white with desert tones and natural wood. Ramps and stairs link the upstairs terrace with the ground-level plaza, a spare, stone-covered patio surrounded by the guest buildings. **ABOVE** Fireplaces sculpted into freestanding walls wrap around columns at strategic points on the main floor of the common building; their shapes echo the carved forms of the skylights above. The muted colors of Chilean arts and crafts take on a resonant richness in the spare white and natural-toned interior.

while several small, freestanding, cubist volumes near the hotel's four pools, positioned well away from the hotel buildings, house saunas. The primary exterior colors are white and natural wood and earth tones, with highlight splashes of muted blues and golds on doors, window and wall trim, the saunas, and outdoor furniture. The colors, like the materials, are imperfect, imprecise, meant to reflect the effects of time and weather. "Imprecision is alive with suggestions," in the words of the architect.

Elevated about 5 feet (1.5 meters) above ground to enhance the views of the desert and mountains and protected by curving wood and copper roofs, the guest rooms open onto sheltered, inward-facing patios that also serve as corridors linking the wings with the main building. The waves shade these patios,

their angular forms working in counterpoint to the slight angles of the buildings beneath and helping to create a sense of separation for each guest-room door. The corridors connect along the interior perimeters of the guest-room buildings, forming a continuous path that rises to 12 feet (4.28 meters) above ground as it links with the main building. At this point it opens to form a trellis-shaded terrace whose views take in the nearby orchards and town and the more distant mountain and desert terrain. On the exterior walls of the guest-room wings, the architect cut a single blue-trimmed window the length of each building to emphasize its horizontality.

A network of waterways and pools flows through the fields and around the buildings and plazas, cooling the grounds and

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ABOVE AND OPPOSITE The architect extended the copper and wood roof deeply into the central plaza to make shady patios in front of each guest room. Cutouts in the roof system allow for interesting plays of shadow and light on the walls and grounds.

enriching the feeling of the hotel as oasis, shelter from the fierce desert environment. Positioned away from the hotel for a sense of privacy and discovery, the resort's four swimming pools, designed in a zigzag line, mimic the style of regional reservoirs; the water, drawn from deep wells beneath the oasis, is used to irrigate the fields around the property, so it is completely changed every twelve days. At another oasis, Termas de Puritama, 18.6 miles (30 kilometers) away, within the 18,532-acre (7500-hectare) Explora Estancia, Del Sol built walls, platforms, trails, and several more saunas where hotel guests bathe in natural hot springs at an altitude of 10,170 feet (3100 meters) under the stars of the southern sky.

Back at the hotel, the main building offers a layered, multifaceted interplay of interior and exterior, of light and shadow, of public and private space, that echoes the blurring of public and private space common to the towns of the region. High, free-standing wall elements and rows of massive columns loosely define the dining room, living room, bar, shop, and lobby, while ramps and stairs create dynamic circulation patterns. The internal volumes, shaped by angular walls and ceilings that shift in height from space to space, are generously scaled—the primary volumes are 4.1 meters (13.44 feet) high—with

numerous windows of varying shapes opening onto magnificent mountain and desert views. Throughout the hotel, the palette begins with the same white and muted natural wood and earth tones as the exterior, then adds a wider range of highlight colors—blue and gold, orange, red, green, brown, and black—in relatively quiet tones to woven fabrics and stained-wood furniture. The colors “belong to the materials that one touches, like windows, doors, and furnishings,” notes the architect, who attributes the palette to the colors in aguayos (ponchos) worn by the local people and to the colors in Chile’s temperate forests.

Every piece of furniture in the hotel was designed and made by artisans from all over Chile. The arts and crafts decorating the hotel, and for sale in the shop, are also native to Chile, linking the hotel to the Atacama culture and other indigenous cultures. This boldly designed project occupies 42 acres (17 hectares) of land comprising twenty properties that had been held in the same families for centuries. Del Sol left traces of those families on the land and found inspiration in the colors and forms that have shaped this place since ancient times. In doing so, he made a timeless, ruggedly beautiful new hotel.



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ABOVE AND OPPOSITE The lobby bar features custom-designed outdoor furniture stained in seven warm, muted colors. The lounge spills onto a triple-shaded terrace. Glass walls frame views of volcanic cones in the distance. **PAGES 84-85** sheltered by spare, open pavilions, blue and gold cobalt saunas and bathhouses adjoin the hotel's several swimming pools. Paired against the salt curves and colors of the desert, mountains, and sky and reflected in the pool's water, these simple, geometrically sculpting forms take on a monumental presence.

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ABOVE Blue and pale gold window treatments frame a view of the oasis, with the grasses and sky inspiring the palette. **OPPOSITE** The architect found inspiration for the guest-room palette in the colors of the desert and the sky, and the oasis. The interiors display a sophisticated sense of style, enhanced by the use of local and regional crafts and furnishings.



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hotel salto chico

PATAGONIA, CHILE



At the far end of South America, in the land of Patagonia, the Hotel Salto Chico stands amid glowing blue-green rivers, lakes, and waterfalls in the shadow of one of the most ruggedly compelling mountain ranges on earth: the fierce, glacier-clad peaks called the Torres del Paine, contained within Chile's national park of the same name. Designed by a team from the office of Chilean architect German del Sol for the Explora hotel firm, the Salto Chico achieves a two-part harmony with its awesomely wild site; its bold, modern form strikes a strong architectural note, while its small scale and stripped-down, low-rise profile evoke the humility required for any man-made thing set in such overpowering natural scenery. You can't challenge mountains like these; better to stake a simple, clean claim to some small space and make a building that serves as sanctuary, an inward-turning place from which to contemplate the power of the terrain. As architect German del Sol put it, "Architecture seeks to create an intimate relationship between the city and untouched

nature. Architecture places itself as an outpost between what is measured and what is incalculable."

Though it features myriad windows providing dramatic views of the distant mountains, the lakes, and the nearby waterfall that sends the River Paine tumbling into Lake Pehoe, the Hotel Salto Chico has an understated, introverted quality; there are no grounds or outbuildings other than the boathouse, a few hundred yards away on the riverbank. The unadorned, white-painted, horizontal cladding of the ground-hugging buildings enhances this modest quality, as do the generally undecorated exteriors, with plain roofs and unbroken lines of fenestration enhancing the horizontality of the structures. The angled window lines on the exterior reflect the location of stairs and ramps within, which in turn echo the slope of the site.

At a glance, it hardly seems possible that the main building rises four stories, so intently does it cling to its gently sloping



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE This view of the hotel's secondary structure, the lakeshore boathouse, and a view from a guest room, puts the structure into perspective: it lies in a vast, powerful natural landscape dominated by the wild peaks of the Torres del Paine.

riverbank site. Yet it does: the ground floor, tucked beneath and just half the size of the upper levels, contains staff housing, storage, and meeting and music rooms. The first floor serves as the primary public level, with large volumes housing the dining room and the lounge, an oval-shaped bar embraced by a curving stair, and the reception lobby. All these spaces are arrayed along the side from which the mountains are visible. The back of house on this level includes more staff housing, plus the kitchen, laundry, and staff dining facilities. The two upper levels, capped by a copper roof, contain thirty guest rooms in four sizes. There are no private verandas or balconies—the weather, though tempered by the nearness of the sea, can be extreme—but every room features views of lakes and mountains. Connected to the main building by an elevated wooden walkway, the boathouse contains ten bedrooms, a heated indoor pool, a sauna, a gym, and a small outdoor deck with hot tubs.

Finished mainly in wood, the interiors of the two buildings exhibit a warm, colorful, contemporary sense of style. Curving stairs, shifting ceiling heights, angled walls and room dividers, and the dynamic interplay of natural and artificial light from the unusually shaped and situated windows create a sense of liveliness and movement throughout the interior. The primary materials are wood, in natural shades and white, and glass, with slate flooring or wool carpeting specified in some areas as a warming counterpoint. Light, modern fixtures and furnishings in public spaces and guest rooms lend the hotel an appealingly fresh ambience sparked with bright upholstery and bedspreads. With the exception of imports from New York and Europe, all the interior finishes, accessories, artworks, and other elements were purchased in Chile, firmly grounding the hotel in its national and ethnic place. Perhaps this pride of place is most tellingly expressed in the hotel's cowhide chairs, originally designed by German Rodriguez Arias for the house of Pablo Neruda, Chile's world-famous national poet.

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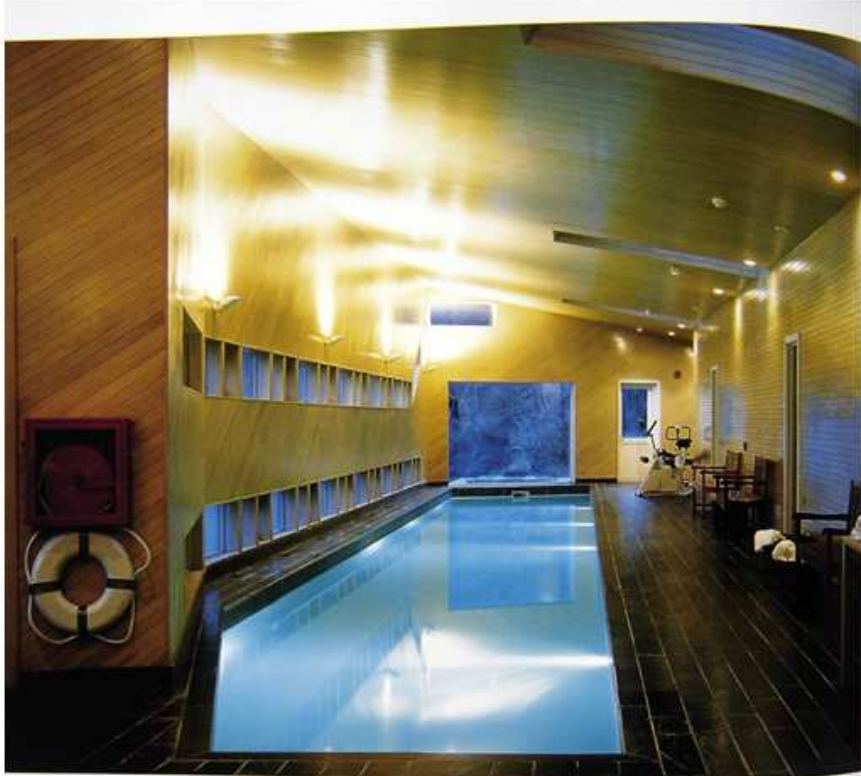


OPPOSITE TOP AND BOTTOM Floor-to-ceiling dividers, slanting walls, multiple colors and textures of wood finishes, and diagonally shifting ceiling heights dynamically divide the lounge into intimate gathering spaces. The furnishings, fixtures, and decorative accessories offer a pleasing mix of casual comfort and contemporary high style. **ABOVE** With a palette limited to wood in a narrow range of natural finishes and shades of off-white, the architect creates a surprisingly lively interior by deftly interweaving rectilinear lines and planes with sharp angles, the occasional curve, and an abundance of well-placed windows. Note how the staircase echoes the angle of the window.

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OPPOSITE The bathhouse contains a skylighted heated swimming pool lined with state decks and windows offering magnificent river and mountain views. **LEFT** The ceramic pieces and other artworks exemplify the designers' commitment to the folk-art and handcraft traditions of Chile. **ABOVE** This dining room was built to show off the view.

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