

# Peace of the Rock





SET WITHIN A SPRAWLING  
RANCH IN URUGUAY,  
A STONE GUEST COTTAGE  
STANDS ON SOLID GROUND

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## FENCES MARKING LAND OWNERSHIP

are few and far between in the great swaths of pasture that comprise Uruguay's southern tip. Those boundaries that do exist in this bucolic landscape seem to have been stitched by the earth rather than the hand of man.

Within these subtly cordoned spaces, small ranches—called *chacras* in Portuñol, the local dialect—hold livestock, wildlife, and that particular breed of humanity dedicated to creating refuge. Some 30 years ago, one of these visionaries, polo player Martín Braun Lasala, purchased 1,000 acres about 15 minutes from Punta del Este. The town had grown significantly beyond its roots as a fishing village, becoming a coastal playground to the likes of Brigitte Bardot, Gina Lollobrigida, and Yul Brynner. Despite the town's glitzy appeal, Braun Lasala was attracted to the breathlessly quiet countryside nearby.

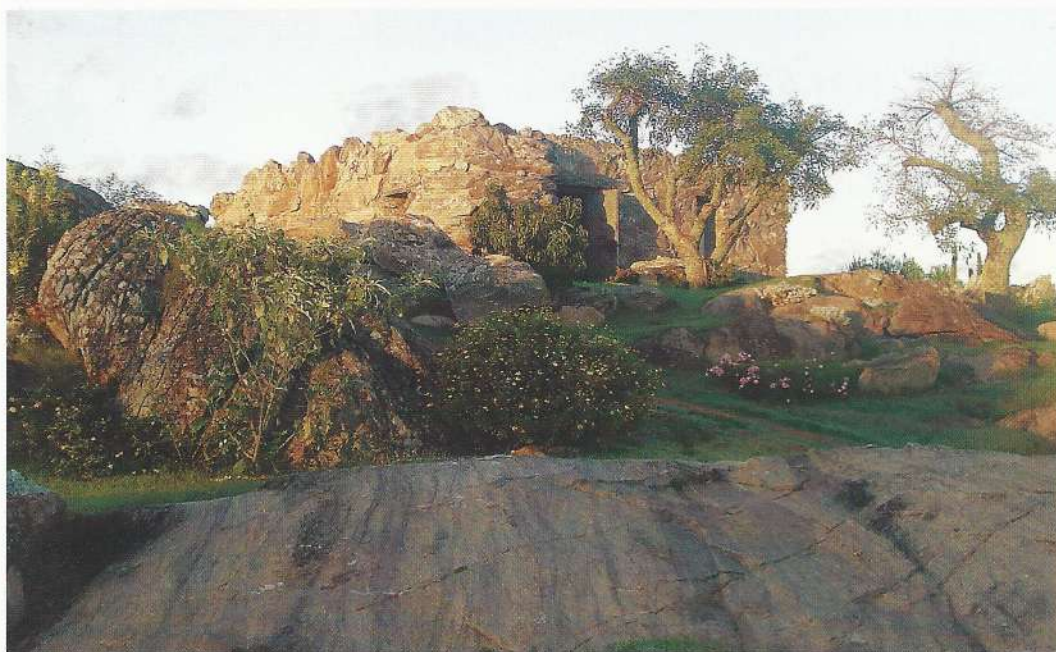
The tenor of life continues to change in and around Punta del Este as builders quickly claim any undeveloped land. From



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Previous pages, left: On a 1,000-acre *chacra*, or ranch, near Punta del Este in Uruguay, sits a stone guest cottage built into the hill. Formerly owned by polo player Martin Braun Lasala, the cottage was part of a family compound. Previous pages, right: An *aljibe*, or cistern, is part of the property's garden.

Right: Almost completely hidden from view, the 1,000-square-foot guest cottage contains a kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bathroom. Below: A rustic elegance pervades the bedroom of the stone dwelling, built and furnished by Braun Lasala. Opposite: The view from the bedroom window. "You can see the morning fog in the distance," notes Mariela Beceiro, Braun Lasala's daughter-in-law.







a rock outcropping above a delta on the property, however, the only clue that anything has changed in the past century is the faint outline of a cityscape in the distance.

The four-bedroom main house—which Braun Lasala built shortly after buying the property in 1977 and gradually added onto over the years as his family grew—is a testament to rustic gentility. Cowhide rugs, baskets of eucalyptus, and straw carpets set the tone for the casually comfortable interiors that also include a game table and roomy upholstered pieces.

Three years ago, Braun Lasala completed another project of

passion: a guest cottage built on a hill a quarter of a mile from the main house. The exterior of the small cottage, which is made from massive stones stacked on top of each other, blends seamlessly into the craggy bluff. The camp-chic interiors are further accented with generous ceiling timbers and wide-plank pine flooring.

The guest cottage also contains loftlike interiors that meld a small kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. Here, as well as in the rest of the space, the theme is rejuvenation, as evidenced by the fluted lace of a hammock and the scent of *La*



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Clockwise from right: The *pirca*, or corral, looks up to the stone guest cottage at the top of the hill. "You may not even realize it is a house, and that is the idea," says Beceiro. In addition to cows, the ranch is home to fish, waterfowl, wild boar, wild turkey, sheep, and an ostrichlike bird called ñandú.

The swimming pool, near the main house, was designed around existing rocks. The chaise longues face the ocean. "This is a popular spot where you can swim, sunbathe, and enjoy the view," says Beceiro.

Daybeds accent a patio that looks out to a sliver of ocean and the sunsets.





*Dama de Noche*, a flower that opens its large white blossoms at night only. By day, the scent of herbs and wildflowers drift above the cottage's flinty footings. Both houses overlook a valley with estuarial waters that commingle with the Río de la Plata and the Atlantic Ocean. On the property, fish swim in various ponds and in an artificial lagoon that the family added. Waterfowl, wild boar, and wild turkey have also made the land their home, coexisting with sheep, cattle, and a small ostrich-type bird called *ñandú*.

Nestled into a group of boulders sits a swimming pool that

is accessed from the main house through a bank of wildflowers. A waterfall feeds the tiny quarry, which is surrounded by chaise longues trained toward the ocean and the fiery orange sunsets of Punta del Este. Before Braun Lasala sold the estate last year, he often split his time between Punta del Este and Rio de Janeiro. Braun Lasala's son, Martín Braun Blaquier, and daughter-in-law, Mariela Beceiro, would also escape to the ranch as often as they could. "We loved to go horseback riding and lounge by the pool," says Beceiro, who lives in Buenos Aires. "It's a peaceful place." 