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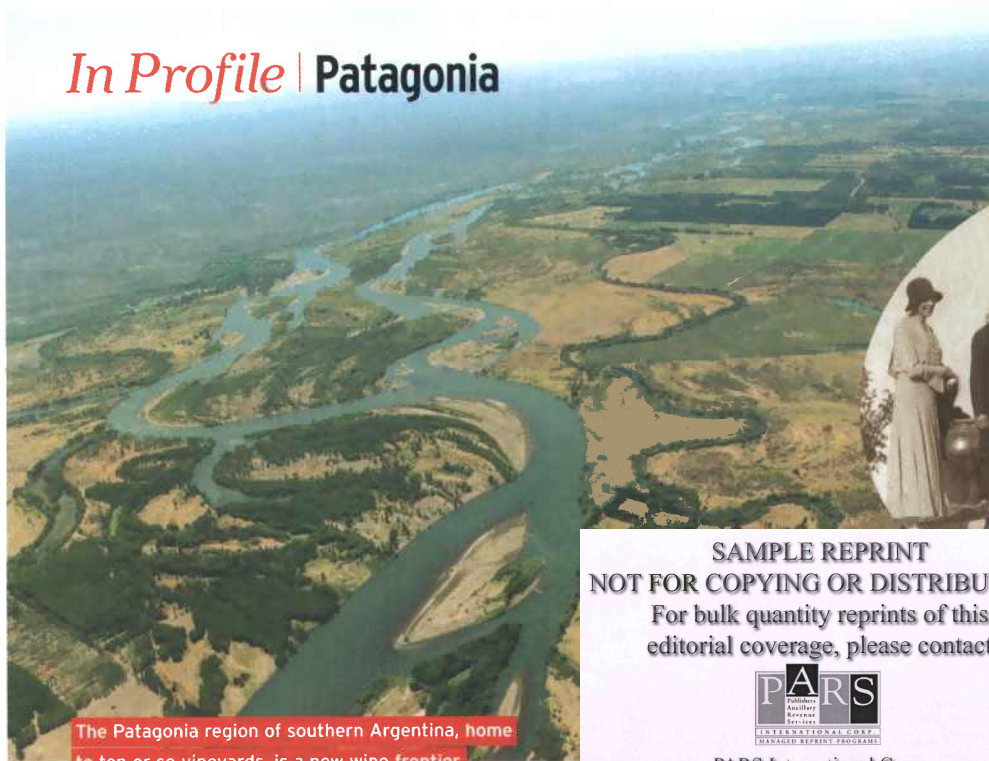
Winemaker Piero Incisa della
Rocchetta, owner of the Patagonia
vineyard Bodega Chacra

SUMMER HITS PATAGONIA IN January—the sky shines bright blue, the poplar trees turn a lush green, and the air is warmed from the 16-hour days of sun. But in the vineyard at the Estación Experimental Agropecuaria Alta Valle, a government facility that studies agricultural technology, the men inspecting bunches of grapes on orderly rows of vines don't seem to care. There's Mario, the local agriculturalist, Hans, the wine guru, and Piero, the vintner from Italy who believes Patagonia may be the world's great undiscovered wine country. These three have a problem.

Something flies past my head and punctures the leaves on a nearby vine. *Whiz...pop, pop.* I look up and see nothing but blinding sun. The vineyard was just irrigated, and as we walk through it our shoes make sloshing and sucking noises. I'm advised to place

Taking ROOT

The grandson of one of Italy's most lauded winemakers strikes out on his own—and winds up halfway around the world. DANIELLE PERGAMENT reports from Argentina.



The wedding of Mario Incisa, Piero's grandfather, in Bolgheri, Italy, 1930

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"THERE WERE SAINTS, POPES, BISHOPS, AND QUITE A FEW MAYORS," PIERO SAYS, SO CASUAL ABOUT HIS LINEAGE, WHICH GOES BACK A THOUSAND YEARS.

my feet on the small white flowers that grow between the vines so I don't sink. Agam, *whiz...pop, pop*. I glance around, confused. Mario points to a kid, maybe 14 years old, sitting on a rickety wooden stand 20 feet above the ground—a slingshot in his hand and a wide grin on his face. "That's Mariano," he tells me. "There is a big problem with birds here. They have eaten half the grapes in some parts." I watch as the boy gnaws on his slingshot like it's beef jerky. "We have tried nets," Piero says, "but this method works the best." In the high desert region of southern Argentina, it's not pesticides, hailstorms, or swarms of locusts that threaten the vines; it's the pigeons. For now at least, the first line of defense is a boy named Mariano armed with a homemade slingshot and a bucket of gravel.

PIERO INCISA DELLA ROCCHETTA has come to the Southern Hemisphere to make not routine red table wine but, as he describes it, one of the best Pinot Noirs on earth. Piero's goal sounds a lot less lofty when you consider that he hails from one of Italy's legendary winemaking families. His paternal

grandfather, Mario, created Sassicaia wine in Tuscany in the early forties and is regarded as both the forefather of Italian wine and one of the top makers in the world. In addition to being ranked among the ten best wines of the 20th century, Sassicaia has been awarded the highest honor by the Italian Sommelier Association.

The Incisa della Rocchetta family tree is something you would expect to find in a dusty leather-bound book with gilded pages. "There were saints,



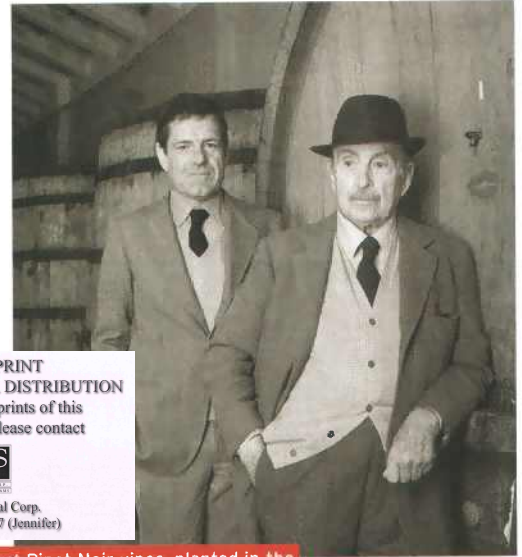
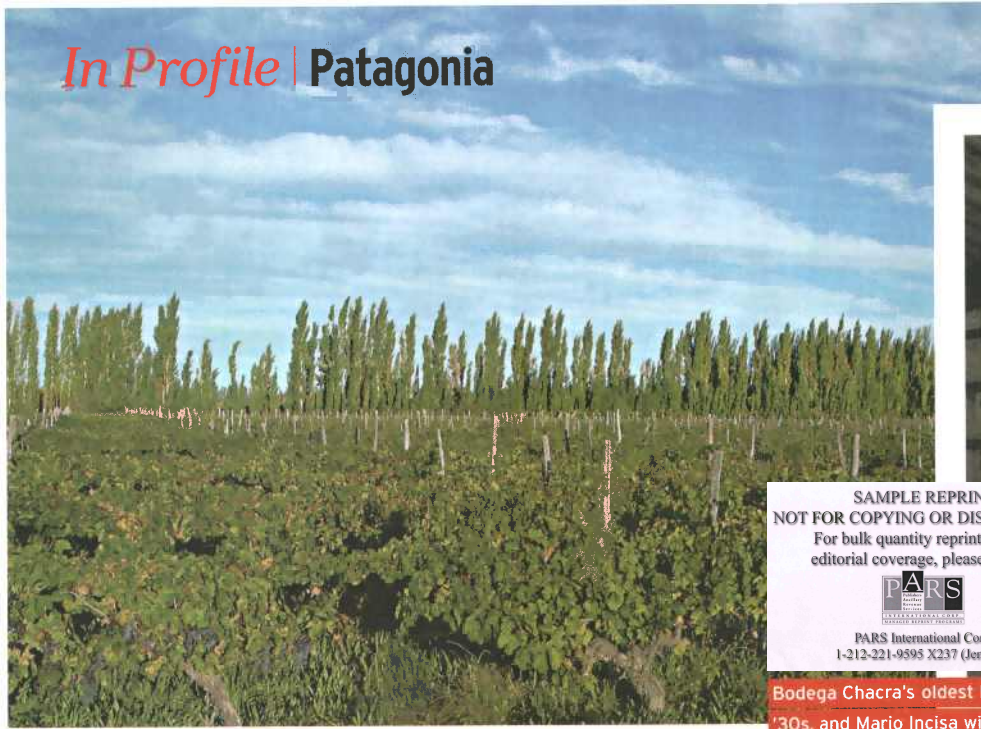
popes, bishops, and quite a few mayors," Piero says, so casual about his lineage, which goes back a thousand years. His great-great-grandfather, Moses Taylor, was the president of City Bank in New York and a railroad magnate who helped the Lincoln administration finance the Civil War. Further back, his ancestors descended from one of the Roman Empire's largest landowners; Mario Incisa della Rocchetta's first home later became Rome's house of parliament. "It's hard to keep track of how we all fit together in my family," says Piero, who out of habit refers to anyone in his family as a cousin. Massimo Ferragamo, president of Salvatore Ferragamo USA, is one of these cousins (by marriage), as is Piero Antinori, owner of the Antinori vineyards. Piero himself bears the title of marchese, though he'd rather not dwell on that.


THE VERDICT IS IN....

"Bodega Chacra 2004 is what I would call a well-knit wine, which is a wine-geek way of saying that it has all its elements in nice proportions—not too much wood or tannin, great color, backbone, and proper structure. It is also very velvety and has a long finish. The overarching word is luscious. It heads toward the darker edge of the Pinot Noir flavor spectrum—darker berries as opposed to a bright cherry kind of fruit. The perfumy quality of Pinot Noir isn't there because of its youth and the fact that it's exceptionally concentrated. It's obviously a powerful wine from very old vines."

—DAVID LYNCH, WINE DIRECTOR OF NEW YORK'S BABBO AND COAUTHOR OF VINO ITALIANO

In Profile | Patagonia



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Bodega Chacra's oldest Pinot Noir vines, planted in the '30s, and Mario Incisa with his nephew Nicolò in 1982

For generations, members of the Incisa della Rocchetta family have been good stewards of the land—and in the business of beauty and refinement. They have raised Thoroughbreds in Bolgheri, Italy, founded a bird sanctuary in Tuscany, and created

one of the world's finest olive oils (also bearing the Sassicaia name). The strongest gene, of course, is the one for winemaking. "I have been around wine my whole life," Piero explains. "When I was six years old, my grandfather would give me and

my cousins wine at the dinner table and ask us what we thought."

On first impression Piero doesn't fit the image of Italian winemaking royalty. Despite his slight frame, he's more like a Tibetan mountaineer: thick dark beard,

COURTESY, PIERO INCISA



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