

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## RECLINE DESIGN

Coming up with a hotel concept that blends bold ideas with sensitivity for the location is a creative challenge for architects. **Ralph Bestic** finds six retreats that master the brief.



PLAYA VIK

Uruguay

Can't say I can put my finger on any defining achievement in the hotel business of this country but right now, because of a solid economy, Uruguay is having a hotel moment. A big one. Uno grande as they say here. Hotels are breeding faster than a hungry gaucho in search of a plate of asado. So let's head on down to the coastline of José Ignacio east of Montevideo and check into the one of the casas of Playa Vik, a private hotel owned by Norwegian-born financier Alex Vik. The design is from Uruguayan architect Carlos Ott and the location, a beachside of blustery, coastal beauty that was, until recently, known only to locals. There are six casas from which to choose and they all contain hand-painted wooden floors, adobe mud fireplaces,

private gardens running riot with bougainvillea, ebony ceilings and above all that, a wildflower-clad living roof. But before unpacking and heading for the pavilion to check out fellow guests or the 120-metre-long wine cellar and the firepit lounging area set in a wooden deck, it is important to explore the Sculpture, a quite astounding titanium and glass structure that defies gravity – its bent cube-like shape seems almost compacted to the ground as it leans and looms at a 30° angle over its own entrance. You enter via a huge, bronze Door of Paradise, inspired by the door of the Baptistery in Florence and – like Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise* – it opens to reveal an interior of art and installations from some of Uruguay's most celebrated artists. The architecture of Playa

Vik has been influenced by the character of the surrounding landscape. The black granite pool is long and narrow and extends out, with no visual break, so that its waters seem almost to be on the same level as the sea. Vegetation morphs into sand, the constant onshore winds (blowing the Sculpture into its weird shape) gust around the casas and cool the rooms and pavilion. The marine light and green-blue Atlantic appear as one, especially at dusk. The structure is sharp, rooted in modernism, green and conscientious but with no sentimental folksy side to it. There is form and functionality, those old twins, but there is also beauty and pleasure. Uruguayans are captive to these

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■ [www.playavik.com](http://www.playavik.com)

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