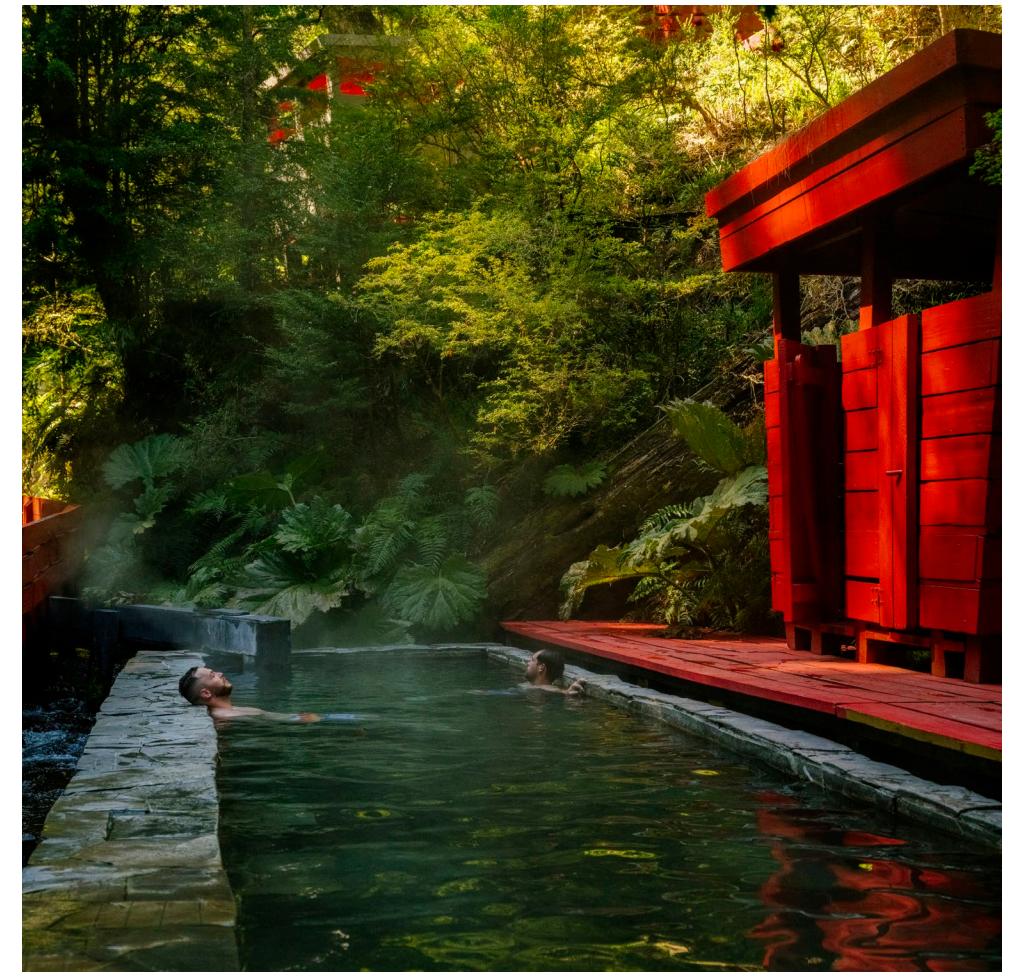




The Chilean Lake District is a lush landscape of jagged volcanoes, enticing pools and verdant jungle that borders the equally beautiful Patagonia. Take a tour of its most luxurious hotels and spas in this showcase of the region's geothermal hot-spring bathing spots and modernism-inspired architecture.

System REBOOT

TRAVEL — REPORT — Chile



Photographer — Kristin Bethge
Writer — Mark Johanson

South of Santiago, past the sun-baked winelands of central Chile, you'll find a cool, lush landscape of primaevae forests and deep blue waters. This is the Chilean Lake District where Bavarian-style homes, built with wooden shingles by 19th-century German settlers, sit in the foothills of volcanic peaks. Here, the seismic force of volcanoes such as Villarrica, Puyehue, Osorno and Calbuco warms the groundwater, which percolates through loamy earth. Host to hot springs, cherished for centuries by Mapuche communities, today, the steaming pools and grottos inspire modern architects whose designs respond to the sublime surroundings.

The latest project to make use of the mineral-rich water is Parque Termal Botánico, a complex that opened this February near the resort town of Pucón. The \$4m (€4.4m) compound along the Liucura River is part botanical garden, part thermal baths. More than 1,000 plant species surround its 10 pools. Bell-like copihue and star-shaped huella flowers dangle over the water, while caracara falcons flutter through canelo trees. "I travelled all around Chile looking for the [often endangered] plants that I wanted to use here," owner Ignacio Martínez tells *Konfekt* as we stroll down zigzagging boardwalks which link slate-coloured bathing pools (two of which lie in grottos). Above, the dressing rooms recall traditional Chilean *galpones*, barn-like structures that are emblematic of the region.

Martínez has a background in plant nurseries for Chile's agricultural industry, and wanted the infrastructure to merge into the landscape. One exception is the Crystal Palace, a curved glass atrium with a black steel frame, which holds a large pool where visitors loll in water surrounded by tropical plants. "My son and I dreamt up the design," he says as we step inside, noting that it's a nod to the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid's Buen

Retiro Park. He's currently building a real-estate project on neighbouring lands, and plans to add a hotel and restaurant in the coming years.

Parque Termal Botánico is only the latest in a string of design-led hot springs to open in recent years. But resort towns like Pucón have been drawing thermal devotees for decades. Twenty kilometres away lies Hotel Antumalal, a lakeside retreat celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2025. Antumalal's founders, Guillermo Pollak and Catalina Rindler, arrived in Chile from what is now the Czech Republic in 1938, fleeing persecution for their Jewish heritage on the eve of the Second World War. The avid mountaineers set up a small tea house on a rocky promontory above Lake Villarrica, 2km outside of Pucón. When Chile's then-president Gabriel González Videla showed up for a cup of tea, Guillermo asked him point-blank for a loan. "He told the president, 'We'll make you a hotel that Chile will be proud of,'" says Rony Pollak, Guillermo's daughter.

Loan in hand, Guillermo teamed up with architect Jorge Elton, who'd made a name for himself with exclusive beach homes in Cachagua, near Santiago, and together they conceived a property that evokes both the Bauhaus and Frank Lloyd Wright, with asymmetrical lines and a main building that appears to hover above the rocky terrain. "My father came from Europe, so he knew about the Bauhaus movement and the revolution it caused," says Rony over a cup of tea on Antumalal's terrace, where stone trails lead to manicured gardens and private lakeside beaches. "What they introduced here was a lot of native timber, such as araucaria trees," she adds of the structure, which was completed in 1950.

From the outside, the 22-room hotel is a patchwork of grey stones, red-painted concrete and steely glass, with a small waterfall trickling below (a wink to Wright). Inside, chunky wooden panels, fireplaces and giant tree-stump tables add warmth. Large windows frame the natural environment, trapping views of the distant Andes, or speedboats zipping across the lake. Furnishings in canary yellow, terracotta orange and sea green evoke the hotel's mid-century heyday, when Academy Award-winner James Stewart and astronaut Neil Armstrong visited. Queen Elizabeth II stopped by on her state visit in 1968.

Top of the spas

Parque Termal Botánico
This new botanical sanctuary near Pucón has mineral-rich pools enveloped by native flora.
parquetermalbotanico.cl

Hotel Antumalal
A Bauhaus-inspired retreat near Pucón with lake views, lush gardens and refined service.
antumalal.com

Huilo Huilo
A pristine nature reserve near Panguipulli with a collection of surreal hotels inspired by the forest ecosystem.
huilohuilo.com

Hotel AWA
A brutalist luxury lodge near Puerto Varas with volcano views, a spa and packages that cover meals and adventures.
hotelawa.cl

Termas Geométricas
A labyrinth of vivid red walkways and artful geothermal pools immersed in a misty ravine near Coñaripe.
termasgeometricas.cl

Termas del Sol
Stone-lined pools and a forest spa connected by boardwalks along a lagoon near Puelo in Patagonia.
termasdelsol.com

Previous spread

1. Pool at the Antumaco Spa
2. Geothermal bath at Termas Geométricas

This spread

1. Grilled conger eel over native potatoes at Hotel AWA
2. Bauhaus-inspired Hotel Antumalal
3. Sun-drenched sitting area of Hotel Antumalal



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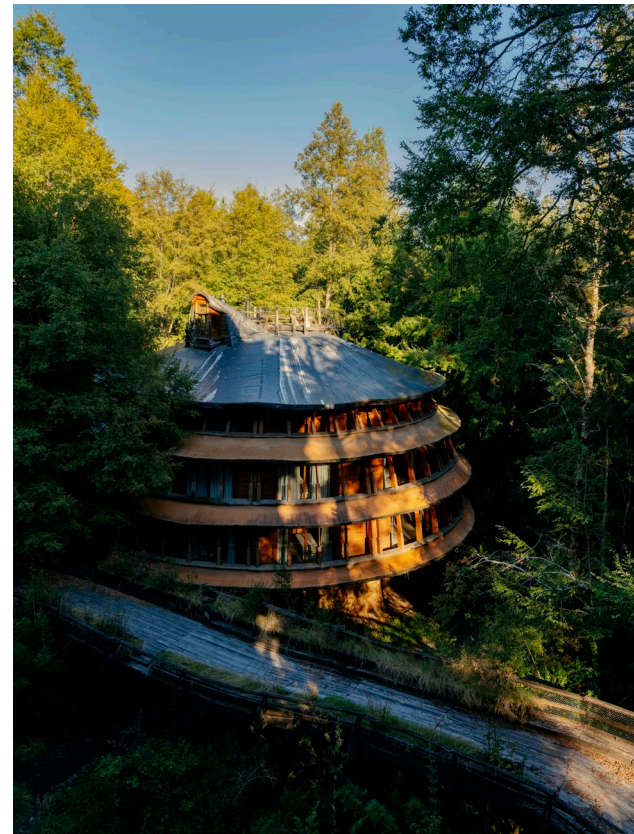
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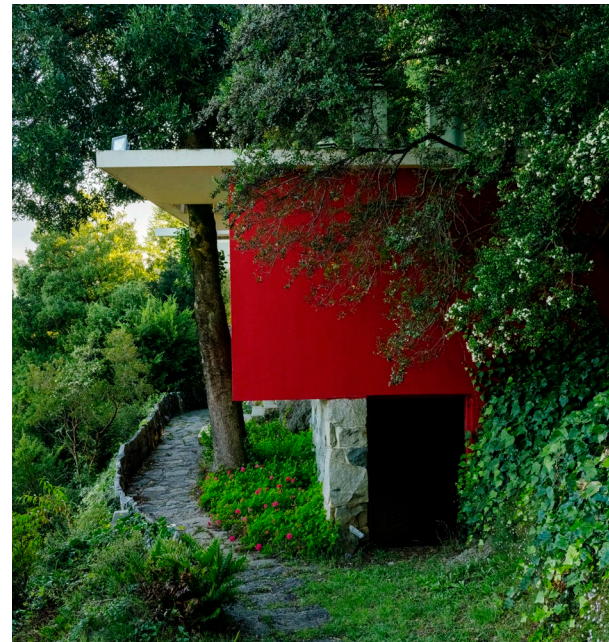
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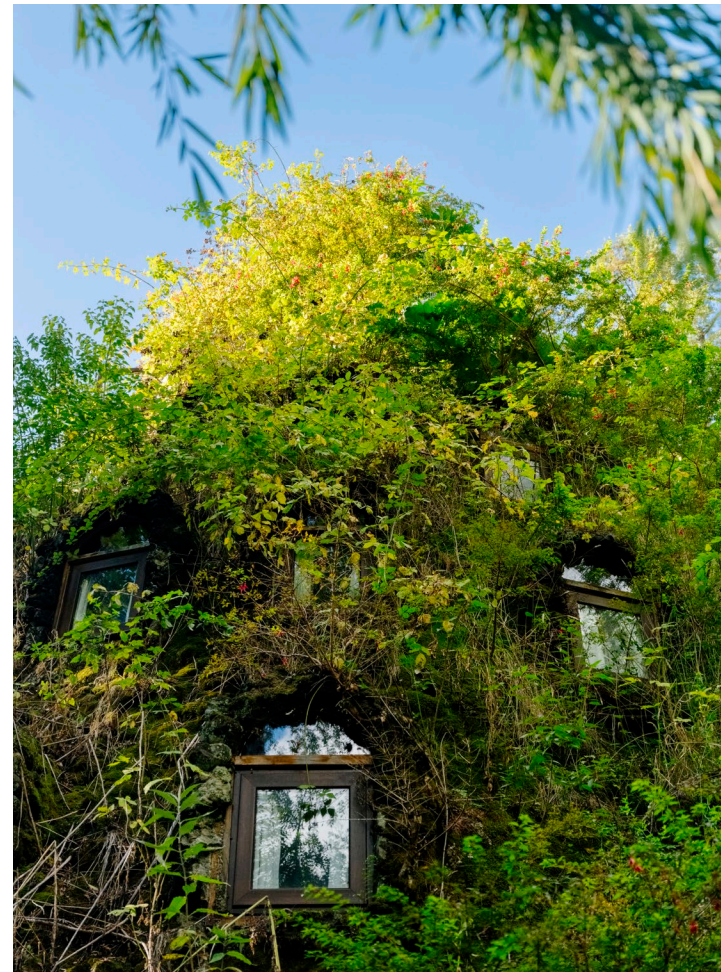
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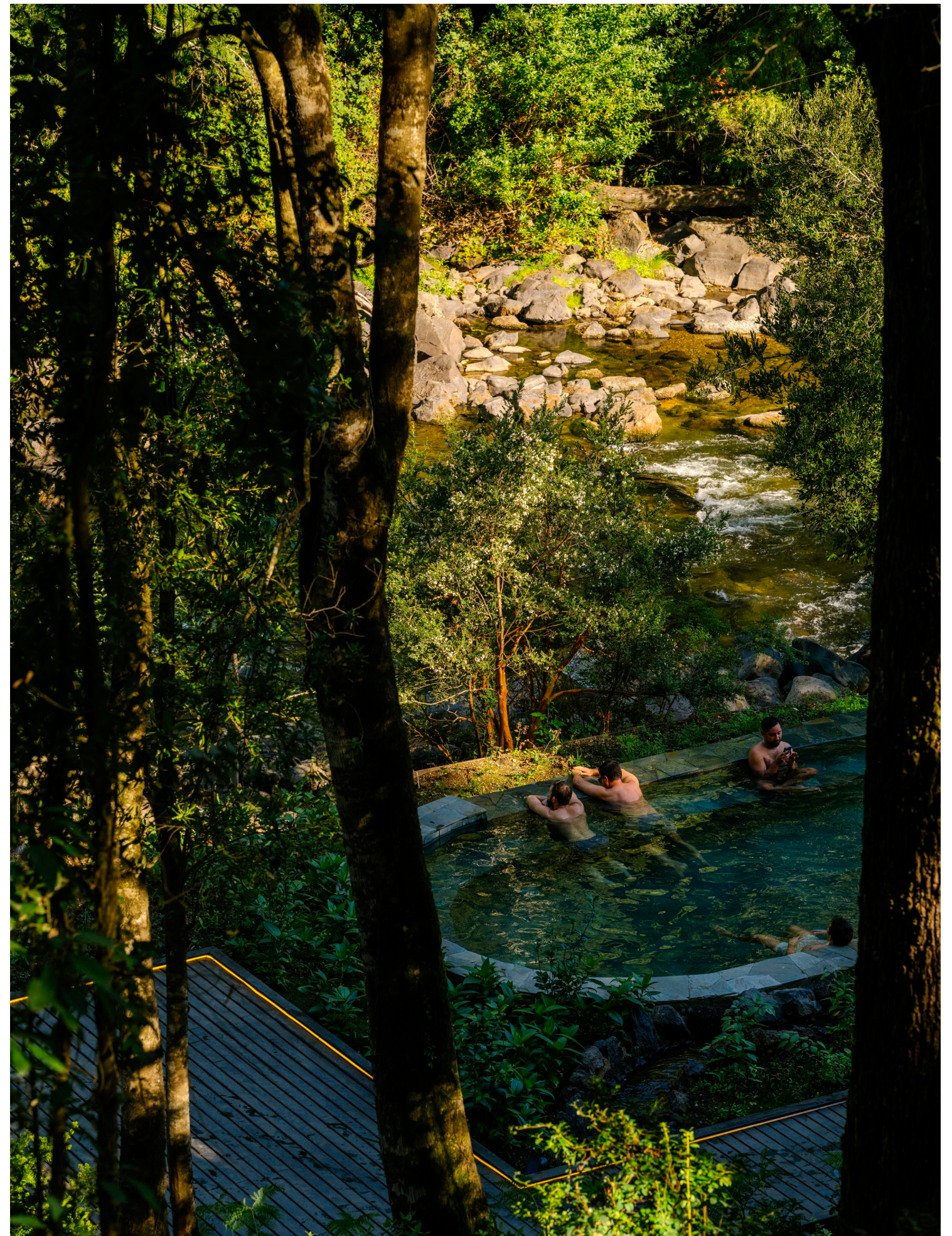


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- 1. Thermal pool at Termas del Sol
- 2. Hotel Reino Fungi
- 3. Cabin at Hotel Antumalal
- 4. View from a guest room at Hotel Antumalal
- 5. The Crystal Palace
- 6. Villarrica volcano
- 7. Exterior of Hotel Antumalal
- 8. Montaña Mágica Lodge



1



2

The Antumaco Spa, which was carved out of natural rock in 2010, has a dry sauna, massage rooms and a bean-shaped indoor-outdoor pool. Today, it lures regional architects, artists and intellectuals who come to enjoy the aesthetics as much as the treatments with hot volcanic stones. “There is this theme of simplicity, but with lots of colour, energy and natural light,” says Rony. “You know how you can see the light in people? That is the way buildings are too.”

The next morning we circumnavigate Villarrica Volcano, driving to Lake Calafquén, before returning inland toward the Andes. Here, spritely araucaria trees – used for the panels at Antumalal but now a protected species – pop like umbrellas from the hilltops. A thin dirt road ascends the volcano’s southern slope to the Aihue Ravine, where 60 springs with gurgling waters feed Termas Geométricas.

This groundbreaking *terma*, designed by renowned Chilean architect Germán del Sol, opened in 2004 following two years of construction during which workers avoided heavy machinery to preserve the natural environment. There are 18 pools to be found along a 500m boardwalk, which tracks above the Aihue River. At the ravine’s end, a waterfall erupts from the dense rainforest. Del Sol wanted all boardwalks and facilities painted fire-engine red to contrast with grass roofs and giant Chilean rhubarbs, which fan along the riverbed. “The red also helps highlight the path in winter, when the hot springs are completely covered in snow,” says manager Javier Becker.

Around Termas Geométricas, ferns curve over pools and moss climbs up rock walls. There’s the smell of a fire warming a café and the slight hint of sulphur in the air. A vast waterworks system hidden in the forest channels hot and cold water into assorted pools, some of which are only big enough for couples, others for small groups. “It’s the way you can connect directly and profoundly with the forest that makes it so unique,” says Becker.

The pure spring-fed waters feature various volcanic minerals, including iron, calcium and magnesium. Becker says these geothermal components can increase blood circulation, eliminate bodily toxins and stimulate the immune system – all in addition to reducing muscle pain and tension.

After a dip in the pools, we drive onward along the edge of another lake: the steel-blue Panguipulli. Sinewy and flanked by mountains, it looks almost like an inland fjord. At the lake’s end are the twin volcanoes Mocho and Choshuenco. Indigenous groups such as the Mapuche, in the south, and the Atacameño, in the north, revere Chile’s 90 active volcanoes, believing that they contain a living spirit. Recent projects on the slopes below have sought to respect this sacred status with architecture that uses natural materials and light-footed construction.

One such example is Huilo Huilo Biological Reserve, a collection of fantastical hotels that are all tucked into (and occasionally covered by) the Valdivian rainforest. Rodrigo Verdugo, the architect behind them, calls his unique style “ethnic surrealism”, which means the buildings are all atemporal, and yet deeply rooted in their surroundings, seemingly built with materials derived from the forest ecosystem. “It has more to do architecturally



“It has more to do with a dream than a style. I wanted to depart from the typical design path and follow a new one that could be like the narrative of a book”

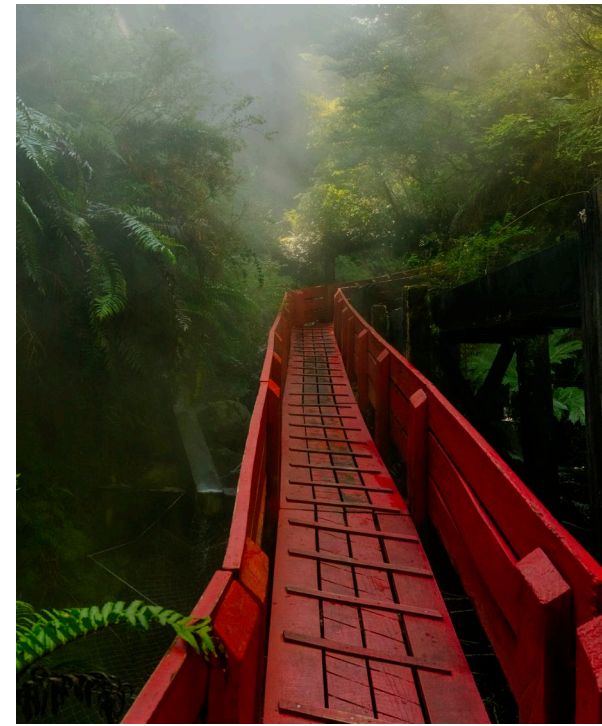
with a dream than a style,” he tells *Konfekt* as we walk up a spiral staircase within Nothofagus, a hotel meant to replicate a tree. “I wanted to depart from the typical design path and follow a new one that could be like the narrative of a book.”

The three principal hotels at Huilo Huilo all mimic organic shapes, channelling the natural splendour of the region. The first, Montaña Mágica, is a conical 14-room “mountain” covered in volcanic stones that have sprouted vegetation thanks to a small waterfall emanating from the roof. The second hotel, 58-room Nothofagus, is a direct inversion, fanning out at the top like a branching tree. The final property, 22-room Reino Fungi, emulates a bulbous mushroom. “The common thread is this abstract narrative about the development of the forest,” explains Verdugo, who built the hotels with native woods, such as coihue and raulí, and connected them all via climatized bridges to create one integrated system.

Huilo Huilo has its own thermally heated pools – both in the spa and at an open-air complex along the Rañintulelfu River. There are also trails to waterfalls that tumble over a granite gorge, and a restaurant serving red deer tartare and stewed boar. “It’s become quite popular among scientists, artists and musicians from abroad,” says guide Rodrigo Campus, who takes us on a tour of the complex the next morning.

Departing Huilo Huilo, we take the Pan-American Highway, which zips through Chilean cow country, and exit at the small hamlet of Frutillar Bajo, which arose after the Chilean government encouraged German immigration to the region starting in the mid-1800s (when it remained a Mapuche stronghold). The region’s biggest resort town, Puerto Varas, lies a half-hour drive south. Just east of it is Hotel AWA, a grey monolithic building that sits along Lake Llanquihue and features raw materials of reinforced concrete, steel and glass.

Architect-owner Mauricio Fuentes cites the influence of modernists such as Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. “In particular, their emphasis on functionality, structural clarity and the interplay between materials and open space,” he tells *Konfekt*, noting the shape of the building, which rises at an angle to the northeast so that guests can wake to views out of floor-to-ceiling windows of



2

Previous spread

1. Spa pool at Hotel AWA
2. Thermal bath at Parque Termal Botánico

This spread

1. Lobby at Huilo Huilo
2. Boardwalk through Termas Geométricas
3. Thermal pool at Termas Geométricas



3

the sun cresting behind the Osorno volcano. “The windows are not just a design feature; they are a core architectural concept that dissolves the boundary between the interior and exterior,” says Fuentes.

Later we plunge into the glacier-fed lake, before racing in robes to the heat of saunas. A sunset spritz on the lakeside docks (featuring the herbaceous hometown spirit Träkál, which is infused with the native berries maqui and murta) segues into a dinner paired with crisp Chilean sauvignon blancs and bold carménère. There’s a cold-smoked beetroot carpaccio, grilled conger eel over potatoes, and the traditional *pastel de jaiba*, a creamy crab dish cooked in a terracotta bowl.

Our final stop the next morning takes us briefly into Patagonia. It’s an invisible line on the map but one that’s nevertheless reflected in the landscape. Here, the air is icier. The sky is cloudier. The forest has a rougher edge. We emerge from tree tunnels at Chile’s northernmost fjord, Reloncaví, and skirt its cerulean waters in a southerly direction to the remote hamlet of Puelo.

The tiny town, dwarfed by razorback hills, has just 800 inhabitants. Yet hundreds of people make the trip every day just to soak in Termas del Sol, a hot springs complex opened in late 2019 by Germán del Sol’s nephew Samuel del Sol with his wife, architect Jacinta León. Germán suffered a ski accident in 2017 and had an epiphany while convalescing in his hospital bed, which led the pair to search the length of Chile for the right spot to build a hot spring. “We sold everything [in Santiago] and moved to Puelo,” recalls León, noting that it was the perfect spot for a project that could have a large local impact.

The Yates volcano supplies a small ravine west of Puelo with its geothermal waters, which León harnesses into 10 stone pools, ranging from 20c to 45c. We reach the complex via a 300m-long elevated walkway, which follows the course of a stream. Once at the changing facilities, we hit a fern-filled estuary where the pools begin. They grow along the boardwalk that runs the length of a cliff wall, with the final baths overlooking a nameless Andean lagoon, Laguna Sin Nombre.

Termas del Sol has refined an experience that is deeply rooted in the local culture. Its new Patagonian Ritual Spa, with boardwalks leading to eight spa stations, draws on Patagonian regional bathing traditions, using native herbs, exfoliating muds, and a central octagon (a symbol of balance and harmony). It’s yet another example of how, in Chile, spa culture goes hand in hand with nature-driven design.

León and Del Sol hope newer hot springs like theirs can attract more international visitors to the region. For now, Chileans are the main clients. “People here investigate the qualities of thermal waters and travel around Chile to experience its hot springs one by one,” says León, noting that there is a long tradition of natural wellness. “In many places there are simply springs on the side of a river,” she adds. “People will go with their families and a shovel, make a hole and sit at the edge of the river in hot waters. Then, they’ll go in the cold water to close their pores.”

Hot springs such as Termas del Sol seek to keep that spirit – elevating the elements that Chileans have long held dear with intelligent design. — K