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DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE, GARDENS, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LIVING

D'Acosta and Turrent, Part III: Mexican wineries

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Alejandro DAcostas Paralelo winery in Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe wine country.

(Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times)

By Barbara Thornburg

Paralelo winery in Baja's Valle de Guadalupe is architect Alejandro DAcostas latest wine project.

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Paralelo winery is laid out in two intersecting crosses (one Roman, the other Greek). Tunnels lead to submerged earthen wine caves and out into a patio and an open-air amphitheater. From a distance, the winery disappears into the landscape.

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Berms on either side of the truck ramp are planted with agave, which are interwoven with old tires -- traces from the land, says DAcosta.

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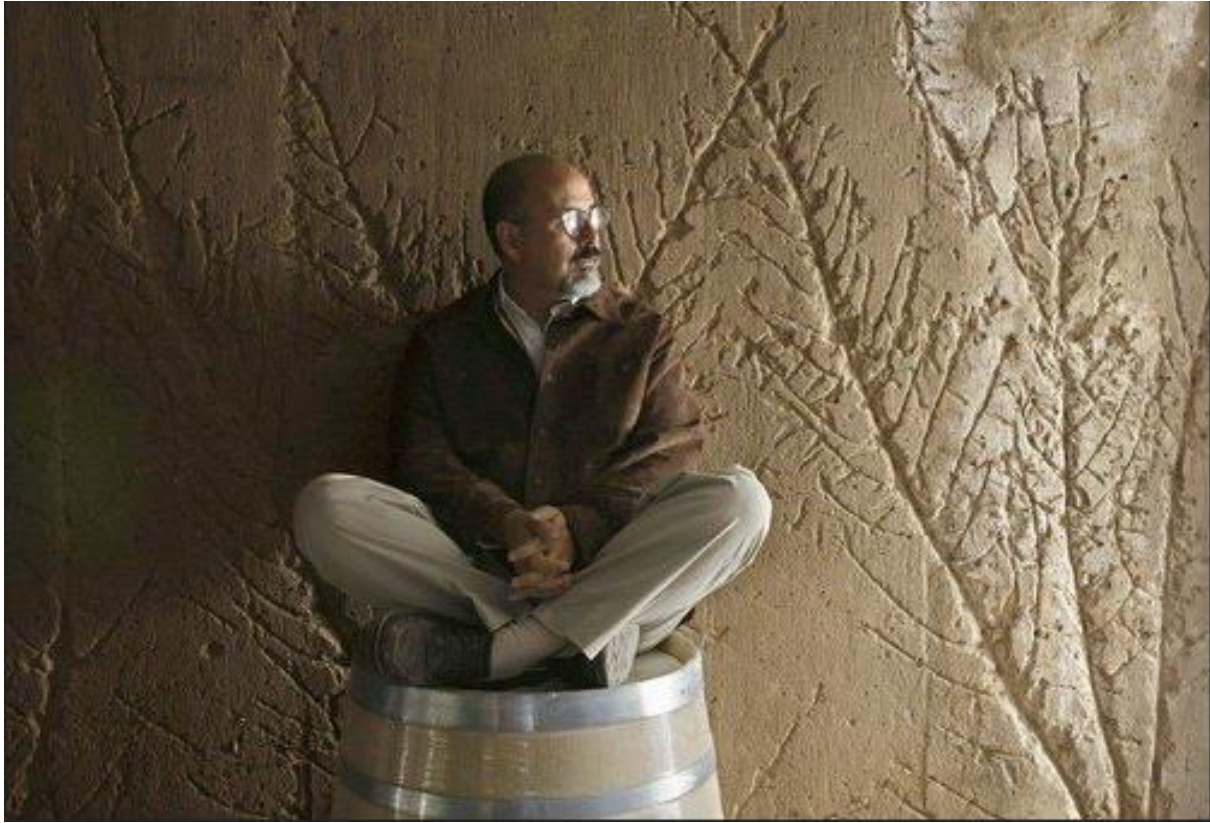
An open-air amphitheater planted with St. Augustine grass is used for cultural events such as concerts and dances during the August harvest festival known as Fiesta de la Vendemia.

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Alejandro D'Acosta's Paralelo winery in Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe wine country.

(Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times)

D'Acosta sits atop a wine barrel in the underground wine cave of his latest winery, Paralelo. The architect imprinted rammed-earth walls with things he found on the property: olive branches, nopal cactus and old tires. This building is in touch with Pacha Mama Mother Nature, D'Acosta says.

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DAcosta and his wife Claudia Turrent sit in the underground wine caves in a window well that brings natural light into the interior. Designing for me is not a matter of light but of shadows. Most people talk about the light but the more romantic part of a building is in the shadows, DAcosta says.

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D'Acosta stands next to wine barrels and rammed-earth walls imprinted with nopal cactus. At one point the cactus actually started growing in the walls, he says.

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A vineyard in the Valle de Guadalupe, Mexicos premier wine-growing region in Baja, near Ensenada.

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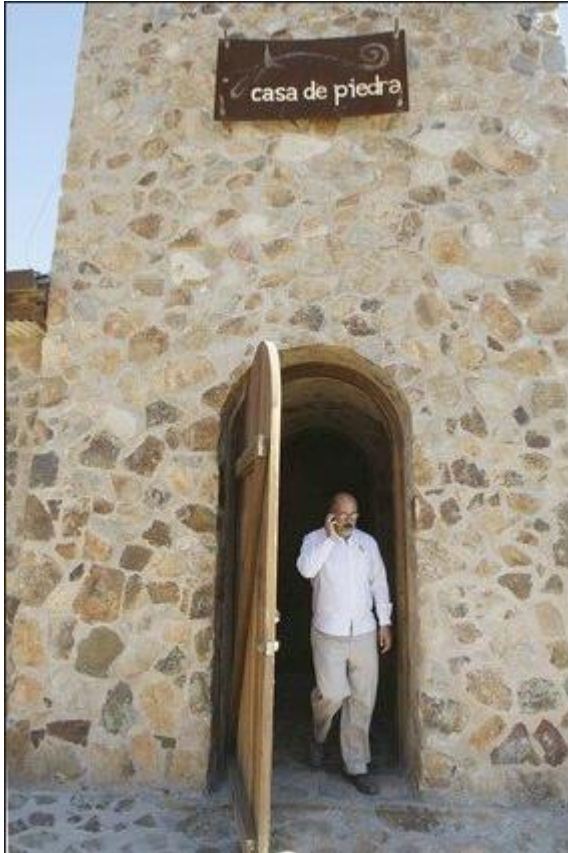
DAcosta designed the Casa de Piedra -- House of Stone -- winery for his brother, winemaker Hugo DAcosta, located in the Valle de Guadalupe. The building is composed of rusted corrugated metal taken from a chicken factory that was going out of business and "*pedra ambar*, a stone found on the property.

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The Casa de Piedra winery features a symmetrical building with a wine-tasting area in the center. A second-floor office above the tasting room is reached by way of a stair taken from an old boat.

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D'Acosta stands inside the old Santo Tomas Winery and restaurant in Ensenada, one of his first remodeling projects when he moved to the area. More recently, he designed the Bodegas de Santo Thomas winery. For the sustainable winery located in the Santo Tomas Valley, D'Acosta combined 22,000 used tires with earth to form the retention walls, while recycled metal gasoline tanks function as tunnel corridors for the underground winery.