

# THE 50 PEOPLE WHO INSPIRED US IN 2015

## The grande dame of Malbec

**LAURA CATENA** by **Christophe Salin, General Director Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite)**



HEIR TO A DYNASTY THAT CELEBRATES ARGENTINE WINE, SHE IS THE FIRST WOMAN TO RUN ONE OF THE HIGH-END WINERIES OF HER COUNTRY.

Laura Catena is a great patriot! She deeply loves her country and knows about it better than anyone. She has very strong ties with all matters relating to Argentina.

Her numerous trips abroad, studying biology and medicine as well as her life in the United States, have forged her convictions rather than certainties. She never acts impulsively; (listens and reads a lot), analyzes, understands, exercises her critical sense... and then acts.

I remember our first meeting at Château Lafite Rothschild, during a lavish dinner at the end of the 90's; a pretty young brunette with laughing eyes and always curious, speaking impeccable French. Laura was fascinated by the encounters of her trip to Bordeaux... and tried to taste as many wines as possible.

An eminent scientist, graduated from Harvard and Stanford, she let herself be infected with an overwhelming contagious sweetly virus: love for the vineyards and wine, from which one does not heal ever. I told

her she was a patriot, if we consider Malbec as an emblem of their country. This grape variety, abandoned by Europe in the last century, became her warhorse. Argentine Malbec would not have grown to its present position in the world if it were not for her tireless dedication.

Laura is the founder of a research institute ("*Catena Institute of Wine*") which for twenty years has been at the forefront of winemaking in Argentina and the world; its purpose is to improve the quality of local wines further. She has written a reference book on regional vineyards (Argentine Wine), which is an act of patriotic faith.

The project we undertook together in Bodegas Caro in Mendoza, fifteen years ago, has allowed me to know her better, work (a little) and laugh (a lot) with her. This wonderful idea of associating two families (Catena and Rothschild), two countries (Argentina and France) and two grape varieties (Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon) would not have been successful if it weren't for the eclecticism and universal knowledge of Laura (and her father). The mind always in motion, regularly testing me, debating the relative or decisive importance of terroir, altitude, grape varieties, methods of vinification, wine ageability, of course, also the aesthetic appearance of the bottles and communication (where she stands out more than anyone). Her rigor of humanistic thought makes me think of Rabelais, who wrote: "Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul".