

A person in camouflage gear, including a cap and large earplugs, is shown from the side, aiming a shotgun upwards. They are standing in a field with a tall corn stalk in the foreground. In the sky above, a large flock of birds is in flight. The background shows a blue sky with some clouds and bare tree branches in the upper left.

# THE DOVE SHOOTING GUIDE TO ARGENTINA

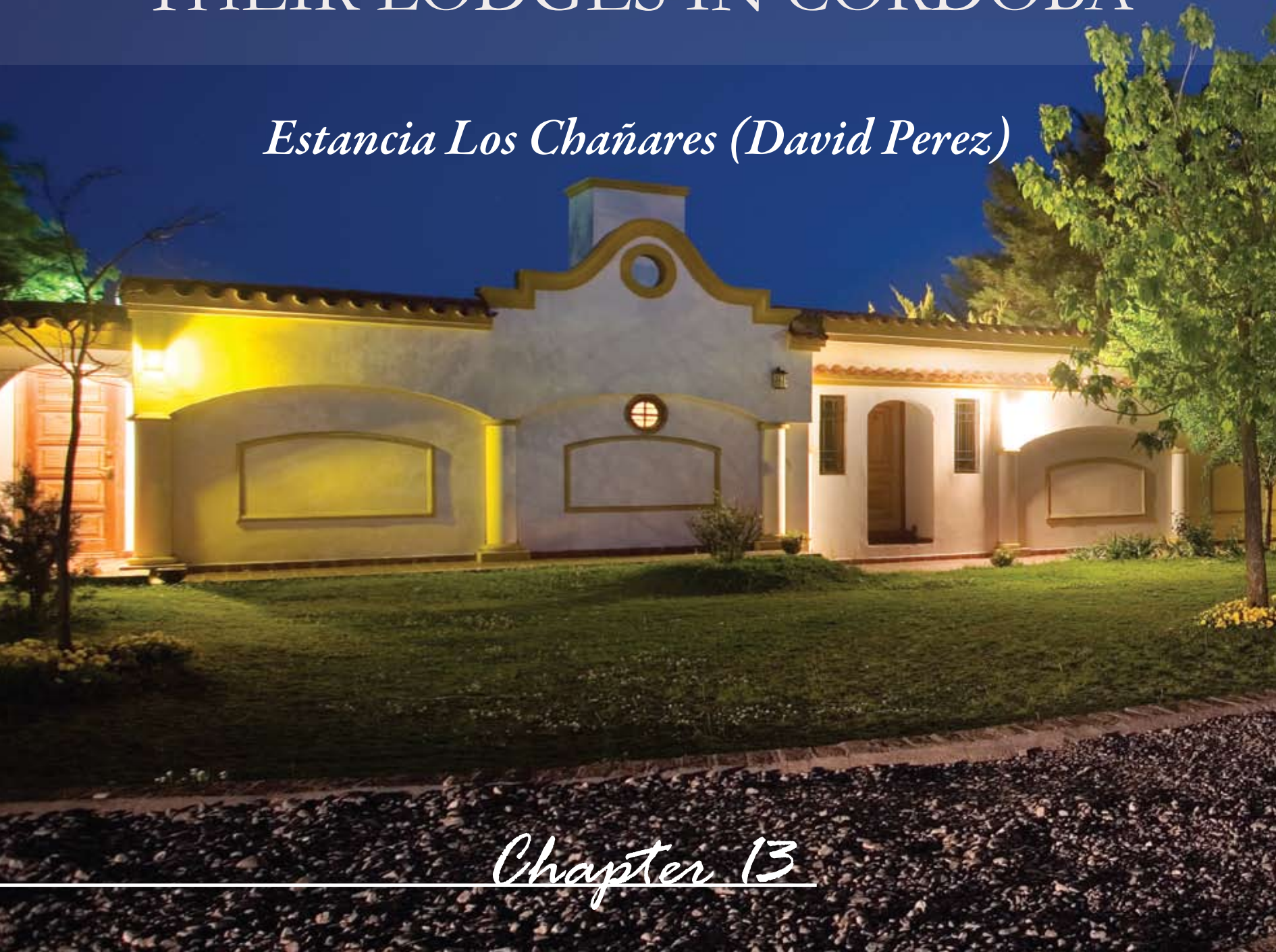
by Tony Townsend

Photography by  
Tony & Yvonne Townsend



# THE OUTFITTERS & THEIR LODGES IN CÓRDOBA

*Estancia Los Chañares (David Perez)*



*Chapter 13*







## LOCATION

The flight to Córdoba International Airport from Jorge Newbery domestic airport (Aeroparque) in Buenos Aires takes an hour and ten minutes and Estancia Los Chañares is approximately a one hour and fifteen minutes drive north in a mini-bus (van).

## THE LODGE

The luxury purpose built lodge at Los Chañares leaves you wanting for nothing. Breakfast is either taken in an interior dining room off of the television / sitting room and sometimes outside on the screen porch. Lunches and dinners are usually eaten in a large screened porch that contains two open fires for the chillier winter months, and the large leather seated gun room is the focus point for post-shooting and pre and post-dinner drinks. The overall look of the lodge is South American with a splash of European thrown in, and all the rooms are decorated with European hunting and fishing paintings and the furnishings throughout the lodge have a rich and comfortable feel.

There are ten en-suite double rooms with very comfortable firm beds, seven of the rooms have twin beds for double occupancy and three other larger en-suite bedrooms have queen-sized beds that are ideal for couples. All the windows have well fitted mesh to stop bugs entering the rooms when the windows are open

*Drinks and canapés after shooting*

*(but before showers) give everyone an opportunity to discuss the day's sport.*



*The dove breast fritters served with post-shoot drinks are so scrumptious that you could ruin your appetite for dinner!*

and wooden shutters can be closed at night to shut out the early morning sun waking you too early during the springtime. Also all the rooms have powerful ceiling fans that can be controlled from bedside switches and because we shooters are a messy bunch, the bedrooms have been well designed with plenty of floor space and with lots of surfaces for bits and pieces.

Because the lodge is relatively new the gardens are still in their early stages of development but the flowering shrubs attract hummingbirds and the overall look is of a well maintained garden even if the grass is often in need of a drink. For me however, the major attraction is not the hummingbirds or for that matter the well designed swimming pool but the adjacent field that constantly reminds you that you are living next door to a woodland ghetto housing millions of doves. Very few other lodges have a similar view from a bedroom window or can offer such an inviting scene to open bleary eyes. A few years ago a friend asked the then owner Serge Dompierre if he could test a gun that he had just repaired. Serge directed him to the bottom of the garden where he was able to test his gun shooting a box of shells in a few minutes at crossing doves. But to top that I understood that a group of Americans that regularly stayed at Los Chañares used to shoot from the shallow end of the pool so you soon realise that the travel time with this outfitter to and from the dove fields is non existent.

## THE ENTERTAINMENT & OTHER ACTIVITIES

One or sometimes two evenings after dinner they have tango dancers and singers with a traditional accompaniment. Limited horse riding is available and the pool is operational throughout the summer months from November to March. They have complimentary wireless internet available throughout the lodge, however if you book a massage, that isn't complimentary and it will be charged at the end of your trip onto your shell account, but they are excellent masseuses that come up from Córdoba, and anyway a massage is a good way to relax tired muscles.

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*Tango dancers entertain the guests after dinner.*



*The Author's choice - Salentein's Primus Malbec is one of the great wines of Argentina but not included within the all in package.*



# The Food & Beverages

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Los Chañares serves delicious and varied meals that are a mix of European cuisine and traditional Argentine meat dishes served with good local wine. During the early days the portions were not overly large although you would never leave the table feeling hungry, unless maybe you are a Texan with an appetite as big as his State. Frankly in those early days as well as being fed two three course meals a day, you also have to consider a full breakfast and post-shoot and pre-dinner canapés, so not only did we ever go to bed hungry, often we would return home heavier than we left, even though we had burnt-off tons of calories shooting! However since David Perez took over the property a few years ago, I can promise you will definitely go home heavier than you left! There is also an open bar that has all the major branded liquors and excellent domestic beers and wines, now this usually puts David's nose out of joint but on my own October trip where I invite a mixed group of friends to join Yvonne and myself, I often pick up a dozen bottles of bubbly from a Disco supermarket in Córdoba before we leave for the lodge. If you want the really good domestic stuff, expect to pay around US\$ 22 a bottle but Baron B costs around US\$15 a bottle and is excellent. Serge Dompierre, the original owner never minded because we weren't depleting his stocks but David being a generous chap always feels like he should supply all the required alcoholic beverages!

Because you never have to leave the property for the shooting, all lunches are taken back at the lodge rather than the traditional barbeque locally called an asado organised by most other outfitters. Although having said that, probably half of your lunch main courses will be cooked on the wood burning grill outside as if you were having a conventional asado in the field.

*Dinnertime with my October group.*





*Spooked feeding doves lift-off as shoot vehicles pass.*

## THE SHOOTING

The purpose built lodge at Los Chañares is situated in the middle of a vast acreage of ideal dove country that is only shot over by guns staying there! There are small ponds, streams and three large areas of the scrubby green-trunked Chañares trees that are one of the favoured roosting and nesting trees for the doves. Neither the drinking areas nor the roosts are ever shot, and food is in abundance, because David Perez, the new owner of Los Chañares feeds the doves. Yes you did read that correctly. The new owner, like Serge Dompierre who originally built up the property from scratch, has continued with the planned feeding programme. At Los Chañares you never feel like you are on crop protection duty for local farmers. Along many of the twenty miles of excellent dirt roads built to access the forty structured shooting areas David plants twenty-foot strips of wheat. When these wheat strips are ripe the crop is cut with a mini-harvester, however with the grain box

left open none of the wheat is collected so the doves have a field day. They also cleared other larger strategically sited areas from five to a hundred acres that are planted with Sunflowers, Sorghum, Millet and Milo. These plots also receive the same treatment as the wheat strips. What you end up with is a totally self-contained estancia where the shooting is run on the same lines as a shoot in the UK. Instead of estate managers and gamekeepers, David has Alex Mitri as the lodge manager and Martin Carranza as the Director of Hunting. Alex and his wife Jessica run the whole operation and directly answer to David. Martin's job is in the field, as well as being head guide he also monitors all of the shooting areas for dove concentrations. Once an area is shot it will not be shot again for at least ten days. After an area has been shot a bird count is made by Martin in order to establish the volume of birds passing within twenty yards of a particular spot over a period of one minute.



All this information is fed into a computer to establish the order areas are shot in the future. Los Chañares does not plan to run out of doves.

Guns are placed in pre-defined designated spots at about 50 yard intervals. Martin is always in the field when we are shooting but especially on the first session. This first location will generally have birds to test any level of shooter. Martin will move from shooter to shooter in order to judge the ability of each member of the party, then accordingly he will place you in locations that you will find challenging. At Los Chañares there is shooting to suit everyone, some areas will deliver serious quantities of doves to cater for Texans restricted to low limits in their own state, to other areas that will stretch the ability of the European high bird shooter and everything in between. All the shooting areas are accessed via the dirt roads so no walking is required reaching your shooting stand which really suited me in 2007 with a damaged knee.

At Los Chañares, unlike dove shooting in cultivated areas you get to see a lot more wildlife, especially on the journeys to and from the lodge seated up on top of the African style seating racks mounted on the American double cab pick-ups. Deer are regularly seen as are the little guinea pig like animal called a Cuis. I've also see red foxes and have had brief glimpses the

*London gunmaker Paul Roberts shooting a 20g Benelli.*



*Paul Roberts shooting a round-bodied 28g Rizzini.*

burrowing Vizcacha and the ferret like Huron and although I haven't yet seen a Puma, wild boar or a silver fox, I know I will one day. At Los Chañares the saying 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' doesn't apply unless you are a dove! You could often hear the crunching of dove bones from somewhere back in the trees, so un-picked birds are never wasted. Both grey and brown eagles and various hawks are on hand to retrieve any wounded birds but unlike gun dogs they don't tend to bring them back to you. It is interesting to watch them because the eagles especially, can sit in a field thirty yards away from you oblivious to all the dead birds you have shot crashing into the ground around them without moving a muscle. In fact I have seen an eagle take a couple of steps to one side or the other to avoid being hit by a falling dove and still ignore it. However, break the wing of a dove and the eagle will pounce and promptly carry it to the nearest tree in order to eat it. They obviously don't like 'em dead!

Not only did we shoot a different area each session, but also we shot a completely different landscape that produced a totally different shooting challenge. The closest shooting area was just a carpet slipper shuffle from the front door of the lodge and the furthest I have ever shot was about fifteen minutes away. The quantity of birds seen over the five days confirmed



my view that if the inclination was there to shoot one or two hundred boxes a day, it was possible. I imagine that if I tried it, and the sanatorium didn't get me first, the bankruptcy court would from the cartridge bill! You could genuinely request and get anything from birds that looked completely out of range but were killable to ones that would suit any novice shooter!

Los Chañares, like most lodges, has a selection of over and under and semi-auto shotguns for hire currently at \$50 a day (\$60 in 2009) although this figure will inevitably rise again in future years. Generally you will only be able to hire the most basic models because Argentine import duty is extremely high on firearms. If you are 6' 4" and need a 16" stock or for that matter a left handed gun you are going to be unlucky because guns are supplied to fit the average right-handed Joe. If I remember correctly, Beretta build guns with a standard 14 5/8" stock so as most lodges have at least some Berettas it would be sensible if you need a long stock to bring an extension pad from either Kick Killer or Limbsaver. Increasing the stock

length by using one of these pads will have the added bonus of extra recoil reduction to the shooter bent on firing thousands of shells a day. Of course Los Chañares will have extension recoil pads but they are unlikely to be the ones with the new high-tech recoil eliminating material. The bottom line is if you want a gun that fits you – bring your own!

Because Los Chañares is not in the true sense a working arable farm, it is extremely hard for the shoot to hold the number of birds needed to run their operation successfully during harvesting time on the surrounding farms, so they shut the whole operation during April and May and early June.

Los Chañares stock the excellent RD Caza 12, 20 & 28 bore cartridges costing US\$ 10 .75 a box of twenty-five and they sometimes stock .410 shells. So I guess it would be sensible to advise your booking agent in advance to check with the lodge to see if they currently have a stock or can get a stock of .410's prior to your trip.

*Paul Roberts hidden behind a Los Chañares reed blind.*





*Yvonne Townsend in action on Doves.*



# General Overview

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In my opinion this estancia has almost everything. The lodge is extremely comfortable and the food is very good, but the big plus at Los Chañares, because it owns the land it shoots over, is the lack of travel to and from the dove fields. Also because the original owner Serge Dompierre regularly shot in Europe, Martin was clued into the required need for quality birds, but that is not to say that he ignores the requirement of quantity. Tell them at Los Chañares that you want to shoot a lot of shells and they will have you taken to a high volume spot, but if you think that you might want to shoot something like one or even two thousand shells in a day, they will tell you that can be achieved anywhere on the property. What they mean by high volume is somewhat higher! In 2008 a shooter from Houston in Texas shot over 7,000 shells in a single day! Yes I know the thought of shooting that many shells in one day would fill most of us with dread, as would the three thousand dollar plus cartridge bill, but realistically they can give you exactly what you want and that makes this place special.

Los Chañares is probably one of the more expensive dove shooting operations in Argentina, but it is also arguably one of the best and they know that, so they have little incentive to be seriously competitive with some of the other outfitters. Although currently David Perez has been offering low season deals that are very competitive but I don't know how long these will last. Also the base cost is not what you will pay to the sporting travel company because depending on how sporting agents have packaged together the cost of gun clearance, transport to and from both the international and the domestic airports, plus your import and export licences for your guns, your hunting licence, and of course Buenos Aires hotel and internal flight costs. You need to do a little jungle-busting to reach a final cost, and don't forget to budget for your shells!