

## Hotel Antumalal, Pucón, Chile

*Nestled in a nature reserve and packed with original 1950s details, the Antumalal is as pristinely preserved as the surrounding landscape.*

Some time in the 1940s, the then president of Chile, Gabriel González Videla, sat down for tea and berry cake at a small waterfront café on the shore of Lake Villarrica. Like many visitors, he was spending his vacation in Chile's Lake District, an increasingly popular spot 725km south of the capital, Santiago. As he marvelled at the views across the lake and over patches of rainforest, the café's owner approached him. Guillermo Pollak, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, had a dream of expanding his business to include an on-site hotel and wanted to see if Videla could help him get a loan for his project.

Ambitious? Yes. But if you don't ask you don't get. In 1947, with the backing of the head of state, Pollak began work on the Antumalal. He commissioned architect Jorge Elton, a graduate from the Universidad Católica in Santiago, who had designed the lakeside café that previously stood on the site. The young Elton was one in a new generation of Chilean architects, spurred by a rising demand for residential and recreational properties that sought to provide resorts and spaces on a par with those in Europe or North America for the country's growing middle class.

Like the masters of modern architecture (such as Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra), Elton and his contemporaries understood their discipline as a search for beauty in form as in function. The approach resonated with Elton's patron Pollak, a lover of photography, and his wife Catalina, an avid gardener. "My father Guillermo and Jorge would spend their weekends walking through the grounds and discussing plans for the hotel and its park," says Pollak's daughter Ana Verónica, Antumalal's current owner. "Over years of close collaboration they became good friends, brought together by their sensitivity for nature and passion for what they did."

Scenic though it was, Pollak's plot of land – spread across a steep, tree-covered slope with irregular, rocky terrain – complicated the development. "There were three rules," says architect Miguel Eyquem, who supported Elton on the project. "All trees are sacred. This was the first. The second was, since wood burns, only concrete is to be used on the façade. The third was that other elements of the terrain are equally untouchable."

After hand-drawing a topographic plan, Elton and Pollak found that there was only one possible setting that would allow the structure to blend with its surroundings: the hotel was to be placed on a platform and embedded in a rugged slope.

Hotel Antumalal opened in 1950. The name (meaning "Corral of the Sun" in the indigenous language Mapudungun) alludes to the unobstructed sunset vistas that twinkle off Lake Villarrica. Perching on concrete slabs that extend over the edges of a cliff, Antumalal appears to float above the lake. It consists of two wings that form an L-shape, one a single-storey with nine guest rooms, the other a two-storey with common areas, a suspended terrace and four rooms (plus two family suites) upstairs. At the meeting point between both units lies an airy living room, the main feature of which is a stone-paved wall that hugs the form of one of the garden's oldest lingue trees.

In almost 70 years, Antumalal has maintained all the established flora. "Elton's creation is a delicate machine from which to contemplate the landscape," says Fernando Pérez Oyarzun, head of architectural and urban studies at the Universidad Católica. "Everything was designed to obtain an interior quality that is rooted in the building's relationship with the exterior." Guests access Antumalal by a shaded path that winds through bellflower meadows. In homage to Lloyd Wright, Elton incorporated a waterfall that still trickles beneath the living-room end of the concrete platform. The bedrooms and four chalets bring elements from the natural world to the interior: the individual fireplaces nod to the active Villarrica volcano that rises behind the hotel. Everything is an ode to the land and culture of the Unesco-protected reserve in which the hotel sits, from the floor lamps and bedside tables made from fallen trees to the sheepskin mats made by the Mapuche community.

All furnishings were designed by Elton and Pollak, including an Antumalal variation of the butterfly chair with its leather seats and iron frame, and a dining room clad in araucaria wood to contrast with the concrete exterior. Updates include a pool house, carved into the rock in the 1960s, as well as a bamboo roof to cover the terrace. Although the guest rooms now have flat-screen TVs, they're no competition for the main highlight: the view.













