

## Publication - Financial Times



“Up here the roadside stalls sell, not mangoes and pineapples, but apples and potatoes. At just under 3,000 metres I drove through stark and bare Andean moorland before the road suddenly plunged down into a deep valley lush with pasture, unexpectedly far greener and more fertile than those high, dry peaks. Hacienda Manteles — manteles means “tablecloths”, a name inspired by the patches of cultivated land in various tones of green arranged along the valley walls — is a farm growing

maize and vegetables, about 15 miles east of Ambato. But this is one hacienda, explained its owner César Durán, an engineer and academic, that aspires more to the condition of a nature reserve. Above the main house lies a 200-hectare swath of primary cloud forest, with waterfalls that plummet from the heights. Andean spectacled bears amble down to the garden to nibble the bromeliads. Beyond the windows of the breakfast room, emerald-green hummingbirds buzz like tiny drones among the branches of a monkey-puzzle tree.



As I ate breakfast, the morning mist cleared and the snowy slopes of Chimborazo (a 6,268 metre-high volcano) reared up into view, glittering. My host reeled off the various activities on the menu today: a hike or ride to the waterfalls? Trekking on the lower slopes of the volcano? Durán can arrange excursions with indigenous guide Alonso Pilla, of the Salasaca people, who invites guests to his village house to learn about medicinal plants and poncho weaving.

The aspect of Hacienda Manteles that piqued my curiosity, however, lay closer to hand. Rooms in the oldest part of the hacienda are comfortably wood-lined in the style of a mountain lodge. Further down the valley from the main house stands a group of new pavilions designed by British architect Jaskran Kalirai, son-in-law of Durán and his wife Guadalupe, and opened in 2012. In the conservative world of Ecuador’s haciendas these striking structures in brutalist brick, concrete and stone, with plate-glass panels framing massive views, represent a radical departure. Their interiors have a rough-hewn elegance that Frank Lloyd Wright might have admired, the austerity of textured concrete and unrendered Andean stone softened a little by terracotta floor-tiles and vintage wooden furniture” (Richardson, Paul. “Five-Star Farmstays in Ecuador.” Financial Times, Financial Times, 11 Nov. 2016,).