

THE **ski**JOURNAL

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER ONE • \$12.95US • \$14.95CDN



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01 • Huere Darquier and her father, Manuel, in their family-built home. The license plates were collected from all over the world and creatively adorn several walls.
Photo: Julian Lausi

02 • Heavy metal meets South American sugar. Skier: Huere Darquier.
Photo: Peter Moynes

03 • Leaving the gringos behind: Huere and sister Lula go strolling in their backyard. Cerro Catedral, Argentina.
Photo: Peter Moynes

DARQUIER DAYS AHEAD

THE SKI INDUSTRY'S HAPPIEST AND HARDEST WORKING FAMILY HAILS FROM BARILOCHE, ARGENTINA.

Words: Mark Lasseter

It is storming hard on an early August morning in Bariloche, Rio Negro, and while this would be a crowded powder day in the Western world, it is quite empty here. We're in the midst of a 10-day, 130-inch massive snow cycle, one of the biggest anyone around here has ever seen. With strong winds and flakes swirling everywhere, visibility is reduced to near nothing. Only a couple of lifts are open at Cerro Catedral, and as I stand, staring into the void, at the base with Peter Moynes and Bariloche local Huere Darquier, I wonder if we have any business going up there.



"You guys aren't chicken, are you?" asks Huere, apparently seeing doubt in our eyes. Argentine tourists stare at us like we're loco for even thinking about it. "Trust me guys," argues Huere, an imposing 5'4" if ever such a thing existed, "I know what I am doing; it will be worth it. Not only that, it will be *see-ack*," which is how one says "sick" with an Argentine accent. We're being called out by a slim, small redhead with an audience. Peter and I don't want to be *pollo*, so we meekly follow Huere into the lift line and ride the sextuple chair into the intense wind and whiteout, *sin visibilidad*.

At 25 years old, Huere is junior to us in age but definitely the veteran in terms of terrain and conditions at Catedral. When I first met her at the base of Whistler during a damp day in November 2003, I couldn't believe my Argentine friends who assured me this new instructor was some kind of phenomenal skier. She wore glasses and was timid, and looked more like a wet rat than anything else. She seemed no older than 18 and planned to return to Bariloche after the season to work as a librarian.

Her plans changed abruptly later that year when she got her first pair of fat skis and started beating most of the boys down the hill. Today, Huere has no problem offering up her opinions, and if you can't keep up, she'll kindly point out where you can meet her at the end of the day. Here at Catedral, that would be Taje, her favorite snack stand, the

best place to grab a Quilmes beer and *alfajores* (Argentine chocolate cookie pastries) as German folk music blares in the background. (On the topic of German music, Huere's favorite band—another sign of her newfound aggressiveness—is heavy metal group Rammstein.)

Catedral is perched in the Patagonia of southern Argentina between the shores of lakes Guitierrez and Huapi, and though it doesn't have the reputation for steep and big terrain that its neighbor to the north, Las Leñas, does, due to its trees and relatively crowd-free slopes it is by far the best resort in South America to ski during a storm day. As the wind moans in our ears, Huere traverses completely to the other side of the mountain to the upper Condor area. Doing our best blind mice imitation, we follow. Huere skis down and then hikes up the mountain like an Argentine goat leaving us two gringo males gasping for breath.

No chairs means big bootpacking, but it also means we reach bigger and more untouched powder. Huere takes us to her favorite Catedral nooks and crannies—secret pillow lines, tree stashes, ridges in the middle of nowhere that we would never find by ourselves. At the end of the day, in reply to our thanks for her guidance and hospitality, she shrugs and says, "Hey, it's what I do, just a normal day for me. I love this place. Where else can we ski powder the whole day with no one else around?"



Hospitality and skiing come naturally to the Darquier family. The parents and all five kids have worked, or are currently working at, Cerro Catedral.

In 1966, before Huere was born, her parents, Manuel and Lia, decided to move the family from the hustle and bustle of Buenos Aires to the more relaxed small town of Bariloche and its promise of beautiful lakes, forests, and, of course, mountains. They sought a cleaner, safer life for their then-young children Diego, Delfina, and Joaquin. Manuel and Lia didn't know what to expect but were willing to take a chance. Huere and the youngest Darquier child, Lula, were born in Bariloche, making them *nacido y criado*—"born and raised."

Manuel and Lia were nervous at first, as they had never even seen snow, let alone gone skiing before. After settling in and buying a piece of land, they built a modest home and worked jobs that had nothing to do with winter. However, they soon realized that to truly belong in Bariloche, they needed to alter their lifestyle. In their second year in Bariloche, Lia accepted her first ski job as an assistant instructor of toddlers for the Club Andino ski school, and got her level one instructor certification. Manuel began working on the lifts.

This continued as the children grew older, and times were good until 1990 when the Argentine economy deteriorated. That's when a friend

of Manuel's who had been going to Andorra for a few seasons helped Manuel and Lia find seasonal work overseas. In a move reflective of the cultural jump they made from Buenos Aires to Bariloche years earlier, the parents decided to move the whole family to Andorra for the Argentine summer/European winter. They funded the move by working every day without a break during the entire Argentine ski season.

This seasonal yo-yo soon became commonplace for the Darquiers. Manuel became certified in repairing gondolas and chairlifts, and Lia continued to work in ski schools. Soon Diego, Joaquin, and Delfina were old enough to teach skiing and embarked on the dual-winter lifestyle as well, working in ski schools in Andorra and Bariloche. In Andorra, which boasted better facilities than Bariloche, all the Darquier kids started ski racing intensively. At nine years old, Huere was blowing by French and Spanish racers, competing as an Andorran.

As young adults, the children started giving Andorra a pass in favor of North America with its promise of bigger mountains, more money, and longer seasons. Delfina and Joaquin are now fixtures at Beaver Creek's ski school, with Delfina spending more time in Colorado year-round and Joaquin returning home for Argentine winters. Huere and Lula have become two of the top female skiers and instructors at Whistler. Huere has competed



on the World Freeski Tour and has appeared in magazines and on television. She's a three-time Argentine freeskiing champ and has been ranked seventh in the world twice, and in 2005 she came in second in the U.S. Freeskiing Nationals at Snowbird, Utah. And, with Smith, Helly Hansen, Converse, and Liberty on board, she is also one of only a few Argentine skiers that have international sponsors.

As if that wasn't enough, Huere also bikes, climbs, kayaks, and is mastering archery. And, showing signs of her librarian past, she is close to getting a book of her poetry printed by a publisher in Buenos Aires.

In 2005, Manuel and Lia stopped traveling to Andorra to enjoy the work-free Patagonian summers in Bariloche. They still work during the winter, however—Manuel at a rental shop at the base of Catedral and Lia teaching children at the same ski school as 22-year-old daughter Lula. Diego threw in the ski school jacket years ago to start his own family and lives in Bariloche year round.

The small house Manuel and Lia built during the '60s grew, out of necessity, over the years to accommodate the family, just as the town of Bariloche itself was growing. The house screams "made with love" and boasts personal touches and mountain charm such as the detailed gardens in the front yard, the 80 or so pairs of skis artistically pinned to a wall (and license plates from all over the world pinned to other walls), a framed photo of Joaquin on the cover of the U.K. publication *Ski Magazine* from

1994, and, my favorite thing and something guests always fight over, the white swinging chair hanging from the ceiling that resembles a miniature hammock. The Darquier cats freely roam the four bedrooms made mostly from wood—especially Huere's cat, Obiwan.

Last summer, taking advantage of Bariloche's bustling tourism economy and using money saved over the years from their seasons in Andorra, the family built two cabins on the property to rent to tourists. They built the cabins themselves with lots of sweat, blood, and tears, with the cutting of wood, painting, and various other tasks falling mostly to the siblings. Huere loves and admires her parents for creating such a beautiful family, for even though they're spread across the world, the Darquiers are together all the time. They're not the most financially well-off family I know in Argentina, but they are the richest in terms of work ethic, happiness, friendliness, and sheer ski talent.

Although Bariloche has exploded from a population of 24,000 when the Darquiers arrived in 1966 to close to 120,000 today, it still has a small-town feel. Manuel and Lia hope their cabin rentals see them through retirement. Living in Bariloche is a bit more expensive now, and you have to wait a little longer for things like *alfajores*, but that's OK with the Darquiers, especially Manuel and Lia. They're not going anywhere anytime soon. §