

Southern Beauty BEEAUTY

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

NCIS's **Cote de Pablo** has lived all over the world — but still calls her native Santiago home.



Back in 2004, when producers of the CBS crime series “NCIS” first sought to cast the role of Ziva David, a former Israeli Mossad liaison officer, they knew they’d found their feisty international agent in actress Cote de Pablo.

Born in Santiago, Chile, and raised from age 10 in Miami, this then-emerging talent embodied all the right qualities. Confident, politically savvy, worldly and, yes, easy on the eyes, de Pablo nailed her audition even after co-star Michael Weatherly went off-script, touched her hair, and commented that she reminded him of Hollywood star Salma Hayek. Unfazed, she never broke character, dismissed him completely, and immediately landed the part. Nine seasons later, she’s still emoting like mad on one of television’s most enduring dramatic series.

She laughs about the audition now, and remembers those early days with affection. “I was living in New York then and was about to open a Broadway show . . . I remember getting off the subway and walking these very long blocks. It was so cold out I started to cry, and I thought, ‘Let there be a job out there that takes me away from this winter!’ And before you know it, here I am in L.A.”

She says she adores sunny California, just as she loves being a regular on a series with close ties to D.C., although much of the show is shot in and around L.A. “When I was a kid, I went to Washington,” she tells *Flyer*. “Because the show is so connected to D.C., I always feel like I’m waiting to go, that [a trip there] can happen at any moment, and likely will. I can’t wait.”

In the meantime, de Pablo, 33, is an avid traveler during “NCIS” hiatus, globetrotting in every direction. Her first stop, always, is her native Chile. “I go back to Santiago every year to visit friends and family,” she says. “It’s a great place. But if I want a rest, I head to my beach house, which is about two hours from the city. It’s beautiful, a real bohemian place on the ocean.”

She speaks wistfully of her childhood in Santiago and draws parallels to the discourse of debate so commonly heard in America’s capital city. “I came from a place where there is a lot of political opinion. I grew up during a dictatorship, so maybe not so openly, but certainly in my house,” explains de Pablo. “My mother was a TV journalist, and in my home people talked about interesting things. They would bring out a bottle of wine and a guitar, and the conversation would go into politics.”

This love of intellectual conversation and interest in world affairs is what formed her foundation, she says. When the family moved to Miami when she was a preteen, she expe-



Above: de Pablo as special agent Ziva David. Below: The Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago.

rienced a true culture shock in Florida—and ultimately found her voice.

“I was so sheltered. I went from private school [in Santiago] to public school in Miami, and was suddenly surrounded by kids with whom I had very little in common,” she recalls. “People didn’t talk about politics or go through the seasons . . . it was a hard transition. I missed my family, my friends, the long summers on the beach, the fireplace, my grandmother and her cooking. I searched for a way to express myself—and my discomfort. It’s how I became an actor. The artist in me came out.”

After moving to New York in 2000, de Pablo performed in a Public Theater production of Shakespeare’s “Measure for Measure” and appeared in small roles on the daytime soap “All My Children,” as well as on Fox’s short-lived series “The Jury.” Broadway beckoned and she landed a part in “The Mambo Kings”—and then came the life-changing call from Los Angeles to audition for “NCIS.”

“I go back to New York all the time,” she says. “New York has this innate creativity in the air that I love. I’m constantly inspired by all that energy.”

In addition to flying back and forth between the coasts, de Pablo has her sights set on touring other faraway climes. “I’m dying to go to India,” she says. “I’d love to go to Russia and Croatia. Africa, too, will come, but I’m not feeling it just now—some places pull you in at the right time. The Seychelles is coming up soon, for obvious reasons; what a beautiful place. And El Salvador and Uruguay. But I still need to travel in the U.S., too, to Montana and Seattle. There are so many places I still need to see, right here!”

Whether she’s in Machu Picchu or Milwaukee, don’t expect to find the actress at another luxury chain hotel—at least not if she’s in full-on exploring mode. “You can go anywhere in the world, stay at a [five-star hotel], and have that experience and be pampered,” she tells *Flyer*. “I want to stay somewhere authentic. I want to experience myself in the culture. The biggest reward about traveling is expanding your horizons.”

Cote’s Chile

The actress and Chilean native dishes on a few of her favorite things in the South American hot spot:

• NORTH COUNTRY

“Chile is a long, narrow country that borders the coast,” says de Pablo. “It has the most amazing, diverse geography. If you’re heading up north, which is a seven- or eight-hour flight from Santiago, you’ll discover the desert, an incredible region. It’s dry and gorgeous, with spectacular sunsets. At night you see the stars, millions of them. Also, sweet boutique hotels to die for, with great pools and spas.”



• SANTIAGO

In addition to the city’s bustling markets, stunning architecture and nearby picturesque hills, “the Santiago region is just an hour away from the very best vineyards,” says the actress. “If you love wine, you must go.”

• DOWN SOUTH

“Here you’ll find both volcanoes and the lake region—it’s out of this world down there, so gorgeous and green,” she says. “Pristine lakes, tons of ecotourism. You can go hiking and fishing on virgin land. The beaches are beautiful, but it takes a brave soul to go into the ocean. It’s freezing. But you cannot deny the beauty. The south is comparable to the Swiss Alps.”

OMAR GUERRA