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Aix-en-Provence: Château La Coste

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"The day my sister Mara brought me to Château La Coste for the first time, I was shocked. I was moved by the beauty, and I knew it was a special place. I hope you get that great feeling as well." This is a quote by Patrick McKillen, an Irish entrepreneur and patron of the arts who purchased the Château La Coste — a 200-hectare space in 2002 — and created one of the most exquisite and interesting sites in France.

The Château La Coste is located in the village of Le Puy-Sainte-Réparate, 20 minutes (15 km) north of Aix-en-Provence. On this hilly estate, stands a 17th-century Palladian style bastide (a typical elegant Provencal farmhouse) and some vineyards. Right away, Mr. McKillen hired the most significant modern architects (many of whom are Pritzker Architecture Prize winners) to create an especially unique domain, including Tadao Andō, Frank O. Gehry, Oscar Niemeyer, Jean Nouvel, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers.

Upon arriving at the bottom of the hill of the property, the first work of "art" you can admire is the Gate designed by renowned Japanese architect and 1995 Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate Tadao Andō, born in Osaka in 1941. He is known for the simplicity of his creations, often using pure concrete and for paying homage to his Japanese heritage. In addition to the Gate, in 2011 he also designed the Centre d'art and its restaurant. While strolling in the property, at the top of the hill he found ruins of a Chapel dating from the 16th century. He decided to have it rebuilt and to frame it with a glass and stainless-steel protection. Like his *Church of Light* (1989) in Osaka, he left some openings in the walls so that natural



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The auditorium designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano in the middle of the vines.

light could penetrate the space and invite calm, reflection and meditation.

In 2002, for the *chai* (pronounced "shay"), the aboveground working space where the grapes are stored and ripened, and the wines are bottled, Mr. McKillen called on the French architect Jean Nouvel (born in 1945, and Pritzker winner in 2008), to design the most up to date technological building. In 2006, it was operational, and in 2009, the organic label AB was attributed to Château La Coste. Red, rosé, white wines are all made from the domain's vines as well as "La Bulle de La Coste," a bubbly rosé made according to a traditional method.

To Patrick McKillen, respect for the environment and nature is paramount, evidenced by his work throughout the domain.

Close to the *chai* is the "Village," home to the outdoor restaurant La Terrasse, opened in 2013. It is the very definition of the charm of Provence, located nearby art gallery, a bodega and the Auberge La Coste, a new hotel. A little bit higher up the hill is the very discreet "La Villa

La Coste," a five-star palace and spa with a spectacular view of the entire domain and the surrounding countryside.

Brazilian artist Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012) designed the auditorium and the exhibit space, a low and curvy building with glass walls is surrounded by vines which reflect in such a way that they appear to grow inside it. Mr. Niemeyer wrote about how much he enjoyed this project but unfortunately the building wasn't completed until 2022, 10 years after his death.

Another indoor exhibit space is the Pavillon d'Exposition (2017), a creation by Italian architect Renzo Piano (born in 1937 and 1998 Pritzker winner of). Parts of his Pavillon are built underground. The space is used for temporary exhibits of photography and sculpture.

But that's not all: Scattered around the outdoors of the estate are exhibited more than 40 works of art collected by Mr. McKillen — a veritable "who's who" of modern and contemporary artists' featuring works by Louise Bourgeois, with her

enormous *Crouching Spider* (2003) which seems to fly over the large pool at the entrance of the property and works by Alexander Calder (*Small Crinkly*, 1976), Andy Goldsworthy, Yoko Ono, Richard Serra, Ai Weiwei and many more. Those artworks are parts of the permanent collection in addition to the temporary exhibits rotated throughout the year.

Damien Hirst from Britain was 2024's only guest artist; he brought 90 sculptures and paintings to La Coste for a show entitled *The Light that Shines*: Indoors, outdoors — everywhere you turned there was an original Damien Hirst creation.

This summer, 2025, three artists with very different styles have been invited:

- Ralph Pucci, *PURE*. Made in New York: *A Celebration of a Sculpture Studio*. Known today for creating luxury furniture and lighting as well as exhibiting major designers and artists' works, his family's business started 70 years ago repairing and creating mannequins.

- French artist, photographer and writer Sophie Calle, qualified as a "conceptual artist."

- HA Chong-Huyn, a Korean abstract painter artist born in 1935 who specializes in monochrome paintings.

There is simply so much beauty to admire and appreciate at this elegant domain. It is truly a rare jewel.

Martine and Frederick Dulles live in France. Martine, who was a docent at the MET in New York and a licensed tour guide in Charleston, organizes bespoke guided visits in Paris and France (mpd@dullesdeleu.com). Frederick is an international business lawyer and an adjunct professor of law in French business schools (fhd@dullesdeleu.com).