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PORTFOLIO



EXPONDING ELEGANCE

JASMMINE WONG | QUENTIN CHIARUGI | PAIGE PARKER
JOCHEN KRAUSS | SCOT TOON | PAUL FRENCH
ALEXANDER PANG | TRAN ANH HUNG | STEVE DIXON

AT LEISURE

ART AMIDST THE VINES

CHÂTEAU LA COSTE

Near Aix-en-Provence in France, over 250,000 guests visit Château La Coste annually to take advantage of its unrivalled artistic and architectural offerings

BY Y-JEAN MUN-DELSALLE





With a winemaking heritage dating back to 200 B.C., Château La Coste's roots may lie in its wine, but recently, the vine has followed in the footsteps of art and architecture. This is extremely unusual since the opposite is generally true: A renowned vineyard may expand its activities with a hotel, restaurant and exhibitions to attract more wine buyers, but at La Coste, the cultural offer is so rich and ambitious that some visitors may come solely for it.

Here, the art and architecture collection that opened to the public in 2011 preceded the launch of its five-star boutique hotel, Villa La Coste. Aware that sculpture parks are seldom self-supporting, it has also been cleverly diversifying. Visitors can spend two hours or an entire day in this slice of Provençal paradise. They may choose to dine indoors or outdoors, watch a film on the grass, attend a concert or a conference, buy a book, go for a tour in the kitchen garden or the winemaking chais, or discover buildings, installations and sculptures by the world's greatest architects and artists. They may even sleep on-site in the ultra-luxurious, high-design hotel suites with first-class service and breathtaking views of Mont Ventoux, and enjoy the Michelin-star restaurant Louison run by Chef Gérard Passadat or acclaimed Argentinian Chef Francis Mallmann's signature steaks cooked over an open fire.

Mr. Daniel Kennedy, Château La Coste Art Centre Manager, says, "Hospitality and welcome are very important here. The area's so beautiful and well visited already that the idea of hospitality seems logical in a lot of ways, but some vineyards aren't interested. Through our art, architecture, restaurants, events, cinema, music, there's a whole global proposition to visitors that makes La Coste more of a destination. People might know us because they're wine lovers or art lovers, because they're tourists in Aix, because they're huge fans of Passadat or Mallmann. But it's not marketing for the wine. It's not that simple and it would be the worst marketing in the world because of the budgets. It's a passion for the place and for developing something that's permanent."

In the middle of the property stands a long, sleek, single-storey art center made of concrete, glass and metal by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, which is surrounded by reflecting pools on which a three-metre-tall spider sculpted by Louise Bourgeois appears to dance, and a black, yellow and red mobile-stabile by Alexander Calder moves in the wind. Visitors meander on undulating footpaths amidst the vineyards and in the woods, punctuated by 34 outdoor artworks. Starting at Larry Neufeld's pair of slate bridges, they





CHÂTEAU LA COSTE'S SPRAWLING, ART-FILLED PROPERTY





stumble upon a dark lair by Andy Goldsworthy, play with large colorful sliding screens by Liam Gillick or discover monumental sculptures. The artists are of international stature – Richard Serra, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lee Ufan, Franz West, Paul Matisse or Jean-Michel Othoniel – and the works integrate well into the landscape. Sean Scully's Boxes Full of Air open-frame sculpture in Corten steel with vertical and horizontal lines offers onlookers different perspectives, while Ando's labyrinthine pavilion in spruce asks visitors to contemplate their environment. Then, after dark, Tatsuo Miyajima's fiery and poetic LED wildflowers light up like fireflies.

However, the art doesn't restrict itself to the official walking trails – it is everywhere, with the vineyards occupying less than half of the 500-acre estate. It is in the architecture designed by top names: A music pavilion by Frank Gehry, exhibition galleries by Renzo Piano and Jean-Michel Wilmotte, a kitchen garden by Louis Benech and an auditorium by the late Oscar Niemeyer in the pipeline. Art is also in temporary exhibitions by the likes of Ai Weiwei or Tracey Emin, in a 19th-century royal Vietnamese tea house, in the hotel lobby and rooms with pieces by Damien Hirst, Jean Royère, Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Yovanovitch, Fernand Léger and David Douglas Duncan. There is also the collaboration with Galerie Patrick Seguin where visitors can stay starting this month in the Jean Prouvé Guest Suite, a prefab 6x6 Demountable House originally created in 1944 by a leading figure in the history of 20th-century architecture and design for war victims in the French region of Lorraine that was updated by architects Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, introducing modern living facilities like electricity, hot water, solar panels, a kitchen and a bathroom. And then art is in the wine. The construction of two chais were entrusted to Jean Nouvel. At the forefront of technology, the two half-circles of aluminium resemble beautiful minimalist works.

La Coste has been the personal project since 2002 of Patrick McKillen, a discreet and global businessman who made his fortune in real estate and has interests in an empire of offices, shopping centres and hotels like Claridge's, The Connaught and The Berkeley in London. He visits every fortnight and speaks of the domain as his home, having fallen in love with the region over 25 years ago. He felt it was a noble task to make wine here. And it was too good not to share it. He has elevated the quality of the wine, implementing biodynamic principles, adding a bio label in 2009 and making it more high-end. Crazy about architecture and contemporary art, he wished to advance art and the vineyards in concert from the start, obsessed by perfection. Art and wine are indeed pulling each other up to the top. It's not a case of doing tourism, wine or art on the side – it is a global project. And it's unique in France. P