

MODERN

Provence's Château La Coste, long home to an organic winery and an esteemed art and architecture park, is now opening a new luxury hotel overlooking the 600-acre estate.

MARVEL

BY ALICE CAVANAGH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDERIK VERCROUSSE

I'M PROBABLY THE MOST frustrated architect or artist: I can't draw a straight line—I leave that to the experts," says 60-year-old Irish property magnate Patrick (Paddy) McKillen, whose sizable portfolio includes interests in five-star hotels, such as The Connaught, The Berkeley and Claridge's in London, as well as numerous office and retail locations across the United Kingdom, the United States and Ireland.

For his most personal project to date, Château La Coste, a 600-acre estate in the heart of Provence, McKillen called on a monumental list of expert architects (many of whom he counts as close friends), Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers and Tadao Ando—the Pritzker Prize-winning list goes on—have all contributed to the property.

First acquired by McKillen in 2002, Château La Coste, which features an organic winery and art and architecture park with works by 26 architects and artists, opened to the public in 2011. This summer, after planning for more than a decade, McKillen will launch Villa La Coste, a luxury hotel on the site. The elegant stone structure overlooks the property's Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Vermentino vineyards and includes 28 villas, some with their own private plunge pools. The new hotel, which will

feature a library, bar and restaurant helmed by French chef Gérard Passédat, who also owns the Michelin-starred restaurant Le Petit Nice in Marseille, has a clean, angular design that contrasts with the area's rambling *bastides*. "I didn't want to create something 'old world,'" McKillen says. "We wanted to be contemporary but rustic."

McKillen not only conceptualized the design of the hotel, alongside his in-house architects and the Marseille-based architect Christopher Green, but also curated the art that hangs on its walls. The wall behind the check-in desk features sketches by Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti; a Damien Hirst piece, from his series of psychedelic spin paintings, hangs opposite Sean Scully's *Robe Red Red* canvas. On another wall, pages from Louise Bourgeois's embroidered fabric book *Ode à la Bièvre* are mounted in a gridlike formation above a wooden Charlotte Perriand table. The lobby's centerpiece is a banquet-size wooden table by Nouvel with a polished stainless-steel sculpture by Tom Shannon on top. The room's mix of materials—cool stone floors, walnut wooden doors and the striking spider marble used for the bar—serves as a sleek backdrop to the expansive view of the Luberon Valley, visible through floor-to-ceiling sliding-glass doors.

Each private villa has a similar view, along with a floor plan—up to 3,000 square feet—that includes a walled-in courtyard. The guest-room décor is minimalist but warm, with four-post beds, breezy white canopies, Scandinavian-style shelving and works by artists from Bernard Prize to Hiroshi Sugimoto. McKillen acquired each piece specifically for the site: "I've never bought art for investment reasons, never in my life," he says. "There's nothing worse than keeping something in a cardboard carton in a basement."

One of nine children, McKillen grew up in Belfast and now divides his time between Los Angeles, London, Paris and Provence (as a rule he travels light, with just a passport and credit card in his pocket). His father was a metalworker whose workshop expanded into a family construction business that eventually led to Paddy's career of acquiring and building properties. Art (particularly sculpture and sketches) and architecture, however, have long interested him. "I just love being around artists," he says, pointing out that he's always eschewed art fairs in favor of dealing directly with artists. "If you asked me what would be

CONCRETE DREAMS
Château La Coste's Art Centre (2011), designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando.



my best Saturday afternoon, it would be to spend it in an artist's studio."

McKillen discovered Château La Coste with the help of his older sister, Mara, who has lived in Provence since 1990. During annual holidays in the area with his family, McKillen became enamored with it—and with the idea of owning a vineyard. When he purchased the historic family-owned estate and winery, he was determined to produce one of the region's finest organic wines. After recruiting oenologist Matthieu Cosse, Château La Coste, which has a 340-acre vineyard, gained organic status in 2009 and has since gone one step further by turning to biodynamic practices. Today, McKillen produces several organic white and red wines, as well as some of the region's most popular rosés.

In the mid-2000s, when McKillen needed a new building for his state-of-the-art winemaking equipment, he turned to Nouvel—a renowned French architect whom he'd met through his friend, Parisian art dealer Patrick Seguin—to design the estate's *chai à vinification*, which also includes a cellar for wine storage. The two Nouvel-designed cylindrical structures, completed in 2008 and connected underground, are located near the estate's main cluster of buildings—known as the Village, which includes the historic *bastide* (where Paddy's parents now reside) and a wine shop. (An underground *chai à barrique* by Nouvel, specifically for barrel storage, is currently in the works.)

After commissioning Nouvel, McKillen began inviting other architects and various artists to create site-specific works on the property. The first commissioned artists included Sean Scully, who built a stacked stone sculpture in 2007; Richard Serra, who created three steel sheets in 2008 that sit in the Provençal hillside; and the British sculptor and environmentalist Andy Goldsworthy, whose dome-like, underground *Oak Room*, built in 2009, is located beneath one of the original Roman dry-stone walls, known locally as *restanques*.

McKillen also recruited Japanese architect Tadao Ando to design a structure that could frame one of his most important acquisitions at that point—a Louise Bourgeois *Crouching Spider*, the first in an edition of six and the only one in France. "They were nearly all pre-sold to museums, and she only agreed to sell it to me because I came up with the idea of putting it on water," McKillen says. Ando designed the Art Centre to appear as though it is sitting on a pool of water, in the middle of which is Bourgeois's masterpiece. "The installation was really Paddy's thing—we trusted him," says Jerry Gorovoy, the late Bourgeois's long-time assistant and friend. "He doesn't miss a beat. He is quite aware of what's going on and sensitive to all the details."

An Alexander Calder piece, which Alexander S.C. Rower, the artist's grandson, helped carefully repair, was placed with Ando's guidance in the water on the opposite side of the Art Centre. The building, which functions as a welcome center, also has a restaurant that serves local, seasonal food—much of it from the on-site vegetable garden—and a gift shop that offers art, architecture and design books and a small selection of limited-edition prints.

In addition to the 26 current works dotted about the estate, there are 15 or so pieces, by artists like



BY DESIGN
Clockwise from left: The Art Centre frames Alexander Calder's *Small Crinkly*; sketches by Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti in Villa La Coste's foyer; the estate's vegetable garden, designed by landscape designer Louis Benech; a guest bedroom in one of the new hotel's 28 villas.



VIEW FROM THE TOP
Clockwise from far left: The Luberon Valley as seen from a guest villa; the daily bread delivery for the Art Centre's restaurant; Frank Gehry's Pavillon de Musique; the property's original *bastide*, where McKillen's parents live.



LAND ART
Clockwise from above: Sean Scully's *Wall of Light Cubes*; the property's 340-acre vineyard, with a mix of red and white grapes, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Syrah and Grenache; the Tadao Ando-designed Art Centre; a guest bathroom with the line of toiletries that McKillen is developing for Villa La Coste.



"WE DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO FORGET WHY THEY ARE THERE: THE GRAPES ARE THE REAL ART AT LA COSTE."
—PATRICK MCKILLEN



FIELD OF DREAMS
Clockwise from above: Louise Bourgeois's *Crouching Spider*, the only one in France; Tom Shannon's *Drop*; Bourgeois's *Ode à la Bièvre*, above a Charlotte Perriand wooden table.



Ai Weiwei and Tony Berlant, that are partially constructed or in the works, and every one is intended for a particular location. McKillen collaborates on the specific site with every artist or architect—each of whom usually takes time to scope out the property in advance. "It's not simply a collection of names; it's about what each person brings to this experience," says Hong Kong-based architect André Fu, who has visited the property several times and has designed the bar and library at Villa La Coste as well as a 12-room spa that will open at the end of the year.

"We can't just plonk them about," McKillen says of the placement of the commissioned pieces. "The last structures on the land were built by the Romans, so I was very careful to respect every tree, every blade of grass and every herb."

Directly across from the Art Centre, the vineyards frame Frank Gehry's Pavillon de Musique, a large wooden and glass structure originally commissioned for the Serpentine Galleries in London but funded by and intended for Château La Coste. McKillen seeks to remind visitors of the vines at every possible moment: "We don't want people to forget why they are there: The grapes are the real art at La Coste," he says.

The parklands on the property are protected, so there is an arduous approval process, overseen by the local mayor's office, to build there. Currently plans for works by architects including Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers and the late Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer are being evaluated; however, the first stone of Ai's installation that's in development has just been laid. "There's no mad rush; there's no deadline," McKillen says. "We never want this project to end."

Self-guided tours of the estate, which cover around three miles and last about two hours, are available seven days a week. The path discreetly leads visitors to each of the installations—most of which are free of signposts. "We want people to come across the pieces almost by accident—that leaves a lasting memory," McKillen says.

This approach is appealing to many of the artists and architects whose work is featured on the property. "An encounter is exactly what I want to create—from the material that I choose and for the visitors as well," says Korean artist Lee Ufan, who has both a temporary exhibition (ending September 24), as part of the estate's revolving art program, and permanent work at Château La Coste. *House of Air*, Ufan's permanent piece, is a small, hilltop stone hut, in which his minimalist paintings have been applied directly onto the walls. "For me the surrounding space has as much importance as the object," says Ufan. "I wanted people to feel the atmosphere as much as my artwork."

Although Château La Coste is often associated with its popular rosé, international visitors are typically introduced to its art and architectural park by word of mouth, as McKillen doesn't advertise or work with a publicist. "Paddy's an extraordinarily self-effacing person," says Sean Scully, who has several works of art on the estate. "He is very deferential to the artists—everything is in their favor. I think one day, in the future, his place is going to be like a Medici house—it's going to be equal to what you see when you go to Italy now." ●

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