

# DOMAINE DU MUY

PARC DE SCULPTURES CONTEMPORAINES  
CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE PARK

LUXURY – THE TELEGRAPH

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The Mitterrand's home is set in their sculpture park at Domaine du Muy in Provence. From left: Edward Mitterrand's sons, Terence, 14, and Hector, 16; his partner, Iana Moreno (above, Jean-Gabriel, niece, Lucie, 15; and Edward himself. The drawing is LSD II by Gloria Friedmann (2012-13)



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## RIVIERA MODERN

Charged with designing a contemporary home for the art-loving wing of the Mitterrand family.

India Mahdavi reimagined Provençal style

'We're still working on the last bathroom,' says Edward Mitterrand over the phone from Geneva, where he spent the lockdown months. 'You'd think, wouldn't you, that a house would be a bit easier to finish than a sculpture park?' But at the Domaine du Muy, the 30-acre project in the South of France, 40 outdoor artworks had been installed even before the house acquired all its walls. 'Perhaps we just know more about art than houses,' he says with a laugh.

Perhaps so. The Mitterrand name might be most closely associated with politics – François was president of France from 1981 to 1995 – but for this branch of the family, the business is most definitely art. Edward's father, Jean-Gabriel (the president's nephew), has run a gallery in Paris since 1988 focusing on post-war sculpture.

Edward opened his first space in Geneva in 1999 with a show of works by Jean-Michel Basquiat. 'No one was quite sure about them back then. We priced them around \$200,000,' he says of the late American artist whose paintings can now fetch over £80 million.

In 2013, father and son joined forces to buy a piece of wild countryside, le Domaine du Muy, less than an hour's drive from St-Tropez. It also came with a half-built house. 'The landscape was beautiful,' says India Mahdavi, the Paris-based designer whom Edward eventually commissioned to rescue the incomplete building. 'But the house?

By Caroline ROUX Photographs by Chris TUBBS

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Shocking! A cheap version of the Provençal style. Someone had started it in 2000 and left it with no windows.'

Thanks to Mahdavi – whose work includes the Pepto Bismol-pink restaurant at Sketch in London, an intimate boutique for Tod's on Sloane Street, macaron-coloured tea rooms around the world for Ladurée, and private projects including homes for fashion designer Alber Elbaz and heiress Maja Hoffmann – the house is now a series of fluidly connected internal spaces, with arches instead of doors, and cool tiled floors. A once murderously sun-drenched terrace is protected by a mashrabiyya-type screen. And most remarkable is the matt-ish but metallic silver exterior.

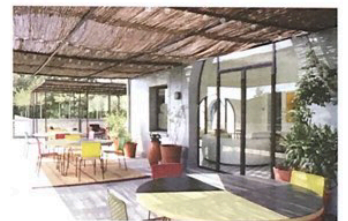
'We explored so many ideas for the façade,' says Mahdavi. 'All the traditional Provençal pinks and oranges. Then, one day, I was standing outside looking at a huge Subodh Gupta artwork – a stack of shiny silver buckets – and at the olive trees with their silver and green leaves, and it occurred to me that we could paint the house silver and make it disappear into the landscape.' The building has certainly taken on a more dignified presence, and the Gupta has since travelled far. 'I think it's at Casa Malca in Tulum now,' says Edward, referring to the chic boutique hotel in Mexico.

In the South of France, money and art are part of the region's past and present. The rich have played here for decades – the expat American socialites Gerald and Sara Murphy, who arrived in the early 1920s, provided the template for Nicole and Dick Diver in F Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*. Artists, most famously Matisse and Picasso, have been lured by the light and the lifestyle. The super-wealthy – the Bamford family, Bono – now have generous estates in the region. (The Beckhams and the Jolie-Pitts have come and gone.)

But Le Muy is part of a more discreet cultural conurbation. Just up the road, the art dealer Enrico Navarro lives in a house designed by Rudy Ricciotti, the architect of Marseille's Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations. A little further on is Patrick Seguin, the Parisian specialist in post-war design who has made



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Edward Mitterrand and his half-brother, Mark Cresswell, with *Red Ends* (2017) by Mark Handforth. Laminate tables were custom-made for the terrace. Architect India Mahdavi opted for a silvery façade to harmonise with the Mediterranean foliage. She also incorporated arched windows and doorways as part of her new Provençal vernacular



Jean Prouvé's demountable houses into collector must-haves. Seguin's own house, by the celebrated starchitect Jean Nouvel, is nearing completion.

I first visited Le Muy in the summer of 2015, and rather loved its scrubby landscape. Edward was there to greet me – overwhelmed at the time by the amount of work it had taken to tame the terrain. He had toiled with a group of 15 through that early summer. 'We were digging paths in 40-degree heat,' he recalls now. 'Drinking 60 litres of water a day between us, and probably sweating out more.' Once installed, the artworks stood out starkly among the tufty bushes of maquis, the cork oaks and native pines.

Now, the greenery has grown to meet them. A geometric totem by Sol LeWitt is surrounded by grasses; an intriguing woodsman's cabin by Mark Dion is nestled in trees. A bouncy blue squiggle in steel by Keith Haring from 1985 has plenty of room to breathe in its own piece of prairie; while Tomás Saraceno's *Cloud Cities* – a cluster of polygonal modules – reflects the weather and the sky. 'I love the way they are hidden, and you find a surprise around every corner,' says Mahdavi. 'It still feels like a very natural landscape.'

Works at Le Muy are selected by Edward and Jean-Gabriel but are on consignment, from either a gallery or a collector, who perhaps wishes to sell them or who doesn't have a suitable place to store them. 'It's like a

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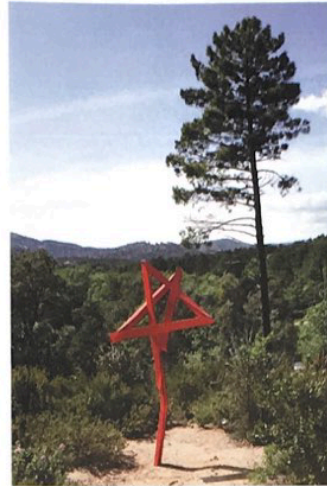
laboratory. We can see how well works survive outside,' says Edward. 'If we sell them, it's more like an accident. I certainly don't want someone chasing you through the maquis with a price list.' Instead, he is developing an expertise in outdoor art – its installation and conservation – that is leading to a new advisory service, to complement his existing role as an art advisor to a handful of clients. 'I've been doing quite a few Zoom calls with Middle Eastern countries,' he says. 'People tend to buy the wrong works for outdoor display, and not many companies are advising on that. Saudi has even more projects on the go than the Emirates.'

Meanwhile, Mahdavi, who knows this coast well, has been working hard to define a new Provençal style. (She is currently renovating her own house in Arles.) 'I want to develop a language for the South of France that is more modern, less traditional,' she says. 'And here, at Le Muy, I wanted to work in black and white. I'm always called the "Queen of Colour", but that wasn't called for here.' The monochrome cement-tile floor was created as part of her range for the Italian company Bisazza. 'The black shapes on them give the impression of light falling through a screen,' she says, 'and they're a bit Pop, a bit Roy Lichtenstein.'

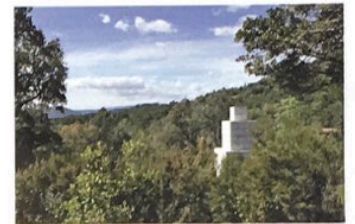
Mahdavi may have favoured black and white, but the place is full of furniture that she has created for various projects before including it in her retail range and it delivers bright splashes throughout. 'This is,' she says, 'a place to live, but also a place to redefine art.'

A blue-bodied *Nana* figure by Niki de Saint Phalle sits on its own plinth, radiating 1970s feminism; a sheep – by the French artist François-Xavier Lalanne – wanders across the terrace. (Jean-Gabriel was very close to Lalanne and his wife Claude, famed for their animal and vegetable sculptures respectively, and helped forge their careers.)

'This isn't a place with a purely commercial objective,' Edward points out. 'It's about building relationships. You're not coming to choose a sculpture like you'd choose a tree. It's where the conversation begins.'



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Current works in the Domaine du Muy sculpture park include *Red on Red* by Mark Handforth, *I-2-3 Tower* by Sol LeWitt, *No Comment* by Wang Du and Tomás Saraceno's *Cloud Cities*



*'If we sell them, it's more like an accident. I certainly don't want someone chasing you through the maquis with a price list'*



Lauren Taschen, of the art publishing house, and philanthropist Nicolas Berggruen are among those who have dropped in lately. Some collectors stay the night.

Those who do wake up here may see a merry-go-round by the German artist Carsten Höller from the master bedroom's window. Though the right size for a children's playground, it is matt black and turns anti-clockwise – a fairground ride with a sting in its tail.

Edward has two sons from his first marriage, teenagers who like Le Muy, but like a little less the heavy-lifting activities that can break out at any moment as part of this ongoing project. His partner, Iana Moreno, has closer ties with Ibiza, as well as two sons now in their early 20s with other holiday ideas. 'When you're that age, you don't really want to be in the middle of nowhere,' says Edward.

Yet there are frequent visitors to the house. Earlier this year, the young French artist Marie Hazard stayed here as part of an artist's residency, and her spectacular woven works, inspired by Le Muy, are now on show in the gallery space that occupies part of the ground floor. And then there's Mahdavi, who can't resist popping in as she travels up and down the coast. 'And if I find they've changed things around,' she says, 'I do need to know why.' ●

*Domaine du Muy Contemporary Sculpture Park is open until 11 October, by appointment (domainedumuy.com)*