

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

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No-Pressure Provence

Sometimes doing next to nothing in a good hotel is the best way to experience a place.

Provence hardly needs a sales pitch—from medieval Avignon to the port of Marseille, the countryside is a maze of hilltop villages, open-air markets, and lavender fields. Which is why it's tempting to try to tick off every charming town, vineyard, and experience (cooking class, bike tour, both?) when you're there. But to do so is to miss out on part of the region's true appeal—its languid pace.

Creating an escape where guests can slip into this lazy rhythm is exactly what inspired retail mogul Frédéric Biousse, founder and former CEO of Sandro Maje Claudie Pierlot (SMCP), and art dealer Guillaume Foucher to buy the **Domaine de Fontenille**, a wine-making estate in the southern Luberon, and turn it into a boutique hotel set away from Provence's most touristy corners.

In 2013, the couple started a multi-million-dollar, 18-month overhaul of the property, restoring its eighteenth-century manor house and reviving its wine production (the estate has been growing grapes since 1638) with new equipment and a modernized storeroom. They kept the sand-colored exterior and didn't alter the footprint of the house, but did a full gut renovation of the interior, creating 17 rooms and suites, each with wide-plank oak floors, olive-green walls, Provençal

furniture upholstered in beige linen, and modern art—by artists like Todd Hido and Anne-Lise Broyer—from the pair's private collection or Foucher's Parisian gallery. Then there are the expansive views of the estate's verdant grounds, with its stands of cedar and plane trees, rose and vegetable gardens, and 86-acre vineyard (which is undergoing organic conversion). The couple also turned the vaulted cellar into an art space where they host exhibitions in collaboration with international galleries like Galerie Claude Bernard.

It's the kind of place that gives you permission to stay put—where enjoying an alfresco lunch prepared by Michelin-starred chef Jérôme Faure, exploring the estate by bicycle, or sipping rosé in the vineyard's tasting room is as culturally immersive as a day-trip to nearby Aix-en-Provence. As the French say: *Point trop, n'en faut*—less is indeed more. **LINDSEY TRAMUTA**



From top: Patio tables at La Cuisine d'Amélie, the Domaine's bistro; the pool and rose garden.

