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DOMINIQUE LAFOURCADE

The "Garden of Eden"

Dominique Lafourcade is a child of the South of France. She was born in Avignon where she grew up in a family of artists. After graduating from high school, the young woman completed training as an interior designer in Paris. This career was an ideal choice. It involved all of the creative activities that Dominique Lafourcade was already passionately pursuing. She designed chandeliers out of metal, furniture, picture frames and lamps, sewed and embroidered tablecloths and curtains from her own patterns and devoted herself to painting. In 1985, the head of a well known gastronomic empire hired her to come up with an artistic design for the labels for their own vintage wine.

For many years, the all-around artist worked for the renowned porcelain manufacturer, Gien, in the town of the same name on the Loire River. Dominique, who was known in this profession by her maiden name, Dominique Lalande, not only came up with new designs for plates, but also painted unique pieces

and collectibles for the tradition conscious company. She took most of her inspiration from nature and lovingly selected vegetable and floral motifs for her

creations. Since she is happiest working outdoors, the career change to garden design came quite easily. When she and her husband purchased the estate *Les*



Confines to the north of St-Remy-de-Provence in 1989, she was able to pursue her new passion for the designing and arranging of gardens as never before. Bruno Lafourcade is a distinguished architect and has made a name for himself by renovating old houses and historic ruins, including convents and castles. Dominique Lafourcade, who over the years had become a self-taught *paysagiste*, or landscape architect, has taken over the design of the gardens and parks of the houses renovated by her husband and son, Alexandre, who works in the same architectural firm. This family studio creates complete works of art, which are known far beyond France's borders for their elegant beauty and tranquility.

When Dominique Lafourcade and her husband, architect Bruno Lafourcade, bought the estate *Les Confines*, it was nothing more than a nineteen acre wheat field on flat land, with an old farmhouse and an ugly barn. The land proved to be an ideal place for the creative family, who together to create a work of art over the years. Above all, the lady of the manor was able to "let herself go wild" and truly create a garden *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, that embodies of her love for clear forms and structures. Then, there was also the incalculable advantage that the property has its own springs. In Provence, where the land is parched by heat and mistral winds, water is as precious as gold. Before the architect began the renovation of the house, Dominique Lafourcade had already laid out the basic structure of the garden. For these plans, she strolled through the house and imagined the ideal view of the future garden from each window.

First to come down was the barn, which was separated from the house by a small yard and five old

[*opposite*] The water lily pool in front of Dominique Lafourcade's house bathed in soft morning light. In front of her studio bloom two pink azalea bushes that reflect the spherical shape of the surrounding bushes and garden elements.

[*above*] The passionate gardener Dominique Lafourcade with a harvest of fragrant flowers from her field of lavender.

[*overleaf*] The large water lily pool is the starting point for a narrow water channel which divides the garden into two symmetrical halves. Clear geometric lines characterize both the structure of the garden and the trimming of the plants.

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sycamore trees. While the trees, providers of valuable shade, were allowed to remain, the foundation walls of the barn were reduced to a low height and then converted into a pond decorated with water lily islands. The pond is the starting point of a long, narrow canal, which runs the entire length of the garden and flows into a small, semi-circular basin. At the end of the stream, you can glimpse through a ring overgrown with ivy to a *tempietto*, a small, circular chapel built according to antique designs. It sits beyond the unmowed meadow and visually caps off the long central axis. Skillful devices such as this are reminiscent of Italian Baroque gardens.

Along a stream shine the silvery, soft leaves of lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*), flanked by olive trees, which in an unusual touch, have not been planted in the ground but in large clay pots. Beyond a path leading across, which is not visible from the house, tall cypresses continue the *allée* in the direction of the pond in the rear. This part of the garden follows the rules of symmetry. On both sides of the canal, bushes trimmed into mighty spheres placed on both sides of the canal mark the corners of

three green squares, the center of which in turn forms a bush trimmed as a sphere or square. Four similarly designed geometric structures complete the overall picture.

Two access balconies overgrown with red and white grapes and purple- and white-blooming wisterias (*Wisteria x formosa* and *Wisteria floribunda* "Alba") flank the lawn of the front section of the garden and lead to the rear section where hundreds of lavender bushes cut into small spheres serve as a reminder of the tradition of lavender production in Provence.

On the west side of the house, from a pergola overgrown with grapevines, you have a view of a crescent-shaped

garden surrounded by tall hedges, from where you reach the rose garden, which lies to the west of a large pond. Crossing the gravel-paved terrace in front of the house, you arrive at a new universe within the park. In accordance with her idea that a garden should be like

[below] Unconventional and humorous ideas, like a tree house with a spiral staircase in an old sycamore, make this garden stand out.

[opposite] View over the geometrically arranged garden and the open meadow in the background on an early spring morning.

[overleaf, left] From the tree house one has a view of one of the two wisteria (*Wisteria x formosa*) *allées*. A tall hedge separates the garden from a large meadow that is also part of the estate.

[overleaf, right] An arcade with violet- and white-blooming wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda* "Alba") with dark purple irises growing at the base. In the middle of the *allée* hangs a sphere made of broken mirrors.

[second overleaf, left] At the end of the long water axis, the eye leaps to an "antique" *tempietto*. Dominique Lafourcade constructed the façade of this temple out of rounded lumber and wood from the garden. "Manual labor is my elixir."

[second overleaf, right] A path paved with rounded stones leads to a *Hortus conclusus*. The artist gathered the smooth stones for the path from the banks of the Durance River and, with the help of a Spanish gardener, placed them with painstaking care to create artistic patterns.

a house with many rooms, Dominique Lafourcade has created multiple small gardens, each bordered with tall hedges. Each of these small gardens is intended for a new purpose and therefore they are all designed differently.

Next to the kitchen is the herb garden, where sage, rosemary, basil, and thyme along with the other popular herbs of Provence, are mixed in with the strict order of boxwood-edged beds. Following practical logic, the herb garden is adjacent to a large vegetable garden bordered by beds of colorful cutting flowers in the style of old farmer's gardens. Chickens are part of every perfect farmer's garden so next to the vegetable garden Dominique Lafourcade placed a spacious stall with pens for poultry. A path paved with large slabs of rock leads through the adjacent orchard into a second vegetable garden. Only a few steps farther, through a passageway in a tall hedge, you come to the most intimate part of the garden. In the center of the square plot is the swimming pool, enclosed by a knee-high wall. The deep dark blue of the water, in which the tranquility of the whole place is concentrated, is unusual. Dominique Lafourcade achieved this effect by painting the inside of the pool blue-gray. This color, and the pool's unusual square shape, bring a fountain or an oasis to mind, not a swimming pool.

Alongside each of the three entrances to this *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) are two thin conifers that stand like tin soldiers in front of the dark green of the tall hedge. A fourth pair "guards" the entrance to the *barraca*. This resting house, inspired by a Portuguese design, is the same size and shape as the swimming pool, underscoring the architectural harmony and tranquility of this area of the garden. This is where Dominique Lafourcade retreats when she wants to work without interruption.















After the "Portuguese Garden" (as the Lafourcade family refers to it) was complete, Dominique was given a three-foot diameter stone sphere. In order to be able to include this grand sphere in her composition, it was clear Dominique that she would have to create a new garden. This is how the "Sphere Garden" came to be. The stone sphere sits in the center surrounded by four flowerbeds. In the middle of each flowerbed stands an acacia bush with its crown trimmed into a round shape. Each bed has a different color: red, black and white, pink, and yellow.

To see her kingdom in its entirety, Dominique Lafourcade built a wooden platform, which is positioned beyond the tall hedge of the Sphere Garden and called *Belvedere*. It stands between her green

paradise and the "prairie," as she calls the land that has yet to be worked on.

Even though she has many ideas, Dominique Lafourcade

then resolved not to create any more gardens. Some years ago her husband, who supported this decision, gave her a donkey to graze on part of the unused meadow. Dominique had a wooden stall built to the east of the Portuguese Garden and marked out an area just for the animal. Unfortunately the donkey was ill-natured and began to attack people, which is why, with a heavy heart, she had to let the animal go. What else was there to do but to turn the donkey pasture into a new garden? The former stall became a simply furnished summer house for Dominique and Bruno Lafourcade where they sometimes even spend the night. To make this summer home more comfortable, there is an open-air shower with water heated in skillfully twisted metal tubes and a "little house" with a door appropriately decorated with a heart. Since food and drink are necessary for true autonomy, a well and another orchard and vegetable garden complete the arrangement. In memory of her donkey, the artist had an image of him made in wood. The animal, wearing a coat of ivy that goes up to its neck, now looks on as a gentle long-term guest with his head over the fence of the vegetable garden.

This sense of humor makes Dominique Lafourcade's garden unique, particularly when compared with the creations of other world-famous

[above] The artist had lifelike silhouettes of bulls created and placed them on the meadow as a constant reminder that no gardens are to be created in this area.

[opposite] The mighty armchair, which was cut from the roots and trunk of a tree, looks like a throne.

[overleaf, left] The Lafourcade farmhouse is a restoration masterpiece. Bathed in the gentle light of the morning sun, the soft color of the ochre yellow house create a beautiful contrast with the pink azaleas.

[overleaf, right] The shape of the rectangular water lily pool follows the old foundation walls of a barn that stood in front of the house.

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landscape architects. Strict lines and structures are relaxed by completely unexpected moments. For example, in the middle of the perfect lawn that lies beneath the linear composition of waterways, olive trees, and boxwood hedges, one discovers the sculpture of a wild boar.

The most recent creation in Dominique Lafourcade's garden is also proof of her humor combined with ingenuity. Since she no longer wanted to expand her garden horizontally, she went vertical and gave her husband a tree house for his birthday. The unusual thing about the wooden house with its creative spiral staircase is that it is located in one of the old sycamore trees that stand directly in front of the family's home; right in front of where visitors are received and special occasions celebrated, the place where their daily life plays out.

Dominique Lafourcade's garden, created with strict lines and geometric shapes, is an expression of perfect harmony and tranquility. It is a garden full of surprises, a garden that satisfies all of the senses: sight, sound, taste, smell, and—the fifth sense—the sense of humor.

[above and opposite] According to Dominique Lafourcade "a garden must not only be beautiful but also practical." Therefore, the artist created an orchard and a large vegetable garden. There is also greenhouse—a Bruno Lafourcade creation—where sensitive plants and seedlings are kept during the winter.

[overleaf, left] The kitchen garden, designed in the style of medieval herb garden, is enclosed by tall hedges. Rosemary, thyme, and other *herbes de Provence* thrive in beds framed by boxwood.

[overleaf, right] A stone sphere occupies the center of the Sphere Garden, which is formally designed around a square. Rigidly geometric hedges complete the garden; behind them the wooden railing of a platform is visible.





