

Robb Report  
**Home & Style**

LUXURY RESIDENCES AND FINE DESIGN

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# AMERICAN BEAUTIES

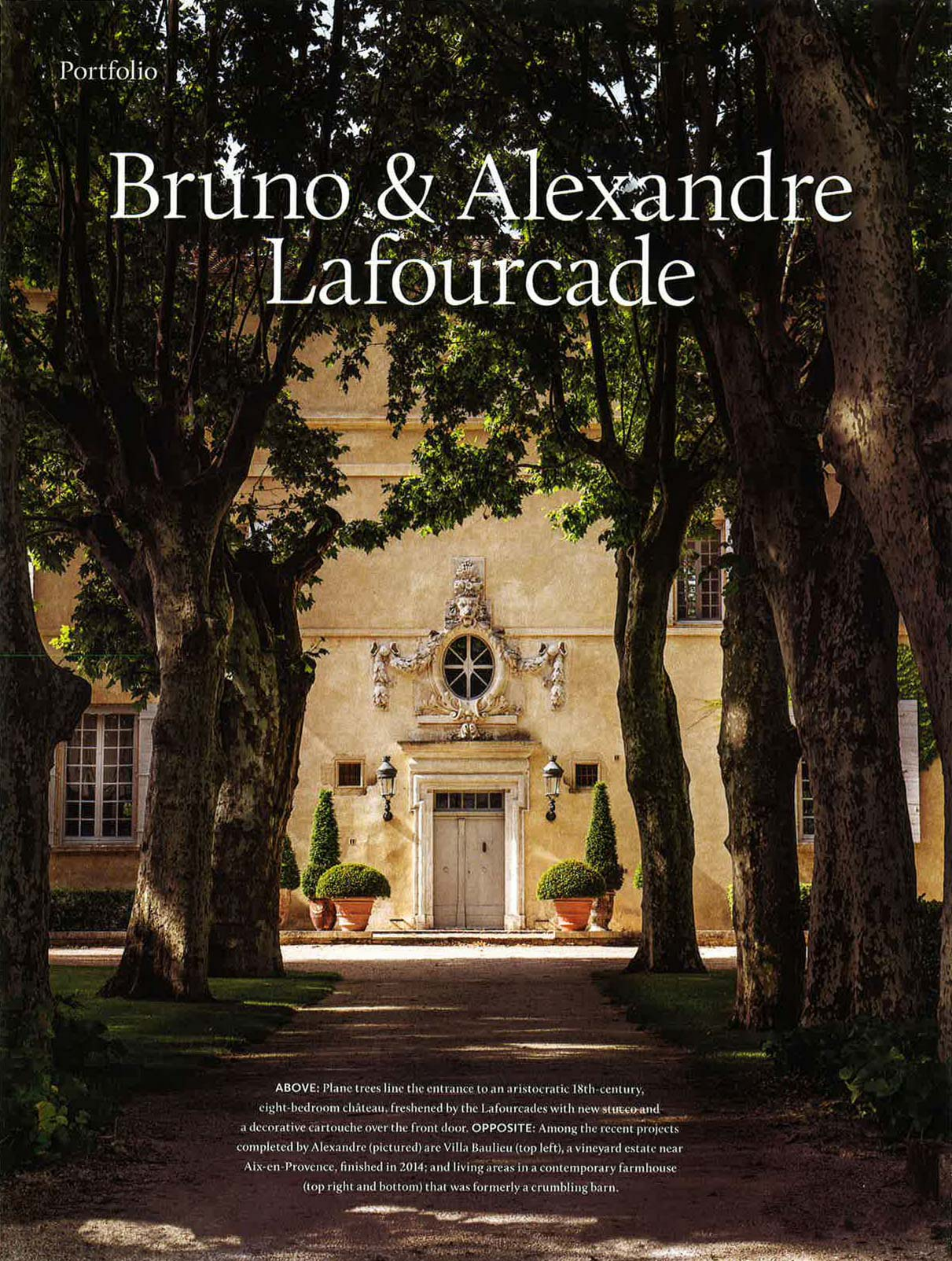
Ravishing residences in New York, Chicago & Los Angeles

A CURTCO MEDIA PUBLICATION

**FUTURE PERFECT:** LOOKING FORWARD WITH DESIGN LUMINARY HOLLY HUNT

Portfolio

# Bruno & Alexandre Lafourcade



**ABOVE:** Plane trees line the entrance to an aristocratic 18th-century, eight-bedroom chateau, freshened by the Lafourcades with new stucco and a decorative cartouche over the front door. **OPPOSITE:** Among the recent projects completed by Alexandre (pictured) are Villa Baulieu (top left), a vineyard estate near Aix-en-Provence, finished in 2014; and living areas in a contemporary farmhouse (top right and bottom) that was formerly a crumbling barn.



**F**OR MANY, to make a trip to the French countryside is to fall in love and fall hard—especially with the idea of owning a bastide. Those who are serious about ownership will likely turn to the Lafourcade family, perhaps the most sought-after restoration and renovation specialists in the South of France. Since launching the business in 1968, Bruno Lafourcade, a self-taught architect who was made a chevalier in 1989, built a reputation on his talent for making the newly refreshed look old. His son, Alexandre, who is now

42, joined the company at age 15 and took the reins in 2012.

Prospective buyers looking to acquire a vacation home amid the vineyards face a bewildering thicket of regulations; they also will find that most new construction is prohibited, and most restorations must stick to the existing footprint and regional aesthetic. But for some 400 clients, the Lafourcades have made it happen, often in the form of a massive stone chateau at the end of an unobtrusive country lane. “Whether it’s a family’s second house or a vineyard property, [each result] will have the same spirit,” said Alexandre in a recent sit-down with *Robb Report Home & Style*. “The spirit of a *very* chic farmhouse.” [KAREN CAKEBREAD]



TOP LEFT: GERARD LE SENECHAL; TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM: BRUNO SUEI; PORTRAIT: JULIEN DAGUET



**How does someone outside France purchase and restore a house in Provence?**

First is to buy the property, and most important is the location and the site, because the trees are difficult to change! After that, when working with us, we have to visit all the administrations—city hall, fire department, and many more—and negotiate.

**Does the client need to face the bureaucratic hurdles with you?**

No, never. I follow everything for my clients. In this office I have a specialist who works all day on building regulations.

**How do you approach the restorations?**

These old houses are often divided into many parts, and for us, the idea is to make the house one unit. So we have to destroy everything inside and completely reorganize. All we keep is the body, and sometimes that’s just four walls.

**You rebuild it to look as if it is from the 1700s.**

Exactly. We have to respect a certain size for the windows and doors, and use materials to keep the spirit of the 18th century. After that, we add all the new technology.

**Any current challenges?**

Right now we have a huge private project near Aix-en-Provence. We had a lot of little rooms, and we’re transforming it completely, with huge rooms and a long perspective inside; the view from the kitchen to the second entrance is [about 200 feet]. It was important to create a common visual communication between every room, to make it easy to understand the house—for guests and for the owners.



### Reverential Treatment

Research is key to the firm's trademark touch. The library at the Lafourcade office in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence is crammed with references covering centuries' worth of period-specific building materials, hardware, and techniques for stonemasonry, carpentry, and ironworking. But listening to the client and using imagination are crucial too. When an Italian family retained the company to turn a 13th-century chapel with a dilapidated monastery into a private retreat, Alexandre supervised an overhaul, the result of which cleverly retains a centuries-old patina. He relocated the entrance from the south to the north side of the property, creating an ancient-looking lane that wends through lavender fields and orchards of almond trees, terminating at the chapel and the front door to the 21,000-square-foot home. All of the floors were replaced with stone slabs, terra-cotta tiles, and oak, and appropriate wrought-iron details, banisters, chimneys, shutters, and paints were applied.

The Abbaye de Pierredon (three views shown), a sprawling family retreat with a vineyard, was rebuilt from the remains of a monastery and a 13th-century chapel.



BRUNO SUET

### Light Therapy

When Alexandre took on a contemporary project in 2000—turning a hangar into an airy, modern residence—it was the start of a diverse branch of the company portfolio. Site and light play as large a role for new-fashioned structures as they do for a Napoleonic-era château. The residence shown on this page—formerly a run-down warehouse for storing lettuce—is now a modern loftlike home in Saint-Rémy for Bruno and his wife, Dominique. Candidates for modern makeovers often draw the Lafourcades to the Côte d'Azur as well, where there is no shortage of 20th-century villas in need of aesthetic upgrade.



TOP: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDL; BOTTOM: BRUNO SUET



ABOVE: Dominique Lafourcade's studio overlooks the garage and a couple of Bruno's Bugattis.

LEFT: The terrace at the Lafourcades' former "salad factory."

### Garden State

Applying the final touches to many Lafourcade projects is the family's landscape artist and Alexandre's mother, Dominique. "She follows me, after, for the gardens," he explains. A Lafourcade landscape, however, is not an afterthought. Dominique travels the world for inspiration, and her outdoor rooms can conjure Renaissance Italy or an *Out of Africa* savanna. The gardens, whether geometric and formal or floral and exuberant, are scrupulously planned to enhance the Provence experience for the homeowners by touching on all five senses. Herb and vegetable gardens, a henhouse or a horse pasture, water features, and a helping of whimsy—all can play into the mix.

Dominique Lafourcade's landscapes are as carefully executed as the homes they surround. Geometry and perspective figure prominently in her layouts, and her husband, Bruno, is her collaborator.



BRUNO SUET



## Alexandre Lafourcade's Top 10



❖ **CAR:** The new Mercedes-Benz AMG GT S, for its performance during intensive use. ❖ **VACATION SPOT:** Île de Ré [where Alexandre restored a holiday house for his immediate family, which includes five children]; Île de Port-Cros, as a holiday break for the entire family.

❖ **RESTAURANT:** Le Bistrot du Paradou in Paradou, where you can taste local dishes like a rustic, satisfying meal of salt cod, escargots, and vegetables with dollops of garlicky aioli.

❖ **PLACE TO STAY IN PROVENCE:** La Mirande hotel in Avignon, near the pope's palace; cozy and charming, a beautiful mansion with 18th-century atmosphere. ❖ **ART:** Botticelli's *La Naissance de Venus* (*The Birth of Venus*), at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. ❖ **VINTAGE CAR RESTORATION:** Laurent Rondoni [at Ventoux Moteurs] in Carpentras, who specializes in Bugatti motors.

❖ **LIGHTING:** Mathieu Lustrerie in Gargas, an ocher factory and a museum devoted to the glittering world of chandeliers. ❖ **UNIQUE PLACE:** The ancient Caves de Sarragan in Les Baux-de-Provence—limestone outcrops which have been quarried since pre-Roman times. ❖ **SHOES:** J.M. Weston, for their comfort. ❖ **CONTEMPORARY SCULPTOR:** François Chevalier, for his king-size bronzes. *Bruno & Alexandre Lafourcade*, +33.4.90.92.10.14, [architecture-lafourcade.com](http://architecture-lafourcade.com); *Dominique Lafourcade*, +33.4.90.95.52.91, [dominique-lafourcade.com](http://dominique-lafourcade.com) **H&S**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mercedes-Benz AMG GT S; Alexandre Lafourcade, after winning a road rally in a Bugatti Type 35 restored by Laurent Rondoni; the Mediterranean island of Port-Cros; escargots; La Mirande hotel; *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli; a bronze Bugatti Type 35 by François Chevalier; Les Baux-de-Provence (left), Mathieu Lustrerie's Lustre Ventoux chandelier (right); J.M. Weston shoes.



SHOES: RICHARD COGNÉ; PORT-CROS: LOOK/ROBERT HARDING; LES BAUX-DE-PROVENCE: HWO/IMAGEROKER/CORBIS; ESCARGOTS: STOCKFOOD/ROGER STOWELL; BIRTH OF VENUS: GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI/BRIDGEMAN; WWW.BRIDGEMANART.COM