

Château Capitoul

Garden visit led by Caroline Bourdillon, Green Space manager

OUR VISION.

We wanted to make Capitoul the distinguished expression of its natural environment of scrubland and vineyards, testimony to a thousand-year-old coexistence between man and nature and living proof that man and the environment can and must prosper side by side.

THE HISTORY OF THE DOMAIN

Introduced by the Greeks in the 5th century BC, winemaking in Languedoc was developed by the Romans who established Narbonne in 118 BC. Located at a strategic crossroads between the Via Aquitania (towards the Atlantic) and the Via Domitia (linking Italy to Spain), Colonia Narbo Martius (Narbonne) quickly became the prosperous capital of Roman Gaul whose wine, honey and many other products were shipped across the Empire.

At that time, La Clape was a Mediterranean peninsula dotted with small lakes, which earned it its ancient name: Insula Lacquis - the peninsula of lakes. Surrounding these lakes were vineyards, many owned by victorious legionnaires to whom Caesar had granted land suitable for growing vines. Capitoul was arguably one of these earliest legacies, although the estate's first citation as a wine producer comes from a Latin parchment dated 26 May 1324.

Throughout the first millennium, Narbonne remained an important city, a reference for agriculture and learning, at the confluence of various cultures, some coming from far beyond the Mediterranean. The city and its surroundings experienced a decline in the 14th century, in particular because of the silting up of the Graus (Coves) connecting the sea to the city.

At that time, it was the monasteries and other religious orders that perpetuated the wine-growing tradition, both a factor of economic power and a Eucharistic necessity. It was in a Dominican monastery in Limoux, around 1530, that sparkling wine was invented, a technique transplanted to Champagne a century later by a monk named Dom Pérignon.

In the 15th century, Capitoul also belonged to monks - the canons of the cathedral of St-Just (visible from the windows of the castle). It was probably at this time that the estate was baptized with a derivative of its current name, derived from the Latin Chapter, Capitular, Capitulum.

Gradually, the production of wine in the region decreased considerably, becoming a quasi-dying and mainly local activity, with little export. Little is known about Capitoul during this period, although the estate continued to appear on maps throughout the Middle Ages and into the 17th and 18th centuries.

The tide turned in the second half of the 19th century, with the beginning of the so-called Eldorado of Wine period, characterized by a huge increase in demand due to industrialisation and the need to provide workers with a daily ration of wine low in alcohol.

In 1867, European vines fell victim to phylloxera, an aphid that decimated the roots of vines, causing a collapse in production throughout Europe. While Languedoc was hard hit, the

infestation curiously caused the market to accelerate. Thanks to the sandy soils (capable of repelling mites) combined with the installation of American rootstocks on the vines, production resumed briskly and the market began to smile on Languedoc: demand peaked at a time when wine was in short supply. The opening of the Béziers-Paris railway line drastically reduced travel time from the capital (from four days to one), and the region boomed as vast wine fortunes were made around Béziers – the wealthiest city of France at the turn of the century.

In 1898, the Rivière family, owner of Capitoul and holder of a large wine-growing fortune amassed during the prosperous period, undertook the restoration and transformation of the estate up until 1990, creating in the process the buildings that exist today. Capitoul quickly regained its rank among the most important estates in the region.

However, the turn of the century proved to be the high point. Overproduction and cheap imports of Algerian wine caused prices to collapse. Plentiful supply of drinking water, world wars, evolution of tastes and emergence of wines from the New World... so many reasons which exerted strong competitive pressure on the industry. Capitoul, like many others, gradually fell into a majestic lethargy, continuing to produce as it had always done, but selling into an indifferent market which led to its gradual decline.

In 1962, the estate was bought by Fernand Aupecle to complete a portfolio of southern estates built up on his return from Algeria. The estate remained in his family until in 2011 when its wine and wine tourism potential persuaded the Bonfils family to buy it. The first phase of restoration mainly concerned the vineyard and the cellar - replanting of the vines, expansion of the estate and overhaul of the range. At the same time, there was a long process of obtaining authorisations to create a premium wine tourism destination. The Bonfils family took a stake in Domaine & Demeure, a specialist in the restoration and operation of wine estates as exceptional tourist destinations.

The partnership set up and the permits obtained, work began in 2018, heralding the rebirth of this venerable estate located in the Aude and ensuring its sustainability for generations to come.

THE TEAM

Following successful restorations of the gardens at Château Les Carrasses and St Pierre de Serjac, co-founder Anita Forte set herself a challenge: to take the environmentally friendly landscape of Capitoul to another dimension.

To help realize this ambition, we contacted world-renowned botanist Olivier Filippi, who jumped at the chance to demonstrate that superb gardens could thrive in the most arid environments, without pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers or even water. He agreed to provide us with his plants and botanical know-how, then introduced us to James Basson.

The latter took up the challenge of restoring the landscape and developing it in his own naturalistic style. Combining abundant planting and restoration of existing gardens, he has striven to carve out spectacular gardens that blend harmoniously into the surrounding landscape.

THE HAMLET GARDENS

The gardens of Château Capitoul, with their breathtaking view of the lagoon with pink flamingos, were created by James, in collaboration with Olivier who suggested a range of Mediterranean plants adapted to the dry and rocky environment, plants which would flourish without fertilizers or herbicides or even water. The gardens reflect this naturalistic style: everything is planned so that over time, the newly created spaces will blend perfectly into the surrounding landscape.

James selected a palette of about 100 species. Around the holm oaks and Aleppo pines underplanted with field maples and Judas trees, unfold sculptural massifs of euphorbia, lavender, rosemary and succulents intended to sublimate the metamorphoses of the landscape. of the Clape massif across the seasons.

REHABILITATION OF THE CHATEAU GARDEN

Unlike the new gardens in the Hamlet, the gardens established at the foot of the Château, neglected for generations, required us to put some order into the wild grassland. In clearing this jungle we identified the remains of a garden from the beginning of the 20th century, planted with a mixture of local and exotic species typical of Art Nouveau gardens. The rehabilitation is in progress: the existing plants have been reinvigorated whilst new seedlings have been added to them, in accordance with the initial concept.

THE ENVIRONMENT

We see ourselves as temporary curators of Capitoul: the rehabilitation has been carefully studied in all its aspects in order to preserve and enhance the natural environment and the rich architectural and social heritage of the place. This new lease of life has allowed Capitoul to find the place it deserves in the local environment.

The approach which governs all our choices:

dry gardens, environmentally friendly swimming pools, low-emission equipment, organic waste treatment, green design and construction, chemical-free cleaning and intensive use of local products grown on site.

CAPITOU PLANT LIST

Ornamental Prarie band B

Ampelodesmos mauritanicus

Salvia fruticosa

Achillea coarctata

Brachypodium phoenicoides

Centaurea bella

Calamintha nepeta

Antirrhinum barrelieri

Bituminaria bituminosa

Eryngium amethystinum

Cneorum tricoccon

Catananche caerulea 'Tizi n'Test'

Centranthus ruber
Bupleurum gibraltaricum
Salvia sclarea
Dorycnium hirsutum 'Fréjorgues'
Iris unguicularis
Origanum vulgare subsp. *hirtum*
Salvia officinalis 'Nazareth'

Ornamental Boule Band A

Lomelosia minoana
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Sappho'
Artemisia caerulea subsp. *gallica*
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Ulysse'
Cistus x tardiflorens
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Santa Barbara Blue'
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Spice Islands'
Rosmarinus officinalis 'Tuscan Blue'
Carex halleriana
Sideritis cypria
Salvia lavandulifolia subsp. *oxydon*
Stachys cretica
Salvia multicaulis
Sideritis syriaca
Salvia lavandulifolia subsp. *vellerea*
Globularia vulgaris
Teucrium capitatum
Asphodelus fistulosus
Thymus capitatus
Asphodelus microcarpus
Santolina benthamiana
Thymus vulgaris
Dianthus rupicola
Helichrysum italicum
Hyparrhenia hirta
Lavandula latifolia
Teucrium flavum
Santolina magonica
Origanum syriacum
Thymus mastichina

Hedge Prarie Band B

Salvia 'Montagne de L'Hortus'
Ampelodesmos mauritanicus
Salvia 'Mas de Lunes'
Bulperium fruticosum
Salvia candelabrum
Teucrium fruticans

Salvia leucophylla

Salvia pomifera

Hedge Boule Band A

Pistacia lentiscus

Cistus x tardiflorens

Cistus halimifolius 'Cap Sim'

Cistus albidus

Cistus monspeliensis

Cistus clusii

Cistus creticus

Cistus libanotis 'Major'

Cistus x clausonis

Cistus x escartianus

Cistus x florentinus

Cistus x ledon

Cistus x pagei

Cistus x picardianus

Cistus x pulverulentus

Cistus x purpureus

Cistus x skanbergii

Cistus x tephreus

Cistus x verguinii f. *albidiflorus*

Phillyrea angustifolia

Rhamnus alaternus

Viburnum tinus

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Isle de Beaute'

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Sappho'

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Boule'

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Arp'

Rosmarinus officinalis 'Bonifacio'

Rosa banksiae 'Alba Plena'

Clematis tangutica

Jasminum polyanthum

Lonicera japonica 'Chinensis'

Parthenocissus henryana

Solanum jasminoides

Rosa banksiae 'Lutea'

Clematis cirrhosa

Jasminum mesnyi

Lonicera japonica 'Halliana'

Trachelospermum jasminoides