



Domaine du Rayol
LE JARDIN DES MÉDITERRANÉES



Portrait of the Domaine du Rayol

2024

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Conservatoire du
littoral



jardin
remarquable

Welcome to the Domaine du Rayol, “land of nature and spirit” (Gilles Clément)

At the foot of the Maures mountain range and perched on a peak facing the islands of Hyères, **the Domaine du Rayol became a natural protected site when it was acquired by the Conservatoire du littoral (the Coastal Protection Agency) in 1989.** At that time it was highly sought after by real estate developers. **The renovation of the site**, which had been abandoned for 15 years, **was entrusted to Gilles Clément.** He chose to combine the natural and iconic landscapes of distant regions with a similar climate of the Var coast. He created landscapes that were biologically similar but aesthetically different. **It was the elaboration of the Domaine du Rayol that gave rise to the concept of the Planetary Garden.**

Travel is the spirit of this site

Travel between nature and culture, since architectural and natural heritage are blended together, travel in distant Mediterranean landscapes, and travel within oneself because of the feeling of unity between the visitor and the Garden, felt as soon as they arrive. A kind of magic descends on the visitor, who is caught up by the plunging view of the sea, moved by the beauty of the place, the clouds and the sky. They find themselves irresistibly brought back to the earth, under the Garden's spell. The visitor is at the heart of a scene where a close connection is formed between them and the landscape before them.

“The Domaine du Rayol is a garden where staging the landscapes is not seen as an end in itself, but as a means of helping us understand the complexity of living organisms.”

Gilles Clément

The concept that gave rise to the creation of the Garden, requires explanation and instruction. Guided tours adapted to all audiences, activities and training courses have been created to assist all those wishing to understand the Garden and let themselves be carried away by the site's extraordinary beauty.

The landscaping work and the follow-up of the Garden evolution are still monitored by Gilles Clément who returns two or three times a year to listen to the gardeners, give advice and unwind. A team of 8 gardeners is currently devoted to managing and attending to the Garden.



From holiday resort to the Mediterranean Gardens: the history of the site

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At the beginning of the century, certain wealthy people took the little Train des Pignes and discovered the shores of the Corniche des Maures. Enchanted by the beauty of this still-wild coast, the Adam, Eiffel, Royce, Clément-Bayard and Foncin families had their holiday homes built above the blue streams, among the cork oaks, heather, cistus and arbutus trees...

THE COURMES FAMILY, THE FIRST OWNERS



Alfred and Thérèse Courmes in Saint-Tropez, 15.08.1912
© Archives Famille Courmes et Chouanard

Born in Bormes-les-Mimosas, Alfred Courmes, a well-read man and great explorer travelled the world to do business in the colonies. Very attached to his region, this Parisian man of the world had just turned 50 years old when in 1908 he acquired the Vallon du Figuier, almost forty hectares of wild scrub land, in order to build a home in which to retire.

Thanks to his friend Guillaume Tronchet, an official architect renowned in his time, Alfred and Thérèse Courmes (married in 1910) gradually built villas and other buildings on their property: first of all a farm and a spectacular antique-inspired pergola (1910), the Hôtel de la Mer (1912-1919), the well and the picturesque Bastidon, and lastly a second more modern and cosy villa, the Villa Rayolet (1925).

Inspired by his travels and the exotic fashions of the time, Alfred Courmes organised a garden around the pergola featuring exotic essences. The garden contained palm trees, date trees, eucalyptus, agave, mimosas, bamboo and, *Araucaria bidwillii*. Close to the farm a vegetable garden and orchard were also laid out for the needs of the couple.



Alfred and Thérèse Courmes in front of the Villa Rayolet, 1932
© Archives famille Jean-Michel Chouanard



Étienne Gola, head gardener, with the geometric flowerbeds of the pergola c. 1945-1950
© Archives Étienne Gola

THE POTEZ FAMILY, A NEW ERA FOR THE DOMAINE

Alfred Courmes died in 1934 and his wife Thérèse, despite her attachment to the Domaine, sold it to the famous aeronautical engineer Henry Potez. Potez lived in the Villa Rayolet from 1940 with his family, while the headquarters of his company were in the Hôtel de la Mer. His finance director was none other than Abel Chirac, father of the future French President, Jacques Chirac.

The renovations were entrusted to an architect, Raoul Minjot, who bestowed an Art Deco style on the property, including the gardens where this took the form of geometric compositions.

A number of gardeners contributed to the splendour of the Domaine, and new plants came to enhance the garden. In 1948 it featured almost 400 exotic species. It was also at this time that the majestic staircase framed by yews was built below the pergola, the great perspective.

After the war, the Domaine became the summer residence of the Potez family. The Maison de la Plage was built in 1949 on the foundations of the former boathouse.



Henry and Alice Potez, 1940-1945
© Archives Chantal Letourneur et Michelle Potez

From holiday resort to the Mediterranean Gardens: the history of the site

A DOMAINE RESCUED FROM URBAN DEVELOPMENT BY THE COASTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

In 1974, Henry Potez sold this unique place, which was highly sought after and acquired by an insurance company for real estate speculation. A housing development project was launched. Residents formed an association, Les Amis du Rayol, and took action to preserve this area from massive urban development.

The fight ended after 15 years with the intervention of the Coastal Protection Agency which put forward an alternative proposal with Gilles Clément's project. During these 15 years the buildings remained abandoned and the exotic garden was no longer maintained. Nature ran its course; certain plants thrived and others disappeared.

In purchasing the Domaine du Rayol in 1989, the Coastal Protection Agency wished to preserve the natural riches of this Var coastline named Corniche des Maures, where, hidden behind a curtain of Mediterranean vegetation, lays this exotic paradise.



Gilles Clément and a gardener, 1992 © DR

Gilles Clément wanted to display the flora and landscapes associated with areas of the world that have a Mediterranean climate; and thus the Mediterranean Gardens was born.

In 10 years the overgrown garden was transformed into a planetary landscape where human intervention met biodiversity. **Today, the Domaine du Rayol comprises 20 hectares, 7 of which are reclaimed and open to the public. Its built heritage has also been preserved.** The various buildings are used to support the Garden's educational activities.

GILLES CLÉMENT

Gardener, horticultural engineer and writer, Gilles Clément was the author of more than twenty works, largely translated, and was awarded the Grand Prix du Paysage in 1998. A landscape artist and instructor at École Nationale Supérieure du Paysage de Versailles, he was chair of Artistic Creation at Collège de France in 2011-2012.

Today he teaches in workshops in Italy, Spain and France. His work revolves around concepts of the "Garden in Movement", "the Planetary Garden" and "the Third Landscape".

His major achievements include the Mediterranean Gardens at the Domaine du Rayol (to which he is particularly attached and whose progress he continues to follow through two annual technical committee meetings with the gardeners team from the Domaine), the gardens at Abbaye de Valloires, the garden at ENS Lyon, and in the Paris region, the gardens of Musée du Quai Branly, Arche de la Défense and Parc André-Citroën.



Gilles Clément © Pascal Tournaire

THE HÔTEL DE LA MER OVER THE YEARS

circa 1925



© DR

1991



© DR

2023



© Domaine du Rayol

A garden of travel and world biodiversity: birth of the “Planetary Garden” concept

Gilles Clément and the gardeners who worked alongside him set up a “Planetary Garden” at the Domaine du Rayol. There they conjure up “**a planetary index open to biologically similar regions of the world.**”

THE MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE

The Mediterranean climate is one of transition between tropical climates and temperate climates. Summers are hot, with pronounced dryness, and winters are mild with regular rainfall and rare freezes.

Areas with a Mediterranean climate are located in the Mediterranean basin of course, but also in south and south-west Australia, along the California coast, along the coast of Chile, and in the south-west of South Africa.



In red : the Mediterranean climate © DR

The biodiversity of Mediterranean regions is remarkable, with just 2% of underwater land on the planet containing 20% of specific plant richness, i.e. more than 26,000 endemic species.

“The Planetary Garden is a concept that considers :

- together the diversity of human beings on the planet
- humans’ role as guardians of this diversity in an intertwined manner.”

“Each garden, considered in the traditional sense, inevitably enhanced with species from all over the world, can be regarded as a planetary index; with each gardener as a matchmaker between species that were not destined to meet.”

Gilles Clément,
« Une écologie humaniste »

THE CONCEPT OF THE GARDEN

The visitor-traveller strolls through the fynbos of southern Africa, the Chilean Matorral, the Australian Mallee and Kwongan, the Californian Chaparral, the scrub land and the Provence forest, landscapes all characteristic of the Mediterranean climate.

But they also observe landscapes from climates close to the Mediterranean climate, such as those in the arid or subtropical American Gardens, in the Asian Garden with its spectacular bamboo and plant formations with tree ferns from New Zealand. These exotic landscapes are based on the botanical interests of the first owners.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GARDEN

The implementation, the selection of plants to combine and the maintenance of the garden are in keeping with the plan to evoke natural landscapes. Cultural practices, in the same spirit, forbid the use of fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides and various chemical treatments.

The vegetation is surrendered to the whims of the local climate; it suffers in the summer but flourishes when the first autumn rains arrive, and continues to flourish until the next dry summer period.

Gilles Clément is the instigator of the “Garden in Movement”. It’s a concept that requires management of a place that’s constantly evolving, a place where it is difficult to predict, a place of inventions and transformations. So, the practices of neglect and “non-intervention” are raised to the same status as those involving intervention. Gardeners are the alchemists of these transformations. They seek a balance between the necessary preservation of this biodiversity and respect for the spirit of the site.

This intermingling must be accepted and managed within this limit of imbalance. It’s about combining scientific knowledge with a sensitive analysis of the place. Gardeners use shapes, volumes, play on shadow and light, transparency, atmosphere and feeling, as well as botanical considerations and cultural constraints to manage the site.

The portrayal of movement, intermingling, evolution of species and landscapes, transition, transformation (of plants – the living world -, of material – the earth -, of spirit – the sky) illustrates the choices in the management of the Domaine du Rayol. Up to the Marine Garden, inspired by what begins on land and extends into the sea, the Domaine du Rayol has over the years become a natural and cultural touchstone for conservation and management of Mediterranean gardens and landscapes.



New Zealand Garden
© Domaine du Rayol, Goscha Besançon

Today: guided tours, activities & training courses

The Domaine du Rayol welcomes around 90,000 visitors each year, spread over the twelve months of the year. **The site is open every day, all year round**, except for December 25.

The site is managed by the Domaine du Rayol Association, formed as a non-profit organisation according to the French law of 1901. A Board of Directors comprising 11 members, chaired by André Del Monte, and a team of more than 30 people, headed by Sybille Bernard, are responsible for the management and the development of the Domaine du Rayol.

GUIDED TOURS & ACTIVITIES

Visitors can choose to stroll independently or take a guided tour (in French only), at no additional cost and accessible to all. An audio-guide is available in French, English and German. **One to three guided tours are offered each day**, depending on the seasons. These guided tours last an hour and a half and present the world of Mediterranean landscapes, recounting the history of the Domaine, the plants and their secrets.

For those who love botany, for the skilled gardeners or nature curious visitors, themed tours are scheduled throughout the year to deepen their knowledge: mimosas' blooming in January and February, botanical walks every season or nocturnal strolls in the summer. Booking required.

NEW FOR 2024

"What grows at the sea's edge?", themed tour

Do you know what coastline means? More than just another term for "sea side", the coastline is an essential link between life on land and the marine world. Accompanied by a guide, from the Maison de la Plage to the Pointe du Figuiér, discover this space where land and sea, Humans and Nature, beauty and fragility come together.

Children's activities are also offered during certain school holidays (6 years and up): the activity "Hands in soil" helps children better understand the life cycle of plants and of the soil, and "Garden's little fauna" casts a new light on insects (in French only).

For school groups, educational activities adapted to each level are also offered.

In the summer, visitors can discover the 11th landscape, the **Marine Garden**, in a wetsuit, with flippers, mask and snorkel (adults and children of 8 years and up), or from 4 years and up with the "Feet in water" activity (booking required).



Guided tour of the Garden © Domaine du Rayol, Goscha Besançon



Improvement in Botany training course
© Domaine du Rayol, Amélie Tiennot

TRAINING COURSES



La certification qualité a été délivrée
au titre des catégories d'actions suivantes :
ACTIONS DE FORMATION

Since 2006 the Domaine du Rayol has been certified as a state training courses centre and in 2023 obtained Qualiopi certification, which testifies the quality of training and confers eligibility for public funds.

In 2024 the Domaine du Rayol is offering several training courses to professionals and individuals to raise awareness, pass on and share knowledge of plants and gardens.

These training sessions take place over one to three days and combine theoretical instruction in a training room with practical application in the heart of the Mediterranean Gardens. The instructors are experts in their field, usually authors or teachers.

On the agenda for 2024: introductory and advanced botany, discovery of Gilles Clément's concepts, the art of dry stone, pruning in the garden, sowing and cutting, zero-phyto plants care, bird watching, watercolour botanical illustration, etc.

All year round the Domaine du Rayol organises events, and particularly at each change of season. The Domaine du Rayol also takes part in national events such as See You in the Gardens on the 1st weekend of June and European Heritage Days on the third weekend of September. Romantic Evenings (classical and Mediterranean music concerts) take place outdoors facing the sea, on Monday evenings from mid-July to mid-August.

AN EVENT AT EACH SEASON

🌿 **Opening of the spring exhibition** Sat. March 23
"Canopées", by Hélène Muller

🌿 **See You in the Gardens** Sat. 1 and Sun. 2 July

🌿 **20th Gondwana, the Mediterranean Plant Festival** Sat. 5 and Sun. 6 October
2024 theme : The Planetary Gardeners
Exhibition and sale of plants, conferences, talks with nurserymen and gardeners, workshops and activities for adults and children, guided tours, etc.

🌿 **Open Gates Days** Sat. 7 et Sun. 8 December
Free admission for all!



Gondwana © Domaine du Rayol, Nicolas Mouny



Festival Soirées Romantiques © Christine Roméro

30TH ROMANTIC EVENINGS FESTIVAL

Classical music concerts Mondays at 9:00 pm from mid-July to mid-August.
On the esplanade of the Hôtel de la Mer, facing the sea, renowned artists come to perform the works of the great classical composers.

Monday July 15 : Pierre Réach (piano)

Monday July 22 : Anne Queffélec and Gaspard Dehaene (mother and son, piano)

Monday July 29 : Nicolas Baldeyrou (clarinet) and Geoffroy Couteau (piano)

Monday August 5 : Trio Hélios, Raphaël Jouan (cello), Éva Zavaro (violin) and Alexis Gournel (piano)

Monday August 12 : Dana Ciocarlie (piano)

Mediterranean Concert Monday August 19 at 9:00 pm

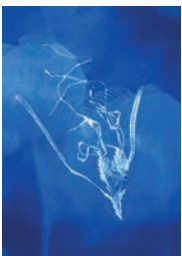
"**Hâl, le voyage amoureux**" ("Hâl, the Journey of Love"), with Keyvan Chemirani (zarb, percussion, santur), Maryam Chemirani (voice), Bijan Chemirani (zarb, percussion, saz) and Sylvain Barou (Celtic flutes, bansuri, duduk, ney-anbân). A self-portrait of musicians travelling for several decades on a planisphere that is constantly re-imagined: Iran, India, the Mediterranean, the Celtic world...

EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS

Sat. 21 et Sun. 22 September

€2 entry for everyone! Introductory guided tours of the Gardens every hour, exhibition, a fun discovery of the Gardens with children's book (4-6 and 7-12 years old).

TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS



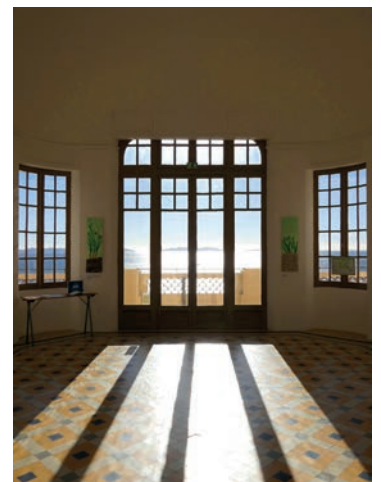
🌿 **"Posidonia", by Aurélie Trabaud** Until March 13
Painting, cartography, watercolour and cyanotype, around Posidonia.

🌿 **"Canopées", by Hélène Muller** From March 23 to May 26
Plants dyes and prints.

🌿 **"Odyssea", by the Collectif Personne** From June 1 to Sept. 22
Botanical and poetic charcoal sketches, embroidered cartography, around the voyage of Ulysses.

🌿 **"Les invités", by Célia Pernot** From October 5 to Dec. 1
Colour photographs and portraits, around garden characters.

🌿 **"Sans retour", by Fabrice Serafino** From Dec. 7 and mid-March 2025
Installations made from wicker.



Potez room © Domaine du Rayol
Left picture : Corb and Posidonia superposition © Aurélie Trabaud

Much more than a Garden : exhibitions, restaurant, bookshop, plant shop...

Aside from the permanent and temporary exhibitions presented in the various buildings through the Domaine, the Garden has a themed bookshop, an ecological plant shop and a café/restaurant, the Café des Jardiniers.



THE HÔTEL DE LA MER

The bookshop and the plant shop are accessible independently from the Garden entrance.

An expression of 20th century seaside architecture, the Hôtel de la Mer, restored in 2023, is currently the building that welcomes visitors.

The Gardener's bookshop,

With its inventory of 4,000 works, making it one of France's largest "nature" bookshops, the Librairie des Jardiniers is specialised in gardening, botany, plant uses, landscape, protection of nature and of the coastline, the Mediterranean, etc.

Salle Potez

Temporary exhibition space (see page 7).

Ecological plant shop

The nursery at the Domaine du Rayol features iconic plants from the Mediterranean Gardens. Based on the same ecological management principles as the Garden, it aims to "produce without depleting" and to achieve this follows a charter specifying no input (no fertiliser in particular), respect for the earth, the root system and plant equilibrium.



Hôtel de la Mer © Domaine du Rayol



THE FERME

Restaurant open all year round.

At the heart of the Garden, the restaurant **The Café des Jardiniers** will delight your taste buds. In keeping with the concept of the Garden, the Café offers a creative cuisine at lunch time, with seasonal produce, inspired by gardens from the Mediterranean and elsewhere, as well as afternoon treats.

Faithful to the eco-friendly management approach of the Domaine du Rayol, the chef works with fresh, seasonal produce, with a preference for farm-to-table supply chains. Exuding originality, the place chosen to accommodate this relaxing space is at the heart of the Garden, in the former Farm.



The Café des Jardiniers © Domaine du Rayol, AT



THE MAISON DE LA PLAGE

Henry Potez had the Beach House constructed in 1949, on the foundations of a former boathouse. Its style is reminiscent of the "preppy" classicism of the 1930s. Today it hosts **a permanent exhibition on the marine environment**.



THE VILLA RAYOLET

Built in 1925 by the Courmes family, then extended and modernised in the early 1940s for the Potez family, the Villa Rayolet is today on the additional register of historic monuments. This bourgeois seaside Villa, which reflects the new post-war lifestyle, is now open for visits every day. It houses a **permanent exhibition: "De la villégiature au Jardin des Méditerranées de Gilles Clément" (From holiday resort to Gilles Clément's Mediterranean Gardens)**.



The Villa Rayolet © Domaine du Rayol, Goscha Besançon

SPACE RENTAL AND SEMINARS

It is possible for individuals and companies to rent rooms or spaces in the Gardens to hold lectures, seminars, shoot films or organise photo shoots, etc.

Information and reservations all year round:



+33 (0)4 98 04 44 02



reservation@domainedurayol.org

For over 30 years, the **Domaine du Rayol Association** has preserved and maintained the site, and is 90% self-financed through admission tickets and activities developed on site. The remaining 10%, which is vital, comes from subsidies from local authorities, patrons and individual donations.

SUPPORTERS OF THE DOMAINE DU RAYOL

The leading public partners: the Coastal Protection Agency, owner of this 20-hectare estate, on the Corniche des Maures. It supports the management and development of the site.

The Communauté de Communes du Golfe de Saint-Tropez, the Var Département, the Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region and the State (via the DREAL – regional office for the environment, planning and housing) also support project management and development. The town of Rayol-Canadel-sur-Mer supports events through its financial and logistical assistance.

Neighbouring towns, Cavalaire-sur-Mer, La Croix-Valmer, Le Lavandou, Bormes-les-Mimosas, also provide support for organising and promoting events.

Patrons who have financed an initiative in recent years include the TotalEnergies foundation (exhibition on the marine environment and infrastructures for snorkelling at the Maison de la Plage, restoration of the Bastidon, the introduction room at the Hôtel de la Mer) and the Fondation du Patrimoine (restoration of the Bastidon and the Villa Rayolet, compliance with disability access standards and restoration of the facades of the Hôtel de la Mer).

The Gecina Foundation assisted with the renovation of the Villa Rayolet and its surroundings (particularly the creation of the botanical trail) and helped in the planning for disability access at the Domaine Rayol, alongside the Fondation Crédit Agricole Pays de France, the Fondation d'entreprise Crédit Agricole Provence Côte d'Azur (which also assisted in building the greenhouse) and other patrons.



The Villa Rayolet © Guillaume Exer, exer6.fr



Inauguration of the Villa Rayolet © Domaine du Rayol, Nicolas Mouny

Via the Coastal Protection Agency, Le Petit Marseillais provided support for the creation of a botanical trail, and Colam Initiatives for the restoration of the facades of the Hôtel de la Mer. This major restoration of the Hôtel de la Mer (€1.7 M) was made possible in 2022-2023 through the State's stimulus package.

The AXA Foundation and Botanic provide assistance with the Mediterranean Herbarium project and the Planetary Index around the Bastidon.

Plastic Omnium, Mouvements et Paysages and the Walden group support the general operation of the site.

Private patrons, including the Potez family, also provide personal support.

LASTING PARTNERSHIPS

The **Domaine du Rayol collaborates on a number of projects with partner organisations:** Parc national de Port-Cros, Conservatoire botanique national méditerranéen de Porquerolles, Conservatoire méditerranéen partagé, Centre des monuments nationaux, etc.

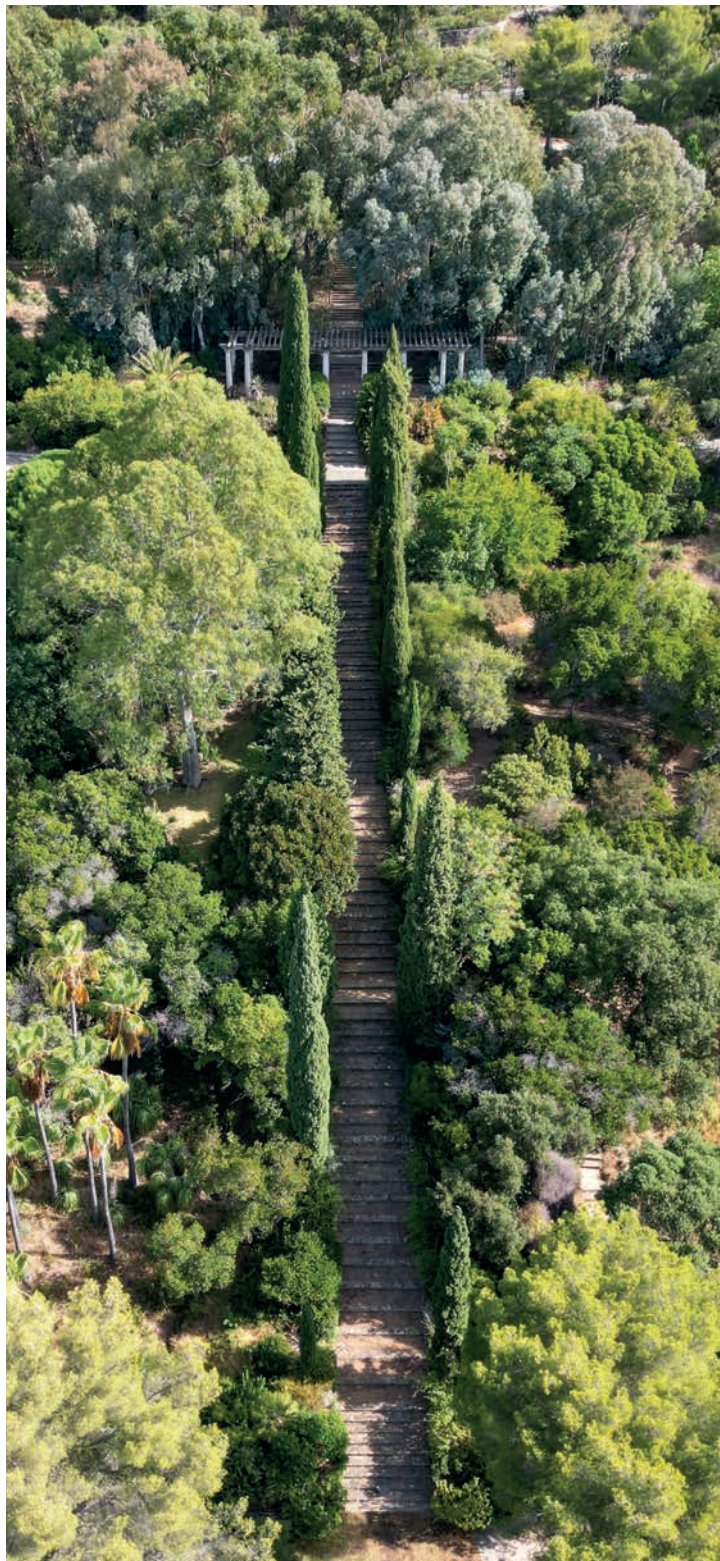
Several **scientific partnerships** have also been formed in the world of research, in particular with ISEN Méditerranée (Engineering school) – RASCASS laboratory (Applied Social Science Research to Design a Sustainable Anthropocene). Others are currently being developed.



Signature of the agreement between ISEN and Domaine du Rayol © Domaine du Rayol

The Domaine du Rayol is a member of the Association des Parcs et Jardins PACA as a **"Remarkable Garden"** (Jardin Remarquable), and of the **Plein Sud network**, which comprises over 70 contemporary art sites in the south of France, to promote and spread the contemporary artistic offer across the whole of southern France.

Lastly, **France Bleu Provence** is a media partner of the Domaine du Rayol.



CAR ACCESS



From Marseille: from Toulon, take the A570 towards Hyères / St-Tropez. In Hyères, follow the D98 towards St-Tropez then in Bormes-les-Mimosas, the D559 along the coast to the village of Rayol.

From Nice: follow the A8 to Muy/St-Tropez (exit 36). Take the D25 towards Ste-Maxime then the D559 towards St-Tropez / Toulon then La Croix-Valmer / Cavalaire / Le Lavandou to the village of Rayol.

In the village, follow the signs for Domaine du Rayol, Le Jardin des Méditerranées, to the entrance to the Domaine located below the village. 2 free parking lots.

BIKE ACCESS



On Véloroute 65, the entrance to the Domaine du Rayol is 300 m from the Voie Verte, which snakes along the former railway track. Signposted from the intersection on avenue Jacques Chirac.

TRAIN ACCESS



Train stations SNCF (TGV) :
Hyères (35 km), Toulon (50 km), Marseille (120 km).

PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESS



With the ZOU 83 network, access from Toulon, Hyères or St-Tropez: line 878 (Toulon / Hyères / Le Lavandou / St-Tropez) and line 873 (Toulon-Hyères Airport / Le Lavandou / St-Tropez).

Stop in front of the Rayol Tourist Office then walk to the Garden (around 15 minutes).

Information: 0 809 400 013 www.zou.maregionsud.fr

PLANE ACCESS



Toulon-Hyères Airport (36 km)
Nice-Côte d'Azur Airport (118 km)
Marseille Provence Airport (140 km)



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