



Lay of the Land

## PRESQU'ÎLE DE GIENS

Superyacht designers Andrew Langton and Pascale Raymond describe their quiet, retro slice of the Côte d'Azur near St Tropez

We have a traditional *cabane du pêcheur*, a fisherman's hut, sitting on the sand about three metres from the water, in Presqu'île de Giens in the Var region. This area between Toulon and St Tropez is one of the nicest parts of the Côte d'Azur because it's not as heavily built up as St Tropez, Cannes and Nice, it's not as touristic and the weather is nicer. By car we're only 40 minutes from St Tropez, but it's really a sailing yacht area, not a superyacht area.

We have a jetty with a little boat and we are close to the three islands of Porquerolles (pictured), Port-Cros and Île du Levant. Porquerolles is the one we go to most often, Port-Cros is a nature reserve and Île du Levant is half military and half a nudist camp – we don't go to this one. On our boat it only takes a few minutes to get to Porquerolles. We take a picnic, moor in the bay by Notre Dame beach and sit there for the whole day. There's a sandy shore and plenty of fish going around the boat – you can see them because the water is so clear.



An incredible restaurant is Pradeau Plage, on the Giens peninsula, set on the beach overlooking Porquerolles. It reminds you a little bit of what St Tropez used to be like in the 1960s and 1970s. I used to go there when I was a little kid with my parents – I remember playing *pétanque* on the square and casual little shack restaurants on the beach with fresh fish; very bohemian. In Presqu'île de Giens you get a bit of this. It hasn't changed as much as St Tropez, Cannes and Nice; it's still quite natural. People are not there to impress. They are there to live and enjoy themselves.

At Hyères, Toulon and Marseilles there are plenty of marinas to keep your boat in winter. In the summer, if you have a house on the water, it is nice to keep your boat there. This is the country of the mistral – you have to realise and accept it. It's good for sailors and it clears the air quickly, so you have a clear sky. We are also next to one of the biggest kite surfing beaches in the South of France.

Where we are the water is so calm that you have this perfect sunset every night in summer. The best thing is to grab the paddleboard from our decking, drag it into the sea and paddle on the flat water into the sunset.



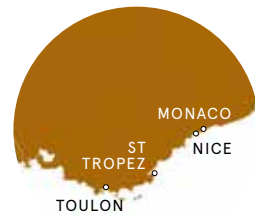
## Property

It took years to complete Villa L'Amour, the first Armani project in St Tropez, from buying the plot to finalising the stunning interior



# HIGH AND MIGHTY

This super-chic Armani/Casa-designed villa in St Tropez was raised up to provide some spectacular sea views, says Francesca Steele



Earlier this year, Giorgio Armani's property division, Armani/Casa, completed its first property in London, the renovated townhouse at Queen's Gate Place, near the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, for £35 million. It was the latest in a growing global portfolio that includes Miami, Mumbai, Istanbul and Rome. But one of the designer's first property projects was a much more intimate affair.

Armani agreed to work on a residence in St Tropez for some Milanese friends who were looking for a holiday home they could potentially use all year round. "It's incredibly hard to find good plots in St Tropez, but they found a spot they saw potential in and spent a few years persuading the current owner to sell," says the agent (and owner's son-in-law) Joshua Buckley. But it wasn't yet perfect. The land was too low and it took several years just to get planning permission and add enough soil to create a space where a home with sea views could be built.

Today, Villa L'Amour by Armani/Casa is a stunning blend of Tropezienne architecture that is sympathetic to the original fishermen's cottages.



A two-storey building with a simple, muted façade and classic wooden shutters, it has a glamorous yet minimalist interior that typifies Armani's trademark style. There are five en suite bedrooms (plus a staff bedroom) and the Armani "greige" palette is found throughout: muted greens, beige and greys on the walls, the floors and furniture. The villa is sunny, calming and achingly hip.

But that low-key colour scheme does not mean low-key materials. The interior walls are made with Marmorino Venetian stucco – Armani tracked down one of the only artisans who still make the traditional lime-based plaster authentically. The floors are laid with brushed smoked oiled oak; the bathrooms are Brazilian marble. Outside, Brazilian paving stones surround the Aqualift pool – the floor of which can be raised so that the pool disappears underneath it, creating a larger area for entertaining.

**"It's hard to find a good plot in St Tropez, but they did find one and spent a few years persuading the current owner to sell"**

The property has a double, open-plan reception room and a high-tech aluminium and bronze kitchen, complete with Gaggenau appliances – and those highly coveted sea views. But what really makes the property stand out is its proximity to the centre of town. It is less than 500 metres from St Tropez's hotspots, including the celebrity mecca Hôtel Byblos and charming main square, Place des Lices.

"We are seeing an increased number of people interested in being closer to the centre of town and the port," says Buckley, who works for H Barnes & Co. "Recently we've had two enquiries from people prepared to spend €200,000 a month on rental properties in the centre. It's often the case that the yacht set are not so bothered about being right on the beach because they have access to life on the water through their boats."

Villa L'Amour was recently let for around €150,000 a month and the owners are prepared to consider offers for sale. For those interested in renting, the agent will also arrange a yacht charter, helicopter and bodyguards, along with a personal trainer, butler and chef.

Those with their own boats may wish to moor at Port de St Tropez, which has 800 berths (of which 100 are visitor berths); alternatively you can buy a berth at nearby Port Grimaud, where larger, seaside villas are often available to buy and seem like a bargain compared with St Tropez proper. Savills has a three-bedroom townhouse with a pool and private mooring for sale in Port Grimaud for €3.495 million. ■

Villa L'Amour by Armani/Casa is available to rent and buy, POA, through H Barnes & Co, London, +44 20 7499 3434, hbarnes.london. Francesca Steele is senior property writer at The Times