

Cezanne
en Provence



Atelier *des Lauves*



1. WELCOME TO THE ATELIER DES LAUVES

Welcome to des Lauves Hill. Are you perhaps wondering where this unusual name comes from? In the local Provençal dialect, the term simply refers to the large, flat stone slabs that are common in this area. But this place is now world famous for an entirely different reason, and that's because of the house right in front of you. Designed and built by Paul Cezanne himself, it was constructed in the early 20th century. To understand how this artist came to be here, we need to go back in time a little.

Aix-en-Provence's most famous son was born in 1839. At the time, his father, Louis-Auguste Cezanne, made and sold hats on the Cours Mirabeau. His mother, Anne-Elisabeth Aubert, was most likely one of Louis-Auguste's employees. Paul was their first child. In 1841, his sister Marie was born, followed in 1854 by a younger sister, called Rose.

The family came from a modest merchant background and initially lived in the town centre. However, their fortunes improved significantly when the father – together with a partner – opened a bank. The family's social standing also changed for the better. So much so, that in 1859 Louis-Auguste bought a magnificent country house: the Bastide du Jas de Bouffan to the west of Aix. For the young painter, this house would become far more than just a summer home: it would be a veritable place of artistic experimentation to which he remained deeply attached.

Throughout his life, Paul Cezanne divided his time between Paris and Aix-en-Provence. Every time he returned to Provence, the family's country home became his studio, his refuge and his creative laboratory.

But all good things come to an end. Following the deaths of their father in 1886 and their mother in 1897, the three siblings reluctantly sold the property in 1899. Cezanne, who by then was spending more and more time in Aix, moved into a flat in town at number 23 Rue Boulegon. But how could he paint serenely in such cramped conditions? This space quite simply did not allow him to paint in the way he truly wished.

And so, in 1901, he bought this plot of land on des Lauves Hill. The location was perfect. It was in the heart of the countryside, just a few minutes' walk from his flat and, most importantly, it was close to the viewpoint from where he could see his favourite subject, the Mont Sainte-Victoire. In the afternoons, Paul Cezanne would go to the Jardin des Peintres or "painters' garden" at the top of the hill to work. The house was built to revolve entirely around his art, and he gave his architect one key instruction: that upstairs there should be a huge room filled with light. The ground floor, which was more intimate, would be used for entertaining and relaxing.

Now, let's explore this place that is steeped in history. Please enter and make your way to the first room on the ground floor, which is located on your left.



2. RECEPTION HALL

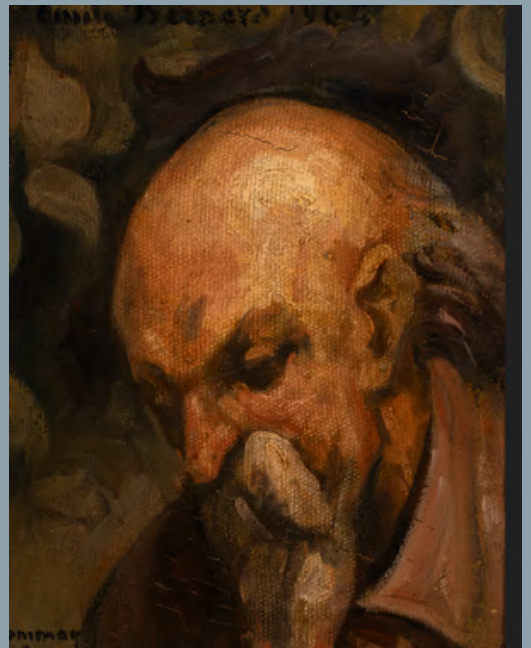
You are now in the largest room that was used once to receive guests. This was where visitors who came to Aix-en-Provence specifically to talk with Cezanne were welcomed. Sadly, he only enjoyed this house for four years. He moved in in 1902, as can be seen by a letter he sent to his niece, Paule Conil, on the 1st of September of that year: "Little Marie has cleaned my studio, which is now finished, and I am gradually settling in here." In the letter he is referring to Marie Brémont, his housekeeper. Mentioned several times in his correspondence, she took great care of him during the last years of his life. Notably, it was she who would take him his lunch when he was at the atelier des Lauves.

Paul Cezanne worked tirelessly: he would get up early, at around 3 o'clock in the morning, and climb des Lauves Hill to his studio, where he would work until midday without stopping. At lunchtime, either his housekeeper would bring him his meal, or he would go back down the hill to his flat. Then, in the afternoon, and weather-permitting, he would set off to paint the landscape en plein air, in other words, outdoors in Nature.

But how do we know all of these personal details about his daily life? Well, it's thanks to Émile Bernard.

This eclectic painter, who was born in the city of Lille in 1868, would come here to visit his older friend. He was even given the huge honour of being able to use the ground floor of this house as his studio for some months. During his stays in Aix, Émile Bernard made two paintings: one was a still life and the other was a portrait of Paul Cezanne. If you look to your right, you can see these two canvases on the wall. Thanks to the time that they spent together, Émile Bernard has left us a moving witness account of Cezanne's life at des Lauves.

In fact, he was not the only young artist to be welcomed here.



Tribute to Cezanne by Émile Bernard, 1904

Another painter, called Charles Camoin, also visited, and you can see a self-portrait just opposite the entrance. Born in 1879 in Marseille, he did his military service in Aix-en-Provence, starting in 1901. Camoin, who was a member of the Fauvist movement, most likely discovered Cezanne's work at a solo exhibition held in 1895, organised by the famous art dealer Ambroise Vollard.

In fact, it was Vollard who encouraged Camoin to travel to Aix to meet Cezanne. Whether it was with Émile Bernard, Charles Camoin or others, strong bonds were forged and these continued by letter.

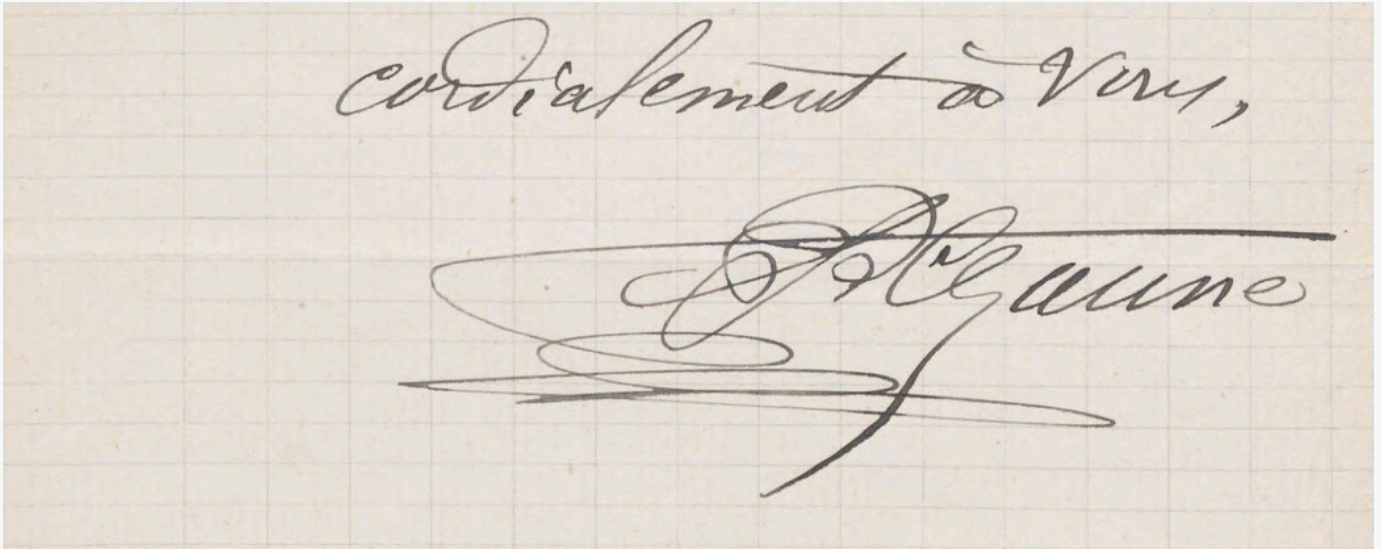
Although Paul Cezanne never had any official students, this wide-ranging correspondence was a way for him to give valuable advice, garnered over decades of experience. And so it was that an avant-garde group of people from diverse backgrounds began to form around him.

To take a closer look at these famous letters, simply head to the next room.



Self-Portrait as a Soldier by Charles Camoin, 1901

3. SECOND ROOM



You are now in the second room of the atelier, which is a much more intimate space, one that was designed for resting in. Cezanne would retreat here to relax, away from any hustle and bustle. The atmosphere here is calmer, almost silent, and naturally evokes a sense of tranquillity and contemplation. But how can you keep in touch with the outside world when you spend so much time on a hill in Provence? Through writing, of course.

A number of these letters, which can be seen in the display case on your left, give us a better understanding of both the man and the artist.

An avid letter writer throughout his life, Cezanne corresponded with fellow painters, such as Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro and Auguste Renoir, writers like Joachim Gasquet and Émile Zola, as well as collectors such as Ambroise Vollard and Julien François Tanguy, known as Père Tanguy.

He also wrote frequently to his family, in particular to his son, whom he called "Petit Paul" and was an invaluable source of support. Cezanne, who by now was getting on in years, relied increasingly on his son to manage his affairs in Paris while he worked at the atelier des Lauves. Young Paul would order the materials his father needed for his paintings, and acted as an intermediary with art dealers.

The letters that the two men exchanged reveal a father who was both very tender but also tormented:

"My dear Paul, I've already told you I'm suffering from cerebral problems, my letters reflects that; well, I look on the dark side of things, so I feel increasingly forced to rely on you and to look to you for my bearings."

The letters often ended with tender words such as these:

"My dear Paul, I embrace you and your mother with all my heart."

Nor did he forget his long-standing friends in Aix. After all, he valued lifelong friendships. Here in Provence, he stayed in touch with old acquaintances until the end of his life. Among them was the painter Achille Empéaire, whom he had met in Paris. Then there was Henri Gasquet, a baker Cezanne had known since childhood:

His son, the poet and journalist Joachim Gasquet, would become the standard-bearer for a generation of young people in Aix who thought the world of Cezanne. Lastly, let's not forget Philippe Solari, a sculptor and childhood friend of Émile Zola. Incidentally, Solari created a bust of Zola, which now stands on his grave in the Montmartre Cemetery.

He also made the bust of Paul Cezanne that you can see right here on the mantelpiece. The richness of his writings reminds us just how erudite this painter was. A lover of classical literature, he even won a prize in Latin and Greek when he studied in town at the Collège Bourbon with Émile Zola. Among the books on display here are art books, proof of his keen interest in artistic theory.

However, theory is no substitute for practice. After meeting the painters Camille Pissarro and Armand Guillaumin, he soon started working en plein air, something he would do for the rest of his life. As early as 1866, he wrote the following to Émile Zola:

"You know, any picture done indoors, in the atelier, never equals things done outdoors. In pictures of outdoor scenes, the contrast of figures to scenery is astonishing, and the landscape is magnificent."

This obsession with nature and light would also fascinate a younger generation eager to meet Cezanne. This is apparent in the three photographs taken by Ker-Xavier Roussel, displayed here on the chest of drawers. A young painter at the time, Roussel was accompanying his friend Maurice Denis, both of whom were part of the same artistic movement, the Nabis.

Please proceed to the next room to see some of the elements that feature in these photographs.

*Bust of Paul Cezanne
by Philippe Solari*



4. CEZANNE'S PAINTING MATERIALS



Whenever Cezanne set out in search of a subject, he would take an impressive number of items with him. He would wear a suit, take a long coat, a hat and sometimes a parasol, not to mention all his art supplies: canvases, an easel, a chair, brushes, a palette, paints, sketchbooks, a rucksack and a satchel.

It is said that he could carry up to 20 kilos of equipment!

Right up until the end of his life, Cezanne would tirelessly roam the countryside to paint. He would walk to what is today the Jardin des Peintres or Painters' Garden, or travel by horse and carriage to Le Tholonet, Bibémus quarries and to Château Noir. Despite his deep attachment to Provence, he continued to travel regularly to Paris and its region.

All of these places evoked fond memories for the artist. But, the story of his atelier did not end with his death. Paul Cezanne junior, known as "Petit Paul", inherited the property. However, as he lived in Paris and was caught up in the turmoil of the early 20th century, he rarely visited Aix-en-Provence, and it was his aunt Marie who took care of the premises. Following her death in 1921, "Petit Paul" decided to sell his father's atelier des Lauves to a young poet who was deeply in love with his homeland. This young man was Marcel Joannon, who would become better known as Marcel Provence.

Please continue to the next room to discover more about the new owner.

5. MARCEL PROVENCE

Born in 1892, Marcel Joannon was so passionate about his native region that he even adopted its name, changing it to Marcel Provence. He discovered Cezanne's work when he was quite young – not least because the painter's sister, Marie, was a friend of Marcel's mother.

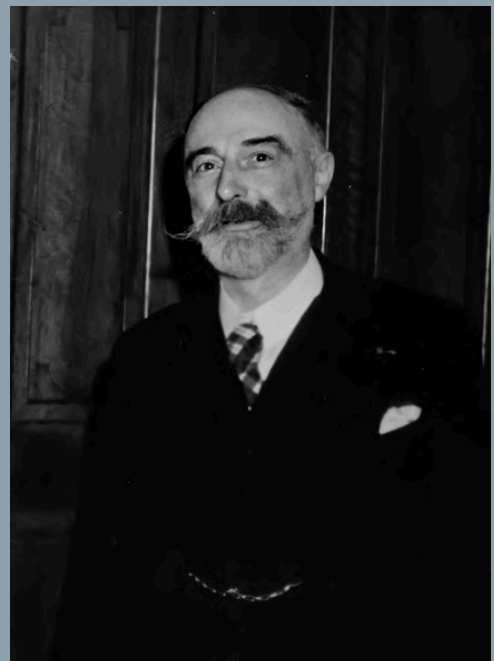
The story goes that, as a teenager, Provence and a friend would climb over the wall surrounding des Lauves to pick olive branches, which they would then place on Cezanne's grave in the Saint-Pierre cemetery. Quite an act of devotion! In 1921, Marcel Provence bought the property from "Petit Paul", the painter's son, solemnly promising to preserve the artist's memory. Unlike Paul Cezanne, the new owner lived in the house and also furnished the ground floor. He kept the first floor as close to the original as possible, only adding a few pieces of furniture to preserve the atmosphere Cezanne had created.

A true pioneer of cultural mediation, he quickly grasped the power of communication, happily taking part in radio interviews to support the causes that mattered most to him. Marcel Provence thus set up – or was involved in – numerous cultural initiatives in the region. These included the revival of faïence pottery production, also known as tin-glazed pottery, in Moustiers-Sainte-Marie; the creation of open-air theatres; and the establishment of the Musée du Vieil Aix, which showcases the history, cultural heritage and decorative arts of Aix-en-Provence, and where you can discover more about Marcel Provence.

But how do you promote the genius of an artist who was often shunned by his peers? Ensuring that Paul Cezanne's work was recognised was undoubtedly one of Marcel Provence's most challenging battles. Despite being a member of the Académie d'Aix and sitting on the committees of various cultural institutions in the city, he often faced significant hostility from other members. Driven by a desire to keep the memory of the painter alive in his hometown, Marcel Provence, a trailblazer in his endeavours, was keen to share his vision with a wider audience.

So, he opened the atelier des Lauves to visitors, organised guided tours of sites associated with Cezanne, and gave numerous talks and presentations to schoolchildren. It was here, in these very rooms, that Marcel Provence died in 1951. With Marcel's death, the city of Aix-en-Provence lost its greatest champion of Paul Cezanne, and the atelier suddenly found itself under great threat.

To find out what happened next, please join us upstairs for a closer look at this famous studio.



Marcel Joannon, known as Marcel Provence

6. L'ATELIER DE PAUL CEZANNE



You are now in the heart of the “sanctuary” – Paul Cézanne’s atelier. In fact, he had the entire house built specifically so that he could have this now-iconic room. As you can see, it takes up almost the entire first floor. This gave the artist a huge 58-square-metre space in which to work and create freely.

As with any artist’s studio, the matter of light is absolutely fundamental. After all, how can you hope to paint in colour without understanding light? In this, Paul Cézanne was no exception as the entire space was meticulously designed with this in mind. Firstly, he chose to set up his studio on the first floor, where it would receive as much natural light as possible, unobstructed by the surrounding trees. He was determined that nothing would alter his colours, not even the green reflection from the olive trees. To let in the daylight, he therefore had this enormous, north-facing five-by-three-metre window installed. This provided him with constant light throughout the day, as well as all year round. Here, in the south of France, the Provençal sun is much stronger than in other places, so two windows were fitted with both internal and external shutters. This allowed him to control the amount of sunlight entering the room exactly as he wished.

The room was also fitted out with the same idea in mind. Look down for a moment: you’ll see a parquet floor made of pine wood. In Provence, the most typical type of floor is of octagonal, red terracotta tiles called tomette; perhaps you noticed them on the stairs. However, tomette are shiny and, more importantly, they risked casting a red reflection onto the canvas. Cézanne therefore decided to install this pine-wood parquet, which both absorbs and diffuses light in a much more neutral way.

In his relentless quest for the perfect light, Cezanne made a decisive choice: he had the walls painted a neutral grey, just as he had done a few years earlier at the Bastide du Jas de Bouffan. White walls would have produced a light that was too harsh and with too much glare. This grey, on the other hand, created a soft, balanced luminosity throughout the room whilst beautifully accentuating the colours of his palette and what he was painting.

Take a look at the objects arranged against the wall: can you see how their glazed surfaces stand out clearly against this neutral background?

It was these everyday items that served as models for Cezanne's still lifes. Have you ever wondered why his apples are so famous? It is simply because, in his still life artworks, he gradually deconstructed traditional perspective.

Now, take a closer look at the reproductions of Paul Cezanne's paintings and compare them with the actual objects. On the chest of drawers, you'll easily recognise some of the items he painted, including the green olive jar and the blue ginger jar. In Cezanne's paintings, you can see the front, the top and even a little of the inside of the jars.

However, if you look at the actual objects in front of you, it's impossible to see them that way! Cezanne broke with the academic rules of painting by presenting several viewpoints rather than a single perspective. When creating a still life, he would spend a long time refining its composition, searching for the perfect harmony of shape and colour. Walking around the objects, he would study them from every angle, before bringing these various perspectives together on the canvas.



These multiple perspectives help explain why he is often regarded as one of the fathers of modern art. Artists, such as Picasso and Braque, would later build on this idea, taking it even further to create Cubism. Finally, take a moment to look at the small statue on the chest of drawers, known as Love in Plaster.

As you look at the painting, you'll see that Cezanne shows several sides of the statue at once, even though you would normally have to walk around it to see them all. By the way, when Cezanne purchased this statue, he thought he was buying an artwork by Pierre Puget, a 17th-century sculptor from Marseille.

However, he was mistaken; this Love in Plaster was in fact made by François Duquesnoy, son of the sculptor who created the famous Manneken-Pis in Brussels!

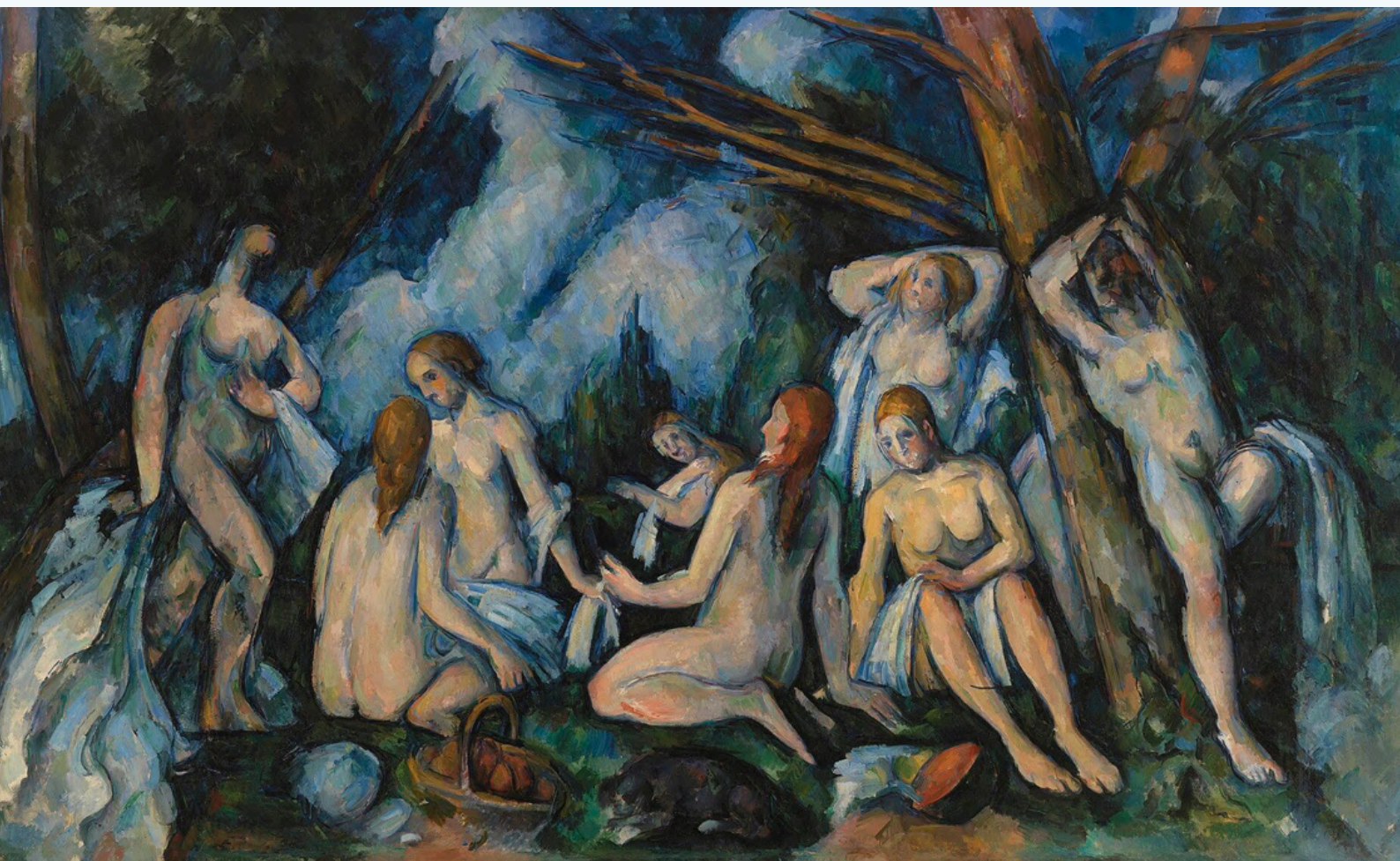
Now, turn around and look at the photograph taken by Émile Bernard around 1905. You'll easily recognise Cezanne, posing in his studio in front of one of his paintings. This photograph is a valuable record because it shows that many of the objects visible then are still here today. To the right of the painting, for example, you'll see the small chest of drawers, still standing in the same place. Just above it are the coat rack and the shelf holding the famous statue known as Michelangelo's *Écorché* or flayed body.

On the other side of the painting is the stove. Although it is no longer the original, it has been returned to exactly the same spot. The painting behind Cezanne is one of the three versions of *The Large Bathers*, widely regarded as the masterpiece of his later years. Notice how the canvas rests on a large mechanical easel, which you can still see today on the south wall of the studio.



The Large Bathers are in fact three monumental canvases painted during the last 10 years of Cezanne's life, and depict women bathing by the edge of a river. Yet this series still holds a mystery. Who, or what, inspired these figures? Did Cezanne work from live models? Were they even women? Whatever the answer, these large nudes reveal his gradual shift towards abstraction, with the bodies, composition and landscape becoming increasingly geometric. It was during this same period that, on the 15th of April, 1904, he wrote these famous words to Émile Bernard: "Deal with nature as cylinder, spheres, cones, all placed in perspective."

The largest of the three canvases, now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, measures about two metres by two and a half metres. Faced with artworks of this size, Cezanne soon encountered a practical problem: how could he get these monumental paintings out of the studio without damaging them on the narrow staircase? His solution was simple. He had a special opening, known as a *passe-tableau*, cut into the wall to the right of the large window. Hidden behind a shutter, this narrow vertical hatch allowed the canvases to slide directly from the studio into the garden, where the gardener would stand ready to receive them.



Les Grandes Baigneuses by Cezanne, 1895-1906

Sadly, Cezanne only worked here for four short years. On the 15th of October, 1906, while painting at the nearby Jourdan cabin, he was caught in a violent storm and spent several hours in the rain. Laundry workers passing by recognised him and helped him home. He would never leave his bed again. Sensing that the painter was close to death, Madame Brémond alerted “Petit Paul” and the artist’s wife, Hortense. On the 22nd of October at 10:20 am, she sent them this alarming telegram:

“Come quickly, both of you. Father very ill.”



Paul Cezanne in studio

Paul Cezanne died the following day, on the 23rd of October, at seven o'clock in the morning. Four years may seem like a very short time. Yet those few years left a lasting mark on the history of art, as the paintings Cezanne created here would inspire countless artists throughout the 20th century. That is why, after Marcel Provence’s death in 1951, when the building was threatened with demolition, a group of collectors, historians and art lovers – most of them American – mobilised to save it. But how did this modest building attract attention from across the Atlantic?

The answer lies with a young enthusiast from New Jersey named James Lord. When he learnt of Provence’s death, he alerted leading Cezanne authority, John Rewald. Together, they founded the Cezanne Memorial Committee and launched a major fundraising campaign. Their initiative received invaluable support from several prominent figures in the French cultural world, including Jacqueline Bouchot-Saupique, the Louvre’s first female curator, who helped them in their efforts. In 1954, the atelier was finally saved.

The committee then donated it to the University of Aix-Marseille, which cared for it until 1969, when ownership was transferred to the city of Aix-en-Provence.

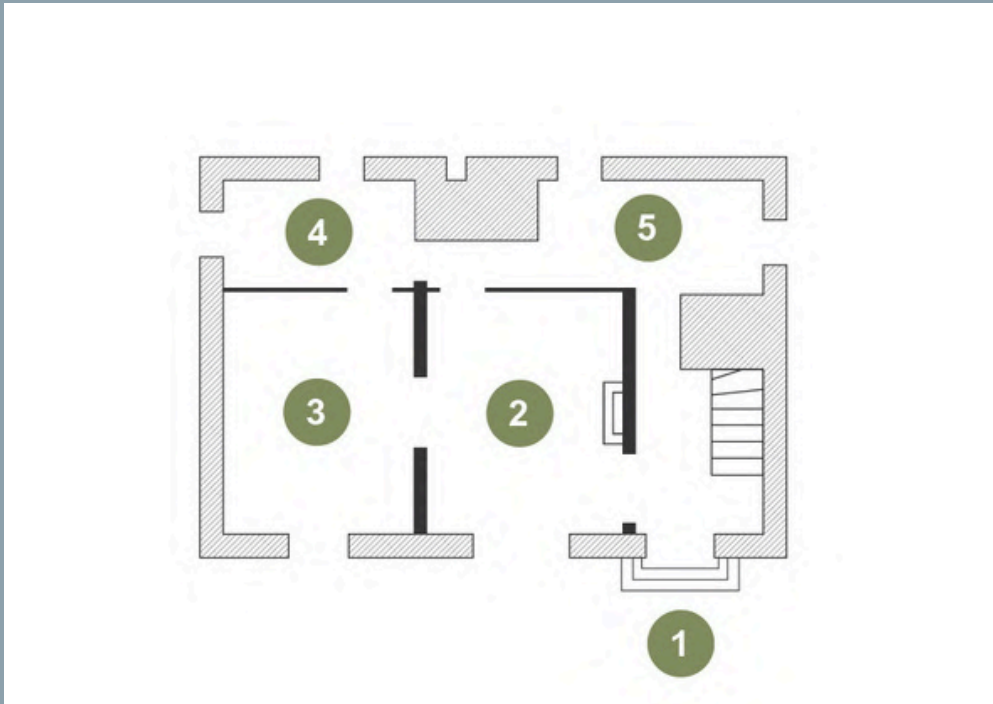
More than simply Paul Cezanne's last creative refuge, this is a truly unique place: an artist's atelier that was threatened with demolition on several occasions and is now recognised around the world as one of the birthplaces of modern art.

We now invite you to explore the garden and discover more of this remarkable history. Before leaving the atelier, please remember to return your booklet to the collection boxes provided.

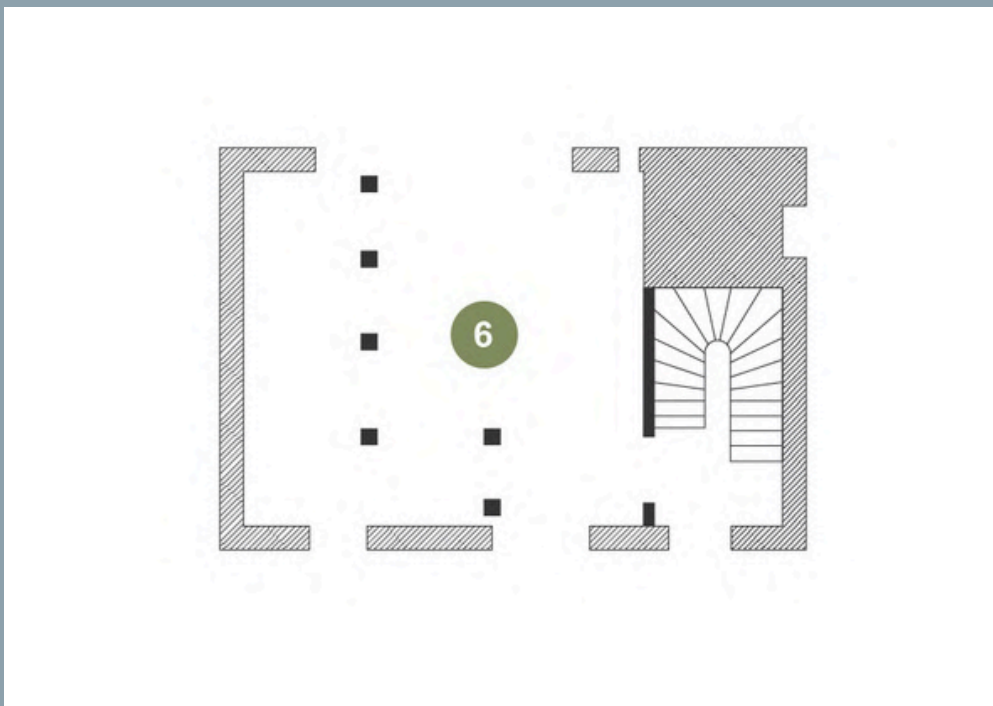
We hope you enjoy the rest of your visit and that this tour inspires you to explore the other places associated with Cezanne and continue this wonderful adventure.

Jardin des Lauves by Paul Cezanne ,1906





Rez-de chaussée - Ground floor



Premier étage - First floor