



8 The ornamental garden

(access from the town)

The château sat on a vast estate complete with stables, a manège and a real tennis court. Its ornamental garden was filled with flowers and even boasted a grotto, ponds and water features. It was also later used as a vegetable garden during the prison era. It was separated from the château by a dry ditch and surrounded by walls, including the wall surrounding the medieval bastide. In around 1630, having praised “*this truly magnificent monument, with walls adorned with gold and silk hangings (...) covered with gold, silver, azure and other rare and precious colours richly adorning all sides*”, two travellers counted “*64 galleries and tree-planted covered walkways (...) two or three fountains and many rabbits and other game animals*”.

Practical information

Length of the visit: 1 hr 30 mins

Gift and book shop

The guide for this monument can be found in the *Itinéraires* collection and is available in 2 languages in the gift and book shop.

Centre des monuments nationaux

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The first Duke of Épernon

A Cadet de Gascogne

Jean-Louis de Nogaret de La Valette (1554-1642) was born into provincial nobility at the Château de Caumont, in the Gers department of France. As a young nobleman and *Cadet*, he was destined for a military career, and fought in the Wars of Religion along with his older brother, following in their fathers' footsteps. In 1573, they took part in the siege of La Rochelle led by the Duke of Anjou, the future Henry III.

The climb to the top

The skilled and ambitious Jean-Louis was soon noticed and found himself at court. As Colonel General of the Infantry, he controlled the armies, governed strategic provinces and accumulated wealth, honours and hatred. In 1587, he married Marguerite de Foix-Candale,



The King's hall, restored as it was in 1652.

who came from a great family that extended his influence in the south-west. She died in 1593 following the birth of their third son. The Duke secured his inheritance

and maintained his lineage, going on to build this château in the fiefdom of Cadillac, demonstrating his rank and for the posterity of his lineage.

He shines brightest in adversity*

Following the assassination of Henri III in 1589, Catholic Épernon had a distrustful relationship with Henri IV, who Ravaillac killed in 1610. The infallible old duke supported the regency of Marie de' Medici, ensured positions for his sons and connections, provided guards for the musketeers of Louis XIII and governed Guyenne, but found himself marginalised by Cardinal Richelieu. When absolutism won through, he was one of the last great feudalists. He died under house arrest in Loches, having just celebrated his 88th birthday.

* motto of the Duke of Épernon.

130 years as a prison

Cadillac prison

The State bought the château in 1818 to house France's first women's correctional facility. Reasons for imprisonment ranged from theft to violent crimes (including many infanticides, often by abused women). Inmates were ruled with an iron fist, with 12 to



The King's hall, used as a dormitory during its prison days.

13 hours of forced labour 6 days a week and a rule of absolute silence enforced by nuns. Malnutrition, cold, the furious pace of work and overcrowding were

responsible for a mortality rate of up to 18 % some years. A total of nearly 10,000 women were detained at Cadillac over the course of the 19th century.

A 'remand' centre

Young girls, including vagrants, girls of bad character, infanticides again and girls who were sent there by their fathers, who held all the power, replaced the prisoners at Cadillac in 1891. Those considered to be 'incapacitated', having no sense of right and wrong, and who were therefore acquitted, were sent here with no minimum age, until they reached the age of majority (21 years). In 1928, a fire likely caused by a mutiny destroyed the northern part of the château.

The end of the château-prison

Despite various attempts to develop the château (especially after 1945), its penitentiary past continued to weigh heavily, and the institution closed in 1952 after two ward suicides. The State assigned the heavily damaged château to the fine arts, following which emergency work was carried out and a number of events hosted. At the turn of the 21st century, extensive restoration work was undertaken to revitalise the building, with the emphasis very much on accurately reflecting its dual history.

Ducal Château de Cadillac

A dual history

A 17th-century palace...

Built between 1599 and 1633 for Jean-Louis de Nogaret de La Valette (1554-1642), a *Cadet de Gascogne* who



became the first Duke of Épernon, the Château de Cadillac is an example of early French architecture. With its classic appearance and its sumptuous interior design, the palace was designed to be much more than a residence; it emphasises the

rank achieved by its patron as a 'half-king' who built for posterity. The grandiose château was soon visited by great figures, but would serve for less than half a century. Bernard (1592-1661), second Duke of Épernon, died with no direct heir. The palace's two wings and four corner pavilions were torn down in the 18th century.

... converted into a prison in the 19th century

After the building was seized during the French Revolution, the State decided to open France's first women's correctional facility at the château in 1818. In order to adapt the building to its new role, a caretaker's lodge and two lower wings were built to close off the courtyard. The conditions of incarceration were merciless throughout the century. In the 20th century, young girls took the place of the inmates when the site became a 'remand centre', which later closed in 1952. A number of major restoration projects have since restored the original château without obscuring its past as a prison, thus accurately reflecting its dual history.



1 The courtyard and the grand staircase

The main body of the château and the first parts of the wings demonstrate its classical architecture. The lower wings, built for the prison, date from the 19th century. The grand staircase in the centre of the property serves all of the floors, from the basement on the garden level right up to the attic, leading to the ducal apartments on the ground floor and the royal apartments on the first floor. Each apartment comprises a suite of adjoining rooms.

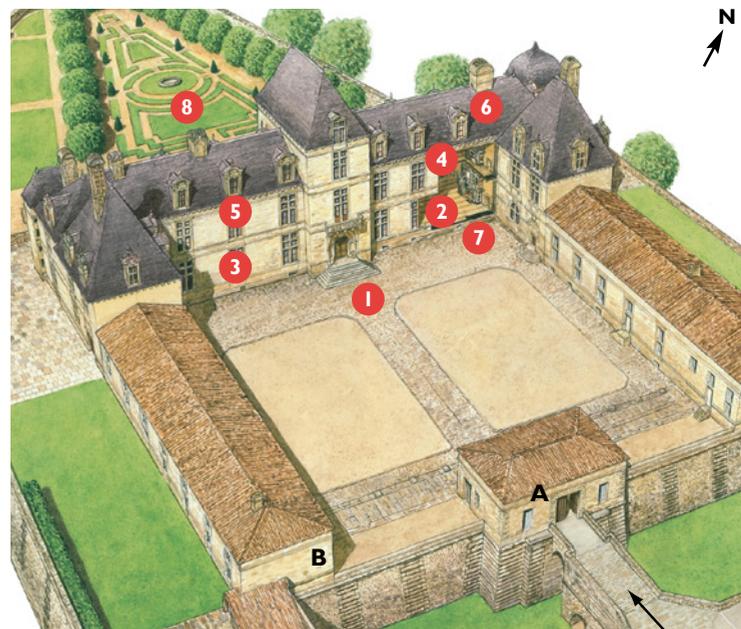
Ground floor

2 The Duke's apartment

While the rest of the decor was destroyed in the fire of 1928, the **reception chamber** has retained its monumental fireplace, where Julien Salaud's *Grand Duke I* (2017) takes centre stage, along with a cross installed in the 19th century for the prison chapel. On the walls, meanwhile, *The Odyssey of Ulysses*, based on the cartoons by Simon Vouet, reflects the original illustrated tapestries, depicting a historical event, a religious cycle or a hero of Antiquity. Portraits of Henri IV and Marie de' Medici complete the decor.

The **antechamber** houses the oldest fireplace in the château and features three tapestries, two of which are based on *Ovid's Heroides*, notably *Phaedra*. It used to open out, on the garden side, onto the ceremonial room in the corner pavilion, and served as a sacristy and refectory for the nuns guarding the inmates in the 19th century.

The **bedroom of the second duke** is furnished with a four-poster bed with twisted columns. Its original ceiling, featuring trompe-l'oeil coffering, features a painted design that has been reproduced on the lower panelling and in the adjacent oratory, which also has a *Pietà*. A portrait depicts the first Duke of Épernon.



- A ticket office
gift and book shop
- B toilets

start of the tour

3 The Duchess's apartment

This apartment, which once served as the prison infirmary and was spared by the fire of 1928, still boasts its rich decor.

A portrait of Bernard, the second Duke of Épernon, adorns the fireplace in the **reception chamber**. The four tapestries depicting *The Story of Psyche* were woven in the 17th century. Having fallen in love with Cupid, Psyche must face the trials of Venus, his mother. The fireplace in the first antechamber features a portrait of Queen Anne of Austria, who visited the château in 1632 and 1659, and is topped by the Duke's carved monogram, a very common feature of the original decor. The tapestries depicting the prophet Daniel and *The Three Bouquets* reflect the design of the room in the 17th century.

The **second antechamber** retains its painted ceiling, along with a fireplace that was remodelled in the 18th century. *Diorama ou le murmure des murs*, a piece created by Cécile Léna (2020, 6 mins), echoes the history of the château.

The **cabinet doré** ('golden cabinet') has retained its Italian-style ceiling decorated with mythological representations and enhanced with gilding.

First floor

4 The King's apartment

As was the case with any large château, an apartment was fitted out for the king. This one was used by Louis XIII in 1620 and Louis XIV in 1659. The landing doors date back to the days of the prison, when inmates on the upper floors were crammed into dormitories.

The **chamber** is dedicated to Henry III, to whom Épernon owed his status. The tapestry of the *Siege of La Rochelle* in 1573 is part of a hanging commissioned by the Duke and woven at the château itself. The room is decorated with a bust of the king, his monogram and his full-length portrait, alongside Queen Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, along with a hanging depicting the *Story of Rinaldo and Armida*, taken from *La Jérusalem délivrée* ('*Jerusalem Delivered*'), based on cartoons by Simon Vouet.

The **antechamber** overlooked the grounds and featured the château's most ornate fireplace, which was damaged by the fire of 1928. The wall hanging woven in Flanders in the 16th century illustrates the *History of the Civil Wars of Rome*, alongside *Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides*, with an ebony cabinet completing the line-up. The duke owned 14 ebony cabinets, which were considered state furniture.

5 The Queen's apartment

The **room** features a wall hanging of *Theagenes and Chariclea* based on cartoons by Simon Vouet. It tells

the story of an Ethiopian princess and a young Greek, Theagenes, who is also depicted in two paintings.

The **first antechamber** has a highly ornate fireplace with a painting depicting *Queen Artemisia drinking the ashes of her husband Mausoleus*, a story that legitimises regencies. Two tapestries from Flanders, meanwhile, depict *The defeat of Queen Zenobia of Palmyra* and *The triumph of Emperor Aurelian*.

The **second antechamber**, with its unfinished fireplace, features a wardrobe from Bordeaux. It used to open onto a ceremonial room on the garden side, and a hall of mirrors and the 'gallery of the illustrious' on the city side. It also overlooks the terrace that in turn overlooks Cadillac-sur-Garonne.

6 The attic (second floor)

In the 20th century, the 'remand' centre installed individual wire mesh cubicles referred to as 'chicken cages' for the minors in its care.

After the 19th-century prison dormitories, these cells afforded a certain privacy, but also reinforced the sense of confinement.

7 The basement

The **rooms in the basement** were used as a refectory for the prison two centuries after they had housed the château's kitchens and the workshop where master upholsterer Claude de Lapierre wove the hanging recounting the *Life of Henry III*. The adjoining echo room, which served as a kitchen for the prison, boasts remarkable acoustics thanks to its vaulted ceiling, followed by an understated hidden suspended spiral staircase serving the building from top to bottom and providing discreet access to all of the floors.



Suspended spiral staircase