

POETRY IN PLANTS

Inspired by the works of Claude Monet, Les Jardins d'Étretat in Normandy is an enchanting assemblage of planting, sculpture and dramatic coastline

Les Jardins d'Étretat overhang the famous Amont Cliff, which still attracts painters from all over the world. It was on the very terraces of Les Jardins d'Étretat that Claude Monet painted his *Cliffs at Étretat* series, regarded among the greatest works of art ever produced



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Cypripedium 'Memoriam Shawna Austin' from the re-created collection of orchids of Madame Thébault, the garden's foundress. Topiaries of D'Amont Garden. *Clockwork Forest* by the art collective Greyworld in The Avatar Garden. *Monet* sculpture by Agnieszka Gradzik and Wiktor Szostalo in The Impressions Garden. *Until the Word is Gone* series of terracotta sculptures by Sergei Katran in The Zen Garden. Topiaries of La Manche Garden. Landscape architect Alexander Grivko. *Drop of Rain* by Samuel Salcedo in The Emotions Garden. OPPOSITE FROM TOP La Manche Garden's hedge mazes are shaped like waves, crashing against the cliffs. Roxelana villa, named to after the role that had catapulted Madame Thébault into stardom



Beyond turreted chateaus, sweeping D-Day beaches and Monet's much-loved lily pond, Normandy is home to one of the most intriguing gardens in Europe. The creation of the landscape architect Alexander Grivko, Les Jardins d'Étretat is a unique collection of botanicals and art installations from contemporary artists, all skilfully integrated into a hillside cascading down to the sea.

Originally founded in 1903 by the French actress Madame Thébault, the gardens are an enchanting Alice-in-Wonderland-style escape just two hours from Paris by train, and has been open to the public since 2016. Filled with a poetic arrangement of planting that grows and blossoms year round, Les Jardins d'Étretat is a must-see for those on the trail of Monet, who lived in Étretat and spent his childhood in Le Havre just a 30-minute drive away.

Integrated within the gardens is an array of head-turning sculptures that surprise and capture the eye, and just when you think you've seen it all, a magnificent coastal panorama unfolds with the towering chalk-white cliffs of Porte d'Aval on full display, the very cliff Monet often painted in his later years. According to Mark Dumas of the garden design and landscaping company Il Nature, which carried out the construction, Alexander believes that the landscape surrounding a person is an extension of one's inner self. The garden was inspired by neo-futuristic ideas and the seacoast of Normandy, its cragged outlines and the movement of waves crashing against the shores. This explains the unique sense of timelessness, serenity and transience that the garden evokes in visitors.

There's also a great deal of history to absorb. For example, at the foot of the garden lies a former oyster park founded by Marie Antoinette. From here, her favourite fresh oysters were harvested and delivered straight to her dining-room table. The 'Power Garden' located closest to the cliff edge is another highlight. Inspired by the movement of the sea, *Phillyrea angustifolia* rises in waves and descends in spirals framed by delicate blue *Agapanthus africanus*. Elsewhere, *Enkianthus japonicus* imported from Japan has been sculpted into mollusk-like formations (a nod to the oyster farm), brought into focus by a collection of emotive sculptures by the Spanish artist Samuel Salcedo. For exhibitions and events, visit etretatgarden.fr. Les Jardins d'Étretat is located on Avenue Damilaville, 76790, Étretat, France □

