

Lascaux IV

The International Centre for Cave Art
Centre International d'Art Pariétal



Introduction

The new International Centre for Cave Art (Centre International d'Art Parietal) in Montignac, France welcomes visitors to an immersive educational experience of the prehistoric Lascaux cave paintings. Known by archaeologists as the 'Sistine Chapel of Prehistory' due to their spiritual and historical significance, the 20,000-year-old paintings are among the finest known examples of art from the Paleolithic period.

Architects Snøhetta and SRA, alongside scenographer Casson Mann, worked closely with a team of archaeologists to create a holistic museum and educational experience. As an interpretation center featuring state-of-the-art experiential storytelling technology paired with a facsimile of the caves, Lascaux IV offers visitors an opportunity to discover the caves in a unique way that reveals a sense of wonder and mystery, as if they, too, were the first group of adventurers to stumble upon the cave paintings.

The Lascaux Caves paintings were first discovered in 1940, and opened to visitors in 1948. Soon after the opening, however, the mass influx of visitors and the exposure to exterior elements had begun to degrade the paintings. In 1963, the original Lascaux Caves were permanently closed to the public to preserve the extraordinary art from irreparable damage brought on by its overwhelming popularity, and the fragile site was granted UNESCO World Heritage Status in 1979. In 2010, for the 70th anniversary of the cave discovery, the International Centre for Cave Art project, Lascaux IV was announced.

As a striking, contemporary addition to the landscape of the Vézère Valley, Lascaux IV frames a new experience of some of the finest known examples of prehistoric art, and offers profound new ways of understanding the rich heritage of the site. The contemporary geometry and materiality also counters the potential trap of artifice: allowing the visitor to understand that they are in the presence of a reproduction, without distracting from the power of its impact. The exterior reflects the contours of the limestone geology and reveals a dramatic exhibition experience designed to transport the visitor into a cave complex complete with tunnels, chambers lit by shafts of broken sunlight, and paintings that are mediated by state of the art technology and scenographic techniques.

Wonder and mystery

The new Lascaux IV Caves Museum is situated at the intersection of two unique landscapes, between a densely-forested, protected hillside and the agricultural Vézère valley. Snøhetta's design conceives the museum as a fine cut in the landscape, inviting visitors into a curious world of prehistory. It was here, deep in the caves below, that prehistoric artists produced extraordinary cave paintings over 20,000 years ago.

As a museum and interpretation centre, the project has opened up the possibility of visiting Lascaux, the most spectacular of all painted caves, to a new generation of visitors. The highlight is the facsimile cave that allows visitors to experience this mysterious environment, to touch the contours and textures of the stone and contemplate the ancient artworks.

Lascaux IV marks the beginning of a new phase in the celebration of the knowledge of this unique site and its cultural heritage. Through a holistic approach that considers the landscape, the architecture, the interior, and the scenography as a whole, the design aims to create an experience that educates visitors on the significance of the site while revealing the original wonder and mystery of its discovery.



Lascaux IV press release by Snøhetta & Casson Mann



A Fissure in the Landscape

Lascaux IV is created as a fissure in the landscape. The roof features a gentle broken line, echoing the hill's undulating form. Across its length, the façade ranges from transparent to opaque, maintaining an inseparable relationship with the exterior, offering hints of what is contained within.

Lascaux IV is placed in a transitional zone between untouched forest and agricultural land. By using the exact border that does not belong to either of these two vastly different landscapes, the architecture aims to be a contribution to the location and landscape, facilitating a dialogue between the two contrasting landscapes. The building's form and materiality have been given a sober expression, within any excess, speaking to the elements of the surrounding nature. In this way, the building aims to reflect the curious spirit of the original caves and context, as well as to stand as a grand representation of the future heritage of the area.

The walls, roof, façade strip, and both interior and exterior flooring are all made in the same architectural concrete, giving the building a monolithic expression. The raw, unfinished treatment of the material evokes the mineral world, the rock of the hills, and the cave.

The project's second predominant materiality, glass, defines the façade and the roof of the orientation space. The transparency of the façade creates a direct visual connection between the exterior and the interior, inviting the public in. The interplay between the glass and the concrete produces a series of contrasting effects, between opaqueness and transparency, light and shade, incomplete and sophisticated, rough and smooth. Their reciprocity creates balance and gives the facility a contemporary feel.

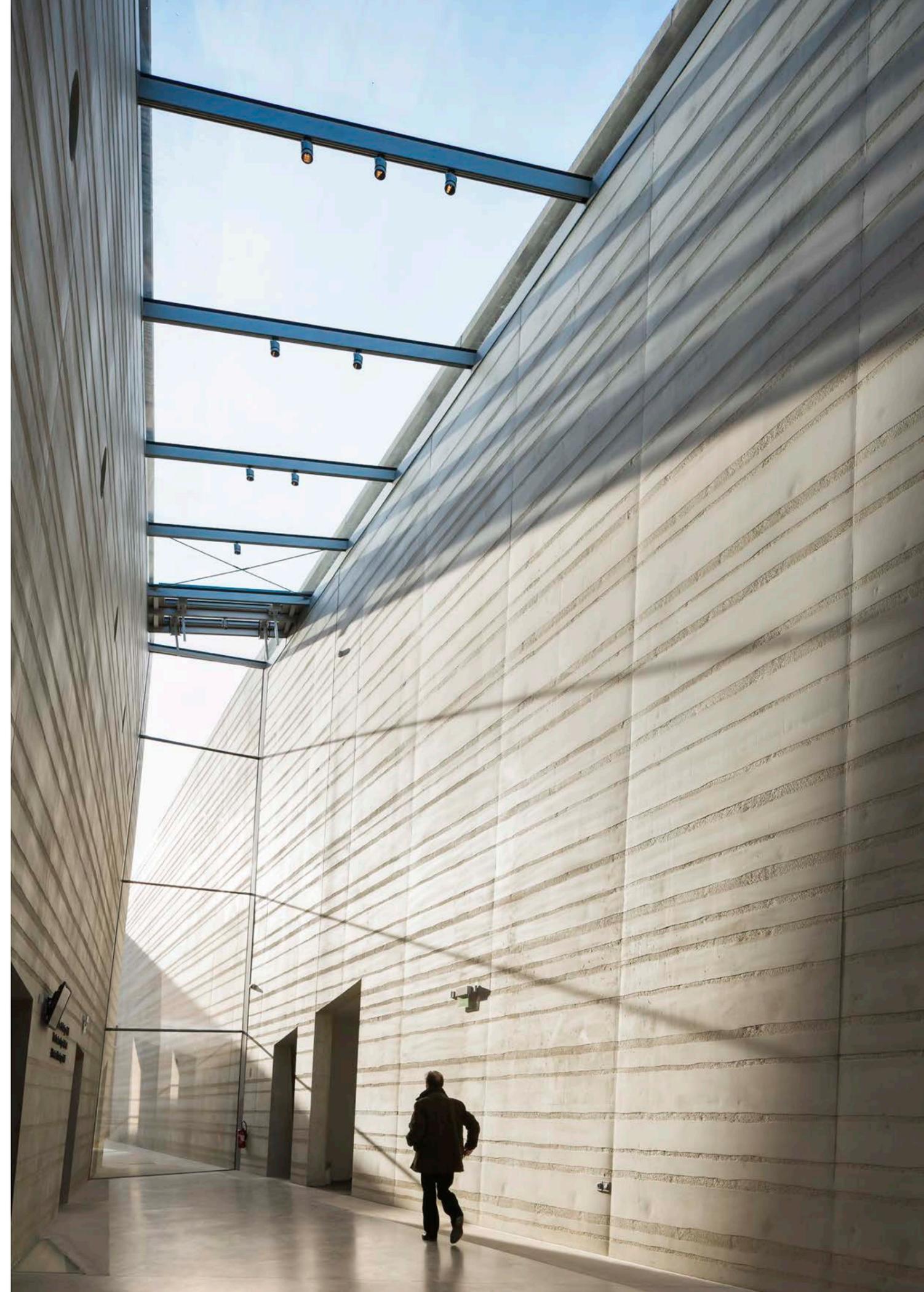


Shaped by Light

The design of the building has been shaped by two principal sources of natural light. One is created by a lateral cut in the landscape that lifts and separate the two planes, pulling them apart to generate a vertical facade where the light enters the building horizontally. The other is a deep cut along the spine of the building, which reveals the horizontal glass surface of a skylight and allows light in vertically. Throughout the course of a day, visitors experience the various shades and intensities of light that are filtered through the roof glass and the façade.

As visitors make their way through the building, these changing light conditions subtly highlight the various functions and atmospheres of each space. From the darkness in the caves replicas, to the open sky in the garden, to the shadow-play in the orientation zone, visitors progress through a sequence of lighting conditions that is carefully attuned to how the eye responds to lightness and darkness.

At night, the exterior landscape is framed by the warm glow of the artificial lighting within, forming a discrete volume of light that describes the shape of the entrance façade and the shape of the spine.



A journey of discovery

The visitor experience is carefully sequenced. Beginning in the lobby, visitors ascend by a lift to the belvedere out on the roof, where they can enjoy a magnificent panoramic view of Montignac and the Vézère Valley. They then descend a gentle slope towards the cave facsimile, which follows the incline of the roof towards the edge of the forest until reaching the entrance to the replica. The winding path through the landscape and gradual descent back down to grade facilitates a mental transition through time and space, creating an experience similar to that of the cave's first discoverers in 1940.





La grotte

Inside the replica, the atmosphere is damp and dark, re-creating the humidity within the caves. Sounds are muffled; the temperature drops to about 16 degrees Celsius. This sequence is dedicated to contemplation, allowing people an experience of the sanctuary that once was. Lights flicker just as the animal fat lamps of Paleolithic times did, revealing the rich layers of paintings and engravings on the surface of the walls.

The cave replica was developed through the most advanced 3D laser scanning and casting technologies to replicate the original cave form to a 1 millimeter tolerance. Following the construction, the caves underwent a careful analog process: 25 artists spent 2 years hand-painting 900 meters of resin rock reproductions. To ensure the highest level of accuracy, artists used the same pigments that the prehistoric painters used 20,000 years ago to recreate the 1900 paintings and engravings that adorn the walls of Lascaux IV.



Jardin de la grotte

Upon exiting the facsimile, the visitor arrives at a transition space known as the Jardin de la grotte, or the Cave Garden. This patio provides an opportunity to readjust to the exterior context, after the intense visceral and emotional experience of the replica. The relationship to the sky, the presence of plants and the sound of flowing water frame this moment.

The next sequence of chambers is devoted to deciphering the cave's works to facilitate their comprehension and encourages visitors to gauge for themselves the historical, cultural, and symbolic stakes of the paintings. It is a pedagogic exhibition space enhanced by digital learning experiences, featuring interactive tables that enable people to deepen their individual discovery of Lascaux.



L'atelier de Lascaux

The dramatic journey leads to a series of diverse exhibition chambers. Visitors are equipped with an interactive digital companion device (CdV), an intelligent multi-media guide with audio and personalised language settings that enable visitors to interact with exhibits, providing augmented experiences, deeper information and content. This device liberates the gallery spaces from text panels – an important aspect of this experience, which blends art, history, culture, and contemplation. Casson Mann's design for the scenography is grouped into thematic zones that immerse the visitor in thoughtfully crafted environments.

This first gallery is dedicated to a leisurely exploration of the main paintings seen in the facsimile. Eight great fragments of cave are dramatically suspended from the high ceiling or rise up from the stone floor.

On display within L'Atelier de Lascaux are:

- Les Deux Bisons Adossés – Two Crossed Bisons
- La Grande Vache Noire – The Great Black Cow
- Le Panneau de l'Empreinte – The Chamber of Engravings
- L'Abside – The Apse
- La Scène du Puits – The Shaft Scene
- Le Diverticule Axial – The Painted Gallery
- Le Cheval Renversé – Upside Down Horse
- La Salle des Taureaux – The Hall of Bulls

Visitors can examine each painting more closely. Here the panels are accompanied by explanations of how the paintings survived for so long, why the real cave is now closed, and how the artists of 20,000 years ago worked.

These elements use projections to animate the work and give it life, allowing visitors to see the works up close and understand them in a way that is not possible within the cave replica itself. The visitor can move freely inside this space and use their digital companion to message their group or access more details in the form of images, animations and movies, allowing the visitor to explore a topic of interest in depth.

In addition, a model map and interactive activities allow visitors to try various drawing, etching and painting techniques, and can handle replicas of objects found during archaeological excavations of Lascaux.



Le cinéma

Wearing 3D stereoscopic glasses visitors are taken on a digital voyage through the cave. This 3D film takes visitors around the world, immersing them in other painted caves from Australia to Spain, Mongolia to Canada, enabling them to compare Lascaux and these other exceptional sites. The intimate cinema space introduces visitors to a rich film experience that combines two giant, immersive screens. With one vertical screen and one suspended in the ceiling, the 3D tour provides exclusive access to Lascaux's legacy, including the Cabinet of Felines, which cannot be seen anywhere else.



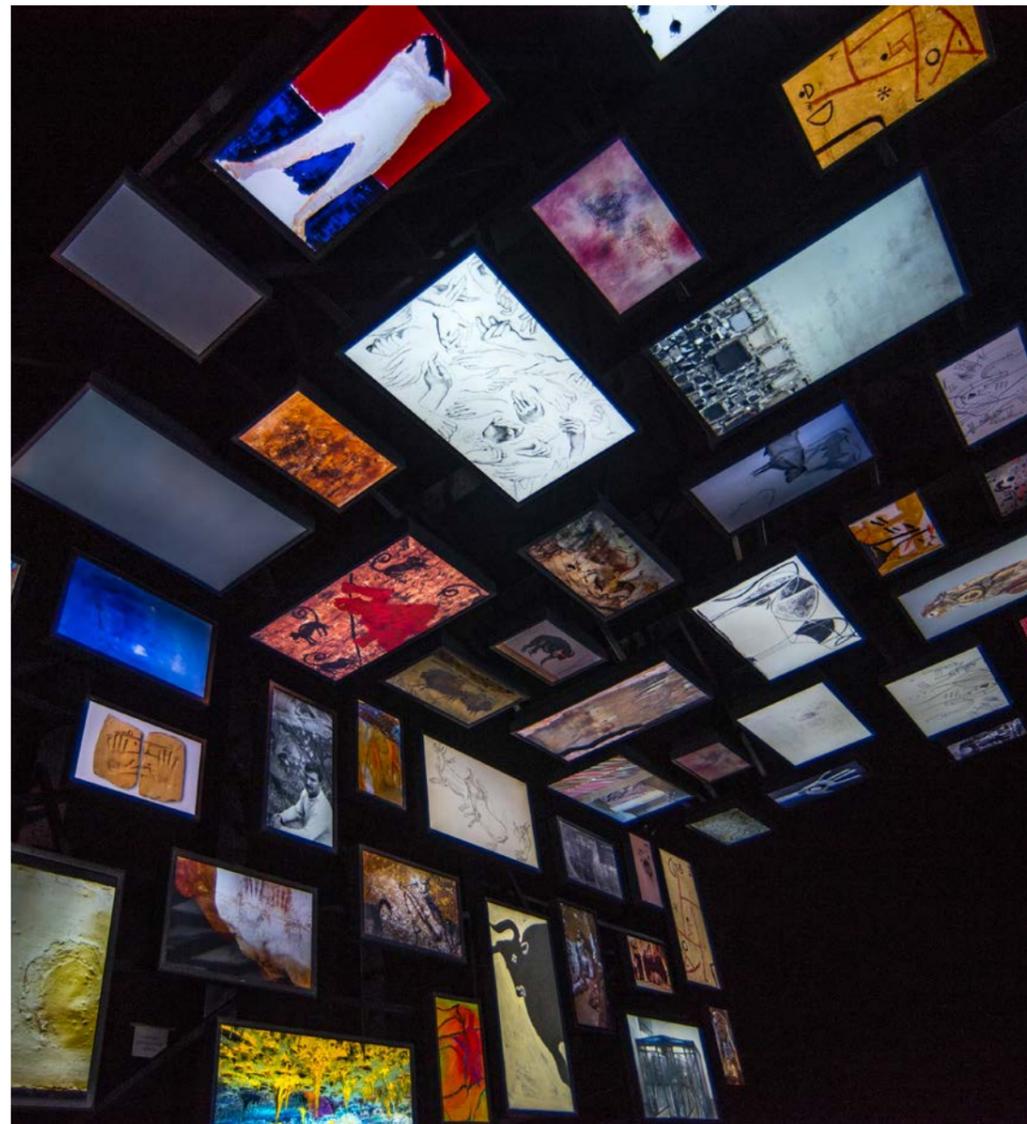
Le théâtre de l'art pariétal

This theatrical zone presents a three-act play using light, sound, movies and objects to give life to the story of Lascaux cave art. Each act takes place in a different space and visitors move from one to the other, discovering: the 'history of prehistory'; the significance of cave art; what today's scientists and archaeologists have found in caves.

La galerie de l'imaginaire

In the Imagination Gallery, visitors are able to explore the influence of prehistoric cave art on modern and contemporary artists in an interactive digital gallery. During their investigations visitors are invited to curate their own exhibition of images from the virtual library and then 'post them' up into the digital cave of contemporary art for all to see on a common public wall.

This content has been curated by John Paul Jouary, professor, philosopher and author, it is devoted to the relationship between Paleolithic art and the art of our time. Jouary's work precisely defines the relationships between the different images, and he has meticulously prepared various thematic guides that visitors can follow on their CdV.





Zone d'orientation

Running through full length of the building, the central orientation zone is illuminated by a fissure of overhead light and evokes an almost sacred and spiritual character. With plenty of daylight and its generous size, the space becomes both an important tool for the flow between the various exhibition spaces, a place to rest between exhibitions as well as a social meeting point where visitors can gather.

Atmospheres and Intensities

The project balances stark differences in atmospheres and intensities of experience throughout, from the enclosed exhibition spaces ensconced in the hill, to the light-filled lobby and transition spaces. In the same way, the juxtaposition between descent and ascent, inside and outside, earth and sky, or nature and art, evoke the analogous experience of the caves. These tensions speak to the enduring impact of the caves and their influence on contemporary culture.

The program of the building is organized with a focus on simplicity and clarity. With a variety of offerings, each zone of the museum is customized to the content communicated in each space.

Weaving together physical and interpretive concepts and spaces, the holistically conceived center unites Paleolithic art with contemporary approaches to spatial and experiential storytelling.





Fact sheet

Location	Montignac, France
Address	Avenue de Lascaux, 24290 Montignac, France
Client	Conseil Général de la Dordogne
Ground surface	11 400 m2
Total floor surface	8 365 m2
Total plot size	53 065 m2
Status	Completed
Project duration	2012 – 2016
Opening date	December 15, 2016
Architect	Snøhetta
Landscape architect	Snøhetta
Interior architect	Snøhetta
Scenography	Casson Mann
Associate architect	SRA Architectes
Associate architect, study phase	Duncan Lewis Scape Architecture
Collaborators	
Virtual reality specialist, study phase	Jangled Nerves
Construction economist	VPEAS
Structural design	Khephren Ingénierie
Fluids, roads and utilities engineering	Alto Ingénierie
Facades and glass design	RFR
Lighting designer	8'18''
Acoustical engineering	Commins dBlab
Management and operating company	Semitour Périgord

Media

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Press kit and photography	snohetta.prezly.com

About the Lascaux Cave Paintings

Located in Montignac, Dordogne, France at the heart of Périgord Noir, the Lascaux Cave, is a masterpiece of cave art. The Vézère Valley in Dordogne, where Montignac lies, is considered the cradle of prehistoric European civilization and the home of many cave painting sites. Following its discovery on September 12, 1940 and subsequent opening to the public in 1948, the Lascaux Cave became a major tourist attraction and a world-renowned prehistoric site. The visitors and exposure to exterior elements later began to degrade the paintings, leading to the permanent closure of the caves to public access in 1963. In 1979, the cave was granted UNESCO World Heritage site status.

In the years that followed the closing of the caves, the preservation of this “Sistine Chapel of prehistory” was made high priority, while two other replicas, Lascaux II and III, provided the public with partial exhibition of the caves. Lascaux II has been seen by more than ten million visitors since its opening in 1983, and an exhibition (Lascaux III) has been touring the world since 2012: Bordeaux, Brussels, Paris, Geneva, Chicago, Houston, Montreal, South Korea and now Japan. In 2010, for the 70th anniversary of the cave discovery, the International Centre for Cave Art project, Lascaux IV, was announced. Lascaux IV was initiated to conserve the integrity of the original cave complex, while ensuring that the public can still appreciate the remarkable Paleolithic paintings within. It is part of a strategy to establish Lascaux and the region as an internationally culturally and scientifically significant attraction in terms of access, understanding and conservation of parietal art.

Initiated by the Département of Dordogne, the European Union, the French State and the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, the International Centre for Cave Art opened on 15 December, 2016 by President Francois Hollande. This new museum houses Lascaux IV, the most recent and extensive replica of the cave paintings. The museum's mission is to develop, promote and educate on the wealth of paintings and carvings adorning the Lascaux Cave.

About Snøhetta

Snøhetta is an internationally operating architecture and brand design firm consisting of architects, landscape architects, interior architects, graphic designers, researchers and artists.

For over 25 years, Snøhetta has designed some of the world's most notable public and cultural projects. Snøhetta kick-started its career in 1989 with the competition-winning entry for the new library of Alexandria, Egypt. This was later followed by the commission for the Norwegian National Opera in Oslo, and the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion at the World Trade Center in New York City, among many others.

Since its inception, the practice has maintained its original trans-disciplinary approach, integrating architectural, landscape and interior design in all of its projects.

Snøhetta is currently working on a number of projects internationally including The French Laundry Kitchen expansion and Garden Renovation in Yountville, California, the Le Monde Headquarters in Paris, the Cornell University Executive Education Center and Hotel in New York, and the design for Norway's new banknotes which will go into circulation in 2017. Recently completed works include the redesign of the public space in Times Square, the Lascaux IV Caves Museum in Montignac, France, and the expansion to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Among its many recognitions, Snøhetta received the World Architecture Award for the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, and the Aga Kahn Prize for Architecture for the Alexandria Library. Since its completion in 2008, the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet has also garnered the Mies van der Rohe European Union Prize for Architecture and the EDRA (Environmental Design Research Association) Great Places Award, as well as the European Prize for Urban Public Space, The International Architecture Award and The Global Award for Sustainable Architecture in 2010. In 2016, Snøhetta was named the Wall Street Journal's Architecture Innovator of the Year.

snohetta.com

About Casson Mann

Founded in 1984, Casson Mann is an experiential design agency, whose mission is to create bespoke, innovative projects for clients across the arts, culture, museums and hospitality.

With a focus on the visitor, Casson Mann's team of exhibition, interior and environmental designers consider form, content and space holistically. From museum exhibitions to restaurant interiors, whatever the theme, the aim is to create richly textured experiences that exceed visitor expectations.

Casson Mann's transformative approach has delivered benchmark galleries for Britain's major cultural institutions, including Victoria and Albert Museum, Science Museum, the Imperial War Museum and the Natural History Museum. In recognition of their pioneering work, founders Dinah Casson and Roger Mann were awarded Royal Designer for Industry in 2005. The studio also work internationally and have completed projects in Philadelphia, Bologna, Miami, Moscow, Bordeaux – and now Montignac.

The Lascaux project continues the studio's commitment to innovative experiential approaches. A voyage of discovery, the greatest challenge was searching for ways to take visitors away from their smartphones, to come off-line and to allow themselves to be washed with the glory and mystery of the cave paintings: in essence, to remember the power of the un-edited, un-filtered experience.

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