

# Welcome To Domaine Félicité

**N**ot a museum, but nonetheless open to the public, overflowing with information about Saint Barth and its heritage by way of the history of one branch of the Magras family. Domaine Félicité opened its doors in November.

*"It is not a museum,"* insist Arlette and Alain Magras. Yet it seems like one. This brother and sister have transformed a large tract of family land in Public into a *"relaxing place that expresses the heritage of Saint Barthélemy."* The site, which comprises 10 thematic elements and a magnificent garden, opened to the public on November 14.

## An Incredible Family Tree

The small green cottage or "case" that dates from the end of the Swedish period in Saint Barth has been renovated and is the first stop on the visit. Inside, the walls and tables are covered with a century of Swedish history in Saint Barthélemy. In fact, Domaine Félicité, the name of this charming property on the main road in Public, once belonged to the Swedish governor Norderling. According to research done by Arlette Magras, he gave the property the name Habitation Félicité, perhaps encouraged to do so by this West Indian wife. Old maps, information, and images from the Swedish era await visitors: for example census data on the number of residents and slaves neighborhood by neighborhood. Or in the case of shoddy maintenance of their vegetable garden, Swedish authorities could dispossess residents...



Same cottage, another room: A genealogical tree equal to that of a royal family traces the members of the large Magras lineage. "We called this room the Salle Deveau. *"He was a big fan of genealogy and worked for the post office in Guadeloupe. His correspondent in Saint-Barth, a Monsieur Gréaux, had asked him to do his genealogical tree. He started, got really interested, and didn't stop,"* notes Alain Magras. His sister Arlette enriched and continued this project over many years. And here is

the result: on an entire section of a wall, one can see several generations of this vast family... *"I wouldn't do it again,"* Arlette, a little tired several weeks after the opening of Domaine Félicité.

In the same room, the roots are various Saint Barth families are deciphered. On a map of metropolitan France, places of origin are marked: Questel from Rouen, Bernier from Vesoul, Blanchard from Lille... as well as a list of last names of families from the



Alain and Arlette Magras in front of their family's genealogical tree.

windward and leeward side of the island who were already in the island during the Swedish era. "There were 75, and about 25 of those remain today," notes Arlette Magras. The first known census dates from 1681. Bernier, Aubin, and Gréaux families already lived on this little rock.

Part of the property is still under construction, and might well feature a small store, which will sell cuttings from local plants.

### Saint Barth Has Its Botanical Garden

In this fabulous garden, the Magras have planted no less than 275 regional species. Palms such as "lataniers," and "amarres créoles," banana trees, pineapple, "côtelettes," wild guava, rosewood, "bois fourmi," star fruit, sugar apples, manioc... Arlette Magras is finalizing the signs that indicate the local name and scientific name for its plant, as well as its family." Here we will add a

small playground," adds Alain Magras, indicating part of the lawn. "And here, you can see the cistern that dates from the Swedish era, which still functions. Over there are some ruins, which we imagine could have been a kitchen, since you can still see the oven..." A place filled with history, yet given a new life with the presence of all these plants, which are in great shape thanks to all the recent rain.

### A Look At Henriette and Zulma By Their Descendants

Another exhibit in another little house, dedicated to a forebear of Arlette and Alain Magras: Henriette Malespine, a very pious schoolteacher who left the public school to become the first teacher at the Catholic School in Colombier, which was created by Father De Bruyn in 1926. On the wall, the photos of first classes that graduated from 1926 to 1931. In another room, old timers will recognize old stoves from the past, in

a kitchen fitted with a "fouilleux" or three rocks with a baking rack, and a propane refrigerator...

Next is the captain's cabin, a room dedicated to the many vessels that plied the waters of Saint Barth, from the sea to salt ponds, for the pleasure of kids or for commerce, getting to school on another island... Another display illustrates traditional professionals, notably fishing and straw work. Another room focuses on Zulma Adolphe Lédée, first in a line of merchants who opened the "Bazaar vide-poche" circa 1890. This small boutique was the ancestor of CCPF and ALMA, among others... Arlette has gathered inventories from that era, the oldest of which dates from 1923, and gives an interesting insight into the products purchased—and available—in Saint such a long time ago. In the next room, she reconstituted, with what she could find, a pharmacy with the kinds of products that were in vogue not all that long ago including "L'Emplâtre de la main de Dieu" (Plaster from the hand of god), an old remedy.

Why spend "a fortune," asks Alain Magras, in the creation of this space, which required at least two years of work, rather than build a few rental houses or a project that would have been more profitable? The modest answer of the Magras siblings: "Let's just say we are very attached to the history of Saint Barthélemy."

**Open Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday: 3pm-6pm, or by appointment**  
**Entry: 5 Euros**