

Campari drinks family embroiled in row over sale of 'Louvre of botany'

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The Times



The Villa Les Cèdres in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the French Riviera was built in 1830
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Plant lovers are looking for a green-fingered billionaire to save what has been called the world's finest private botanical garden, which they believe will be in danger of destruction when the most expensive house in the world is sold.

The garden, nicknamed the Louvre of botany, is attached to the Villa Les Cèdres, a 14-bedroom mansion in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat on the French Riviera, that is up for sale for €350 million. It is thought to be the highest ever asking price for a residential property.



The exotic gardens were developed by the creator of Grand Marnier, Alexandre Marnier-Lapostolle. The Fous de Palmiers (Mad About Palm Trees), the French branch of the International Palm Society, is concerned that the 35-acre garden, which contains 14,000 species and sub-species of plants, will be sold to a hotel chain that will cover it in tennis courts. "It is the most beautiful private botanical garden in Europe and in my opinion the world, and do we want this global heritage to be lost?" Etienne Trentesaux, deputy chairman of the Fous de Palmiers, asked.

His association is calling for a "true plant lover" to buy the property and to save the garden, which also has 2.5 acres of greenhouses. They hope the media attention will make it difficult for the future owner to dig it up.

The mansion was built in 1830 but the garden, also known as the Domaine des Cèdres, was developed in the 20th century by Alexandre Marnier-Lapostolle, the creator of Grand Marnier liqueur, and Julien, his son, who was passionately interested in botany. Franklin Picard, the publisher of *Un Jardin Botanique D'exception*, a 300-page book on the Domaine des Cèdres, told *Le Figaro*: "It's a real treasure."

In 2016 the Marnier-Lapostolle family sold Grand Marnier to the Italian Campari group, maker of the aperitif. The mansion and garden were included in the deal but Campari immediately put them on the market again. *Le Figaro* said the Italians

would get €80 million when the property was sold with the rest going to Grand

Marnier's
shareholders.



The 35-acre garden contains 14,000 species and sub-species of plants MARLENE AWAAD/ BLOOMBERG/GETTY

The Fous de Palmiers, whose members used to visit the Domaine des Cèdres twice a year until Campari took it over and closed it to the public, said the garden cost hundreds of thousands of euros a year to maintain and needed 20 gardeners.



The 14-bedroom mansion is up for sale for €350 million MARLENE AWAAD/ BLOOMBERG/GETTY

"At €350 million the new owner might nourish the desire to make the property profitable by turning it into a hotel or a luxury restaurant . . . we fear that could modify or destroy the botanical garden," Mr Trentesaux said.