

○ Joëlle DARRICAU: CULTURAL INTUITION

Joëlle Darricau, current owner of the site, was doubtless the first to envisage the contemporary cultural role of the Isturitz site today. Her close relationship with the site began in childhood, and over time she became familiar with:

- the potential of the caves for adventure and play
- prehistory and the research activities she witnessed growing up and which fed her scientific, artistic and personal interest in the site.

This intuition also arose from her family's longstanding interest in the site's cultural value going as far back as the early 20th century:

- Her great-grandfather, Doctor Laugier, blocked industrial exploitation of the site and allowed the first archaeological digs.
- In 1953, her grandfather, A. Darricau, won official recognition of the caves as historic monuments.
- Artistic intuition arising from the talent and culture of her mother, Elisabeth Lereboure – talented pianist and winner of first prize from the Barcelona Conservatory – and a family environment where great importance was placed on art and culture.

In 1982, Ms Darricau inherited this rich heritage site from her father and the associated burden of responsibility. Since then, she has dedicated her intuition, knowledge and artistic sensibilities to increasing recognition of the site's cultural value.

From a scientific and cultural perspective, she forged a close working relationship with the regional archaeological service in the 1990s to continue excavation of the site. It was thanks to her efforts that all of Gaztelu Hill was classified as a historical monument in 1996 to ensure its protection. She has supported the efforts of archaeologists and played a direct role in funding a number of research programmes. She campaigned for exhibits in the Basque Country of the Isturitz collections of the National Archaeology Museum in St-Germain-en-Laye. She has promoted implementation at the site of artistic, educational and cultural projects emphasising the close relationship between the contemporary arts and science.

As leader of one of the Basque Country's most prestigious tourism businesses, Ms Darricau is aware of her role and responsibilities in overseeing management of the Isturitz site, and she has advocated promotion of responsible and unified cultural tourism activities that bring people together and preserve the environment. In this regard she has worked closely with the tourism board and the departmental tourism committee, local communities, the Atlantic Pyrenees General Council, the DRAC (regional cultural affairs directorate) of Aquitaine, the regional council, the Basque Cultural Institute and numerous tourism and cultural organisations throughout the Basque Country.

Joëlle Darricau is respected and appreciated by the scientific and cultural communities alongside which she works for her commitment to protecting the site and dedication to making it a living cultural site that pays tribute to the past while also looking forward to the future.

The Isturitz site continues to thrive thanks to her efforts.