

## HISTORY OF THE CHÂTEAU

It was in the very early years of the 13th century. Bernard de Casnac, the powerful lord of Castelnaud, had become a fervent supporter of the dualist religious beliefs practised by the Cathars, also known as the Albigensians. In 1214, the castle was seized by Simon de Montfort, a northern baron sent down to crush the Cathar “heretics”. Bernard de Casnac recaptured it the following year, but it was finally burned down a few months later by order of the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The pattern was set! As the 13th century progressed, the fortress was rebuilt - its only remaining traces today being the square keep and the courtine or “curtain wall” (the area between two bastions).

Once again, it was one of the principal power-centres in the Périgord region and was rivalled by its pet hate, the Château de Beynac (though the two neighbouring stone monsters never went head-to-head directly).

In 1337, the Hundred Years War broke out. Through Magne de Castelnaud’s marriage with Nompar de Caumont, the castle then belonged to the Caumont family, who supported the English - whereas the Barons of Beynac were loyal to the French. In little more than a century, the Château de Castelnaud was handed over no fewer than eleven times. Finally, in 1442, the French captured it permanently after a three-week siege ordered by France’s King Charles VII.

With the end of the Hundred Years War, the Caumont family took back the château and reconstructed it. But the imperatives of defence were still paramount. The lower bailey was protected by two semi-circular towers pierced with cannon ports. A drawbridge and a new barbican were built. At the same time, a large new main building (principally for the living quarters) was erected alongside the keep. Castelnaud remained the power-centre of its lordly owners, as exemplified and reinforced by the mighty artillery tower built in 1520.

The Caumonts became Protestants. Captain Geoffroy de Vivian’s, born at Castelnaud, defended it during France’s bitter Wars of Religion (1562-98) and fought ferociously against the Catholics. He was so feared throughout the whole region that no one dared to attack Castelnaud in all that time. However, while the Caumont family still had possession of the château, they no longer lived there, finding it too uncomfortable.

After the French Revolution of 1789, the neglected site was rapidly overgrown and the château soon became a stone quarry. In 1832, when the river traffic and the emancipation of the village of Castelnaud necessitated the construction of a slipway for its riverside port, the builders found no need to hew fresh blocks of stone. It was easier to take some from the southern part of the castle and send them tumbling down the slope... straight to the worksite!

In 1966, the château was listed as a Historic Building at the request of its new owners, Philippe and Véronique Rossillon. Today, it is owned by their son, Kléber Rossillon.

➔ Make your way towards the round tower, the Artillery Tower, and enter through the postern gate.

## THE ARTILLERY TOWER

The postern is a little door, often hidden, opposite the main entrance. During sieges, it was used as an exit for mounting counter-attacks.



The first firearms were perfected at the beginning of the 14th century. The gunpowder used was a mixture of saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur. During the 16th century, a tower was added to the existing fortifications to counter artillery fire and position the defenders’ own cannons. Here, the walls are five metres thick. The tower was round so as to do away with dead angles.

### Ground-floor

👁️ A small cannon called a **falconet**, forged in the early 16th century, is installed in the firing chamber.

Off the staircase leading to the second floor is the **armoury**. On the opposite side from which attacks could be expected, it was designed to ensure that the tower was not endangered if there was an explosion.

### Second floor

👁️ Three pieces of artillery occupy the cannon ports. The one on the right is a **hackbut** (ancestor of the harquebus). The other two pieces are known as **veuglaire cannons**, with a rapid-loading breech particularly suited for defence purposes.

The dome-vaulted ceilings of the three gun floors in this tower are pierced in the centre by a square trap, through which munitions and gun-pieces could be raised or lowered without difficulty.

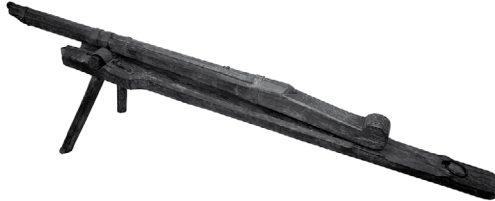
In the 15th century, technical innovations came thick and fast! Whereas some artillery pieces were an assemblage of cast-iron bars, at the end of the 15th century the use of bronze for the manufacture of cannons became widespread. The metal was cast in a mould to improve its strength and make it more airtight. The cannons were also mounted on wheeled gun-carriages to improve their mobility.

## THE ARTILLERY TOWER

### Third floor

Typical of this “modern” artillery were such pieces as the veuglaire cannons, culverins, and organs (spraying their projectiles from as many as 12 gun barrels).

👁️ Displayed in the centre of the room is a **culverin**.



👁️ In the niche on your right is a **veuglaire cannon**, which could be loaded easily through the breech thanks to detachable combustion chamber.

👁️ One showcase displays **harquebuses**. These lighter weapons could be carried by one man, who had much more independence than before thanks to the new firing system.

👁️ A remarkable specimen of cannon in the showcase to the right of the window is a German **alarm cannon**, in bronze, with an inscription engraved on its bore in Gothic script:

My name is Völlin van Esentür  
I eat powder and I spit fire



👁️ Near the bay is a 16th-century **organ with 12 gun barrels**. This engine could sweep a large sector of the battlefield with lead balls.

➔ On leaving the artillery tower, a staircase takes you up to the level of the former main living quarters, today an open area.

### Terrace

👁️ This giant post mounted crossbow is a defensive weapon which could fire its bolts up to 200 metres - missiles capable of piercing three men and a horse before lodging in a door.

From the panoramic views over the Dordogne and Céou valleys, you can readily understand the site’s strategic importance.

## THE PAINTINGS ROOMS

In the 11th and 12th centuries, combatants wore a mail shirt, which protected them very effectively from sword slashes and arrows.

👁️ In a showcase, one chain mail is hung on a wooden “T”. Above it is a hood or collar of mail, for protecting the head.



Around 1250, with more general use of shock weapons such as flails or morning stars and maces, together with the perfection of crossbows, the knights wore sheets of reinforced metal called “**plates**”.

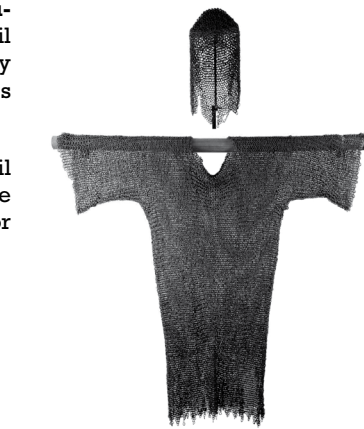
**Full suits of armour** appeared at the end of the 14th century.

👁️ A full suit of armour from the 16th century is exhibited in a display case. The flutings that characterise it are of what’s called Maximilian craftsmanship, named after Emperor Maximilian (1459-1519) who provided an impetus to the German armour-making industry.

👁️ An equestrian scene presents the gear worn by the horseman and his mount. The plated armour completely protected him from blows while several pieces of armour called “barding” covered the horse’s vital parts.

The wall paintings created in this room in 2016 present the series of the “Nine Worthies”. This equestrian formation comprises three triads of heroes known for their military exploits. From the back right towards the left, the Pagans: Hector, Alexander the Great and Caesar; then the Jews: Joshua, David and Judas Maccabaeus; and to the right, the Christians: Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon. This decor characteristic of the 15th century was highly prized by the nobility who wanted to identify themselves with these knightly ideals. according to the distemper technique (paint made of natural pigments mixed with casein and applied to a dry primer), the range of colours faithfully recreates those of the period.

➔ Take the little wooden staircase in the direction of the crossbow room.



## LOWER CHAMBER OF THE KEEP

This room houses an exceptional collection of powerful and precise crossbows used in battle and for hunting.

👁️ The crossbows with composite bow were armed with a spanning belt with spanning hook (see the crayfish-shaped crossbow in the arrowslit on the left).

The bow was made by assembling bovid horns, wood and tendons. It was later replaced by the steel bow.

👁️ The crossbow with goat’s foot lever appears next (showcase to the right of the entrance). It was used by the cavalry.



👁️ The crossbow became so powerful that a winch, called windlass, was used (arrowslit on the left). This slow and cumbersome system was operated by the infantrymen for the defence or the siege of a fortress.

👁️ The cranequin crossbow is equipped with a mechanism just as efficient as the windlass but much more rapid and less cumbersome (double showcase). In the army, the personal horse guard to François I was the last to use this system.

👁️ The pellet crossbows (big showcase in the niche) were light and used for hunting small game, rabbits or fowl. The pellet was a small round projectile made of terracotta or lead.

Whatever their design, missile-throwing weapons played an important part in the battles of the Middle Ages.

Derived from the bow used by ordinary archers, the crossbow had two distinct advantages: its **power**, enabling it to be fired over longer distances, and its **accuracy**. Because the bowstring was held in a slot, the user could spend more time over taking aim, without having to exert extra energy, thus improving his chances of being on target.

The weapon, however, did take longer to reload: a crossbowman could fire two bolts a minute, whereas an archer could unleash ten or more arrows.

➔ Leave the room by the narrow staircase to the left, which leads to the keep’s upper chamber.

## UPPER CHAMBER OF THE KEEP

👁️ A collection of 14th and 15th century furniture is presented in this room of the keep.

In the Middle Ages, furniture was very limited and followed the lords on their journeys.

Each time the lord of Castelnaud moved to another residence, his tapestries, fabrics, plates and dishes went with him... hence the need for items of furniture to hold them.

👁️ The collection shown here comprises a small walnut **chest** for clothing, a **trunk**, a **bench chest**, a **throne chest** and a **folding stool with arm-rests**.



Originally, the upper chamber was the château’s **command centre**, giving access to the strategic defensive positions:

👁️ the **wooden hoardings gallery** is accessible. In the 13th century, its floor had trap doors through which the defenders could protect the foot of the keep wall by dropping projectiles on the assailants below. Later, this was replaced by a line of more robust **machicolations** (in stone), around the top of the keep. The hoardings gallery was reconstructed as part of the restoration work on the château.

👁️ the **parapet walk**, at the top of the “curtain wall”, enabled the archers and crossbowmen to control the lower and upper baileys below. From this walkway one can see the successive lines of defence (lower wall, barbican, curtain wall) from which besiegers’ incursions could be resisted in depth.

➔ To continue your visit, follow the parapet walk to get to the main living quarters.

On the way, you will pass a “bricole”, a kind of large sling that hurled stone projectiles in defence of the castle. This stretch gives you a magnificent view over the Dordogne valley: on the right is La Roque-Gageac; on the left Beynac and in front of you the Château de Marqueyssac, listed for its historic high-up gardens formed by 22 hectares of trimmed box hedges.



Thank you for your visit!

As you leave, may we recommend a visit to the  
**CHÂTEAU'S BOOK SHOP:**  
open all year-round.



The shop offers specialized books, models of siege engines, reproductions of tapestries, replicas of medieval jewelry and glassware, pens, inks and calamus (reed-pen) to begin learning the art of calligraphy, and many other original souvenirs.




**THE TAVERN:**  
open in season



**The tavern** serves light snacks and refreshments. Its green arbours are an ideal spot for taking a brief break while enjoying the view of the valley.


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## PROJECTILE LAUNCHERS

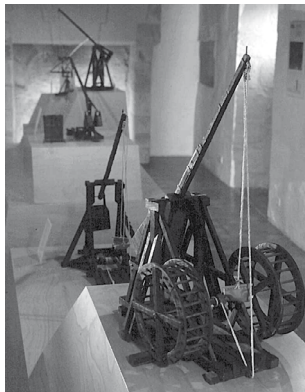
 Displayed in this room is a replica of an arrow-launching trebuchet, in 1/10 scale. Reconstructed from plans drawn up by a 13th-century military engineer, **Villard de Honnecourt**, it was designed to throw its projectiles from as large as a beam. However, because of the machine's proposed size (30 metres tall!), combined with its limited effectiveness, it is thought that one was never actually built.


➔ **The next room** displays **models of war machines**, 1/10 scale.


The “**perrière**” (or “perrier”) worked on the sling principle, with men pulling on ropes to bend back its arm and then fire off stones.

To improve performances, medieval engineers invented more powerful machines which could be operated by mechanical means, such as the **wheeled mangonel**, the **trebuchet** and the “**couillard**” (which had twin mobile counterweights).

Because all these early forms of artillery were made of wood, none of them have survived today. The only sources enabling us to reproduce them have been account books, miniatures, and compilations of the drawings and treatises of such military engineers as **Villard de Honnecourt** and **Konrad Kyeser**.




 Displayed in the window niche are 1/20 scale models of war machines used in ancient times: the **catapult**, the **belfry** (a movable tower for attacking fortifications) and the **battering ram**.


 Copies of Konrad Kyeser's designs can be seen alongside the stairs.

## THE WEAPONS ROOM

### Cut-and-Thrust



The **dagger** was worn in the belts of foot soldiers. It was the ideal weapon for men who wanted to kill someone by surprise. Archers were also equipped with daggers; once they had fired their arrows, they could then finish off the men they'd brought to the ground.  
 Daggers in the wall showcase.

The **sword** was the key item of medieval weaponry. Its blade was designed to cut, pierce and parry. Most of the swords in the Middle Ages had large, straight, double-edged blades, with a cruciform guard and a pommel, preventing the hand from slipping from the hilt, which served as a counterweight.  
 Swords from the 14th and 15th centuries.

### Shock weapons

The **flail**, **poleaxe**, **hammer** and **mace** were weapons that relied as much on their weight as on their cutting edges or spikes.




### Staff weapons

These arms were wielded by foot soldiers who, when in close formation, had no great fear of cavalry charges. Their blades, in various forms, were fitted on fairly long wooden shafts. Each was named according to its shape or function.

 **Vouge**, **bill**, **bardiche**, **halberd**, **gisarme**...

On their right, a **large selection of agricultural tools** recalls how staff weapons originated. Before being developed and adapted as arms to meet specific requirements, tools were certainly the first weapons used by man.


 To the right of these tools, some pieces of tournament equipment are presented together. The harness plate armour, of which the skirt protected the lower part of the body, was worn for foot jousts. The helmet, called a “frog-mouthed jousting helm” was used for a type of German joust known as “Gestech”, which consisted of breaking the lances on the adversary or unhorsing him. Last, a rather amazing piece can also be seen. It is a crest that ornamented the helmet and was worn by the participants in order to be recognized during the tournaments.



➔ **Other rooms to visit**  
**as you go downstairs...**

## END OF INDOOR VISIT

### The central showcase room

 The first showcase displays **swords** and **daggers**. The second holds **shock weapons**. These include spear-heads, as well as and caltrops which were spiked devices dug into the ground to lame horses' hooves and enemy soldiers' feet.

### Model of the 1442 siege

A reconstitution of the preparations for the attack in **October 1442**, when the **French**, by order of King Charles VII, **besieged the English-held Château de Castelnaud**. After three weeks, the English captain surrendered, in return for having his life spared and a financial “sweetener” of 400 gold crowns.

➔ **Continue downstairs to the ground floor**  
**and enter the diaporama room.**

### The diaporama

This room, close to the kitchen, was probably used as a cellar. It now offers a documentary showing how military architecture evolved.



### The kitchen

The paving and ribbed vaulting of its roof have been restored from original fragments found on the site. A large fireplace, adjoined by a small bread oven, has also been installed. An ancient wall cupboard holds two 16th-century buckets, which formerly served the well in the upper bailey.

On leaving the kitchen, you pass through this **upper bailey**, the inner courtyard sheltering the **well**, which played a crucial role in the life of the château. Fed by ground water, it is 46 metres deep. It is protected by the surrounding curtain wall, 15 metres high and topped by a parapet walk for defence purposes.

### The barbican

After the main door, a wooden stairway crosses a **ditch** and leads to the **barbican**. This small tower protected the entrance into the castle. Its walls were pierced by several **cannon ports** and a **break-back trap**, a rectangular hole in the roof, through which the defenders could drop projectiles on the heads of any attackers who got through the gate.

## OUTSIDE / THE LOWER BAILEY

This **lower bailey** lies between the outer wall, separating the château from the village, and the curtain wall protecting the keep. In the Middle Ages, it sheltered the forge, the oven, the stables, and sometimes the stalls of such craftsmen as weavers and potters. In case of attack, it also served as a refuge for the villagers.

➔ **You can now climb up to the top of the bastion**  
**and see its series of full-size war machines.**

### The bombarde

Firing this early version of a cannon was a very delicate matter. Before reloading it, the gunners had to wait for it to cool down. As a result, its best rate of fire was only once an hour. Meanwhile, the attackers protected themselves behind **wooden mantles** - large shields, on wheels, which had triangular apertures through which the soldiers could keep look-out and fire crossbows.

### The perrière

Like the “bricole”, the perrière was a machine fired by men pulling on ropes. Although the least powerful of war engines, they are the oldest. Regarded mainly as defensive weapons, they were very effective against cavalry charges. Reconstructions have shown that a 1 kg stone ball hit its target at 90 mph.

### The mangonel

Invented towards the end of the 12th century, this machine had a fixed counterweight totalling several tons. It needed a great deal of muscle-power to pull down the mast, because the engineers had not yet grasped the advantages of articulated weight (as appeared later with the trebuchets).

### The trebuchet

This version of medieval “artillery” fired by a counterweight was the most powerful machine of its time and remained in use up to the 16th century. Despite its low rate of fire - only one or two per hour - it was regarded with such fear that its mere arrival on a siege site was often enough for the defenders to surrender. The stone balls displayed here are replicas. Sometimes with iron bands wrapped round them, the original missiles could weigh more than 100 kilos.



Walking down, you can see the enclosed **medieval garden**. Laid out in geometric form, it served practical purposes above all; the plants grown were essentially for medicinal, tinctorial and culinary use.

  
Château de  
**Castelnaud**  
MUSÉE DE LA GUERRE AU MOYEN ÂGE

