

# FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

35+ YEARS of FRENCH PROPERTY ADVICE

ISSUE 399  
MAY/JUNE 2026

## HEALTHIER THAN EVER!

"Moving to France has made us much fitter and happier"

## WHAT'S IT WORTH?

How property valuations are calculated in France



What you should know before you buy a house with a swimming pool in France

### EXPERT ADVICE

Buying guide: Hérault

UK pensions and France

The role of the agent and notaire

French healthcare and the S1 form

Architecture styles: Neoclassical

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€85,000

Aveyron



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Dordogne



€1.4m

Loire

£5.95



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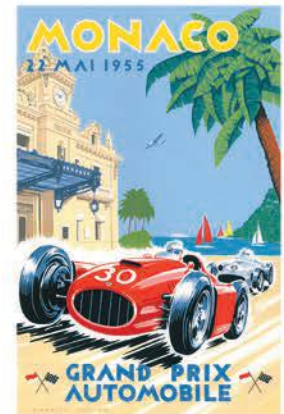
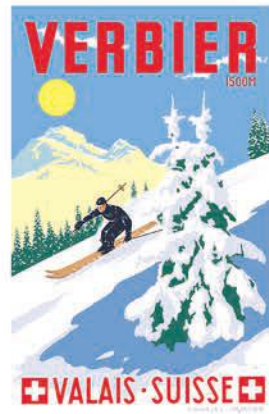
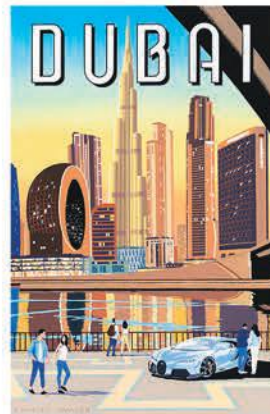
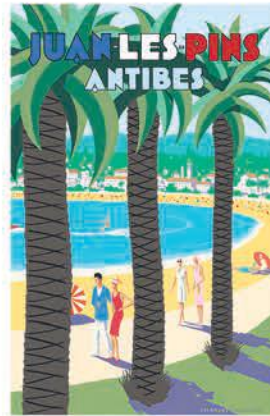
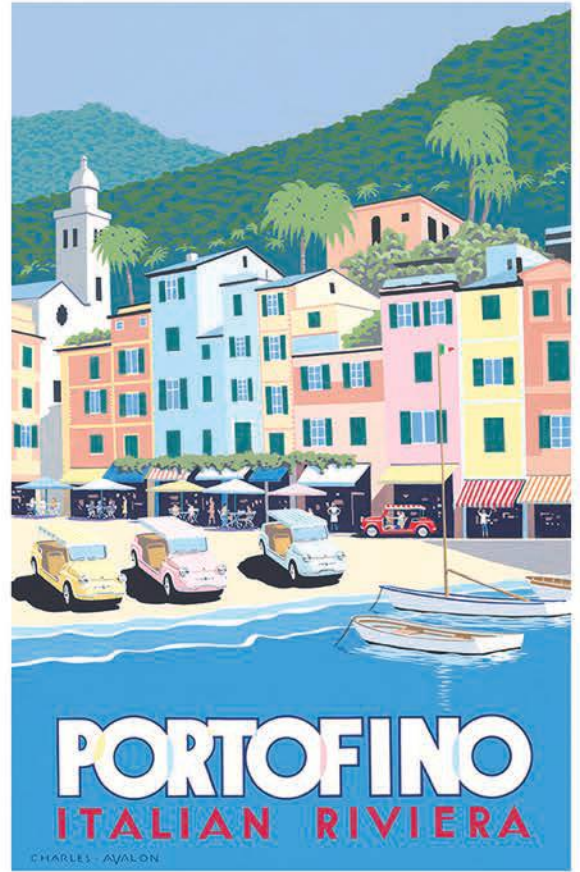
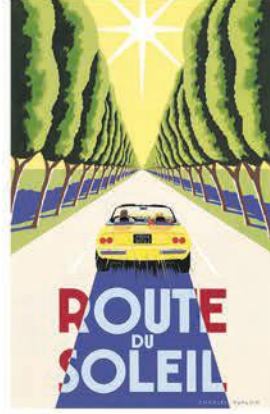
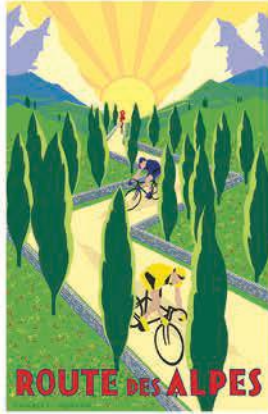
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# THOUGHTS FROM THE PIGEONNIER

## 3 THINGS I'VE LEARNT THIS ISSUE

### P10

The number one town for the best quality of life in France is Biarritz on the Atlantic coast

### P58

In addition to asking an estate agent in France for a property valuation, you can instruct a qualified property valuation expert

### P88

From 2023 to 2024, the French government allocated €12m to support the creation of shops and commercial ventures in isolated rural areas

This issue's *Intrepid chatelaine* column got me thinking. Writing about a new trend for more intimate weddings at the château, owner Erin wonders if people are seeking the “slow elegance of old-world style that our fast-paced world is missing... the time to slow down, disconnect and enjoy one another’s company and luxuriate in the slow-living of a long summer afternoon in France”. She may have been talking about couples planning their big day, but I think the same could be said for the motivation behind many people’s search for a home in France, whether for holidays or a complete life change. I’d love to hear if this rings true with you, and the reasons for your own French property dreams. On the subject of *FPN* columns and escaping to sleepy rural France, I’m sad to report that our chutney-making mod, reluctant animal carer and correspondent from the Loire, Ian Moore, has penned his last column this issue. I’m sure it won’t be the last we hear from him though – and of course, we’ll still be able to access his wit via his novels. Finally, I must mention our French Property Exhibition in Birmingham in May – we hope to see you there and hear all about your French plans. *À bientôt!*

Karen



## EDITOR'S PICK

### Detached character home in Charente

I never fail to be impressed by what great value for money househunters can find in France. Take this lovely stone house with large garden and workshop, for example. On the market for just €165,850, it has three bedrooms, lots of character and has been fully renovated – no work to do, just enjoy your new home and local area. It's in a village just a five-minute drive from the pretty market town of Chef-Boutonne, which has a range of shops and amenities, including a lake, park and outdoor pool. [immo3c.fr](http://immo3c.fr)



Don't miss the French Property Exhibition in Birmingham in May - see the back page for details

## Contributing this issue...



Page 90

### Arthur Cutler

Navigate France partner Arthur Cutler has 30 years' experience of French administration and advises on all aspects of relocating to France.



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### Nicola Venning

Nicola is a freelance journalist specialising in residential property. She is a regular contributor to the Daily Telegraph and Daily Mail.



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### Joanna Leggett

Marketing director at Leggett Immobilier, Joanna is a French property and relocation expert who regularly appears on TV.



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### Robert Kent

Robert is the founder and CEO of Kentingtons, specialising in French tax and investments, guiding movers to France for over 25 years.



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### Julia French

Julia lives in southwest France where she runs a swimming pool company, designing, building and renovating over 150 pools to date.



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### Tracy Leonetti

An experienced relocation expert with over 30 years of living and working in France, Tracy is the founder of LBS specialising in French administration.



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### Paddy Gibbons

Managing director of Artaxa Immo, Paddy has 20 years' experience leading agents selling properties across Hérault, Aude and Pyrénées-Orientales.



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### Mar Bonnin-Palmer

Head of partnerships at Moneycorp, Mar has been in foreign exchange for over 15 years helping clients with their currency needs abroad.

# FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

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**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Fabulous Farmhouse**

**Manche** €259,700  
Ref: A39887 - 4-bedroom renovated farmhouse with large garden.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: E Climate class: B



**Wow Factor**

**Calvados** €1,275,000  
Ref: A37953 - Château, guesthouse, outbuildings and listed heritage park.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: E Climate class: E



**Business Potential**

**Gard** €1,500,000  
Ref: A32183 - 17-bedroom provençal mas with 6 apartments and land.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: D Climate class: C



**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Renovation Project**

**Indre** €71,600  
Ref: A42935 - 1-bedroom house with garden, well and old stables.  
*10% agency fees included paid by the buyer.*  
Energy class: G Climate class: C



**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Southern Charm**

**Alpes-de-Hte-Provence** €385,000  
Ref: A43513 - Modern 4-bedroom home with garden and amazing views.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: C Climate class: A



**Sitting Pretty**

**Dordogne** €356,000  
Ref: A41493 - Large 4-bedroom home with pool, garden and garages.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: C Climate class: C



**Great Value**

**Haute-Vienne** €119,900  
Ref: A38125 - A lovely 3-bedroom detached house with garden.  
*9% agency fees included paid by the buyer.*  
Energy class: F Climate class: F



**Timber-framed Cottage**

**Orne** €235,000  
Ref: A39530 - Charming 5-bedroom cottage with garden and a gîte.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: G Climate class: C



**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Lovely Longère**

**Cher** €339,995  
Ref: A38524 - Magnificent 6-bedroom longère in an elevated position.  
*6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.*  
Energy class: C Climate class: B




**Rental Income**

**Lot** €395,000  
Ref: A42791 - 4-bedroom restored maison de maître with two gîtes.  
*6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.*  
Energy class: D Climate class: D



**Château Chic**

**Dordogne** €577,000  
Ref: A06420 - 15th century 5-bedroom house with beautiful formal gardens.  
*6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.*  
Energy class: D Climate class: D



**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Location Location Location**

**Alpes-Maritimes** €420,000  
Ref: A41323 - Antibes. 47m<sup>2</sup> apartment with sea view, terrace and pool access.  
*Agency fees to be paid by the seller.*  
Energy class: C Climate class: A

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Sophie Lebarcq - Leggett Agent

**30**  
YEARS  
of French  
property  
advice

# FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

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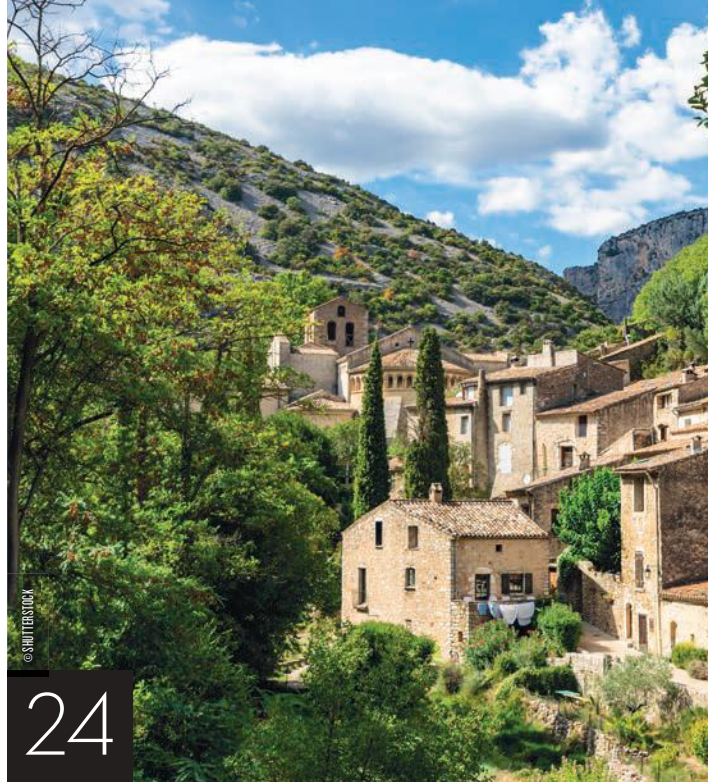
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A stunning home and business in southwest France – see page 16

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# Tête à tête

This month's pick of letters and social media



**Karen's Friday bargain:** "Be still my beating heart... could this gorgeous four-bedroom stone house in Charente really be mine - or yours - for just €94,600?! Some work is needed, yes, but there's so much potential - it could make a larger family home or two separate dwellings (there are two kitchens), perhaps one to live in and one to rent out? There's lots of character, lots of space inside and out, and lots of outbuildings to create whatever you wish - art studio, gîtes, games room, workshop... what would you do with it?"

Karen Tait, FPN Editor

**Gary Michael Boichat:**  
Wonderful!



An opportunity to co-own this luxury three-bedroom apartment on the prestigious St-Germain Boulevard in the 7th arrondissement of Paris. One share - €698,681.

**Eva Widajewicz:**  
🔥🔥🔥🔥

## GET IN TOUCH!

Tell us what you love about France and what owning a French property means to you, on our social media or email: [karen.tait@francemedia.com](mailto:karen.tait@francemedia.com)

## WONDERFUL WOODY!

**F**rench Property News is a fabulous magazine covering many insightful articles. This month (FPN397), I particularly enjoyed Ruth Wood's column. As well as giving a tour through the current internet dating terms, I laughed at her comment about paying for a French mobile phone number only to receive calls

from scammers. A few years ago we ventured onto the Free Mobile network to arrange appointments whilst visiting our holiday home and to obtain a card for our local *déchèterie*. We can almost set our watches to the regular timings of the spam calls. I'm looking forward to reading more delights in *French Property News*.

**Liz Sawyer**



The view from Liz's seaside apartment in Languedoc

## STILL GOING STRONG

**W**hat a lovely surprise to see not only Freddy Rueda featured in this month's magazine (FPN398) but also Ian Morris! We viewed properties with Freddy - and then used the services of surveyor Ian when we eventually purchased our French property back in 2003. We never actually met Ian as we had busy lives in the UK at that time but he offered a very good and thoroughly professional service, good to see he's still around, and Freddy too!

**Name withheld**

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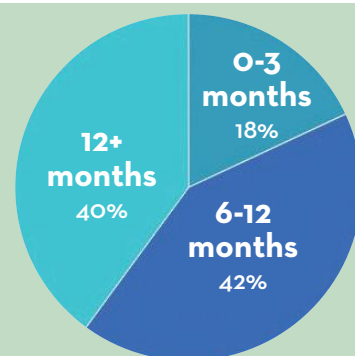
"Set in the charming hilltop village of Pierrerue in Hérault, this two-bedroom character property enjoys a peaceful setting surrounded by rolling vineyards, but just a short drive or scenic walk to the town of St-Chinian. On the market for €195,000."



## WE ASKED YOU...

"What is your timeframe for buying in France?"

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# Beaux Villages

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**DEUX-SEVRES** €318,000 HAI  
**BVI82599** A collection of properties partly restored with huge potential  
 Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €300,000



**CHARENTE** €375,000 HAI  
**BVI84782** 6-bed, 3-bath village property full of character with garden  
 Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €353,774



**DORDOGNE** €330,750 HAI  
**BVI83865** 2-bed property with 4.4Ha and a lake near a market town  
 Fees: 5% paid by the buyer Net price: €315,000



**HAUTE-VIENNE** €220,000 HAI  
**BVI84302** 3-bed, 2-bath village house - lovely garden and barn  
 Fees: 7% paid by the buyer Net €205,608



**LOT-ET-GARONNE** €436,000  
**BVI74708** 3-bed house, a studio annex plus pool and open barn  
 Fees: Paid by the vendor



**INDRE** €399,500 HAI  
**BVI66284** Impressive 4-bed, 4-bath small-holding with pool and barns  
 Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €376,887



**CHARENTE** €295,000 HAI  
**BVI79755** Flexible living - 5-bed family home including a granny flat  
 Fees: 7% paid by the buyer Net price: €275,701



**TARN** €375,000 HAI  
**BVI84815** Open-plan farmhouse, with covered terrace and garden  
 Fees: 5% paid by the buyer Net price: €357,143



**DORDOGNE** €636,000 HAI  
**BVI79263** 4-bed house plus 1-bed flat, pool, huge barn and 10Ha  
 Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €600,000



**GERs** €1,590,000  
**BVI83043** Handsome 6-bed manoir set in 1.4Ha with pool near Lectour  
 Fees: Paid by the vendor



**DORDOGNE** €875,000  
**BVI84460** Superb 6-bed contemporary home with pool and rural views  
 Fees: Paid by the vendor



**CHARENTE-MARITIME** €535,000 HAI  
**BVI81994** 4-bed main house, 4-bed gîte, pool and gardens near Cognac  
 Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €504,717

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# AU COURANT

Keeping you up to date with the French property market, news, travel and events

## WHERE TO LIVE: FOR A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE

The latest ranking of the *Villes et Villages où il fait bon vivre - Palmarès 2026* (towns and villages where life is good) includes 37 towns and 66 villages for the first time, while dozens of locations have climbed over 50 places, including Concarneau in Brittany, Besançon in the southern Alps, Fréjus, Orange and Salon-de-Provence in Provence, St-Raphaël and Mandelieu-la-Napoule on the Riviera, and Ajaccio in Corsica.

The top of the rankings remained stable, with municipalities from the Basque Country (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) and Normandy having scored highly for several years. Épron in Calvados retained its first-place in the villages category, thanks to a strong performance in safety, environmental protection and quality of life. Guéthary and Martinvast maintained their second and third positions. Also noteworthy was the entry into the top 10 of Durtol in Auvergne, after its population fell below 2,000 inhabitants from 2025 to 2026.

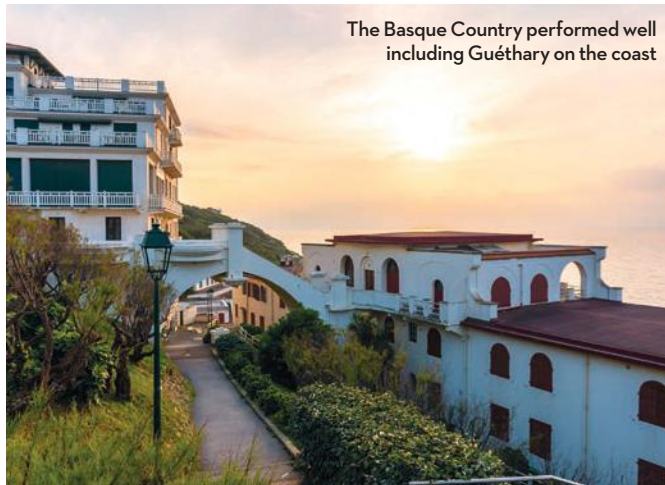
The top city, Biarritz, took first ranking for the second year in a row, while Annecy rose to second place from third last year and fourth in 2024.

The results highlight the rise in popularity of human-scale cities, especially those on the coast, which offer a high quality of life without the hustle and bustle of larger metropolises.

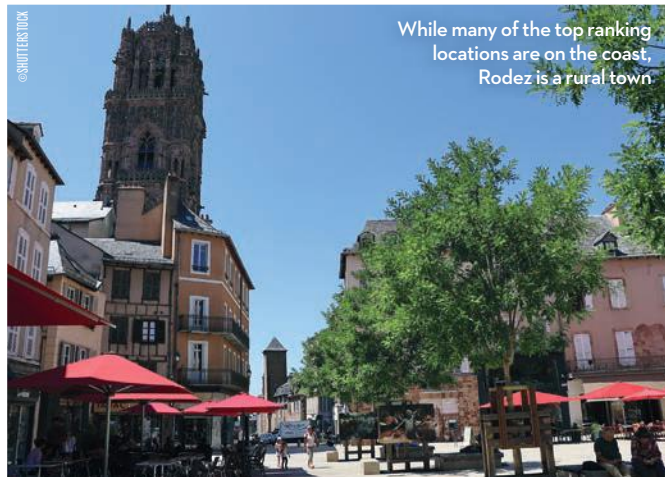
The study takes into consideration a number of factors including quality of life, healthcare, transport, education, shops and services, leisure facilities, safety, local taxes and property appeal.



Annecy has risen in the ratings



The Basque Country performed well including Guéthary on the coast



While many of the top ranking locations are on the coast, Rodez is a rural town

### TOWNS WITH OVER 2000 INHABITANTS

1. **Biarritz** (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
2. **Annecy** (Haute-Savoie)
3. **Angers** (Maine-et-Loire)
4. **Bayonne** (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
5. **Rodez** (Aveyron)
6. **Cherbourg-en-Cotentin** (Manche)
7. **Anglet** (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
8. **Caen** (Calvados)
9. **Nice** (Alpes-Maritimes)
10. **Brest** (Finistère)

### VILLAGES WITH UNDER 2000 INHABITANTS

1. **Épron** (Calvados)
2. **Guéthary** (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
3. **Martinvast** (Manche)
4. **Mazères-Lezons** (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
5. **Biard** (Vienne)
6. **Théoule-sur-Mer** (Alpes-Maritimes)
7. **Peltre** (Moselle)
8. **Vogllans** (Savoie)
9. **Châteauneuf-d'Ille-et-Vilaine** (Ille-et-Vilaine)
10. **Durtol** (Puy-de-Dôme)



Caen in Calvados did well, as did Épron, a village just outside the city

# BUY OR RENT IN FRANCE: HOW DO THE NUMBERS STACK UP?

The 12th annual *Acheter ou Louer?* by financial commentator MeilleurTaux has revealed the French cities where it makes more financial sense to buy a property rather than renting in the long term.

The study analyses property prices, rents, tax and charges, and also considers potential returns that could have been made by investing the money instead of using it for a purchase. The shorter the time (see boxout), the more financially viable the purchase in comparison to renting (based on a 70m<sup>2</sup> property).

A favourable buy/rent ratio is largely due to the relatively lower cost of property. In more expensive cities, it can take many years of owning a property before the purchase becomes profitable, as opposed to renting. For instance, in Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Nice and Bordeaux, it can take more than 18 years.

However, the study emphasises an improved situation for buyers, driven by easing interest rates and a rebalancing of prices. Buyers



have slightly more purchasing power and many cities are becoming more financially viable for property purchases.

Across France it now takes an average of 12 years and three months for the purchase of a main residence to be generally more profitable than renting, down from 14 years and eight months in 2024.

“Even if it takes a few years to recoup the costs, buying remains a simple and solid wealth-building strategy,” says Aga Bojarska-Serres, a director at Meilleurtaux.

## CITIES WHERE IT MAKES MORE SENSE TO BUY

1. **Mulhouse** (19 months)
2. **St-Etienne** (25 months)
3. **Limoges** (51 months)
4. **Le Havre** (55 months)
5. **Perpignan** (64 months)
6. **Metz** (69 months)
7. **Grenoble** (83 months)
8. **Clermont-Ferrand** (89 months)
9. **Rouen** (91 months)
10. **Brest** (93 months).

## POP OF COLOUR

As of this year, you may notice some vivid pink licence plates on French roads. These are temporary plates for vehicles with provisional registrations (WW and W ‘garage’ plates), replacing the classic white design. Reserved for new, imported or test vehicles awaiting formal registration, these plates display a clear expiry date. The bright reflective colour makes them instantly identifiable for police checks and other road users, improving detection of overdue or fraudulent provisional registrations. In addition to a fine of up to €750, driving with temporary number plates that do not comply with the new pink format, or have expired, exposes drivers to serious consequences, including vehicle impoundment and even prosecution in case of fraud.

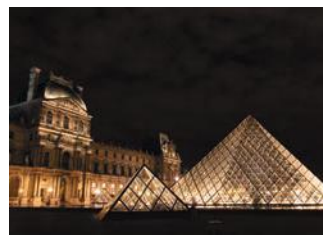


## WHAT'S ON IN MAY/JUNE 2026



### 16-17 MAY BIRMINGHAM, UK **FRENCH PROPERTY EXHIBITION**

Bringing a whole host of French property professionals together under one roof, the popular French Property Exhibition adds another date and location to the calendar this year. Chat with agents, lawyers, relocation experts, legal and financial advisors, and more, plus attend in-depth seminars. Free entry. [frenchpropertyexhibition.com](https://frenchpropertyexhibition.com)



### 23 MAY ACROSS FRANCE **NUIT DES MUSÉES**

For one night every year, thousands of museums across France open their doors after hours for this special late-night event (typically from 6pm to midnight), organised by the French Ministry of Culture. In Paris alone, more than 200 venues will be taking part, including the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay. [nuitdesmusees.culture.gouv.fr](https://nuitdesmusees.culture.gouv.fr)



### 22 MAY - 11 OCTOBER AMIENS, SOMME **INTERNATIONAL GARDEN FESTIVAL**

An enchanted journey between art and nature... Explore the charming watery gardens of Amiens - *les Hortillonnages* - either by boat along the canals or by foot along the waterside paths, and discover contemporary art installations woven into the historic market gardens and waterways. [leshortillonnages-amiens.com](https://leshortillonnages-amiens.com)



### 11-14 JUNE LYON **LYON STREET FOOD FESTIVAL**

Held in France's gastronomic capital, in the Grandes Locos cultural space, this street food festival celebrates its 10th year, aiming a spotlight on all cuisines and terroirs. Discover over 200 exclusive recipes and more than 130 starred chefs and street artisans from all over the world. [lyonstreetfoodfestival.com](https://lyonstreetfoodfestival.com)

# TRAVEL NEWS

■ Although the EU's new EES (Entry and Exit System) is now up and running, it looks like France will miss the EU's deadline to fully register all travellers under the new system, due to ongoing technical problems with equipment and software used to collect biometric data. Travellers are now required to provide fingerprints and facial scans at the borders.

■ The EES will be followed by Etias, a fee-based travel authorisation for travellers who benefit from visa-free short-stay access to the EU, including Britons. Full details will be revealed closer to the launch date, currently expected to be the last quarter of 2026.

■ Due for completion this year, the A69 in southwest France will be the first *autoroute* in the Occitanie region to be barrier-free, instead of using toll booths. Only four other motorways in France use the *flux libre* system: the A79 in Allier, the A13-A14 between Paris and Normandy, and part of the A4 (Boulay exit). The A69 will link the cities of Toulouse and Castres. The system works via sensors and cameras that identify vehicles and automatically calculate the journey cost. Payment can be made on the Atosca website or at any *tabac* or newsagent with the Nirio system.

■ SNCF's Ouigo has launched a classic low-cost train route between Bordeaux and Paris, with tickets costing between €10 and €59 for the 5h30 journey.

■ Air France has introduced a new twice-daily service between Paris Charles de Gaulle and London Gatwick. The route adds Gatwick to Air France's existing London network alongside Heathrow and London City.

■ Explore France in style! CroisiEurope has launched its first ever paddleboat cruises on the River Seine, including a seven night 'History of France' round-trip from Paris to Normandy (April-September).

# FRENCH PROPERTY MARKET: A SHAKY RESTART



The French property market is giving timid signs of reactivation following a three-year-long slowdown. The volume of transactions over 12 months in March increased to 945,000, compared to 750,000 for the same period last year. Still far from 1.2 million seen in 2021, but respectable nonetheless. Experts cited by *Le Monde* said that sales are rising thanks to cheaper mortgages and banks lending more freely.

While prices are creeping up slightly, buyers are still nervous about the economy

and the global situation. According to *Les Echos*, experts report signs of upward price movements. They point to a shortage of homes and lower borrowing rates that might nudge prices higher (up 1% year-on-year in March for apartments and 1.2% for houses).

A Crédit Logement CSA report cited by *Le Monde* shows an average 20-year mortgage rate of 3.20% - not as low as a few years ago, but quite acceptable. It is a comeback, but not a strong one, as jittery buyers could make it stall.

# DRIVING: MEDICAL CERTIFICATE FOR OLDER DRIVERS

In France, there are currently no mandatory medical checks for senior drivers holding standard private driving licences (categories A and B), as these permits are renewable for life unless revoked for medical or other reasons.

But France lags behind many EU peers in requiring senior tests (e.g. every five years over 70 in the Netherlands). Upcoming EU rules to be rolled out progressively between now and 2030 mandate renewals every 15 years, and allow member states to require medical or self-assessments, but it leaves it up to each country to decide.

At the moment in France, plastic card licences are already renewable every 15 years, while the older pink paper versions are valid until January 2033. Medical fitness is only assessed reactively if health issues (e.g. vision loss, epilepsy, or dementia) are reported by doctors, family or police. Some vehicle licence categories do require mandatory medical examinations to renew, but these apply primarily to professional driving permits.



According to comparison site *Les Furets*, however, it can be more difficult to find car insurance if you are over 70. Insurers consider that as a driver gets older, they present a higher risk to insure.

You can ask your doctor for a medical certificate confirming your state of health to support your application to an insurer. This document is not compulsory, but it can make the process easier, according to the site.

## BOUNDARY DISPUTES



In Trélazé, a community near Angers in Maine-et-Loire, a retired couple is facing a devastating court ruling tied to a cadastral error made more than 30 years ago, forcing them to chop their home in two. They must now demolish a 10m<sup>2</sup> extension at their home's core -

including their kitchen - within six months or face daily fines, *TF1* reported.

The saga began in 1981 when they purchased and slowly renovated an old house, later buying adjacent plots like a chicken coop and a pathway. A surveyor's oversight in

the 1980s failed to register a narrow strip as theirs; it legally remained with a neighbour. After the neighbour died in 2015 - following a long-running dispute - the heir sued.

Despite the homeowners' good faith and long-term possession, the court ruled against them, based on strict property boundaries. They must pay €17,000 (around £14 683) in legal costs, as well as effectively cutting their home in half.

The *TF1* report explains that Article 552 of the Civil Code states that ownership of the land includes ownership of what lies above and below it. In practical terms, if your neighbour builds even by just a few centimetres on your land, you are entitled to have whatever has been built on that land removed.

## LANGUAGE TESTS FOR RESIDENCY

As of 1 January 2026, France requires most first-time applicants for multi-year residence permits (*carte de séjour pluriannuelle*) to prove A2 level French, 'upper beginner' level. If you can understand everyday expressions, handle a simple routine conversation, and describe your daily life in simple sentences, you are in business. You must provide a pass grade from an approved centre or a recognised French diploma. Exemptions apply for specific disabilities or applicants over 65. Applicants for 10-year residency cards now need B1-level French proficiency, while those seeking citizenship must now demonstrate B2-level skills.

## REVEALED: MOST EXPENSIVE ADDRESSES

Property platform Seloger has revealed the most expensive roads to buy a home in France. In Paris, the priciest three streets are Avenue Montaigne (€23,993/m<sup>2</sup>), Rue de Furstemberg (€23,905/ m<sup>2</sup>) and Le Quai des Orfèvres (€22,232/ m<sup>2</sup>). For some exceptional residences on Avenue

Montaigne you would have to pay over €45,000/m<sup>2</sup>.

On the Côte d'Azur, prestigious addresses include Rue Gray Street in Cannes (€11,977/m<sup>2</sup>), Avenue Jean Lorrain in Nice (€12,052/m<sup>2</sup>) and Chemin de la Garoupe in Antibes (€12,373/ m<sup>2</sup>).

The report points out that due to significant price

differences between the most expensive streets in France's 50 largest cities, there are many beautiful cities where the most expensive addresses are considerably more affordable.

For example, the most affordable street in the ranking, Rue Joyeuse in Bourges (€2,121/ m<sup>2</sup>), is 11 times cheaper than the capital's Avenue Montaigne.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

- A 44-floor, 180m-high glass triangle is set to join the Parisian skyline this year. The first skyscraper to be built in the city in 50 years, the Tour Triangle will be its third tallest building after the Eiffel Tower and Montparnasse Tower. It will feature a four-star Radisson Blue hotel on the 13th floor, with terraces overlooking the Eiffel Tower. Designed by Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, the tower will also have a restaurant and bar with 360-degree views, offices, shops, cultural spaces, public facilities and 8,000m<sup>2</sup> public garden.



The Tour Triangle

spoken language, according to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie's 2026 report. It has overtaken standard Arabic to take fourth place behind English, Mandarin and Spanish.

- With 396 million speakers across five continents, French is now the world's fourth most-

- French laws requiring homeowners to do compulsory work each year to prevent the spread of wild fires, such as clearing undergrowth, have

been expanded to include new areas. Previously the rules applied to the south of France but parts of Brittany and other areas in the north have been included, specifically the departments of Côtes-d'Armor, Finistère, Sarthe, Maine-et-Loire, Eure-et-Loir and Indre.

- France will mark several significant anniversaries in 2026: the centenary of Monet's death, which will be celebrated across Normandy and Paris; 200 years of photography honoured countrywide; the 30th Unesco birthday of the Canal du Midi; plus big birthdays for the Cité du Vin in Bordeaux and the Lascaux IV caves complex in Dordogne.

- A new *Grande Randonnée de Pays* (GRP) hiking trail launches later this year in northern France. The 350km Ardenne Tour will straddle the French and Belgian Ardennes and has been designed to be completed in 15 stages, of around 23km per day. The trail draws its inspiration from mythology, focusing on Arduinna, the Celtic goddess and protector of the Ardennes forest.

- Kentingtons Tax & Investment Consultants has been announced as the sponsor of the upcoming French Property Exhibition in Birmingham in May. [kentingtons.com](http://kentingtons.com) [frenchpropertyexhibition.com](http://frenchpropertyexhibition.com)

# Three of the best

Renewable energy is becoming more common in France – **Ruth Wood** picks out three properties where character doesn't come at a high carbon cost



**€315,785**

**CHARENTE**

The medieval village of Nanteuil-en-Vallée is one of Charente's five *Petites Cités de Caractère*. In such a charming setting, you might expect a century-old property like this to be a carbon sieve. But no. The three-bedroom house, which comes with a sweet studio gîte, has a top-class greenhouse gas 'A' rating, meaning it generates less than 6kg of CO2e/m<sup>2</sup> per year. That's thanks to its double glazing and the air-to-air heat pump that provides electric



heating or aircon as needed. Still, the Godin woodburner in the sitting room makes a lovely feature! On a no-through lane a stroll from the village centre, the house looks south over 2,690m<sup>2</sup> of gardens that slope down to a river.

[tic-ruffec.com](http://tic-ruffec.com)

**€328,600**

**DORDOGNE**

Périgourdine architecture merges with low-carbon technology at this stone house in Eymet, one of Dordogne's best-loved bastides. It benefits from a geothermal system, using the constant temperature of the shallow earth to provide highly efficient heating. Despite its greenhouse gas 'A' rating, the house has bags of period charm with exposed stone walls and wooden beams. There are four bedrooms, including two on the ground floor, two bathrooms, a



modern kitchen and open-plan lounge-diner. In the 1,380m<sup>2</sup> garden, you can enjoy long summer afternoons by the pool, which has a new liner - if you're not too busy exploring all the shops, restaurants, markets and festivals on your doorstep.

[beauxvillages.com](http://beauxvillages.com)



**€199,500**

**MAYENNE**

Someone artistic has had fun renovating this pretty village property in Couesmes-Vaucé on Pay-de-la-Loire's border with Normandy. Mural wallpapers, beams, rolltop bath, bespoke sliding doors - it's full of delightful features old and new. There are three ensuite bedrooms, two of which are self-contained on the ground floor, creating B&B potential. The 1,370m<sup>2</sup> 'secret garden' is a mini paradise complete with a summer house and tree tunnel.



But what's most impressive is that all this style has substance. A heat pump generates the central-heating and with all-new electrics, windows and plumbing, it thoroughly merits its greenhouse gas emission 'A' rating.

[leggettfrance.com](http://leggettfrance.com)

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See  
**RICHARD  
IMMOBILIER**  
at the French  
Property Exhibition  
– see the back page  
for details

# A vision of beauty

A lovingly restored manor house and luxury hospitality business in Lot-et-Garonne stirs **Ruth Wood's** imagination

French  
property  
dreams

It was on Juliet Morley's birthday 22 years ago that she first glimpsed her fabulous French future. The fashion designer and her husband Deane were househunting in Lot-et-Garonne and had been persuaded to check out a *maison de maître* near the riverside town of Ste-Livrade-sur-Lot. The grounds were wild and neglected, the 18th-century building a sorry state. Although the ground floor was habitable, the upstairs had no ceilings or internal walls. Clamps held the roof timbers in place.

The Morleys took all this in, but they also saw something else – a vision of what the property could be. Deane was struck by the near-panoramic views over the undulating countryside, while Juliet was enchanted by the tall windows and high ceilings, the beautiful panelling and walnut turned staircase. The couple knew it was the place for them.

“It was my best birthday present ever!” says Juliet. “Within weeks the house was ours and our dream of escaping the rat race had begun.”

Since then, the Morleys have lovingly restored the property into a dream home, holiday business and wedding venue. Today, it's a stylish six-bedroom manor house set in eight acres of manicured grounds with a large heated pool, four luxury holiday apartments and a handsome barn that hosts wedding receptions for up to 90 guests.

The manor's spacious hallway, which once held harvest banquets for the estate's agricultural workers, is now laid with solid oak parquet that continues into the two living rooms and dining room. These reception rooms brim with elegance thanks to bespoke plaster cornicing and handmade wall panelling. But it's the stunning mural-style

designer wallpaper that makes visitors exclaim “wow!”

The country kitchen has limestone flooring, a Falcon range cooker and painted cabinetry converted from antique furniture. A period fireplace adds a sense of warmth, but it's not actually needed as a heat pump provides heating and aircon.

Upstairs are six generous bedrooms, three bathrooms and two shower rooms – all finished to the same high spec with designer wallpaper and Italian marble.

Ahead of the 2009 season, the Morleys converted a huge barn into three gîte apartments, then in 2016 they transformed the *pigeonnier* into an exclusive one-bedroom apartment with double walk-in shower – a popular bridal suite. Indeed, the manor is a magical place to get married. Aside from the wedding barn, there are myriad spots to celebrate,

from the terraces and lawns to the long balcony overlooking the pool and Lot valley.

Holidaymakers adore the grounds too, which now feature a games room, play park and the pool. Then there's the little *bastide* town of Ste-Livrade-sur-Lot just five minutes' drive away. “It's a real asset, with its bustling markets, restaurants and shops,” says Juliet. “There are watersports on the River Lot, cycle paths and even a cinema which shows some movies in English.”

Although the Morleys are now ready to hand over the reins, they have no doubt the new owners, whatever their vision – from fabulous home to boutique hotel, wedding venue, yoga retreat, training centre or festival site – will love the property and lifestyle just as much as they have. ■

**On the market for €1.6m**  
[richardimmo.com](http://richardimmo.com)

À VENDRE





See  
**AGENCE NEWTON**  
at the French  
Property Exhibition  
in Birmingham -  
see the back cover  
for details

# A star is barn

This beautiful barn in Haute-Vienne has come a long way since its rustic roots as a cattle shed, discovers **Ruth Wood**

Character  
property  
pick

The humble Limousin cow is a tough cookie. Don't be fooled by her golden coat and the fact that a luxury car is named after her. She can thrive on the poorest, rockiest soil - unlike those pampered dairy cows of Normandy. Her ancestors were not just beef cattle but beasts of burden, pulling ploughs and carts as well as any oxen. And her prehistoric ancestors may well be the bovines painted on the walls of famous caves such as Lascaux.

A cow of such hardy heritage might be 'un-moo-ved' by this barn conversion in the heart of the beautiful Limousin region. But human househunters are sure to be starry-eyed. What was once an outbuilding for overwintering cows has been transformed into a luxury five-bedroom home set on a park of just under a hectare with a sauna and hot tub.

No expense has been spared on the property, which is just outside the village of Rancon in Haute-Vienne, less than 40 minutes from Limoges airport. At the heart of the home is a circular glass logburner with a flue that draws the eye upward, emphasising the original barn timbers and the impressive height of the 80m<sup>2</sup> reception room. Meanwhile, a handsome mezzanine bridge spanning the two sides of the first floor draws the eye horizontally across the space. Together, these architectural features subtly divide the reception room into distinct yet connected living spaces, maintaining a sense of cohesion and flow.

Underfloor heating and radiators ensure year-round comfort, and the property boasts an above-average energy efficiency rating of 'C', which is particularly good for period properties.

The smart kitchen is a fusion of country character and industrial cool, with fitted cabinets, stone flooring, sleek worktops and modern appliances, including two built-in ovens. A generous central island provides a relaxed space to prepare food and dine, with the low ceiling and soft pendant lighting creating a cosy alternative to the dramatic main reception room.

Two of the five bedrooms are on the ground floor, both generously proportioned suites with luxurious bathrooms and dressing areas. And one has something extra special - a climate-controlled walk-in wine cellar! At the top of the floating staircase, we come to a large bedroom with ensuite shower and separate WC, plus a smaller bedroom. Across the beautiful bridge, which looks down on the reception rooms, there's a mezzanine lounge,

another large ensuite bedroom and a separate room that could be a sixth bedroom or office.

The large French doors at the barn entrance open onto a sun-soaked terrace and from here, 8,625m<sup>2</sup> of enclosed parkland opens out before you, a private piece of paradise a short stroll from the centre of Rancon.

You can see this charming village captured in the vibrant paintings of Fred Yates, a Lancashire artist who lived here in the 1990s. Should its many amenities not fulfil your every need, you're only 12km from the town of Bellac, which has a hospital, supermarkets, restaurants and railway station. That's a journey of about half a day if you're droving cattle, 40 minutes if you go by bike, or just 10 minutes if you take the limousine! ■

**On the market for €690,000**  
[agencenewton.com](http://agencenewton.com)

À VENDRE



# FourFiftyK

What can you buy in France for around €450,000? Here are a few of our favourites currently on the market



€449,950, DEUX-SÈVRES



I'd certainly be living the French country dream in this detached, five-bedroom, four-bathroom stone property complete with a heated swimming pool. In a quiet location only 5km from main shops and services, less than an hour from Poitiers airport and 15 minutes from a train station, the property sits in a lovely plot of over 3,000m<sup>2</sup>, with a large courtyard area to the front with space for parking, and at the rear, a covered terrace and garden overlooking fields. Character features are complemented by recent improvements such as double-glazing, new drainage system, solar heated water system and air conditioning.

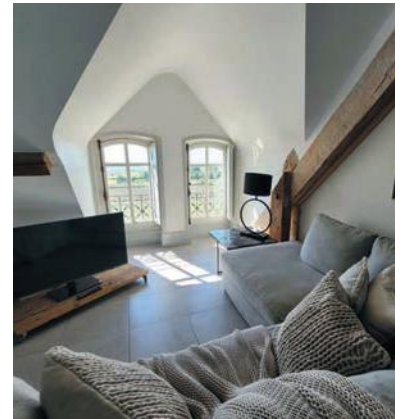
**Ref: 685294 (Agence TIC Ruffec)**  
**Karen Tait, Editor**



You had me at 'château'! This 19th-century two-bedroom apartment in the south of France offers all the charm of living in an historic building, but with plenty of contemporary comforts. The location is excellent too - 20 minutes from Béziers and only 25/30 minutes from the beaches. What's really special, is that it is set on a wine estate, with panoramic views of the vineyards and the Pyrénées peaks. Being part of the estate gives you access to a heated infinity pool, landscaped gardens, a tennis court, concierge services and even a mini farm. The apartment is also being sold fully furnished, so all I'd need to do is pick up the keys and move straight in!

**Ref: 690919 (Real Estate Occitanie)**  
**Emma Kestin, Advertising Manager**

€425,000, HÉRAULT



€450,000, HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES



What I love about this luminous village house in the Hautes-Pyrénées is that its undeniable personality and charm are found in every corner. It has a generous 192m<sup>2</sup> living space, three ensuite bedrooms, a traditional Bigourdan hall, a wooden staircase and a rock-cut cellar with early 1900s craftsmanship: effortlessly blending the old with the new. Its large windows and a terrace fill the rooms with light and offer breathtaking views of the Pyrénées, making each space feel airy and welcoming. Perfectly situated near Luz-St-Sauveur, with ski resorts, Lourdes and airports within easy reach, it combines history, comfort and location beautifully.

**Ref: 694048 (Healey Fox)**  
**Josie Sharp, Digital Content Assistant**

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‘Each time there’s risk with my French property purchase, I want to see a whopping great asterisk’

## Well, now there is

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- spot risks early
- ask the right questions
- make informed decisions



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\* Asterisk **risk reduction** :-)



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AGENT'S  
DREAM HOME



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MARKET FOR  
€385,000



*“This is Gascony: soft colours, honey blushed stone, original beams, gentle architecture and a timeless setting”*

SAYS SARAH DAY



In the 30 years I have worked in France, fashions have changed from Dan Air cheap flights and bulging suitcases to Ryanair bargains and backpacks; from big headphones to tiny earbuds and, somehow, back again. Property tastes have followed the same restless cycle. There were times when everyone wanted an isolated ruin, and others when energy efficiency and a cycle ride to a croissant became imperative.

Yet through all these shifts, one constant has remained: the traditional Gascon farmhouse. Over the years I have fallen

in love with architect designed ‘Twilight’ houses and sprawling country manors, but I always come back to my roots - and to our first farmhouse in the Gers. That is why my current dream property is this traditional Gascon home. It retains its authenticity while offering all the comforts of everyday living: central heating, pool with pool house, two master suites, two further bedrooms, family bathroom and two living rooms - one a quiet space for reading or working, the other a more communal family room centred around a lovely inglenook fireplace. The country kitchen

opens onto a covered terrace and outdoor dining area, with amazing Pyrénées views.

This is Gascony: a comfortable heart for family and friends, soft colours, honey blushed stone, original beams, gentle architecture, a timeless setting, and a 20-minute electric bike ride to croissants and much more. No headphones necessary - just listen to the sunflowers growing. ■

**Sarah Day is the director/owner of Maisons et Manoirs**  
Tel: 0033 (0)6 08 89 12 79  
[maisonsetmanoirs.com](http://maisonsetmanoirs.com)

## PropertyInFrance.com

The new French property portal from FrenchEntrée

The image shows a composite of two screenshots from the PropertyInFrance.com website. The top screenshot displays the search interface with a search bar, filters for price (€0 - €5,000,000+), reference, and minimum beds, and buttons for 'ADVANCED SEARCH' and 'FIND PROPERTIES'. The bottom screenshot shows search results for 'Property for sale in Tarn', listing four properties with their descriptions, prices, and features.

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Known as the 'Venice of Languedoc', Sète is a vibrant port with lots of culture and great beaches

# Hurrah for Hérault

You might not know the name Hérault, but you're sure to recognise Montpellier, the Mediterranean and the stunning, sun-drenched scenery - **Annaliza Davis** looks at why Hérault is a great pick for househunters



Hérault, in central southern France, enjoys around 300 sunshine days each year, and its landscapes encompass picturesque fields of vineyards and olive trees, sparkling Mediterranean seas and dramatic gorges. In other words, it encapsulates the essence of the south of France.

It's one of the country's most popular regions for tourists, drawn by the sandy beaches,

the glamour of the southern coast or by the rugged natural grandeur of the dramatic gorges and characterful rural villages - that's without even mentioning the famous Canal du Midi. You can get lost in the bustling streets of Montpellier, explore the great outdoors of the mountain-biking and hiking trails in the gorges, or browse *brocantes* and markets in quiet cobbled streets. Even the architecture has it all, from tiny

dry-stone huts in the corners of vineyards to grand classical structures framed by fountains, and the property market has just as much variety. Whether you want a modest stopover studio flat or a sprawling estate with acres of land, Hérault will have a home to suit you.

## MATCH THE PLACE TO YOUR POCKET

According to the national network SeLoger, properties

in Hérault cost an average of €3,357/m<sup>2</sup>, which is around 8% higher than the average property price across France. Whereas houses in France generally offer far better value than apartments (€2,531/m<sup>2</sup> compared to €3,870/m<sup>2</sup>), in Hérault they are almost equal at €3,364m<sup>2</sup> and €3,351m<sup>2</sup>.

On the Mediterranean coast, you'll pay a premium of 60% or more, with homes in Palavas-les-Flots fetching €5,576/m<sup>2</sup>

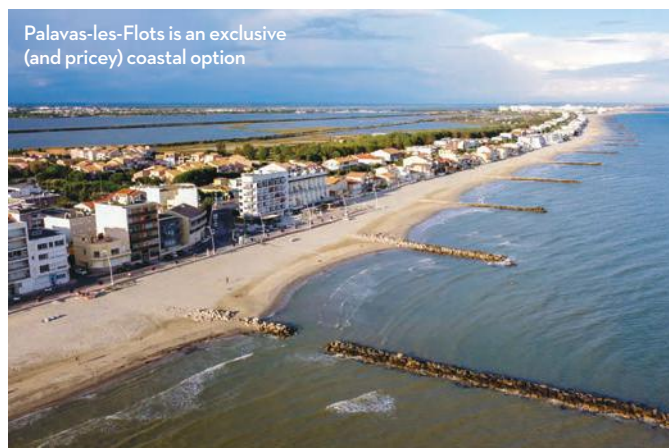


## A MEDIEVAL GEM IN A STUNNING SETTING

**St-Guilhem-le-Désert** is a medieval village located 45 minutes northwest of Montpellier. An official *Plus Beaux Village*, it attracts about 700,000 visitors a year, many of whom come for the Unesco-listed Abbaye de Gellone, one of the steps on the Compostela pilgrimage trail. The winding streets are lined with craft workshops and boutiques, beckoning you to explore, and you can pause in the shade of a 160-year-old plane tree in the central square. Stay longer to make the most of the incredible surroundings, and cross the ancient Pont du Diable to explore the underground wonders of the Grotte de Clamouse.



St-Guilhem-le-Désert is a beautiful medieval village on the Compostela trail



Palavas-les-Flots is an exclusive (and pricey) coastal option



A large cosmopolitan hub, Montpellier is an easily accessible urban centre

*“Whether you want a modest stopover studio flat or a sprawling estate with acres of land, Hérault will have a home to suit you”*

although other resorts such as Agde and Sète are more reasonable at €3,700/m<sup>2</sup>. For the best prices in the region, look to the east around St-Pons-de-Thomières where properties sell for around €1,500/m<sup>2</sup>. This means that a 50m<sup>2</sup> apartment in Hérault could cost anywhere from €75,000 to €280,000 depending on the location.

### LOCATION: WHERE TO FIND WHAT YOU WANT

If you're looking for city life, Montpellier tops the list: it's a

large, cosmopolitan hub that is easily accessible by train in three-and-a-half hours from Paris or Barcelona, and just 11km from the Mediterranean. Montpellier is bursting with heritage from all eras, including a university founded in the 1200s, while its grand citadel is now home to students of the Lycée Joffre.

Of the city's 550,000 residents, 66% are rental tenants and around 17% are students, making it an ideal place to invest in

## FOOD AND DRINK



**James Judd runs a B&B in Hérault and uses his skills as a chef to offer delicious evening meals.**

“The choice of produce in Hérault is amazing, it’s great for traditional French cuisine, as well as dishes with Spanish and Moroccan influences. At the weekly markets, you can find a rabbit or whole chicken, nothing like what you might find in an English supermarket. As for local wine, Picpoul white or rosé is ideal for sipping in the summer sunshine, while red wines tend to be stronger and heavier. At our nearby cave cooperative, take a plastic drum and you can get an amazing rosé for €7.50 for five litres – an absolute bargain!”

Also look out for Pélardon goat’s cheese, which was selected to be served at a state banquet in Versailles for King Charles III, hosted by President Macron, and if you have a sweet tooth, the *tartelettes aux noix* (walnut tartlets) drenched in caramel are dangerously moreish.

rental accommodation. An overwhelming 87% of city properties are apartments. A €50,000 investment in a 20m<sup>2</sup> studio should bring a rental income of around €350 a month and there is often a shortage of rental options available, as Montpellier attracts around 8,000 new residents every year.

For a smaller historic town, Béziers (population 81,000), on the River Orb, offers both wide pedestrian boulevards and smaller medieval streets as well as some of the best value in terms of price per square metre. Over 55% of residents are rental tenants, and the average sale price of €1,973/m<sup>2</sup> means you can buy a 20m<sup>2</sup> studio for under €30,000 and rent it out for €300 a month. Béziers is accessible, with 10 daily rail services to Paris (four hours) boosting its ranking for holiday lets.

Inland, but still close to the coast, Pézenas is also popular,

with charming historic streets, a theatrical heritage, enormous antiques fair and all amenities. The average price here is €2,736/m<sup>2</sup>. In the heart of the town, a three-bedroom house is for sale at €299,000, while a one-bedroom duplex apartment is on the market for €82,000.

Another great tourist draw is St-Guilhem-le-Désert, a gorgeous medieval village northwest of Montpellier (see box-out on p25). Properties rarely come onto the market here, but a small townhouse with a courtyard would cost around €200,000, a character three-bedroom home in the region of €350,000 and a larger, modern property with B&B potential about €500,000.

For seaside living, try La Grande-Motte, a popular resort near Montpellier that sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s and features recognisable pyramid-shaped hotel buildings.

## WHY WE MOVED HERE



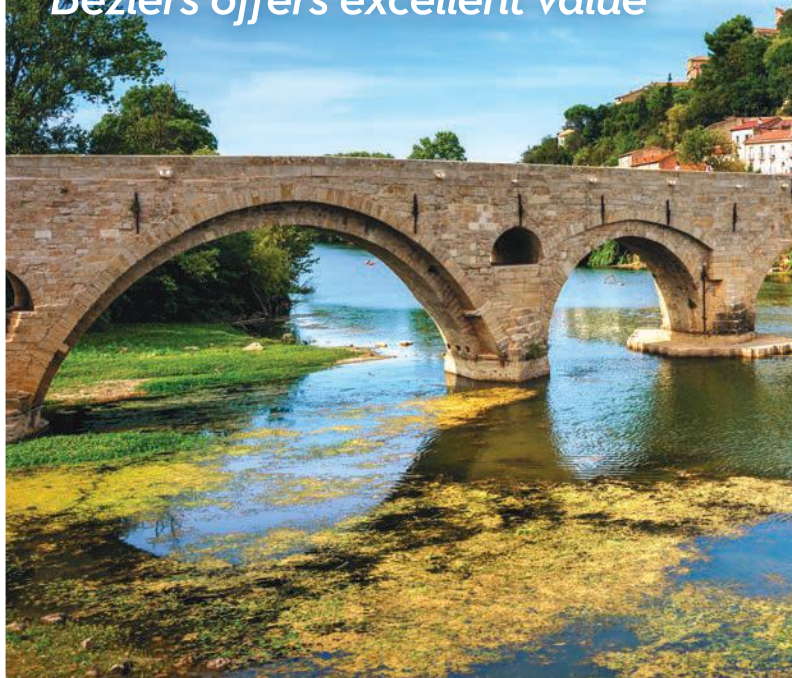
**Photographer Steve Turnbull moved from the UK to Hérault more than 10 years ago, with his French wife, who was originally from Paris.**

“We live in the charming market town of Lodève, near the Lac du Salagou

and I make my living as a writer and photographer. This area is the ‘gateway to the Mediterranean’, and what I love most is the landscape. It’s remarkably varied, from deep dramatic gorges and vast limestone plateaux to lush forests and majestic mountains. In the summer, the Haut-Languedoc Regional Natural Park is covered in purple heather and bathed in sunshine.

“There’s so much on the doorstep and beyond, with Spain only a couple of hours’ drive away, so we never tire of Hérault and I would recommend it to anyone.”

“To maximise your budget, Béziers offers excellent value”



With charming cobbled streets, Pézenas has a strong theatrical heritage

There’s every type of holiday accommodation here, and you could buy your own 18m<sup>2</sup> studio for around €80,000 or €100,000 in a complex with a swimming pool. In the slightly more upmarket, but older, resort of Palavas-les-Flots you’ll look a little harder and pay a little more, but you can still find a studio for around €110,000 – sometimes with a seaview balcony.

Alternatively, head to Sète, where you can enjoy the Mediterranean and the freshwater Étang de Thau lagoon, known for its fishing villages and oyster farms. Prices can rise to more than €5,000/m<sup>2</sup> in the ‘Pierres Blanches’ neighbourhood, but

you can buy a studio flat for €70,000 with a strong market for holiday lets.

To maximise your budget, Béziers offers excellent value with a choice of apartments around €30,000 and small properties on a holiday complex for about €110,000. For larger homes, look in northern Hérault, in the Regional Natural Park between Bédarieux and Mazamet, where you can buy stone properties to renovate for as little as €28,000.

This is also the best area to focus on if you’re hoping to build your own home, as you’ll find more plots here. A €50,000 budget would buy you 2,449m<sup>2</sup> of *terrain*

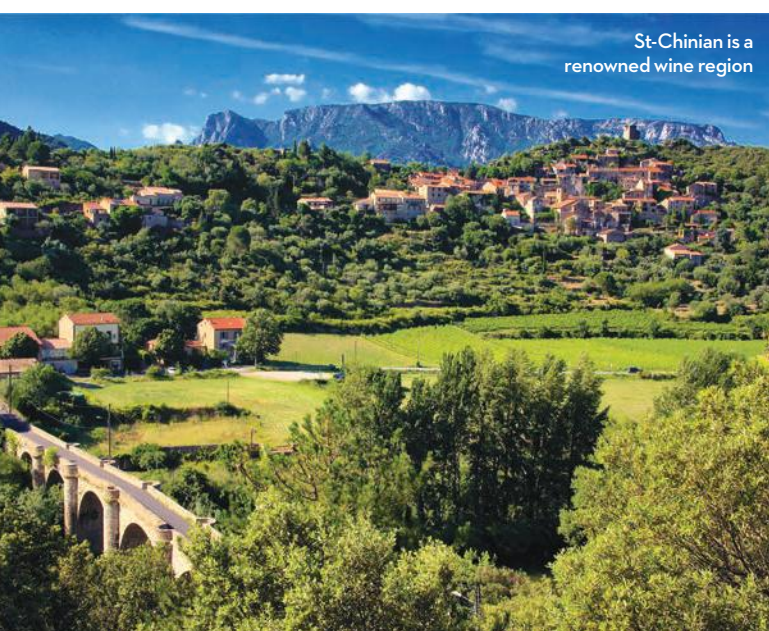




The town of Béziers sits on the River Orb and is just six miles from the Mediterranean coast



Cap d'Agde is a major coastal resort with a large marina



St-Chinian is a renowned wine region

## Property types



You'll find plenty of grand winemakers' houses, including this six-bedroom home with pool for sale at €359,700 ([propertyinfrance.com](https://www.propertyinfrance.com), ref CC397850E)

### Mas

A 'mas' is often a former farmhouse, so you can expect lots of land and outbuildings. The property itself is usually a two-storey stone building, a solid square or rectangular structure that can be very rustic or more refined. You can get an extensive mas with open views and several acres for €700,000, while more upmarket versions can sell for more than €2m.

### Vineyard

This is wine country, so you'll often see 'viticole' properties featuring a winemaker's home among fields of vines, with outbuildings for processing the grapes into wine. A €1m budget will buy a period property bursting with character features and acres of working vines, or look for a 'maison de bordier', a former vineyard-worker's home, which you can buy for around €350,000 complete with 1.5 acres to plant your own vineyard.

### Maison de maître

These manor-like properties are often part of a vineyard or working estate, but you can also find them in towns or villages. Typically dating from 1850 to 1880, they are often symmetrical, featuring delightful architectural details such as sweeping staircases. A €595,000 budget buys a six-bedroom, fully

renovated 'maison de maître' complete with pool, but you can find some for €250,000 if you're happy to update them.

### Business investment

As this is a tourist destination, you might like to invest in an existing business, such as a 350m<sup>2</sup> five-bedroom guest house with an annual turnover exceeding €60,000 in a tourist village near Clermont-l'Hérault for €425,000. For €850,000, consider a holiday complex with three gîtes, leisure facilities, a pool, an acre of land plus a five-bedroom family home.

### Village house

This area has a plentiful supply of charming villages, many featuring on the list of France's Plus Beaux Villages (including Minerve, Olargues and St-Guilhem-le-Désert), while others such as Capestang sit on the Unesco-listed Canal du Midi. Renovation projects start at €35,000, while move-in-ready village homes with small garden start at €80,000, depending on location.

### Apartment on the Med

It's possible to find a 20m<sup>2</sup> studio in Cap d'Agde with a harbour view for €75,000, or a one-bedroom apartment with full sea view for €140,000, while a 138m<sup>2</sup> modern apartment with sea views and balconies will fetch over €1m: something for every budget! ▶

## LOCATION



La Grande-Motte is a distinctive seaside resort built in the 1960s and 70s

constructible (land that is permitted to be built on) in Lamalou-les-Bains or 1,000m<sup>2</sup> in St-Julien, but only 85m<sup>2</sup> in Vendémian closer to the coast.

### EMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY

Hérault's is a service economy: 73% of jobs are involved in the production of goods and services and focused in Montpellier and the main urban centres. Tourism accounts for 9% of Hérault's economy, and much work is seasonal: 49% of overnight stays happen in summer, 25% in spring, 15% in autumn and 11% in winter. An impressive 45% of visitors head to the 90km stretch of coastline and 42% to the area just behind, so that's where you should focus if you want to set up a tourism business in the department.

Unemployment is at 28% among 15 to 24-year-olds, but drops to 12.6% for those aged 25 to 64, higher than the national average of 7.7%. Of those employed, there's a fairly even split between employees (27%),

middle management (28%) and upper management (20%). Only 15% are manual workers.

### TRANSPORT

Hérault's transport links make it a very accessible place to get to from the UK and further afield. Montpellier airport is a 10-minute drive from the centre and is currently home to 13 different airlines connecting across Europe and beyond, and welcoming 1.8 million passengers a year.

There is also an airport in Béziers, although this is much smaller (260,000 passengers a year) and connects to only eight destinations. Rail links are excellent with up to 10 connections per day taking you to the country's capital in four hours or even less.

By road, Montpellier is just three-and-a-half hours from Barcelona, four hours from Italy, and roughly eight hours from Paris. If you're travelling by ferry, the drive south will take you around nine hours from Caen and perhaps 11 hours from Calais. ■

### WHAT THE AGENTS SAY...



Local property agent **Freddy Rueda** runs **Real Estate Occitanie** and has worked in the region's property market since 1995.

"For a couple of years buyers were holding back on buying property, but that seems to be changing.

We're noticing more interest from Americans and Scandinavians as well as British buyers, and there's been a rise in people wanting to buy mortgage-free, with only around 20% needing a loan.

"Many are still drawn to the key tourist areas, but if you head inland from Béziers there are beautiful towns and villages that are not yet well known, especially Pézenas and St-Chinian, for example. You can get excellent value for money in Hérault, particularly in the villages around Béziers, where you can buy a single-storey villa with a gîte, pretty garden and swimming pool for under €250,000."

[realestateoccitanie.com](http://realestateoccitanie.com)

## On the market



**UNDER €100,000**

### Renovation project

In Puimisson, near Béziers, this 90m<sup>2</sup> outbuilding has nearby utilities ready to be connected. The roof and two beams need replacing. It's a renovation project, but could give you a stone home in a popular village.

**€45,000**

(Ref PUI45000E)



**€100,000-€200,000**

### Village home

This charming three-storey home is in a lively village on the River Orb, 30 minutes from Béziers and beaches. It has a 23m<sup>2</sup> living space with a woodburning stove and two ensuite bedrooms, plus a terrace. An ideal pied-à-terre.

**€140,400**

(Ref C140400E)



**€200,000-€350,000**

### Former presbytery

Dating from the 1400s, this four-bedroom property has heaps of character, with exposed stone walls and vaulted cellars, plus a 40m<sup>2</sup> living area and private terrace. It's in the heart of a village with shops and amenities, 30 minutes from the beaches.

**€264,000**

(Ref PFM264000E)



**€350,000-€500,000**

### Modern villa

This low-energy single-storey villa offers a 60m<sup>2</sup> living space with open-plan kitchen and three bedrooms. It sits on an enclosed plot with pool, olive trees, garage and beautiful views. Just 15 minutes from Béziers and 25 minutes from the beaches.

**€405,000**

(Ref C410400E)



**€500,000-€1M**

### Eight-bedroom mansion

An impressive building full of character features, it has eight bedrooms, six bathrooms and six kitchens, so it could be an ideal business opportunity. With huge potential for B&B or rental units, it's in a village near Colombiers and 20 minutes from the coast.

**€658,800**

(Ref NPO658800E)



**OVER €1M**

### Wine estate

This historic estate offers an incredible 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of living space with 11 bedrooms, 13ha and outbuildings. Perfect for eco-tourism, vineyard ventures or prestige events. Only 10 minutes from Lac du Salagou, and 50 minutes from Montpellier.

**€1,275,000**

(Ref B1275000E)

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## REAL ESTATE LANGUEDOC



**Hérault**  
Superb high-end single storey villa and independent guest cottage on a magnificent landscaped plot of 5500 m<sup>2</sup> with pool, horse stalls and spectacular views.

Price : 665.280 €  
Ref. TH665280E



**Aude**  
Charming single storey villa with 190 m<sup>2</sup> of living space on a 3135 m<sup>2</sup> landscaped plot with pool ! Superb !

Price : 475.200 €  
Ref. BT475200E



**Hérault**  
Beautiful town house full of character offering 195 m<sup>2</sup> of living space, a delightful courtyard with jacuzzi and a pleasant terrace, in the heart of the center !

Price : 326.160 €  
Ref. C326160E



**Aude**  
Spacious fully renovated character house with 160 m<sup>2</sup> of living space, 5 bedrooms and a charming private courtyard in a pleasant village.

Price : 195.000 €  
Ref. TC240000E

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## WE NATURALLY DROPPED WEIGHT!

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Billy, 58, and Sandra Moffat, 56, spent much of their time travelling for work. The pair ran a legal management consultancy company, which meant long hours on the road and at desks. However, the pandemic opened up the world of remote working and changed everything. “We suddenly realised we could work from anywhere,” says Sandra.

The realisation led to a property hunt, initially in the UK. “We visited a house in the Lake District and the owners were moving to France. It got us thinking and we expanded our search area.”

The couple settled on a 17th-century stone house on an acre of land in Chouppes in Vienne, near Poitiers, from which they now work as independent management consultants. They were looking forward to adopting aspects of the French lifestyle, but weren’t prepared for the health benefits of living in a rural location.

“After lockdown, we’d put on a lot of weight” says Sandra.

# Fit for life

Living in France has been truly life-changing for these expats, who are all healthier and fitter than they've ever been before, they tell **Gillian Harvey**

“We both had health problems too. I had an arthritic hip so couldn’t exercise much. Billy had diabetes, high blood pressure and raised cholesterol. We were both obese.”

However, over the years since their move, both have found their weight reduce significantly, with little conscious effort. “We’ve each lost exactly 32kg,” says Sandra. “It’s happened completely naturally, without our really setting our minds to it. We put it down to both the healthcare system here and the lifestyle we’re now living.”

After their move, within six weeks of seeing a surgeon in

France, Sandra was given a new hip. And fewer hours on the road have meant more time outdoors, walking and looking after the five cocker spaniels they’ve adopted since their move. “My new hip has meant I’m much more mobile,” says Sandra. “And Billy’s weight loss and improved fitness has meant he no longer has to take medication for his high blood pressure or diabetes.”

But how could moving to France have such dramatic benefits? “For a start, there are no takeaways near us,” says Sandra. “Before, we were travelling a lot, leaving at 6am and returning at 9pm. We’d

*“We’ve each lost exactly 32kg - we put it down to both the healthcare system here and the lifestyle”*



Sandra and Billy Moffat both had health problems when they moved to France, but have seen a dramatic turnaround



Sarah Cameron loves to go running in the Pyrénées



The Moffats are now more relaxed

often grab a takeaway as a result. Now, working from home and without a local takeaway, we’re cooking for ourselves at more reasonable times.”

The local markets also mean that the couple are eating more seasonally, choosing fresh fruit, and veg, less red meat. Plus, they’re now the proud owners of five cocker spaniels who have



ensured that both are active on a daily basis.

“We also have more regular mealtimes, rarely snack, and have learned to savour our food the way the French do. We no longer guzzle and go. Taking our time means we’re more in tune with our bodies and aware when we’ve eaten enough.

“We’re also more relaxed generally. I feel better than I have for decades. I don’t wake up in the morning thinking ‘here we go again’. I have a spring in my step straightaway. The change is phenomenal!”

### I TOOK UP JOGGING AND ENDED UP ON TEAM GB!

When Angus and Sarah Cameron, 52, moved to France in 2003, it was to fulfil a long-held dream of running a vineyard. Both worked for an airline at the time – Angus, now 55, as a pilot, and Sarah as cabin crew. “I got a degree



Sarah and husband Angus sample the competition to their AOP Fronton wine

in Wine Studies from Brighton University in 2003, and we bought a vineyard in the AOP Fronton region, which we ran until 2018.”

While managing a vineyard was quite an active pursuit, after the couple’s two children were born in 2005 and 2008, Sarah wanted to find a way to get fitter. “If I’d been still living in England I might have taken a class,” she says, “but in rural France there are very few options, so in 2012 I decided to try jogging.”

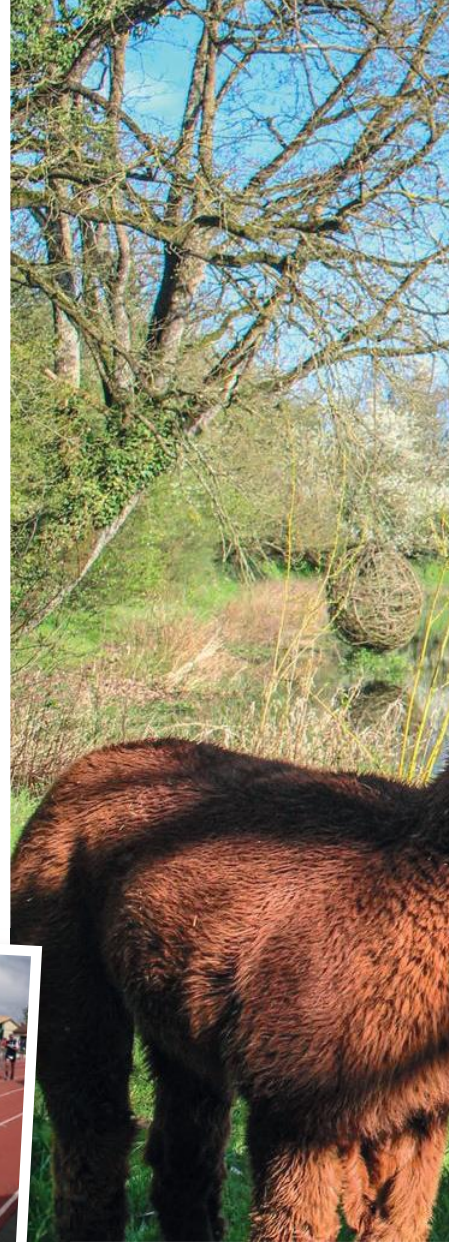
To her surprise, Sarah found she really enjoyed hitting the road. “I wasn’t sporty at school and hated PE – I used to hide in the bushes!” she says. “So nobody was more surprised than me when I realised I was enjoying myself.”

In 2013, a friend suggested they compete in a 10k together for fun in Montauban. “I thought I’d come last, but I

*“To my astonishment, I finished the race in three hours and 32 minutes and came seventh, which qualified me for London and Boston”*



Sarah with Team GB; (inset) winning the six-hour event in Bordeaux



came eighth out of 387 female runners. When I mentioned this to another friend Mike, he suggested I sign up for the Sauternes marathon with him, just seven weeks later. We'd run together and aim for five hours.

“But when the day came, he had to drop out due to injury, so I ran at my own pace. To my astonishment, I finished in three hours and 32 minutes and came seventh, which qualified me for London and Boston.”

Sarah began to learn more about pacing and nutrition in an attempt to get her speed up. Then in 2019, she took part in a 24-hour race in Albi - running 215km, which qualified her for Team GB. “I was overjoyed!” She represented GB in a six-hour race in Bordeaux in August 2020, and was selected for the 24-hour European Championships the following month. Sadly, these were cancelled due to Covid.

Shortly afterwards, in 2021, Sarah had an accident. “I came

off my bike and had to have a hip replacement.” Despite her injury, Sarah was determined to run again and has since completed a marathon and a few ultra marathons with her bionic hip. She finished an 80km race in November 2025 and won a 12-hour trail race in the Aveyron last February. But her pace isn't as competitive and she does suffer some pain.

However, this doesn't stop her running for up to five hours most mornings, and she now works as a coach in the afternoons, alongside her support role in the GB 24-hour management team. “I take my daughter Taliyah, 18, to school, then run in the Pyrénées or the Gorges d'Aveyron. Then it's back for a siesta and coaching in the afternoon.”

Sarah's running has also inspired husband Angus, who was already into fitness, to try his hand at marathons and triathlons. “I think if I'd stayed in the UK, I'd have been going

out with friends and wouldn't have had the same motivation. But we live in the middle of nowhere, and as a result, I became an international-level athlete. I credit France for changing my life for the better.”

**MORE MOVEMENT DID WONDERS FOR MY BACK**

Sophie Hargreaves, 38, and husband, Will, moved to France in 2020, after he was made redundant. “Will was working in the wine industry supplying restaurants, many of which were completely decimated during Covid. I was working as a housing officer, but fancied a change,” explains Sophie.

Originally, the couple had been looking at properties in the UK, but wanting to purchase both a house and land, they gradually started looking at places further afield. “We'd always talked about having some sort of farm and living an outdoor life,” says Sophie. “Eventually we found



Sophie and Will take a stroll with Emilie (and a donkey)

© SOPHIE AND WILL HARGREAVES, SARAH CAMERON



the perfect property in Deux-Sèvres and moved over there in December 2020 to start farming alpacas!"

At the time, Sophie was suffering from chronic pain after sustaining a back injury in 2015. "I tore a disk in my spine, and while I'd had treatment, I'd been left in terrible pain. The only way to deal with it was to take a lot of pain medication. In the UK, I'd been under a pain management team."

Sitting down to drive or working at her desk seemed to exacerbate the pain, so Sophie hoped that, on moving, she might be able to practice a little more self-care. But she didn't expect to experience the dramatic improvement she did. "When I first came to France, I went to the GP and explained my history," she says. "He was happy to prescribe painkillers. But I began to realise that I was barely taking them," she says. "Previously, I'd know immediately if I

missed a dose, but my pain had eased considerably."

Sophie credits much of her improvement with her new more active role on the farm. "I'm often moving and rarely sit still," she says. "Being my own boss, too, means that I can listen to my body and choose tasks appropriately."

"I had hoped for some improvement on moving, but nothing could have prepared me for the dramatic change. Just a month after we arrived, I was bashing a fence post in with a 16kg post knocker. Will just couldn't believe it."

The reduction in pain and end to her reliance on pain medication has also meant that Sophie has been able to become a mum, something she wondered whether she'd be able to do. "I had my first child, Emilie, in 2023, and I'm currently pregnant with baby number two," she says. "I've actually found my back pain clears up almost



The Hargreaves also have a gîte, Vue du Château, that they rent out to visitors

completely during pregnancy, which is the opposite of many pregnant women!"

While Sophie's injury hasn't healed - "I'll always have to be more careful than the average person of my age" - her new lifestyle has worked wonders. "Working on the farm means my muscles are stronger, which

really helps with spinal injuries. No two days are the same. I'll be filling buckets, cleaning the fields, feeding the alpacas, or moving 12kg bales of hay. The range of movement has really helped. Living in France has been life-changing." ■

[lapetitefermedalpagas.com](http://lapetitefermedalpagas.com)

Landing your dream place in France is much easier with professional help (see overleaf for property details)



# Home sweet French home

**Saskia Vlaskamp's** guide to buying a property in France, will take you from finding 'the one' to signing on the dotted line

Imagine waking up to the smell of fresh croissants, the soft hum of a village market and the warm glow of the French sun spilling into your own home. Sounds dreamy, doesn't it?

Buying a property in France might seem like a fantasy reserved for novels or Instagram reels rather than real life, but with professional guidance the process can be simple - even if your knowledge of French barely extends beyond *oui* and *baguette*.

## STARTING THE SEARCH

From the moment you begin your property search, having a dedicated agent or property consultant makes all the difference. Their local knowledge, extensive experience and understanding of the French legal and administrative procedures ensure a smooth, efficient process from the first viewing

to the final signature. They'll take the time to understand exactly what you're looking for, refine your requirements and show you properties that fit the bill.

Whether you're after a sun-soaked villa in the Aude or a quaint stone cottage in the Dordogne, they'll be there every step of the way, helping you navigate the market and organising viewings until you find 'the one'.

## MAKING AN OFFER

Once you have found your dream property, it's time to put pen to paper - or, more accurately, to make a formal offer. Your property consultant will handle negotiations with the vendor on your behalf, ensuring your offer is competitive and well-presented from the start.

When determining the maximum budget for your future property, it's important

to remember that while a property consultant's agency fees are usually included in the property price (check at the start), the *notaire's* fees are additional. These are typically around 8.5% of the purchase price (depending on the area of France) and cover government taxes, any administrative costs incurred and their service.

*Notaires* are compulsory for any real estate transaction in France, but you get to choose the *notaire* who will represent you. Importantly, the total fees do not increase if you and the vendor decide to work with different notaries.

## SIGNING THE CONTRACT

Congratulations, your offer has been accepted! At this stage, you'll be asked to provide proof that you have the funds to buy the property (bank statement, mortgage agreement or firm evidence of an ongoing sale), plus personal documentation to

confirm your identity, marital status and address.

Next comes the letter of intention (LOI), a document signed by both buyer and seller that formalises the agreed offer and allows the legal process to begin. Once signed, the property is reserved for you and taken off the market while the preliminary contract - usually called the *compromis de vente* (CDV) - is prepared. At this point, the process moves firmly into the hands of the professionals, giving you time to relax while the necessary legal work progresses.

Any *notaires* involved play a central role from here on, carefully overseeing the legal and administrative checks that protect both buyer and seller. Your *notaire* will check that the seller legally owns the property, that there are no unknown debts or legal issues attached to it and that the sale complies fully with French law.

Meanwhile, if they haven't already been done, diagnostic checks covering everything from energy efficiency to lead and termite inspections are completed. You'll be provided



begins. At this stage, only the buyer can withdraw from the purchase without penalty, a built-in safeguard to give you time to review everything carefully and move forward with confidence.

### COMPLETION

At the end of the cooling-off period, a deposit needs to be paid to the *notaire*. This is usually 10% of the property purchase price, along with a small advance towards their fees. If you're transferring funds from overseas, your agent or property consultant can connect you to a foreign exchange specialist to simplify international transfers and reduce currency costs.

While the deposit is safely held, the *notaire* carries

out a series of legal and administrative checks, ensuring the property complies with local regulations. In certain rural areas, organisations such as SAFER, a public body that oversees agricultural and rural land, are formally notified of the sale. They have a time-limited right of first refusal to purchase qualifying rural land under the same terms as the buyer, although in practice this is rarely exercised and is just a routine part of the administrative process.

With all the checks complete, the *notaire* can prepare the final contract, known as the *acte de vente* (ADV), which you sign the day you take ownership of your new home, once the *notaire* has received your funds to pay for the property. Around a week

before signing, the *notaire* will notify you of the exact balance remaining, including their fees and minus any deposit already paid. It's important to allow sufficient transfer time to ensure the funds arrive before the signing date.

If you haven't done so beforehand, you need to set up a French bank account, so you have a *Relevé d'Identité Bancaire* (RIB) for the *notaire*, the utility service transfers and the house insurance, which must be in place for the day you sign the *acte de vente* (ADV).

Just before you sign, your property consultant will accompany you for a final inspection of the property. Meter readings are taken and any agreed inclusions or exclusions (such as furniture) ▶

with these reports, which are also annexed to the CDV, and yes, these diagnostic checks are paid for by the current owners.

The CDV is usually ready within six weeks and signing it is a major milestone. You can sign in person at the *notaire's* office or by procuration, a French power of attorney process allowing someone else (often a *notaire's* clerk) to sign on your behalf if you are unable to be present on the day.

After signing the CDV, a 10-day cooling-off period

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Letter of intention (LOI)/*offre d'achat*: A pre-contract document to formalise in writing your intent to buy at an agreed price.
- *Notaire*: A public and ministerial officer responsible for authenticating documents on behalf of clients. They are compulsory for any transaction affecting real estate in France.
- *Notaire's* fees: These include a combination of taxes, administrative costs and the *notaire's* professional fee for handling the legal aspects of a property sale, which cover verification of ownership, preparing the legal deeds and registering the transaction.
- Diagnostic checks: Includes an initial DPE report (energy efficiency), an ERP report (risk and pollution) and further reports on lead, asbestos, electrics, termites and natural and technological risks. Sometimes a drainage report will need to be carried out in addition.
- SAFER: The *Sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural* is a French government-regulated agricultural body. It has the right of pre-emption on agricultural or rural property sales, enabling it to replace the buyer to support the settlement of farmers in the area.
- *Compromis de vente* (CDV): The initial sales contract. This can also be referred to as the preliminary sales agreement (PSA) or *promesse de vente*.
- RIB (*Relevé d'Identité Bancaire*): A bank document containing the name and account details of the holder. It is used to facilitate bank transfers and must be in place when you come to sign the *acte de vente*.
- Procuration: Power of attorney. Signing a procuration will allow the *notaire's* clerk to sign on your behalf if you can't be present at the signing of the contracts.
- *Acte de vente* (ADV): The final contract to sign, to complete the property purchase.



€1.25M

**BERGERAC, DORDOGNE:** Restored six-bedroom manor house with bags of character, saltwater heated swimming pool and guest pigeonier apartment; it's only a short walk from village amenities and less than 15 minutes from Bergerac airport



€695,000

**VILLEREAU, LOT-ET-GARONNE:** Located in a rural spot, close to historic bastide towns and amenities, this renovated farmhouse has two guest houses (each with its own pool) and is set in about 1.5ha of mature gardens; it would make a great rental or family home



€499,00

**DOMPIERRE-SUR-CHARENTE, CHARENTE-MARITIME:** Spacious stone character property with five bedrooms, generous reception rooms and flexible living space; there's a large pool and lovely views over the countryside - all just a short drive from Saintes and Cognac



€495,000

**STE-FOY-LA-GRANDE, GIRONDE:** Charming property with an indoor saltwater pool, sauna, landscaped garden and double garage, in a peaceful location with electric gates and excellent entertaining space; perfect as a comfortable family home or stylish country retreat

*“The entire process takes three to four months from accepted offer to completion”*

are checked one last time. Essentially, it’s the final chance to make sure everything is as expected before you take ownership of your new home.

**BIENVENUE EN FRANCE**

On average, the entire process takes three to four months from accepted offer to completion. On the big day, whether you attend in person or sign by procuration, once the ADV is signed, you are officially a French homeowner. The *notaire* will provide a certificate of ownership, which serves as temporary proof of purchase, with the official title deed arriving a few months later once it has been registered with the French land registry (SPF).

There are several stages to navigate before you finally hold the house keys in your hand, and it can feel overwhelming. With experienced professionals by your side, it becomes a clear and rewarding process, ending with you stepping confidently into your new life in France. ■

**Saskia Vlaskamp is the Marketing Director at Beaux Villages Immobilier [beauxvillages.com](http://beauxvillages.com)**

CASE STUDY



Adam and Chris previously lived in southwest London with their two children: Beatrice (eight) and Xavier (five). Adam is originally from Scotland, while Chris is half-French. They had dreamed of buying a holiday home in France for several years, to replicate the French holiday experiences they’d both enjoyed with their families. In early 2025, they decided to move to France permanently, to give their children a countryside-focused childhood and the opportunity to become fully bilingual.

**What were your expectations relating to the house-buying process in France?**

As we’d bought and sold in London several times, we were used to the rather aggressive and adversarial approach that the London market (and the British buying process in general) encourages, and we’d readied ourselves for something similar in very popular southwest France. We also assumed that the buying journey would more or less mirror the British one, for example, in how offers were made and when structural surveys were required.

**How did this relate to reality?**

We were relieved that the French system seemed to be much more relaxed. Perhaps we were shielded by the agents we worked with, but at no time did we feel pressured to make immediate decisions or panic-buy so as not to ‘miss out on our dream home’.

In terms of the process, yes, it is different and initially, it felt very rigid, but once you get your head around the logic of it all, it makes perfect sense. The technical report that sellers are legally required to provide before putting their property on the market offers transparency, and signing the *compromis de vente* early on gives all parties a huge amount of security. This made our entire experience significantly less stressful than we were used to.

**How did you choose your agent?**

Initially, we were drawn to Beaux Villages because of the quality of its property presentation and its online presence, which made identifying properties we wanted to consider and view very easy. After this, it was all about the relationship with our property consultant, who worked with us over a period of two years to find our French home, taking the time to get to know us as a family and understand what we wanted and needed, and patiently answering all our questions.

**What advice do you have for other British property-buyers?**

Trust the process. Yes, it’s different to what you’re used to and typically takes longer, but it actually makes perfect sense and offers a better experience for everyone – one that helps to provide transparency and security upfront and reduce the pressure surrounding the purchase. Get someone who understands the buying process to help you all the way – especially if you’re considering relocating. Moving to a new country can be a stressful experience, so why make it any harder?



€381,600

**STE-SEVERE, CHARENTE:** Charming four-bedroom house with lovely original features, wooded grounds, separate guest house/office and excellent income potential; the property is situated in a peaceful rural environment, just 15 minutes from Cognac



€296,520

**MONSEGUR, GIRONDE:** Beautiful stone property with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, spacious living rooms, original features, landscaped garden and the potential to create guest annexes; it’s located close to Monségur, with easy access to Bergerac and Bordeaux



€250,000

**COUIZA, AUDE:** This former winemakers’ home has six bedrooms, high ceilings, original stone walls and a unique artistic style; there’s lot of potential to create a spacious family residence here in the sunny south of France - or a retreat, guesthouse or restaurant



€239,900

**LANUEJOULS, AVEYRON:** Peaceful one-bedroom stone home set in nearly 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of countryside; it comes with a large character barn with conversion potential, hen house, bread oven and well - could it be your serene retreat or rural project in the heart of Aveyron?



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Golden Stone

**Deux-Sevres €145,160 (HAI)**  
722369 - Lovely 3 bed stone house with courtyard in a small hamlet.  
Energy performance C | Gas emissions A



Maison de Maitre & Gite

**Lot-et-Garonne €580,000 (HAI)**  
725494 - Stunning maison de maitre with guest accommodation.  
Energy performance A



Provence Character

**Vaucluse €580,000**  
(Agent fees paid by seller)  
499143 - Delightful mas with outbuildings, pool and uninterrupted views.  
Energy performance C | Gas emissions A



Classic French

**Vaucluse €649,000**  
(Agent fees paid by seller)  
581627 - Spectacular stone house with pool and enclosed garden.  
Energy performance E | Gas emissions E



Open Views

**Vaucluse €995,000**  
(Agent fees paid by seller)  
725178 - Stunning fully restored mas.  
Energy performance C | Gas emissions C



Double Fronted

**Gers €590,000 (HAI)**  
471246 - Gascon maison de maitre with gites.  
Energy performance E | Gas emissions D



Great Value

**Gers €299,500 (HAI)**  
548037 - Authentic Gascon house with pool and breathtaking views.  
Energy performance C | Gas emissions A



Gite

**Charente €315,785 (HAI)**  
722277 - Wonderful 3 bed stone house with small gite.  
Energy performance C | Gas emissions A



Rental Potential

**Dordogne €319,640 (HAI)**  
730076 - Fully renovated perigordine house with gite and garden.  
Energy performance C



Gites

**Dordogne €729,000 (HAI)**  
534239 - Charming stone house with panoramic view, gites and pool.  
Energy performance D | Gas emissions C



Good Value

**Lot-et-Garonne € 234,000 (HAI)**  
730058 - Pretty perigordine stone house.  
Energy performance A



2 Stone Houses

**Normandy €295,000**  
(Agent fees paid by the seller)  
728388 - Two beautiful stone houses with apartment.  
Energy performance D | Gas emissions B

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La Place du Vieux-Marché in Rouen's historic centre



occurred in 1694, when the town was almost completely destroyed by a British and Dutch fleet launching incendiary bombs from the sea. Undaunted, Louis XIV ordered the town to be rebuilt and it retains much of that early 18th-century charm.

### MEDIEVAL MAJESTY

We took a guided tour of the old town of Rouen, which has one of the highest densities of listed buildings in France - not surprising, as it was a Gallo-Roman settlement over 2,000 years ago. Despite the efforts of enemies, from the Vikings to the Nazis, to destroy the city, it's clearly flourishing. If culture is your thing, many museums in Rouen are free to visit and as well as famous Monet paintings, the Musée des Beaux-Arts displays works by Renoir, Caravaggio, Velázquez and Modigliani.

Unique in France, the Aître St-Maclou, now a peaceful courtyard filled with trees and benches, was originally a plague pit. The charming timber-framed medieval buildings that encircle the space, housing a café and craft workshops, were then filled with bones from Black Death victims exhumed so that later plague victims could be buried. Up to 45% of the population is thought to have perished, making this lovely place one of the oddest makeovers of a seriously macabre past that I've ever visited.

The Gros-Horloge is even older in date. This astronomical clock tower straddles medieval streets in the old town. It's distinctly eerie to think that

# Coast and culture

**Sarah Daly** explores Rouen, Normandy's capital city, along with the pretty port town of Dieppe



The only time I'd previously visited Rouen, I was 19 and coming to the end of a month-long Interrailing trip around Europe with a school friend. We were tired and it rained, but we were Monet fans, so we visited the spectacular Gothic cathedral immortalised in his work. Once we had ticked it off our list, we staggered back to the dry comfort of our B&B, before heading to Dieppe to take the ferry home.

It's fair to say that Rouen's most famous 19-year-old visitor had a very different stay in the city. On my recent visit, I learned that Joan of Arc was

burnt at the stake here in 1431 at a site that can still be visited today in La Place du Vieux-Marché. Her crimes included wearing men's clothes and claiming she answered only to God and not to the church.

In fact, she led the French army to victory over the English many times during the Hundred Years' War. Her fascinating life and legacy are explored at the Historial Jeanne d'Arc and you can still visit the Donjon (Tour de la Pucelle) where she was held captive.

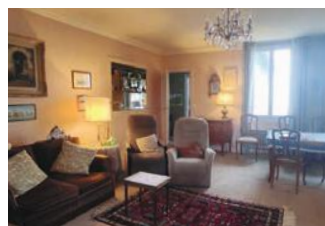
Dieppe, too, merited a lot more attention than we gave it (largely because we got on the wrong train and nearly missed

our ferry home). It's a really appealing town with a pretty seafront and a history entwined with England's.

William the Conqueror created ports here and along the Alabaster Coast, in order to continue trading with his home territory in the Duchy of Normandy. A century later, Henry II, and his son Richard the Lionheart, built Dieppe's imposing castle high on a promontory overlooking the sea. It's now a fascinating museum full of art, incredible ivory sculptures and one of the oldest world maps in existence.

A less comfortable moment of Anglo-French relations

## On the market



**€394,000, Dieppe:** Third-floor, four-bedroom seafront flat near the town centre with views of the beach and castle; comes with a cellar and private parking space (frenchestateagents.com)



**€396,000, Belbeuf:** On the banks of the Seine, this four-bedroom home in over 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of grounds is 30 minutes from Rouen and offers potential to extend. (frenchestateagents.com)



**€1.16m, St-Valery-en-Caux:** Seven-bedroom family home 10 minutes from beaches, set in over 6ha with equestrian facilities and separate building for conversion (frenchestateagents.com)



**€251,450, Foucarmont:** Six-bedroom manor house near schools, shops and local services and half an hour from the coast, with several outbuildings and two garages (frenchestateagents.com)

these, and many of Rouen's buildings would have existed in Joan of Arc's time.

**AGENT'S PERSPECTIVE**

Guillaume Herbert is an estate agent in Rouen. He tells me that a lot of people live in Rouen and work in Paris, which is roughly an hour and 30 minutes' journey by train or car. "The market has stabilised after the sharp rises following Covid," he explains. "You can expect to pay around €2,500-€3,000/m<sup>2</sup> for properties on the right bank of the Seine. If you want to be in the historic centre, however, prices can be as high as €4,500/m<sup>2</sup> for the most

sought-after properties. It's always a good idea to buy a place in an area with stable values," Guillaume advises. "You'll pay more, but it should hold its value for resale.

"Historic properties with charm are often the most appealing to English-speakers, particularly our iconic timber-framed homes. Haussman-type flats with a lift and parking are also popular with this market as are the traditionally middle-class areas near the station and St-André-de-Mont-St-Aignan. They often offer opulent accommodation, with gardens, close to the city centre and to good schools. On the left bank,



**"A lot of people live in Rouen and work in Paris – an hour and 30 minutes' journey by train or car"**

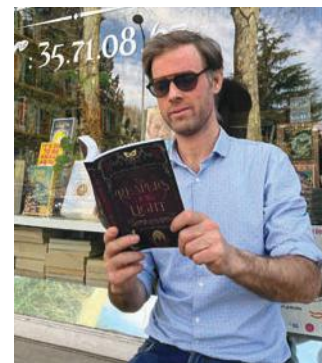
the area around the Jardin des Plantes is also popular.

"Beyond the city limits you will usually get larger plots for your money. To the north, the villages of Bois-Guillaume, Mont-St-Aignan and Bihorel have good local services and are well-served by public transport. They feature architect-designed modern properties as well as beautiful

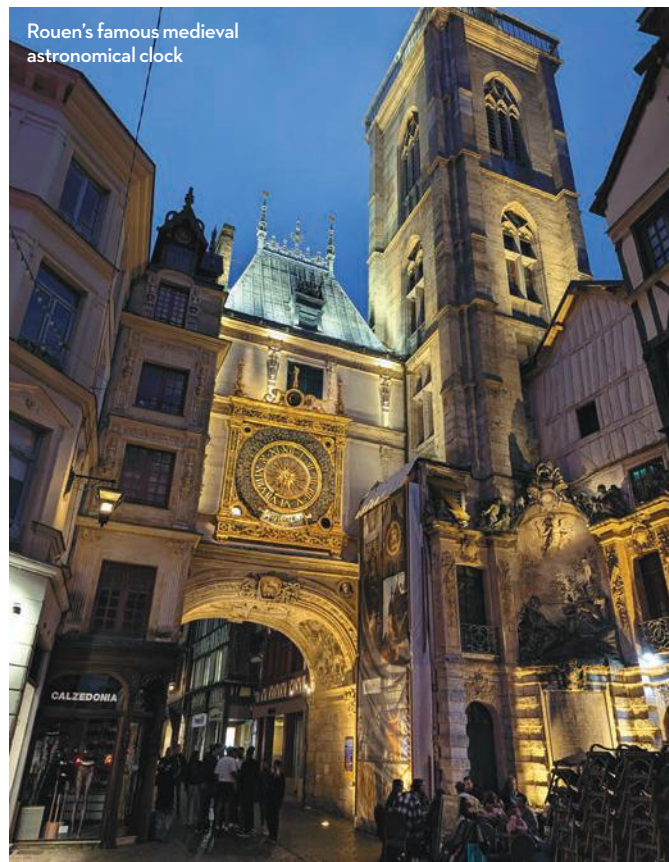
older homes. Le Mesnil-Esnard, Franqueville-St-Pierre and Bonsecours to the east are slightly cheaper but offer a good quality of life for families."

**MOVING BY THE BOOK**

Jersey-born Paul Billington runs ABC Bookshop ([abcbookshop.fr](http://abcbookshop.fr)) in the heart of Rouen, specialising in English-language books. He and his Lebanese wife are French citizens and live with their two children in a modern flat they've recently purchased on Rouen's left bank close to the centre. "I moved to France many years ago to teach English, and Rouen happened to be the first place I found work, but I love the city and never left," says Paul. "I used to visit this bookshop and got friendly with the British owner. When she wanted to sell up, I couldn't resist the opportunity ▶



Paul Billington outside ABC Bookshop

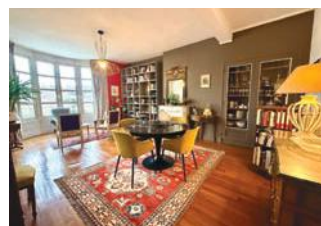


Rouen's famous medieval astronomical clock

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**€749,000, Bihorel:** Light-filled renovated four-bedroom family home with basement and garden, located in a suburb of Rouen with a village feel and good amenities ([sauvage-immobilier.com](http://sauvage-immobilier.com))



**€500,000, Rouen:** Located close to the station, this spacious renovated three-bedroom apartment in a 1930s building has a lift, great views and a balcony ([sauvage-immobilier.com](http://sauvage-immobilier.com))



**€122,000, Rouen:** Studio flat in a beautiful old stone building in the Quartier-Place-du-Vieux-Marché. It has lovely traditional shared spaces and great rental potential ([sauvage-immobilier.com](http://sauvage-immobilier.com))



**€295,000, Sotteville-lès-Rouen:** Unusual three-storey four-bedroom home near the Jardin des Plantes, with two reception rooms, terrace, garden and cellar ([sauvage-immobilier.com](http://sauvage-immobilier.com))



Dieppe's waterfront is lined with characterful historic buildings



Glenn Dudley with wife Claire, son Nino, daughter Marine and granddaughter

to take it on. Most of my customers are French, and I still teach English here to adults and children.

“The shop also acts as a meeting point for English-speakers in the city. When I first moved here, I house-shared and it’s a great way to meet people if you’re moving on your own. It took me a long time to get to the point of buying a property, but that means I understood the city well before I did so. I love it: it’s big enough to have plenty going on, but small enough to retain that small town feeling and to get to know people.”

**GLOBAL CONNECTIONS**

Dieppe has always been a town that faces the sea. It has around 30,000 inhabitants and is divided into six different neighbourhoods, each with its own unique feel. It has a protected deep port, a marina and an innovative dry dock that can store nearly 300 motorboats. An exciting local project is also using waste scallop shells to create calcium

for pharmaceutical use. A huge working swing bridge has just been restored and provides access to Le Pollet, traditionally where Dieppe’s fishing community lived.

This is a small town with global connections. Historically it traded with South America, Africa and Asia, and a project is underway to introduce electrically powered flights between Shoreham and Dieppe.

“I love the market, the proximity to the UK and the tranquillity of our village,” says Glenn Dudley, who has lived in Arques-la-Bataille since 2004, with his Dieppoise wife Claire and son Nino. “The region is green and beautiful in spring and autumn with rich colours from the rolling hills and valleys. The adjacent seaside resorts of Pourville, Fécamp and Le Tréport, as well as Dieppe, offer leisure activities and fine-dining opportunities throughout the year, and trains to Paris and its airports are frequent and travelling easy.

“To anyone considering the move, I would say rent for a year

to get to know the region before buying. It’s also essential to have a stable financial situation to cope with immersion into the local community. It’s not easy to find work unless you’re fluent in French with a transferable profession. There’s so much choice, space and quality of life on offer in France though, and I’ve always found French people to be welcoming and engaging, but for me it is the gastronomy and quality of life that win every time.”

**FOOD AND LODGINGS**

One of the joys of France is definitely the food, and Seine-Maritime is no exception. Rouen is France’s only Unesco City of Gastronomy, part of its Creative Cities Network, and Dieppe and Rouen have some exceptional restaurants. The excellent O2 Mer in Dieppe, with views of the beach, has a creative take on seafood, while on the harbour Le Jehan Ango offers traditional, hearty dishes. La Couronne in Rouen is an atmospheric restaurant with

imaginative food overlooking Place du Vieux-Marché, while Bistrot de la Pucelle offers fresh and seasonal dishes, and in Gill Coté Bistro, I had an excellent beef dish with an onion confit.

If you’re looking for a base for your property search, in Rouen, the Novotel near the cathedral is ideal for exploring both sides of the river, while the sea views from the Hotel Aguado in Dieppe are hard to beat. And the seafood market in Dieppe or the central market in Rouen, where I was introduced to the unctuous heart-shaped Neufchâtel cheese, provide plenty of opportunities to buy exceptional local produce in fascinating surroundings.

It was definitely worth taking the time to revisit this historic part of Normandy. Its coastline is beautiful and Dieppe is a lesser known jewel in its crown. And understanding just how merciless both the English and French authorities were to the young Joan of Arc doesn’t dim the appeal of the city that, in so many places, would have been familiar to her. Today her legend is rightly celebrated in this creative, vibrant and welcoming city. ■



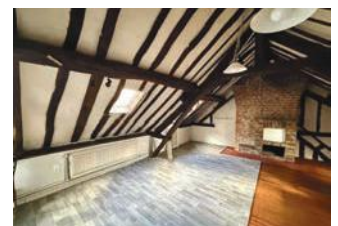
Rouen's cathedral

*On the market*

PROPERTYINFRANCE.COM



**€438,000, Montigny:** In a quiet setting but near village amenities, this three-bedroom home has gardens of over 2,000m<sup>2</sup>, garage, basement and outbuildings (sauvage-immobilier.com)



**€94,000, Rouen:** On the left bank of the Seine, second-floor two-bedroom apartment close to shops, transport and amenities; some updating required (sextantproperties.com)



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When Matthew Cushen bought a 600-year-old townhouse in a village outside Bordeaux two years ago, he wasn't sure that he was doing the right thing. He was planning to alternate between London and France but had never spent time in a small village and had never lived in two homes before. "It was a big experiment to see if I could spend half my life there," he says.

The 56-year-old entrepreneur and venture capitalist - who likes the area because of his interest in and love of red wine - was therefore very careful where and what type of home he bought. Mindful



Matthew Cushen

that he might change his mind, Matthew needed a property that would not only appeal to British buyers but would also "be attractive to French families". He went on to buy in the lively, agricultural village of St-Germain-du-Puch, about 31km southeast of Bordeaux.

"It's in the wine-producing region of Entre-Deux-Mers, so it doesn't have a great wine cachet but it appeals to (French) professionals," he says. A butcher, two bakeries and quite a smart destination restaurant, are all within walking distance of his home.

There is also a train station with a regular 45-minute commuter service into Bordeaux. If Matthew needs to do some work, his visitors can easily take off for the day using public transport. "Bordeaux is a fantastic city, I love it. And it's also of interest to my guests so when they visit, it gives me some space if I need it."

Equally important was the ability to reach his home by train from London. Door to

# A big experiment

Living part-time in a French village has been a successful experience for **Matthew Cushen**, he tells **Nicola Venning**



The house is in the traditional village of St-Germain-du-Puch

door, the journey is under five hours. "I didn't want to be dependent on flying because in about 10 years' time, we might not be doing that much."

## FORMER MONASTERY

Matthew paid €550,000 for the four-bedroom family house in late 2023. "One of the reasons I liked it, was because it was so deceptively big," he says. The house which used to be a monastery, had also once belonged to the local mayor, as well as his "charming" elderly neighbour. "It used to be her grandfather's. She also told me that the German commandant during the war (WWII) requisitioned it as his office and home. My games room was the German army's storeroom."

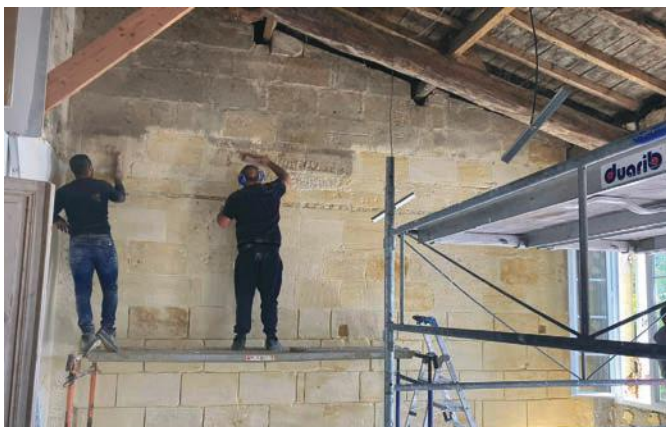
Although the home was perfectly habitable, it was tired and not in the style he wanted, but before making any changes Matthew lived in it for three months to "validate the kind of renovation" he was thinking about. He decided to enlarge the main rooms,



Off the kitchen, an old utility room was replaced by a covered stone terrace



*“Matthew wanted to maximise natural light and enhance the original stone walls”*



The ceiling was lifted in the living room and the old stone brought back to life

maximise the natural light, enhance the original stone walls, and also update the plumbing and wiring. The family bathroom and a smaller ensuite were reconfigured to create an extra one and an additional bathroom was added downstairs.

The kitchen was expanded by replacing an old utility room with a shaded terrace, while the elegant stone staircase, which he “just loves”, was repaired and a box room removed to

create a wider, lighter landing and make the most of the beautiful ancient stone steps.

Planning permission was needed in order to add new doors and floor-to-ceiling windows at the back of the house, so Matthew hired an architect and had the necessary professional drawings done.

“The architect had the idea of creating a new double-height ceiling in the living room and taking down the false low one, and then I suggested putting

in Juliet balconies to make the most of the new height, so we were kind of riffing off each other,” he explains.

#### KEEPING IT LOCAL

Handily, the architect also recommended workmen. As he was living in London during the renovation, Matthew visited at least once a month, generally for a day. “What I missed in France was having a foreman or a main contractor. I didn’t arrange it and assumed

it would just happen, but the trades or artisans are all quite distinct. However, they all got on really well and there was never an instance where someone said, ‘so and so’s late so I have to charge you more’. I missed having one point of contact though.”

As he wanted to be part of life in St-Germain-du-Puch, and “get under the skin”, Matthew was keen to employ local tradesmen and show that he was “investing in the village”.



A small box room on the landing was removed to add space and light



Before



After



The garden was transformed with a long lap pool and large sunny terrace

Fortunately, he was lucky with his electrician who lives near him and has become a keyholder. “He did a great job. He WhatsApps me if there’s something I ought to know. He recommended my cleaner! It’s been a happy outcome.”

The renovation took about six months, in time for the summer, and came in close to Matthew’s original estimates. However, the garden, which he totally transformed by adding a large terrace, long lap pool and landscaping, bumped up the cost by about 40%.

“In my naivety, I hadn’t realised it was going to be quite so pricey,” he says. “But it’s been worthwhile. Last summer I had so many visitors. We were never in the living room, most of the time was spent around or in the pool.”

The total refurbishment, inside and out, cost €500,000. The architect’s fee was roughly 5% of the final amount (€25,000), which Matthew thought was reasonable.

“I definitely would have spent that if I had got any of the contractor and building stuff wrong,” he acknowledges.

However, the purchase price of the house and the renovation cost, at about €1m, is, he admits, more than the house is now worth: “I am under no illusions. I am definitely at a capital loss, but I have created a house that is perfect for what I want to do. I don’t think there is much room in the French market to create value through refurbishments.”

#### WOBBLY WALLS

One of the biggest challenges was a beautiful old garden wall near the proposed terrace and pool, which had become wobbly. “If I tried to mend it in place, I would have lost a couple of months - and most of the summer.” Therefore, Matthew had it taken down so it didn’t delay the main works, and then later rebuilt. It now has “the original stone around a breeze-block core, which is nice

*“I only viewed the house for about 15 minutes - it was a great example of when you know, you know”*

enough, although it no longer looks as beautifully old”.

There was also a problem in the living room when Matthew discovered that one of three main beams in the new double-height ceiling was, in fact, rotten. Although the architect suggested sourcing an older and pricey replacement, Matthew preferred to get a modern, cheaper one.

“One of the things I love about this house is seeing how it’s changed throughout its long life, such as wooden lintels in the walls from doors that are no longer there or old etchings in the stone fireplaces,” he says. “2024 was the year the house needed a new beam. And aesthetically I often like old next to new.”

#### HAPPY ENDING

A happy surprise occurred when he had the carpets pulled up in the bedrooms and attic. “I didn’t know what was under the floor coverings, but when we removed them we found original floorboards with handmade nails - so that was great and we were able to renovate them throughout.

“Another pleasant surprise, is that it’s all worked out,” he smiles. The successful purchase was helped by Matthew giving a detailed brief

and putting in the legwork. He spent about 18 months searching “in a relatively relaxed way” and visited the area, often with family or friends, six to seven times over long weekends, viewing three or four properties per day.

“I didn’t know the region particularly well, although I knew the placenames because of the wine. Hence, I needed to explore around and stay in different places. I learnt a lot through that. Then it was a question of honing down where and what.”

As he did more research, he also realised that he might not need to pay as much as he originally thought. In the end, Matthew fell for a home listed with Leggett Immobilier. “I only saw this particular house for about 15 minutes and there wasn’t an opportunity for me to do a second viewing. It was a great example of when you know, you know.

“People ask me what’s it like living in France? But that’s not the pertinent question. For me, having lived in cities all my life, it’s living in a rural village that I am getting used to. The contrast between the two is really energising. I’m still loving London, but I’m loving France and village life just as much.” ■



There are four bedrooms - ideal for family and friends when they visit

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The Panthéon is a Neoclassical monument in Paris's Latin Quarter

See **LEGGETT IMMOBILIER** at the French Property Exhibition - see the back page for details



# Revolutionary design

Love Neoclassical architecture? This style was a revelation, gives Paris a lot of its character and was forged in the lead up to the Revolution, says **Joanna Leggett**

It is undisputed, France is beautiful. Bound by wonderful coastline, its stunning countryside is peppered with ancient dwellings, divine châteaux, medieval villages and enchanting towns. Every city and major town boasts a rich diversity of architectural style. In the larger ones, wide boulevards - often lined with stately buildings in the ancient Greek and Roman styles - entice you to explore and remark upon the colonnades and columns that adorn their facades. Space and grandeur, symmetry and white stone are the dominant features of their design and a benchmark of French architecture.

This Neoclassical style of architecture first became popular during the reign of Louis XV in the early to

mid-18th century and was said to have been inspired by the archaeological excavations at Pompeii. Louis XV was known for his massive building projects: Versailles, of course, being the largest he built. The style he chose for it was almost religiously followed by others aspiring to impress.

By the 1740s, fashion and tastes in interior design and architecture had started to change, decoration became less extravagant and more classic. Then the Marquis de Marigny - brother of Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's mistress - went on a road trip to Italy with a delegation of scholars and artists to see recent archaeological discoveries in Pompeii and Herculaneum and, naturally, made a grand tour of other classical monuments at the same time.

They came back fired up with enthusiasm for a new classical style in architecture, which imaginatively became known as Neoclassical or *le goût Grec* (Greek style).

## BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Considered a revelation after the heavier Baroque and Rococo styles of previous eras, it really caught on. In 1757, the first illustrated textbook of the style was published, promoting the majestic style of the architects of ancient Greece - and the rest, as they say, is history. This 'cutting edge' new design style started appearing in royal residences during the last years of Louis XV's reign and was prevalent throughout Louis XVI's tenure, which is hardly surprising as Marigny had by this time become director of buildings for the

latter. The style was especially popular in the interior salons and furnishings of Marie Antoinette in her boudoir at Fontainebleau, and with Parisian aristocracy. In fact, while labelled Neoclassical, it was a mélange of Greek, Roman and Etruscan styles, sometimes with chinoiserie and Turkish themes thrown into the mix.

By 1780, this new style started appearing externally too in the architecture of classically designed buildings, which notably included the Petit Trianon at Versailles and the Château de Bagatelle set within 24 hectares of the Bois de Boulogne in the 16th arrondissement of Paris. The latter was designed as a small lodge for brief stays for Louis XVI's brother while out hunting - was this the ultimate comfort stop? It was completed in just

## “The style was especially popular in the interior salons and furnishings of Marie Antoinette in her boudoir at Fontainebleau”

63 days to win a bet with Marie Antoinette over whether he could build a château within three months!

### PARIS STYLE

Towards the end of Louis XV's reign, Neoclassical had become the dominant style in civil architecture. The east facade of the Louvre had been reimaged, nearby the Hôtel de la Marine was erected with its grand colonnaded front elevation facing the Place de la Concorde, and then there's the École Militaire, to name just a few such magnificent buildings in central Paris.

Then came the Revolution. The aristocracy fled Paris, most of their palaces and townhouses were stripped of furnishings and decoration, and many suffered the same fate as Marie Antoinette. While major building works virtually stopped during the initial revolutionary turmoil, the ethos of Neoclassical architecture escaped the confines of Paris and was taken to every part of France. With its style demanding the geometric forms, decoration and majesty of ancient Greece, it was perhaps a symbol of stability.

A modified version of Neoclassicism found favour briefly during the time of the French Directorate in the 1790s, mixing its style with the architecture and designs

of Robert Adam in England. But when Napoleon Bonaparte took centre stage, Neoclassical became the Empire style - with crowns, laurel wreaths, classical heads seen in profile, Napoleon's imperial bee symbol, the eagle and the letter 'N' proliferating.

### CLASSIC CHATEAU

The Château de Compiègne in Oise had been the preferred summer residence for French kings, who enjoyed hunting in its nearby forest. Gutted during the Revolution, Napoleon reclaimed it as an imperial domain and made it habitable again - its beautiful facade featuring columns and porticos in a pleasing symmetry. He altered its layout, added a ballroom and replanted the garden in classical style incorporating an entry into the forest.

This era saw triumphal arches erected - the Arc de Triomphe dominated the Champs Élysées (as well as many a postcard). Townhouses became *hôtels particuliers*, with discreet street entrances opening onto square interior courtyards surrounded by massive dwellings with windows around each side bringing an abundance of light into rooms. Many grand buildings boast impressive arcades at street level, carefully balanced by rows of windows



### CHATEAUX COUNTRY

*In the heart of Touraine, close to Chenonceaux, Amboise and Tours, this classically designed mid-19th-century farmhouse is fully restored, offering an enormous living room, open-plan kitchen, three bedrooms and dressing room with single-storey living. Outside, in the 1.5-hectare private park, there's a swimming pool, pétanque court and wisteria-clad lean-to - the perfect spot to while away hot summer days and evenings.*



### CLOSE TO NARBONNE

*In the south of France in Minervois, Ginestas is crossed by the Canal du Midi and surrounded by vineyards. Within walking distance of amenities, in a private courtyard garden, this stunning 'maison de maître' is full of authentic features offering an opportunity to create a 'chambre d'hôte' or extended family home. Its living rooms are spacious and a grand stone staircase leads to four ensuite bedrooms on the first floor ideal for guests. There are five more on the top floor, while outside the pool beckons, making it the perfect retreat.*



The Temple of Love at Marie Antoinette's château, Le Petit Trianon, Versailles

and columns with classical pediments. The Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux is a great example, its majestic stairway providing inspiration for the Opéra Garnier in Paris. Architecture for churches also used this vernacular, most notably the Panthéon in Paris.

The craze for Neoclassical design spread throughout France. There are wonderful examples of this architecture with its distinctive features including the Place Masséna in Nice, the exceptional 18th-

century urban planning in Bordeaux, the *mairie* (town hall) in Annecy and three large plazas built under royal patronage in the 1750s in Nancy.

During the latter part of the Revolution, the Directoire style emerged, employing Neoclassical architecture, minimal carving and much decorative painting. It was a transitional style reflecting the values of Republican Rome and the changing egalitarian movement of the French regime. Beautiful furniture



Château de Compiègne in Oise

© SHUTTERSTOCK

was created to fill rooms - similar perhaps to the Regency mode in England created during the same period.

And so it continued throughout the Bourbon Restoration until Neoclassicism was gradually replaced as the dominant architectural style by Romanticism and Eclecticism. When Haussmann was redeveloping Paris though, Neoclassic style featured heavily in the buildings that took pride of place when he was creating his wide sweeping boulevards and enhancing the magnificent structures.

## MOVING ON

As the 19th century progressed, so too did class structure, and who could afford the building and upkeep of town and country mansions. More and more people were making enough money to build their own version of stately homes - what we might describe as 'des res' - including entrepreneurs who wanted their own châteaux or *manoirs* built to their own specifications.

Many a Neoclassic château was built around the country including in the Loire Valley, once the exclusive domain of kings and nobles. *Maisons de maître* are smaller but still generous in proportion, offering the chance to create a more than enviable lifestyle for anyone lucky enough to buy one today - and they continued to be built in the Neoclassic style until the turn of the 20th century. ■

**Joanna Leggett is Leggett Immobilier's Marketing Director - view the full portfolio of properties at [leggettfrance.com](http://leggettfrance.com)**

## ELEGANCE IN WINE COUNTRY

*Just 40 minutes' drive from Bordeaux in the heart of Gironde wine country, this beautiful estate is in a private peaceful hamlet. Dating back to 1850, its facade charms with its porticoed classic design and wrought-iron-faced balconies. Completely renovated, the manor is set around the main house with two independent, two-bedroom guesthouses, a vast garden and large swimming pool, with numerous outbuildings. All have achieved an 'A' energy rating. The 'manoir' has four/five bedrooms, large reception rooms and is bathed in sunshine.*

€635,000



€790,000

## PEACEFUL RETREAT IN THE CITY

*This lovely stone 'manoir' is surrounded by a large fully fenced park with automatic gates. Just a stone's throw from the centre of Libourne in Gironde, and not overlooked, it offers modern comfort in exceptional condition. With four large bedrooms, generous living spaces and a swimming pool, it balances urban living and country life to perfection.*



€1.41M

## TOURAINNE TRIUMPH

*Built on the site of a previous château destroyed in the Revolution, this magnificent property sits in parklands of approximately 11 acres with a lake and some huge 200-year-old trees. It has an enormous heated pool and 11 ensuite bedrooms, plus there's a further five-bedroom house, three-bedroom guardian's property and several outbuildings. It's situated in beautiful countryside of the southern part of Touraine and Creuse, near Tournon-St-Pierre.*



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## How long have you worked as an estate agent in France?

I started in 1981 after a chance encounter with a French property developer on a plane from Paris to Nice. By the time we parted ways at the airport, we had a mutual promise that I would take over his agency and if successful I would get 50% of the shares... it was successful and without any contract he gave me 50% and two years later I acquired the rest!

## Where do you cover?

The French Riviera with offices in St-Jean-Cap Ferrat, St-Paul-de-Vence, Valbonne, Antibes, Cannes, St-Tropez - and La Garde-Freinet in the countryside.

## Describe your area in five words

Elegant, accessible, prestigious Mediterranean lifestyle

## What is its appeal?

A rare blend of Mediterranean beauty, cultural refinement and effortless accessibility. It combines elegant coastal towns, renowned resorts such as Cannes and Nice, and charming hilltop villages like Valbonne and Mougins and St-Paul-de-Vence, all set against a backdrop of sea and mountains. Plus over 300 days of sunshine a year, excellent connections via Nice International Airport, a cosmopolitan yet secure environment, and a long-established British affinity.

## What's your favourite corner of the region?

High in the hills, near the ancient Roman Road, above the coast and towns, with stunning 360-degree views of the rugged landscape and the sea.

## Is the region easy to reach?

Direct flights via airlines such as easyJet, Jet2, British Airways from most major UK cities place the Riviera within little more than two hours' flying time, making it ideally suited for frequent visits and longer stays.

## Is it best for holiday or permanent homes?

The Riviera is exceptionally well suited to both holiday living and permanent residence; this dual appeal underpins its enduring attractiveness. For holidays, the region offers immediate lifestyle



# Riviera promise

**Philip Weiser** talks to **Karen Tait** about his corner of the sunny south of France



benefits: a mild Mediterranean climate with over 300 days of sunshine, proximity to beaches, restaurants and cultural events, and effortless accessibility from the UK. For permanent living, it provides a high quality of infrastructure, international schools, healthcare, security and a well-established expat community.

What distinguishes the Riviera is its ability to combine a resort destination with the practicality of everyday living, allowing owners to enjoy it as a seasonal retreat, a main residence, or a seamless transition between both.

## Are there any hotspots, or less well known areas?

The most sought-after locations, particularly among international buyers, are Cannes (Croisette, Californie, Super Cannes) - glamour, events, and strong rental potential; Cap d'Antibes - discreet luxury villas and proximity to beaches and exciting lifestyle; Nice - vibrant city living with culture, airport access and year-round activity; St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat/Villefranche-sur-Mer/Èze - some of the most exclusive coastal addresses on the Riviera.

Established residential favourites (popular with British buyers) include Valbonne

- a charming village with international schools and a strong expat community; Mougins - private estates, greenery, gastronomy and proximity to Cannes; Biot - slightly more accessible, authentic, and still close to the coast. These locations offer more space and land, a balance between countryside and accessibility

'Insider' areas (less known, strong potential), often overlooked by British buyers yet increasingly attractive, include the Cannes hinterland (Opio, Châteauneuf, Roquefort-les-Pins) - more land, quieter environment; Fayence and the Var countryside - excellent value and authentic Provençal lifestyle; Le Cannet (above Cannes) - residential, calmer alternative to central Cannes.

The Riviera is not just one market, but three: Coastal prestige (status and immediacy), hinterland living (space and authenticity), and emerging zones (value and long-term potential).

## What kind of properties are on offer?

The diverse range of properties reflects both the area's long history and its international appeal. Buyers will find everything from elegant Belle

Époque villas and Provençal farmhouses to contemporary architect-designed residences and modern waterfront apartments. There is no single style, the region is characterised by a blend of architectural influences shaped by its heritage and evolving tastes.

Traditional Provençal properties - with stone facades, terracotta roofs, shutters and landscaped gardens - are particularly sought after around Valbonne, Mougins and Biot.

Along the coast, in areas such as Cap d'Antibes or St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, you find grand historic villas alongside sleek contemporary homes designed to maximise sea views and natural light. In towns like Cannes and Nice, elegant period buildings coexist with high-quality modern apartments, close to amenities.

What unifies Riviera style is an emphasis on light, indoor-outdoor living and connection to the landscape. Properties are designed to make the most of the climate, views and lifestyle.

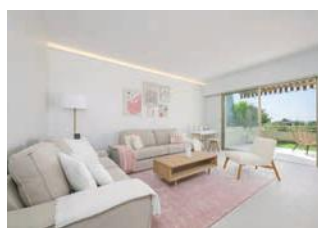
## What would people get for a budget of:

- **Under €100,000:** A studio in a countryside village
- **€100,000-€250,000:** A studio or one-bedroom apartment near the coast

## On the market



**€1.395, Grasse:** Four-bedroom villa with modern amenities, on a wooded plot with pool, sunny terraces, landscaped garden, and separate guest apartment



**€750,000m Cannes-Les Croix des Gardes:** Renovated two-bedroom apartment with south-facing terrace, sea views, communal gardens and pool



**€1,65m, Riviera countryside:** Four-bedroom villa with panoramic views of the sea and mountains; landscaped grounds, terraces, heated pool and BBQ



*“The Riviera combines a resort destination with the practicality of everyday living”*

St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat is one of the most sought-after and exclusive locations on the French Riviera

- **€250,000-€500,000:** A one or two-bedroom apartment near the coast
- **€500,000-€750,000:** A two-bedroom apartment near the coast; a two/three-bedroom villa in a private estate not far from the coast; a three-bedroom villa in the countryside
- **€750,000-€1m:** A three/four-bedroom villa not far from the coast, in the near countryside
- **€1m-€20m:** Price determines location, size, orientation and standard of features - pool, cinema, sauna, tennis court, hammam, size of grounds

#### What's the cheapest property on your books?

A studio in Cannes for €222,000. In the sought-after Palm Beach area, this ground-floor studio is just a few steps from the beaches, in a peaceful, residential area. It's suited to

seasonal and long-term rental.

#### What's the most unusual property you have sold?

On the water's edge, Villa Aujourd'hui was a bold expression of Riviera modernism, capturing the essence of 1930s sophistication. Commissioned in the late 1920s by an American socialite, later owned by Hollywood film magnate Jack Warner, the villa became a meeting place for Hollywood and Riviera society, including Charlie Chaplin and Ava Gardner. The value today could be over €40m.

#### What would be your dream home in the area?

Founded by monastic orders in the 17th century, set within more than 10 hectares of unspoilt Provençal landscape, Domaine de la Sylviane is a

rare historic estate where time appears to stand still. Centred around a former monastic residence, the property unfolds as a private hamlet of stone buildings, olive groves and shaded terraces – all just moments from the heart of the medieval village of Valbonne. On the market for €14.8m.

#### Why do British people buy houses in your area?

A combination of climate, accessibility, lifestyle and long-term value. Their motivations tend to be both emotional and rational. The Riviera offers a rare equilibrium – where accessibility meets escapism, and investment meets emotion.

#### What advice would you give to buyers?

Define your criteria in terms of size, environment and

investment intentions. Consult an agency with whom you can communicate easily, who are familiar with the multitude of areas. Explain the reasons for your criteria and let them make the choice of properties for your visit.

#### Any tips for settling into French life?

Learn a little handy vocabulary and don't be shy to use it. Smile and say “*bonjour*” and “*merci beaucoup*”. Explore and ask questions. Eat, drink and enjoy the sea, the sun, the countryside and the culture.

#### What are your predictions for your local property market?

The market remains stable, even during turbulent times; as demand outstrips supply, prices rise. Unlike many areas of Europe with a benign climate, strict urban planning prevents rabid development and high-rise projects. ■

*Philip Weiser is the founder and CEO of Carlton International*  
[carlton-international.com](http://carlton-international.com)

### AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES

How much would you expect to pay for:

**A detached property with land in good condition?**

€700,000 to €2.5m

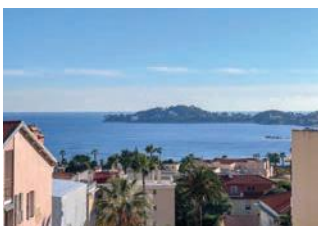
**A three-bedroom townhouse?**

Between €600,000 and €1.3m

**A renovation opportunity?**

It varies a lot. As a useful guide, every euro spent adds 100% of that spend on top of the spend, to the value of the asset

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**€950,000, Beaulieu-sur-Mer:** Top-floor two-bedroom renovated apartment, with balconies and sea views, close to the beach, restaurants and shops



**€1.315m, Tournettes-sur-Loup:** Three-bedroom farmhouse in the heart of natural surroundings, with an independent studio in a stone 'mazet', parking and cellar



**€14.8m, Valbonne:** Historic 13-bedroom estate comprising a former monastery, two villas and an apartment, in 25 acres with heated pool, tennis, fitness area



**€550,000, Grimaud:** Renovated duplex combining charm with modern comforts; entrance hall, living room with fireplace, dine-in kitchen, two ensuite bedrooms



FRENCH  
INTERIORS  
PART 3

longer than intended after a lively evening with friends. Conversations at this threshold have a habit of lingering.

You can take in a surprising amount when you first arrive at someone's front door. A glimpse down a hallway, the smell of something baking, or a familiar scented candle burning on a sideboard. There may be a family cat weaving and purring around ankles, or a dog enthusiastically greeting visitors and investigating the stories carried in on their shoes.

These moments are universal, whether in our own homes or when arriving at friends' houses here in Provence. There is something especially lovely about being welcomed into a warm house in the early evening, with the sun setting on the outside world and dinner on its way.

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The hall or entryway deserves far more attention than it often receives. It is also one of the hardest-working areas of the house. Guests may never see a study, a spare bedroom, a home



An entryway is often thought of as a space we don't really spend time in, just somewhere we pass through. In reality, it is one of the most social parts of a home. It is where a neighbour drops off the scarf you left behind after dinner, where eager trick-or-treaters arrive at Halloween, and where goodbyes stretch

# Bienvenue!

**Susannah Cameron** offers some stylish ideas to decorate an entryway and make your guests feel welcome

© SUSANNAH CAMERON/CHEZ JULIE



*“The entryway deserves attention; it is one of the hardest-working areas of the house”*

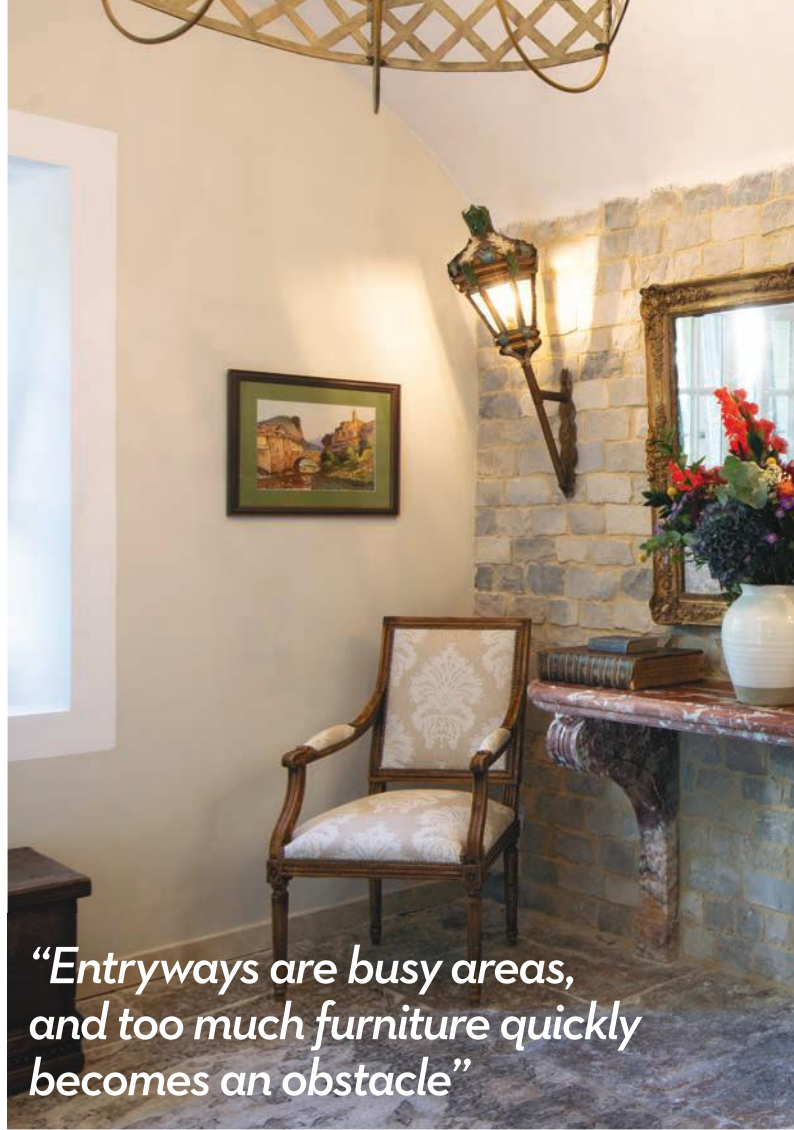
cinema or a wine cellar, but they will always experience the entrance. It receives more foot traffic than most other rooms, which alone makes it worth thinking about carefully.

It is also a genuinely enjoyable space to design and decorate. An entryway does not need much to make it feel complete. A vase of garden cuttings, a piece of artwork you truly love, or an old mirror that has witnessed years of comings and goings can be enough. At the same time, it is wonderfully practical. This is where you pause before heading out to pull on shoes and a coat, take a quick look in the mirror to check that your collar is straight and there is no lipstick on your teeth.

What I often notice in French homes is that entryways tend to be beautifully functional, thoughtfully furnished and welcoming. There is usually somewhere to sit, even if it is just a simple chair or bench, and a place to set down a bag while coats come off or shoes are changed. A console table often holds a *vide-poche* for



**Clockwise from far left:** An entryway should feel welcoming; here the designer has carefully considered proportion and scale; give a hint at what’s to follow in the rest of the house; a plant or vase of flowers can make the area feel complete



*“Entryways are busy areas, and too much furniture quickly becomes an obstacle”*



keys and sunglasses. There may be a coat rack or hat stand for scarves, dog leads and jackets, and often a collection of walking sticks kept close to hand. There is almost always a sensible spot for a wet umbrella; a cast-iron umbrella stand works perfectly, with a tray beneath to catch any drips.

I have noticed more gallery walls, with an eclectic mix of botanical prints, antique engravings, watercolours and landscapes. Nothing matches too neatly, and it is this sense of accumulation and gentle collecting that gives these spaces their ease.

**SIZE MATTERS**

When decorating a hall or entryway, it helps to pay close attention to the architecture you already have. A French feel often comes from working with proportion and scale rather than imposing a look. High ceilings can comfortably take a larger lantern or chandelier, while smaller spaces benefit from wall sconces or lamps that

soften the light and make the area feel inviting, particularly in the evening.

Many village houses in France have a small foyer just inside the front door, acting as a buffer between the street and the rest of the house. In these cases, a circular centre table works well. It is easy to walk around and useful when your arms are full.

In narrower halls or along corridors and stairwells, a console or commode is often more practical. A demi-lune console is especially effective, as its curved front makes it easier to circulate past without catching a hip or a bag. An antique trunk can also be a clever solution, hiding shoes while doubling as seating or a place to put things down.

One anchor piece is usually enough. Entryways are busy areas, and too much furniture quickly becomes an obstacle. What matters most is how the space is used day to day. Where do people naturally stop? Where do they instinctively set things down? Paying attention to these small habits often



**Clockwise from far left:** A mudroom entryway can be stylish as well as functional; think about using one anchor piece, such as a mirror; a seat to rest and put on footwear is useful in a hallway; gallery walls of botanical prints are a popular option; a table top to set things down while preparing to leave is handy



leads to the best decisions.

Lighting plays a larger role than we sometimes realise. Soft, warm light makes arrivals feel calmer, particularly after dark. Sensor lighting can be very helpful, removing the need to search for a light switch with full hands. Lamps and wall lights are often more appealing than a single overhead fitting, especially in areas that are used briefly but frequently. I like to leave a passage light on overnight when we have guests staying who may lose their bearings.

It is often the smaller details that make both you and your guests feel comfortable. When it is clear where everyday things belong, people relax. They don't need to ask, so don't worry about doing the wrong thing. That sense of ease is one of the most generous gestures a home can give.

### SCENE-SETTING

The entryway sets the scene for the house and establishes the tone for what follows. Repeating a colour, a material, or a furniture style helps

everything feel connected. If you love Louis XVI furniture, for example, you might choose a Louis XVI armchair for the entrance and then echo it with a mirror in the same style elsewhere in the house. These details may go unnoticed, but decorating with what you love creates continuity and a quiet sense of coherence.

This way of thinking also encourages collecting over time. Choosing pieces that relate to one another, rather than chasing a look, gives a home its own character. Old mercantile furniture, drapers' tables, scales, shop signs, and well-used pottery all bring a sense of purpose and history. When a home evolves in this way, new pieces tend to find their place naturally. ■

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# What's my house worth?

Understanding property valuations in France, without a crystal ball, can be confusing - **Paddy Gibbins** runs through the pros and cons of the main ways to get your French property valued

Trying to work out what your property is worth in France can sometimes feel like dabbling in the dark arts. The process is rarely straightforward and, in some areas, positively baffling. This is particularly true in popular tourist locations, where the local market is shaped by very different buyer profiles: long-term residents, second-home owners, lifestyle buyers from Paris or London, and investors seeking rental income. Each has their own budget, expectations and frame of reference.

Against that backdrop, a sensible habit is to revalue your property every two years. Doing so gives you a clearer sense of how your home's value is evolving - whether rising, stagnating or falling - and helps you decide what, if any, improvements are worth making. It also avoids unpleasant surprises if you suddenly need to sell.

Property valuation is often described as a blend of science

and intuition, and that is especially true in France. One of the most commonly quoted benchmarks is the price per square metre. While this can offer a rough guide, it rarely tells the full story.

## 'ATYPICAL' PROPERTY WONDERLAND

A square-metre price does not reflect a property's overall condition, its precise location, outdoor space, land, views, exposure or the presence (and cost) of a *copropriété* for apartments. Nor does it capture the emotional pull of an 'atypical' property - something the French market has in abundance.

Take Lyon as an example: price-per-square-metre figures can range from around €1,500 to more than €7,000 depending on the neighbourhood and the prestige of the building. Unsurprisingly, most sellers like to imagine their property sits at the top end of the scale rather than the bottom.



## THREE WAYS TO VALUE YOUR PROPERTY

Broadly speaking, there are three main ways to establish a property's value in France:

1. **Do it yourself**
2. **Ask one or more estate agents to value it**
3. **Instruct a qualified property valuation expert**

Each approach has its strengths - and its pitfalls to watch out for.

### 1) THE DIY VALUATION

**Proceed with caution**

If you decide to value your property yourself, there are

several key principles you should bear in mind.

First, don't start with cost price plus works. This is one of the most common mistakes sellers make. Spending €10,000 on a new kitchen and €15,000 on two bathrooms does not automatically add €25,000 to your home's value. Improvements can make a property more attractive and easier to sell, but they do not always translate into a euro-for-euro increase in price.

The same applies to major technical work. A heating system upgrade, new windows

## On the market



**€345,000, Autignac:** Beautiful 'maison de vigneron' in a village just 30 minutes from the coast, comprising two independent houses linked by a terrace with a swimming pool ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€420,000, Octon:** Modern single-storey house in Hérault, set on a 805m<sup>2</sup> plot; it has three bedrooms plus a room dedicated to short-term rentals and a heated pool ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€595,000, Béziers:** Four-bedroom villa in a lively village with shops, cafés and schools, 30 minutes from beaches; set on a 5,865m<sup>2</sup> plot, it has a heated pool and panoramic views ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€459,000, Lodève:** Near Lake Salagou, three-bedroom house built on a wooded plot of 6,300m<sup>2</sup>; it comes with a vast terrace overlooking the river and a large workshop ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))

“The most commonly used approach is to request an ‘avis de valeur’ from one or more local estate agents”



the works and estimated expense needed to improve performance. Buyers are increasingly factoring these costs directly into their offers.

**Look at the right data – not just the loudest**

Online portals such as SeLoger or Bien’ici are useful starting points to see what is currently on the market. But a word of warning: at any given time, around 70% of listings are priced at least 10% above their true market value. Sellers test the waters, agents compete for mandates, and prices often drift downwards over time.

For that reason, if you are researching active listings, pay more attention to the lower end of the price range than the top.

A far more reliable - and surprisingly little-known - source of information is the government’s DVF database ([app.dvf.etalab.gouv.fr](http://app.dvf.etalab.gouv.fr)). This platform shows actual sale prices for properties sold over the past five to 10 years, depending on the commune.

It is not the most user-friendly tool and does require some practice to navigate properly, but it offers something invaluable: reality. Ultimately, the only true measure of value is what buyers have actually paid.

**2) ESTATE AGENTS’ VALUATIONS**

**Useful, but ask questions**

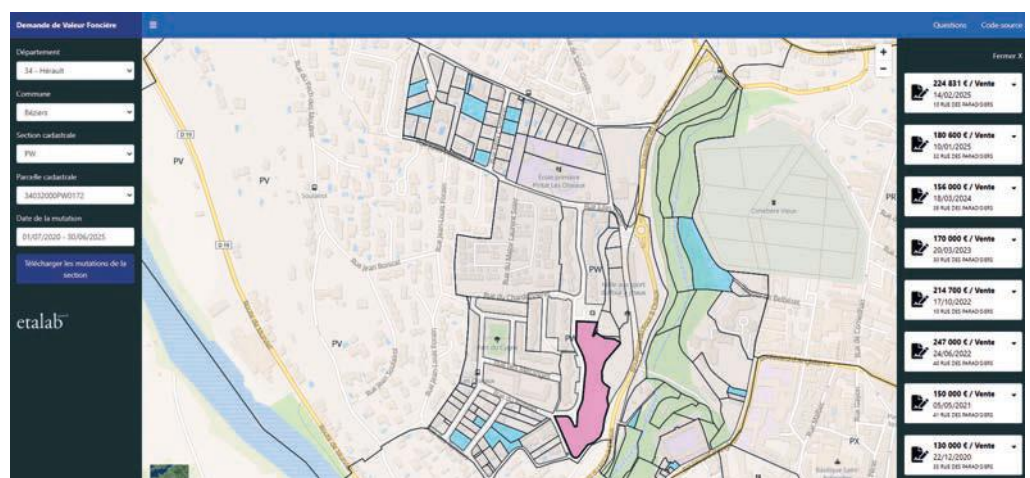
The most commonly used approach is to request an *avis de valeur* from one or more local estate agents. When the agent is experienced and honest, this can be a very effective method.

However, sellers should remain alert. Agents are often competing with one another and may be tempted to give optimistic valuations to secure a mandate. In practice, this can mean figures 10% to 20% above market value.

Some agencies even operate a deliberate strategy of overpricing by around 20% in order to win an exclusive mandate, then gradually reducing the price over a six to nine-month period.

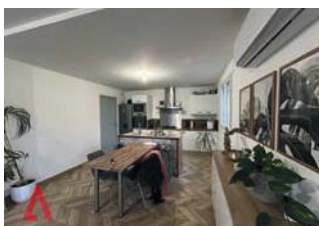
or improved insulation may significantly improve comfort and saleability, but they do not necessarily boost headline value – especially if buyers consider them to be essential rather than optional.

On the flip side, negative diagnostics now carry more weight than ever. Issues such as asbestos, electrical anomalies or, crucially, a poor energy rating (DPE) can have a far greater impact on value than they did five years ago. Properties rated E, F or G now require an additional energy audit, at extra cost, detailing



The government’s DVF database is a little-known but surprisingly reliable source providing actual sales prices

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON [PROPERTYINFRA.NC.COM](http://PROPERTYINFRA.NC.COM) & [FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM](http://FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM)



**€180,000, St-Thibéry:** Two-bedroom apartment with open-plan living area, terrace, private garden with hot tub, outdoor parking space and wooden storage shed ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€315,000, Lake Salagou:** Three-bedroom modern house in a natural setting, a stone’s throw from the lake, with open-plan kitchen, swimming pool, two terraces and garage ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€199,000, Aspiran:** Just 40 minutes from Montpellier, characterful three-bedroom village house with potential, the spacious living room opens onto a walled garden ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



**€255,000, Nissan-lez-Enserune:** Modern single-storey two-bedroom house with open-plan kitchen, garden and garage, near Béziers, vineyards and the Mediterranean coast ([artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com))



Some estate agents may inflate the sales price to win the mandate, then reduce the price over time to sell it

It may sound shocking, but it happens. A good agent should be able to justify their valuation with concrete examples of comparable properties that have sold, not just those currently for sale. A proper *étude de valeur* should reference recent transactions so you can understand how the final valuation figure was reached.

That said, not all properties fit neatly into comparison boxes. France has many unique and atypical homes, where experience and market feel really matter. A good agent should know what is selling, what has sold recently and what budgets are actively coming into the market.

One important – and often overlooked – question to ask is simply: how many properties have you sold?

The French real estate sector sees a constant influx of new entrants. It is not uncommon for around 60% of sales negotiators to leave the profession within six months. An enthusiastic newcomer may be charming, but they may well know less about the local market than you do. Experience counts – *un agent qui a de la bouteille*.

**3) CALL IN THE EXPERT**  
The third option is to instruct a qualified property valuation

**expert:** Typically, they will be a member of the Syndicat des Experts Evaluateurs Immobiliers de France. These professionals produce in-depth valuation reports designed for legal and fiscal purposes: divorce, inheritance, disputes, donations or company structuring. Their work is comprehensive and impartial. An expert will analyse sold prices, consult local agents, review planning constraints, examine the state of the property and apply recognised valuation methodologies.

Cost-wise, such reports start at about €400, but they offer something invaluable: an unbiased and defensible valuation. This can be particularly worthwhile in cases of shared ownership, family transfers, or disagreement between co-owners.

The objective is to determine the *valeur vénale* of the property – the price that a willing buyer and a willing seller would agree in normal market conditions.

**How experts value property**  
Experts use several recognised methods, including:

- **Comparison method:** Analysing recent and comparable sales
- **Replacement value:** The

cost of buying the land and rebuilding

- **Income approach:** Based on net rental income and yields (typically lower in cities than rural areas)

- **Development value:** Assessing what the land would be worth if redeveloped

While many methods exist, the comparison approach remains the most commonly used to establish market value.

**DON'T FORGET THE MARKET CYCLE**

**One final – and crucial – point:** Context matters. The French property market experienced an exceptional surge during and immediately after Covid. Transactions peaked in 2021 at

“France has many atypical homes, where experience and market feel really matter”

around 1.25 million sales, before falling to below 800,000 in 2024. Prices rose sharply during this period, but momentum has since slowed down.

When analysing historic data, especially from 2021, 2022 and early 2023, it is sensible to apply a 10% to 20% discount to reflect current conditions. Yesterday’s peak prices are not always today’s reality.

So, are you confused? Perhaps a little, but not irretrievably so. If you need absolute clarity and a firm stake in the ground, an expert valuation is the gold standard. Estate agents remain an excellent source of information, provided you ask the right questions and choose someone experienced. DIY research is perfectly possible, but only if you base your conclusions on actual sold data, not wishful thinking. In property, as in life, knowledge beats guesswork every time. ■

*Paddy Gibbins is the Managing Director of Artaxa Immo Sarl, an international agency covering Hérault, and is also an Expert en Immobilier with Syndicat des Experts Evaluateurs Immobiliers de France*  
[artaxa.com](http://artaxa.com)  
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Context is important: for instance, property sales surged post-Covid



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# Family, homes and heritage

The inspiration behind the *Chocolat* novels



**Joanne Harris**, celebrated author of *Chocolat*, talks to **Angela Sara West** about the impact of her French family's homes, food and scents on her fiction, from her earliest bestsellers to her latest prequel novel

More than 25 years after sensual *Chocolat* took the literary world by storm - telling the tale of mysterious single mother, Vianne, who sets up a seductive, contentious *chocolaterie* opposite a quaint French village church - Anglo-French writer Joanne Harris continues to captivate readers with her spirited storytelling.

With its lively narrative exploring themes of curiosity, temptation and transformation, the charming book became a novel sensation. And now, following three successful sequels, the award-winning author has published the prequel, *Vianne*, unveiling her vivacious protagonist's origins.

In a tale of two cultures, Joanne was born in Yorkshire to an English father and a French mother who met in France. "French was my first language, and I've always



Noirmoutier, where a young Joanne (inset) spent many summer holidays

spoken it to my parents and French family," she explains, "but English is the language I write in."

Drawing from her blend of British/French backgrounds, her bestselling books are enriched by Joanne's dual legacy and unique perspective. France and her French family hugely influence the author's work, which weaves together

deeply rooted customs, cookery and, of course, chocolate. "I'm lucky to have two cultures to dip into: two kinds of cuisine, poetry, folklore, tradition and literature," she tells me. "I was also lucky enough to have grandparents with interesting stories. I've used both in my books, depending on the

location and the character of the novel."

## FRENCH CHILDHOOD

The French way of life plays a pivotal role in the narrative, resulting in a harmonious blend of intrigue, French heritage, gastronomy and everyday life, so what does this vivid writer like most about France? "I love the sense of connection to heritage and how *le patrimoine* lives on in all kinds of things: recipes, traditions, stories and dress, alongside the rapidly changing face of politics and society."

Having first visited France at just two weeks old, she spent childhood holidays in Brittany and western France - summers at her grandparents' holiday home on Noirmoutier, and Christmas and Easter in the historic walled town of Vitré.

"I have so many memories... Taking my grandfather's

fishing boat out on Noirmoutier, riding his bike all over the island, cooking langoustines and mackerel on the barbecue, picking figs from his trees and hunting for glow worms at night. Also, the carnival in Vitré every Easter, and the château - which I could see through my bedroom window - lit up every evening.”

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Joanne fondly recalls many memorable mealtimes. “The family together, 15-20 people at a time, all talking at once, helping my grandmother and great-grandmother in the kitchen, listening to their stories...”. Her French relations’ properties and fascinating tales are captured in the novels. “My grandfather’s fisherman’s cottage on Noirmoutier was very basic, comprising a main living room/kitchen with a concrete floor, in which my great-grandmother had her bed, and two attic bedrooms.



“His home in Vitré was an ordinary turn-of-the-20th-century terrace house, which had belonged to my great-grandmother,” she explains. “It’s part of my past, my heritage. To me, it’s the landscape of childhood.”

Joanne admires their design. “I like the simplicity of this region’s houses: whitewashed walls, red-tiled roofs, colourfully painted shutters, gardens filled with hollyhocks, tamarisks and rosemary.”

Gascony produced *Chocolat*’s concept. “My grandfather had an old friend who lived in



The historical walled town of Vitré; Joanne (inset) visited here many times in her youth

*“I’m lucky to have two cultures to dip into: two kinds of cuisine, poetry, folklore, tradition and literature”*

Nérac, who he took me to see several times throughout my childhood. I fell in love with La Cigale *chocolaterie* there, where you could watch the chocolates being made from behind a glass screen, and loved the old wooden houses and narrowboats on the river, which became a part of the story.”

With chocolate the central metaphor, she kept the location quiet, although the town itself was very public about its association with the sell-out book. “I was deliberately vague about the inspiration for *Chocolat* until I realised

that Nérac was completely supportive of the connection and started to advertise themselves with great pride as ‘the town that inspired the book’. So, I don’t make any secret about it now!

“Every village has a *chocolaterie*. It’s part of the French tradition of *gourmandise*. Some are famous, like A la Mère de Famille or Les Trois Chocolats in Paris, but it’s actually nice to discover for oneself what’s available. The best *chocolaterie* isn’t always the best known.

“Local French markets are the best,” she adds. “Wherever I go, I find out the market days and check out what’s available. Once again, the famous ones aren’t always the best: locals will usually know better than any guidebook.”

**FAVOURITE PLACES**

With location central to the atmospheric books, *Chocolat*’s fictional Lansquenet-sous-Tannes is based on real places in Tarn-et-Garonne. “I’m very fond of the many little bastides along the river - despite their proximity to one other, each has its own distinct history, markets and special traditions. The culinary

tradition is interesting too, with lots of small producers and independents, keeping the food very authentic.”

A fan of the capital, she loves the Île de la Cité, long walks along the Seine, the Musée d’Orsay and Louvre. “My great-aunt lived in Paris and took me all over the city, so I know it well, although it’s always changing. I set *The Lollipop Shoes* in Montmartre because, despite its enormous tourist appeal, it still has such a village feel and reflects so many different facets of Paris and its history.”

Four of her other books are set in France too: *Coastliners*, *Holy Fools*, *Blackberry Wine* and *Five Quarters of the Orange*, their narratives intricately imbued with dramatic backdrops depicting France’s rich history, vibrant culinary traditions and unique cultural landscapes, with the latter set in a small village on the Loire.

“We often stayed with my parents’ friends in La Bohalle, outside Angers. Many of those childhood summer stories ended up in the book. There were no tourists at the time, and the community was small and close-knit. Every house had an attic full of war



Joanne’s family sitting in front of her grandparent’s house on Noirmoutier



Bustling and vibrant Marseille, where the latest book in the Chocolat series, *Vianne*, is set



memorabilia: helmets, guns, grenades, uniforms, and we'd dress up and play war games. No one ever batted an eyelid..."

**NOSE FOR A TALE**

Joanne has a form of synaesthesia, enabling her to 'smell' colours. "I find my condition enhances my perception of the world from below. Colours trigger scents: bright red is chocolate, blue is coconut, and some purples trigger diesel oil or patchouli."

She infuses reminiscent smells deliciously into her storytelling: "From the scent of Noirmoutier's tidal flats reminding me of childhood, the yellow mimosa that flowers there in February and a freshly made *galette* sold by the roadside, to the lavender markets in Provence, sardines cooking on a barbecue, rosemary in my grandmother's garden and the wax floor polish she used on those perfectly polished floors."

Joanne dedicated *Chocolat* to her French great-grandmother. "A strong, influential personality throughout my childhood, she inspired the character of Armande as well as Vianne. She was a non-conforming woman in a very

patriarchal rural community, who made everyone bow to the force of her personality."

On returning to the wonderful world of *Chocolat*, she says: "I've never really left that world. This is the fifth book I've written about it. But writing a prequel has its own challenges - not least the portrayal of a Vianne who can't cook, has never been a mother and doesn't know anything about chocolate! But readers seem to like it, and to welcome the insights into her past."



The novel is mainly set in bustling Marseille: "I love its excesses: the noise, the history, the clash of cultures, the division between wealth and poverty. It's a very dramatic city, with lots of character and a wonderful series of culinary traditions. The perfect place for Vianne to start her journey."

Joanne also created an exclusive bespoke fragrance, *Vianne's Confession* (above left), to capture the aromatic essence of the village, characters, chocolate shop, church, Mediterranean scents and city smells of the book.

"I wanted a fragrance with a narrative, which would take a passage from the book and illustrate it in scent. It

begins with bitter chocolate, progresses to the scent of the hot streets of Marseille in the rain, then moves to the incense of the basilica to create something both bittersweet and nostalgic," she says.

**FROM PAGE TO SCREEN**

The Oscar-nominated film adaptation of *Chocolat*, featuring Hollywood heavyweights Johnny Depp, Juliette Binoche and Dame Judi Dench, was also immensely successful. Joanne tells me she was delighted with the casting, direction, music and overall aesthetic. "It feels a long time ago now and, at the time, it was rather surreal. The cast and crew were all great and made me feel very welcome."

The film was shot in Flavigny-sur-Ozerain in Burgundy's Côte-d'Or, and

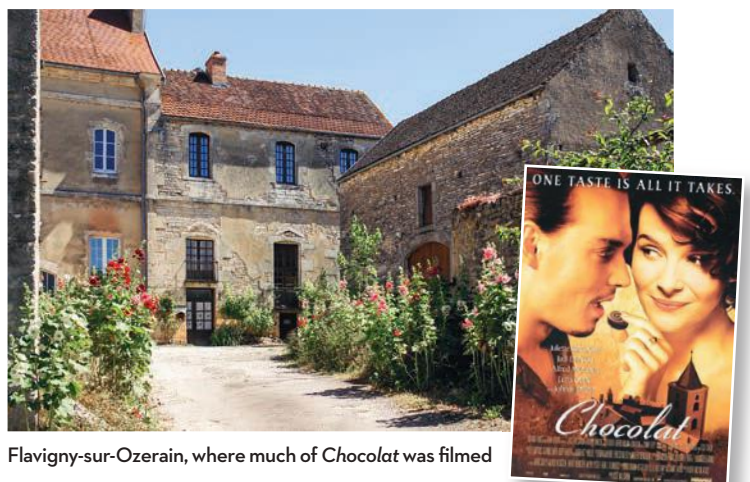
Beynac-et-Cazenac and Sarlat-la-Canéda in the Dordogne, among other places. "I was mostly on set but not on location, although I know Flavigny quite well. It's a very small village, known mostly for its manufacture of aniseed *dragées*. None of the interiors were filmed there as all the buildings were too small to contain the equipment."

I asked Joanne if she had any tips for Brits contemplating making the move to France? "Moving to France sounds like a great idea but be prepared for the challenges you're likely to encounter," she advises. "Bureaucracy is often daunting, and you'll need a good knowledge of French and the systems in place that will either help or hinder your progress."

"Try to befriend officials in your area - the mayor, for example - and ask for help when you need it. Although properties in need of refurbishment can seem wonderfully good value, the actual work required to get them into shape may cost much more than in England, and may need to correspond to the strict building regulations of the region that are designed to keep their character."

Can we look forward to indulging in more mouth-watering books in the *Chocolat* series? "Maybe... I try not to look too far ahead. But something tells me that Vianne has more stories to tell. As soon as I know what they are, you'll be the first to know!" ■

**Join Joanne at her scent-sampling/chocolate-tasting events and more at [joanne-harris.co.uk](http://joanne-harris.co.uk)**



Flavigny-sur-Ozerain, where much of *Chocolat* was filmed

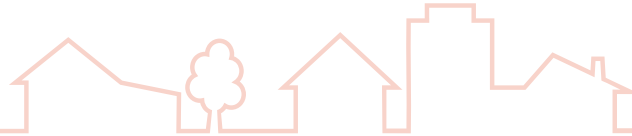
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# Look before you leap

Buying a house with a pool in France is an exciting proposition but make sure you listen to your head as well as your heart, writes **Julia French**



A pool can transform a property from attractive to irresistible

For many people buying in France, a swimming pool is high on the wish list. It conjures up lazy summer afternoons, outdoor meals that stretch into the evening and making the very most of the climate. A pool can transform a property from attractive to irresistible.

However, when you purchase a house with a pool, you're not just buying into that vision. You're also taking on the practical side, the legal requirements, the ongoing

maintenance and associated costs. Being aware of both aspects from the start will help ensure continued enjoyment.

A well-designed, properly maintained pool can be a fabulous asset. A neglected or non-compliant one, however, can quickly become an unexpected expense. The key is knowing what to look for before you sign on the dotted line.

## SAFETY FIRST

France has strict safety laws governing private swimming

pools. These regulations are not optional, and responsibility transfers to the new owner upon completion of the sale. All private in-ground pools must be equipped with at least one approved safety device designed to prevent accidental drowning. This can be a safety cover, a pool alarm, fencing or a pool *abri* (enclosure).

The safety device must meet current French standards and be in proper working order. An old alarm that no longer functions, or a damaged cover

that does not lock securely, does not count. When viewing a house, ask when the system was installed, confirm that it meets regulations and request any supporting documentation.

If the system is outdated or non-functional, you will be responsible for upgrading it, so it's always best to check.

## PLANNING PERMISSION

You should confirm that the pool was properly declared when built. Depending on size and type, pools in France

## “A well-designed, properly maintained pool can be a fabulous asset”

will be included in the seller’s current tax bill.

### POOL CONDITION

A swimming pool may look attractive during a viewing, but appearance alone tells you very little about its condition. Ask when it was constructed and what type it is. In France, most pools are either lined, tiled or prefabricated (*coque*).

With a liner pool, it’s not always possible to see what construction lies beneath until the liner itself needs replacing. A liner typically has a lifespan of about 10 to 15 years. The underlying structure, however, can last for many decades, particularly if built in reinforced concrete.

With tiled pools, look for any loose or missing tiles and gently tap areas in the pool to check for hollow sounds. You may notice a white, powdery

residue (efflorescence). This is not uncommon and is often cosmetic, however, if it’s widespread or persistent, it can indicate the movement of moisture through the structure. Likewise, tile or grout repairs are fairly common and usually straightforward, but may need a professional eye to confirm the pool remains watertight.

Prefabricated pools are typically made from polyester resin. Check for cracks - particularly around corners and steps - and blistering or bubbling on the surface, which can indicate osmosis caused by moisture beneath the finish. It’s also important to check the water line is level all around the pool, as this can signal the quality of the installation.

### OPERATIONAL MATTERS

Take a look at the filtration system for any visible signs



Read more property buying guides on frenchentree.com

require either prior declaration or planning permission.

If the seller cannot confirm that it was correctly authorised, this may cause complications with the purchase. It is not common, but it does sometimes happen, particularly with older pool installations.

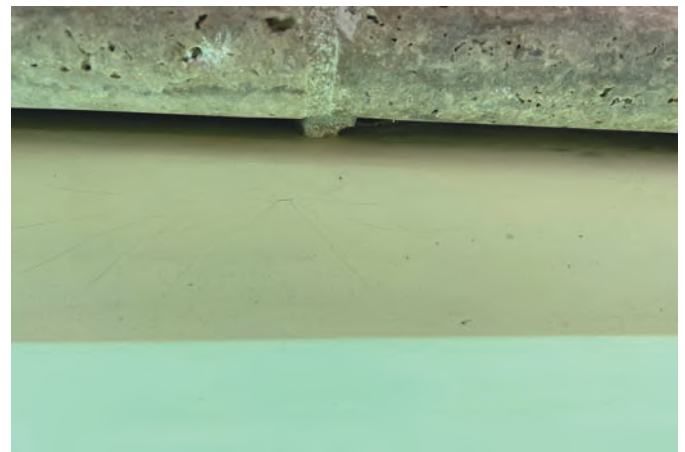
### WHO’S LIABLE?

You should inform your insurer that the property has a swimming pool and confirm that both the pool and its equipment are covered

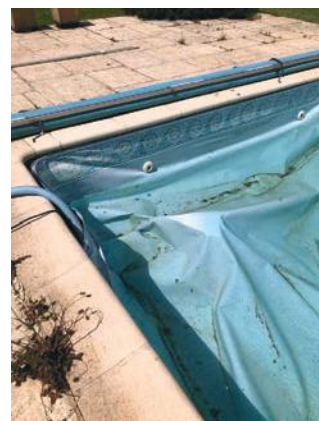
against damage. It’s equally important to ensure you have adequate public liability cover, particularly if you plan to rent the property to paying guests.

### PROPERTY TAX

In France, a permanent in-ground swimming pool is classed as an improvement to the property and is already taken into account when calculating the annual *taxe foncière* property tax. Therefore, if the pool has been correctly declared, it



If the pool is of a *coque* type (prefabricated), check that the water liner is level



Covers should meet safety standards



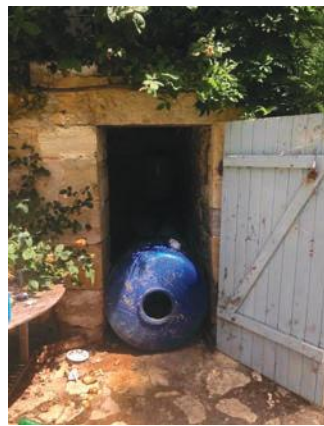
Check the grout in tiled pools



A new cartridge system with a variable speed pump is cost-effective



Look out for bad pump installation



Check the filtration system

of wear, leaks or temporary pipe repairs. These may indicate poor installation or inconsistent maintenance.

Ask how old the system is and whether any problems have arisen. Untidy pipework, improvised electrics or poorly finished surrounds can suggest the pool was not professionally installed, something to look out for in older self-build properties.

The filtration system should operate smoothly. Excessive noise or persistent leaks may require future expense.

### GREEN POOLS

Green or cloudy water is not usually a long-term problem. It may simply reflect seasonal maintenance or a short period of the property being empty. However, it can sometimes point to filtration issues or inconsistent upkeep. If a pool has a history of needing strong corrective treatments to recover from going green, this can place additional strain on pipework and pool coverings over time. While this is not uncommon and is

often manageable, it's worth asking how the pool has been maintained to get a clearer picture of its overall care.

If you're unsure about the condition of the pool, arrange a visit from a specialist before exchange of contracts. An assessment can clarify the overall state of the installation and identify any work that's required now or needs to be planned in for the future.

### RUNNING COSTS

Electricity is usually the biggest cost. Pumps must run daily during the season to maintain water quality. Older single-speed pumps consume significantly more energy than modern variable-speed models. In many cases, upgrading is straightforward and can reduce energy bills considerably.

Water treatment is usually either traditional chlorine products or a salt chlorination system. Where a salt system is already installed, annual running costs are often around €200 for the consumables, compared with approximately

## “Most potential issues are identifiable and manageable with the right checks”

€500 per year for conventional chemical treatment.

It's often assumed that pools need to be refilled regularly (it's important to note that liner pools and prefabricated pools should never be emptied). However, aside from the initial fill, a pool generally only requires the occasional top-up to compensate for evaporation and routine maintenance.

### EYES OPEN

Take a step back and ask yourself whether the pool truly complements the property. When it is well positioned and in proportion to the house and garden, it feels like it has always belonged there and can add real value. But if it is oversized or awkwardly placed, it can overwhelm a smaller plot and restrict how the space is used in the future.

Consider whether the pool is the right size for you and your lifestyle. Think about how often it will be used, by

how many people and for what purpose. While a pool can always be altered by adding steps, for example, or even replaced in the future, it is far better to ensure it suits your needs from the outset.

Ultimately, a swimming pool is simply part of the home. When properly installed, well maintained and suited to the property, a pool brings enormous enjoyment and can enhance both the appeal and value of a house in France.

Most potential issues are identifiable and manageable with the right checks. Ask the right questions and your swimming pool can be exactly what it was meant to be: the backdrop to long summer lunches, happy house guests and the occasional overly competitive lilo race! ■

**Julia French runs *Pristine Piscines in southwest France***  
**Tel: 0033 (0)6 32 10 39 92**  
[pristinepiscines.fr](http://pristinepiscines.fr)

### RED FLAGS

- **Above-ground in ground:** In some cases, an above-ground pool structure has been installed below ground level. These pools are not designed for permanent in-ground use and do not offer the same structural strength or longevity. Their lifespan is therefore more likely to be measured in years rather than decades. They're often identifiable by a surrounding timber deck rather than traditional coping or paving, and the pipework is typically flexible, ribbed tubing rather than solid pressure pipes.

- **Water behind the liner:** Visible water sitting between the liner and the pool wall usually indicates poor drainage around the outside of the structure. Groundwater can build up and create pressure behind the walls, forcing moisture between the structure and liner. This can cause bulging or wrinkling and, over time, may lead to structural stress. Drainage issues are often more complex to resolve than a simple liner replacement, so they should be investigated very carefully.

- **Skimmers and surrounding concrete:** It's also worth checking how the surrounding terrace has been constructed around the skimmers (filters in the pool walls). If concrete has been poured directly onto the skimmer pots without adequate expansion allowance, movement in the terrace over time can place stress on the skimmer housing. In some cases, this can pull the skimmer away from the pool wall, leading to cracks or leaks. This is not common in professionally installed pools, but it is something to be aware of with older installations or where the terrace has been added later.

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Enjoying the sunset over Lac de Pareloup in Aveyron

# The lake escape

A romantic waterside property in a tranquil spot is the dream for many househunters - **Carolyn Reynier** finds the best places to buy around three of France's most beautiful lakes



a rear garden. Roofing is *lauze* (large heavy flat tiles) or slate to protect houses from inclement weather, notably snow.

You'll pay around €150,000 and can still find properties for renovation. Stone farmsteads and barns in and around the village have been, or can be, converted into dwellings. A barn for conversion may cost about €60,000-€70,000; a renovated one will sell for €160,000-€180,000. These Aveyron lakes are popular with tourists, so conversion to gîtes or other tourist accommodation is worth consideration.

Heading south towards Pareloup, smaller Prades-Salars offers similar property but has no shops. Houses are larger so prices are generally on a par with Pont-de-Salars. Canet-de-Salars, three kilometres from the lake, doesn't have any shops either.

Salles-Curan at the southern end of Pareloup has two distinct sectors: on the lake, where houses sell for "exorbitant prices" says Marie, and in the village centre, which has similar prices to Canet and Pont-de-Salars but there are shops and services.

On the lake, there are both old and more recent properties. No new construction is possible thanks to the *Loi Littoral*, which protects not only coastal areas but also large lakes. Lakeside properties - the expression you'll hear is *pieds dans l'eau* - sell for €300,000-€700,000 and come with pontoons, which buyers use to moor their jet skis and boats, says Marie.

For those who like small beaches and nautical activities galore, we're looking at property in the picturesque villages and hamlets around three beautiful French lakes.

Firstly, the 1,300ha Lac de Pareloup on the Lévézou plateau in Aveyron (Occitanie) is the fifth largest artificial lake in France. The hills and lakes of the Lévézou - which are situated between the prefecture Rodez and subprefecture Millau - lie close

to the Parc naturel régional des Grands Causses.

Next, in the verdant Pays Voironnais in Isère (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes), the natural crystalline Lac de Paladru is surrounded by hills. Nearby medieval Voiron is one of three gateways into the 86,000ha Parc naturel régional de Chartreuse and several Alpine ski resorts.

Finally, the 35km-long emerald green Vouglans, France's third largest artificial lake, is in the Pays des Lacs

et Petite Montagne in Jura, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté.

## LAC DE PARELOUP

I talk first to Marie Fabre at MCF Immobilier Conseils at Pont-de-Salars just north of Pareloup in Aveyron. The village straddles the small lakes of Bage and Pont-de-Salars, has shops, services and schools, and is a popular destination, with demand outstripping supply, she says. Old stone terraced village houses may have up to four bedrooms and

## On the market



**€120,000, Valzin-en-Petite-Montagne, Jura:** With grounds and views, this three-bedroom former railway station requiring work is 15 minutes from Vouglans lake (Thomas Lugand, IAD France)



**€230,000, Bonlieu, Jura:** East of Clairvaux-les-Lacs, this 18th-century house has two bedrooms, terrace with mountain views, large cellar and barn (Thomas Lugand, IAD France)



**€81,900, Arinthod, Jura:** Close to shops and Vouglans lake, this four-bedroom house, with cellar and terrace could be converted into separate apartments (Thomas Lugand, IAD France)



**€130,000, Sarroigna, Jura:** Ten minutes south of Orgelet in a quiet location, this three-bedroom house with outbuildings is ripe for conversion (Thomas Lugand, IAD France)

On the opposite bank have a look too, at Arvieu and its beach at Notre Dame d'Aurès. "All the activities you can do outdoors in nature you can do in the Pont-de-Salars sector," she says.

## LAC DE PALADRU

The Lac de Paladru, a private lake in Isère, is surrounded by five communes, says Virginie Dombes of Comptoir Immobilier de France. On the western side, Paladru and Le Pin now form Les Villages du Lac de Paladru, Montferrat lies to the northeast, next is Bilieu, with Charavines at the southern tip. The lake lies between the Lyon-Grenoble A48 and Lyon-Chambéry A43 motorways. "We're really at the crossroads, easily accessible, yet we have the countryside and a certain much calmer way of life," she adds.

There's a mix of larger family homes and second homes. Properties with lake views come at a price and rare *pieds dans l'eau* properties with a private beach come at an even higher one. Old properties are built in stone or with *pisé* (rammed earth), typical of the region. "Today, no building is permitted within 300m of the lake," Virginie tells me. Prices for a small two-bedroom lakeside chalet may start at €180,000, rising to €1m and over for a substantial 200m<sup>2</sup>-300m<sup>2</sup> family home with pontoon and lake access.

Those houses without lake views are still close to the water. Prices start at €120,000-€150,000 for a small house that requires work, rising to €600,000-€700,000 depending on the property

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An aerial view of the Lac de Paladru, Isère

## "Aveyron lakes are popular with tourists, so conversion to gîtes is worth consideration"

type. "On average you can have something *sympa* to renovate or freshen up for €250,000 to €500,000," says Virginie.

The layout of the communes is similar; they all have a few local shops (*commerces de proximité*), while Charavines and Montferrat also have pharmacies. Bilieu is a popular commune thanks to its sunny exposition and close proximity to motorway junctions.

Charavines is larger, more developed, and has a sunny public beach. It's busy during the summer, so if you're looking for peace and quiet, head for the other communes.

You can drive the 14km around the lake, and cycle or

walk around three-quarters of it on a dedicated path. You still find properties for renovation or that just require a lick of paint to freshen them up. Virginie says demand for seasonal letting accommodation is on the increase, but although some properties are closed up during much of the year, around 70% of residents live here year round. "It's not at all deserted the rest of the time."

There are a few apartments (€80,000-€180,000); some residences have been built a stone's throw from the lake and some apartments have a glimpse of the water (€230,000 for two bedrooms). Voiron has a

"very pretty town centre and is relatively dynamic". You'll pay €30,000-€80,000 more for a town-centre apartment.

In the Chartreuse boutique, you can learn how the Carthusian monks make their famous yellow and green liqueurs from a secret recipe. As a teenager, I holidayed in Chambéry with the Sevez family, suppliers of my wine-shipping father's Chambéry Gaudin vermouth. I have fond memories of skiing at St-Pierre-de-Chartreuse, close to the Grande Chartreuse monastery.

Virginie says the climate is good, not too hot, not too cold. "In 45 minutes, we're in a ski resort, in two and a half hours

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**€189,000, Montferrat, Isère:** Paladru lake views and a beach just 100m away make this one-bedroom apartment with two parking spaces a must-see (Comptoir Immobilier de France)



**€345,000, Colombe, Isère:** Southwest of the lake and close to the A48, this seven-bedroom house with outbuildings is in need of renovation (Comptoir Immobilier de France)



**€375,000, Oyeu, Isère:** Renovated family home with four bedrooms, summer kitchen, double garage and pool just five minutes from Paladru lake (Comptoir Immobilier de France)



**€359,000, Paladru, Isère:** Ten minutes from the lake, this contemporary three-bedroom house in grounds of 2,193m<sup>2</sup> is not overlooked (Comptoir Immobilier de France)



Electric mountain biking at Clairvaux-les-Lacs, Jura

we're at the sea. And we're close to the Italian border, too."

## LAC DE VOUGLANS

Finally, Lac de Vouglans in Jura is near the Swiss border. We're looking at property around the northern end - ancient baronies and ruined strongholds testifying to turbulent times. I'll leave you to discover the southern end for yourselves: it's a long lake...

On the western side, the original château at Orgelet was built in the 12th century. Major development took place more recently in the 1960s with the creation of an industrial zone and housing estates, says Thomas Lugand of IAD. The old two-storey houses were built in cut stone from local quarries, most of which no longer exist, so stone often came from dismantled châteaux. You'll pay €200,000-€250,000 for one not needing work, and about €150,000 for one that does.

The sloping topography means that houses above the main road have a garage or

similar on the ground floor, with the living area and access to the garden above; houses below the main road are set up inversely. "They were constructed in the old ramparts so made do with things as they were," Thomas says.

You'll find farmsteads and barns, renovated or ready for conversion, in the surrounding countryside where Simmental and Montbéliarde cows graze to produce Comté, one of my favourite cheeses - in fact, I'm nibbling a 30-month-aged Comté de Noël while writing these words. The last barn Thomas sold (for €35,000) was at Onoz south of Orgelet.

Heading north, La Tour-du-Meix is divided into two sectors. In the older upper St-Christophe quarter, near the château ruins, houses close to the Port du Meix (one of three ports on Vouglans) can have lake views and price tags of €400,000-€500,000. The village centre is located in the lower quarter.

Largillay-Marsonnay has not profited from the expansion of

tourism because it's a little set back from the lake, although there is actually access to a beach. "Not a lot of people know that," says Thomas. Prices are lower and yes, there is a ruined château. Pont-de-Poitte on the lake developed thanks to its proximity to Clairvaux and its Port de la Saisse, mainly used by fishermen.

Clairvaux-les-Lacs has two lakes - the Grand Lac and, well, the Petit Lac. The big one is the commune's main tourist attraction; the small one is much less well-known to visitors. In the village centre there are stone houses on the former château ramparts. As a child, Thomas says, he visited the tunnels linking the houses so that during the medieval wars, residents could circulate underground to reach the ramparts to fight.

Prices are on a par with Orgelet. You'll find more recent housing dating from the 1940s in Hautecour, an extension of Clairvaux. It's often the modern properties that have lake views

- and price tags of €400,000-€500,000 and higher. If Thomas had to classify the communes by house prices, he'd put Clairvaux first by far, then La Tour-du-Meix, Orgelet third and last Pont-de-Poitte.

This corner of Jura remains authentic, it's not overdeveloped, explains Thomas. Yes, there are lots of folk during summer, but at Clairvaux you only have to go 500m and you're surrounded by forest. "You can be in completely isolated sectors, where you meet few people, where telephones don't necessarily work," he says. "If you want to cut yourself off from the world, you can still manage to do that." So if you do, you know where to go. ■

[levevou.fr](http://levevou.fr)  
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## 3 REASONS TO BUY HERE

*These lovely lakes in Aveyron, Isère and Jura offer year-round or holiday living with good tourist accommodation potential*

*Waterfront homes, old stone village houses and modern properties, barns and farmsteads renovated or for conversion*

*Easy access to airports: Montpellier/Rodez for Aveyron; Grenoble/Chambéry/Lyon for Isère; Lyon or Geneva for Jura*

## On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON [PROPERTYINFRA.NC.COM](http://PROPERTYINFRA.NC.COM)



**€33,600, Prades-Salars, Aveyron:** In the village centre, this one-bedroom house for renovation has a first-floor balcony and attic for conversion (MCF Immobilier Conseils)



**€319,000, Velanne, Isère:** Longère-style property in 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of tranquil land near Lake Paladru; three bedrooms and two barns for conversion (Comptoir Immobilier de France)



**€174,900, Le Vibal, Aveyron:** A furnished two-bedroom chalet with direct access to Pont-de-Salars lake in a preserved environment (MCF Immobilier Conseils)



**€219,000, Trémouilles, Aveyron:** Northwest of Pareloup, lake is this contemporary one-storey home with three bedrooms, two terraces and a garage (MCF Immobilier Conseils)



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or those already well established in a skilled profession – electricians, plumbers and hairdressers – a relocation overseas often raises questions. Will my qualifications be recognised abroad? Is it going to be too difficult to start from scratch after I've spent years building up my trade at home? How will I be able to find enough customers to be successful in France?

At times, the dream of starting a new life across the Channel may seem overwhelming for those who have invested a lot of time perfecting their skills and building up their business in the UK. However, with some research, careful planning and a positive attitude, starting a new life and business in France is completely achievable.

### A POPULAR CHOICE

The mild climate, reasonable house prices and proximity to neighbouring coastal departments have long made tranquil Deux-Sèvres a popular choice with British buyers. Tony Eyre and his family moved to the area more than two decades ago, settling in the charming commune of Melleran, close to the borders of Vienne and Charente.

"We decided to move to France for a better life, without the increase in violence [in the UK] and for the general wellbeing of our children," Tony says. "We chose Deux-Sèvres because you have access to airports and it's only a four-hour drive to Caen for ferries.

# Trading places

How do you transfer your existing knowledge and expertise to a new business in France? **Leah Rottier** has all the answers



Tony Eyre, Le Mécano Anglais (The English Mechanic)

It's a great department with beautiful countryside and, in general, a very nice place to raise our children," he adds.

Having obtained his mechanical engineering qualifications and having owned a successful garage in

England, Tony wanted to transfer his expertise and experience to a new business in France. So, in 2005, he opened his garage, which he called Le Mécano Anglais (The English Mechanic).

### ADVANCE PLANNING

With the family's move to Deux-Sèvres thoroughly planned well in advance, Tony talks of the surprising ease of dealing with the dreaded French administration. "I had no problems setting up my business," he says. "Research is definitely necessary. All my qualifications and certificates were translated to French. When I registered with the *Chambre des métiers* in Niort, they were very helpful and we had very positive relations with them."

Getting all the relevant qualifications translated into

French by a certified translator (*traducteur assermenté*) is essential before booking an appointment with the various authorities. The *Chambre des métiers* or *Chambre de commerce et d'industrie* (CCI) will look much more favourably on your application and business proposal if you can show you've done your research and arrive with all the necessary documents and translations in place.

Once up and running, Tony's next challenge was marketing the business. With many communes in the area already home to small, independent garages, as well as larger franchises, Tony had to work out how he could achieve the success he'd had in England. "Finding a niche market is a must," he says. "Many people set up businesses in France with little or no idea of the available market."



Melleran is pretty – and accessible

With such a large anglophone presence in Deux-Sèvres, Tony decided to target British customers, who now make up the majority of his clients. "Marketing was easy using the free local magazines, my website and, after a while, word of mouth," he says. And, as time has gone on, the need for marketing and publicity has diminished.

Further north, in the small commune of Torchamp (61), Iain and Louise Davison run a successful property maintenance service. They also relied on extensive research



Melleran's *mairie* (town hall), Tony's first port of call when starting his business

and invaluable help from the *Chambre de commerce et d'industrie*, when they established Property Care People in 2006.

“When we started the garden and gîte maintenance business, we were fortunate to meet a lady who worked for the *Chambre de commerce* in Flers. She also ran the courses for new English businesses, which turned out to be invaluable.”

### ARTISANAL WORK

As is often the case with property maintenance companies, the Davisons also had to register with the *Chambre des métiers*, because part of their business – chimney sweeping and installation of woodstoves – is classed as artisanal work.

“We had no issue with this, as our UK certificates of competence were translated into French,” Iain explains. “We had a lot of assistance at the time from the CCI and the *Chambre des métiers* to allow our business to grow.”

Iain has trouble thinking of any negatives about his family’s move to France and transferring their business skills. With his wife, Louise, he has established a successful business that continues to grow, almost two decades later. While starting out with mainly British clients, the business is now sought after by French customers and international estate agents too.

“We have encountered many different situations in



St-Mars-d'Egrenne is popular with second-home owners

The Davisons set up their property maintenance service in 2006



**“We found that working with the French system is better than trying to challenge it”**

our work in France,” he says. “Unblocking toilets at gîtes in the dark and rain happens from time to time, and once we had to drive 30 minutes away to a property at midnight as the client had forgotten their keys,” he laughs.

“Despite all of this, it has been a great experience for us. My advice to newcomers is that if you follow the rules and work as hard as you did in the UK, then the rest comes. We were driven to achieve what we wanted to do, and we found that working with the French system is better than trying to challenge it.”

### THE RIGHT DECISION

Another top tip from Iain is to choose your property and area well, depending on the business you’re planning, and whether you’re looking to work with English or French customers, or both.

Torchamp is a small commune, located next to St-Mars-d'Egrenne, which is popular with second-home owners because of its thriving local shops, dynamic community spirit and numerous associations. It’s also located on the illuminated village circuit, which draws



The couple live near St-Mars-d'Egrenne, a dynamic town with lots going on

thousands of visitors over the festive period each year.

With house prices in the department of Orne among some of the lowest in Normandy, you can often find a good bargain, especially if you’re looking for a fixer-upper or total renovation project.

“It’s a quiet and clean area, with access to some large towns,” Iain says. “And for those who need it, there’s easy access to the UK too.”

Wherever you decide to settle in France, the advice for those looking to transfer a skill set or business is clear: cross the Channel with a good dose of determination and positivity, and have the necessary paperwork

translated. Then, be prepared to work hard (not forgetting to enjoy yourself too) to ensure you make the most of your new life in France. ■

### TOP TIP

Depending on your profession, you’ll need to register with the *Chambre des métiers* or the *Chambre de commerce et d'industrie*, sometimes both. If you’re unsure which category you fall under, check their websites or contact your *mairie* which can often point you in the right direction. [artisanat.fr](http://artisanat.fr) [cci.fr](http://cci.fr)

# Growing together



France, like the UK, has a charitable open gardens organisation, OGJO - **Julie Evans** explains the key role that its coordinators and garden openers play

**A**cross France, thousands of private gardens open their gates each year in support of charitable causes. Behind these welcoming spaces is a volunteer-led association, Open Gardens/*Jardins Ouverts* (OGJO), built on generosity, community spirit and a shared love of gardening.

OGJO connects garden owners with visitors, raising funds for charities that support children, families and local communities. While each open garden is unique, the success of the association relies on a simple, powerful idea: people working locally, together. At the heart of this are garden openers and coordinators - volunteers who bring the network to life.

## KEEPING IT LOCAL

As OGJO has grown, it has become clear that a centralised approach is neither practical nor sustainable. Instead, the association depends on local coordinators who act as a point of contact within their region.

The coordinator role is varied but rewarding. It includes identifying new gardens that may wish to open, keeping in touch with existing garden openers, and offering practical support as they prepare for their open days. Coordinators often help with the organisation of events, answer questions, and provide reassurance - particularly to novice openers.

Many coordinators attend local garden groups, plant fairs or community events to spread the word about OGJO. Most build up small local teams of volunteers who can lend a hand on open days if needed, helping to create a friendly, supportive atmosphere.

The role suits people who enjoy visiting gardens, meeting others and connecting

with people. Confidence, friendliness and enthusiasm are far more important than specialist knowledge. While speaking some French can be helpful, it is not essential. Basic computer skills are useful, as much of the necessary communication takes place online, but above all, coordinators share a genuine interest in people and gardens.

## A NEW PERSPECTIVE

I recently became a coordinator for OGJO in the Dordogne. Like many volunteers, I stepped into the role not because I considered myself an expert, but because I could see how

important local coordination is to the association.

What struck me most is how welcoming and generous the gardening community is. Many garden owners are modest about what they do, yet the impact of opening their gardens - both financially and socially - is enormous. As a coordinator, my role is simply to make things easier: answering questions, offering reassurance and helping garden openers feel supported rather than isolated.

For anyone considering becoming a coordinator, it is reassuring to know that you are never expected to do



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Valérie has been opening her garden to the public for more than 10 years

everything alone. The role grows gradually, at your own pace, and you become part of a wider network of volunteers who are always willing to share advice and encouragement.

## OPENING A GARDEN

For many people involved with OGJO, opening a garden is about far more than horticulture. It is a way of sharing, connecting and giving back. One long-standing garden opener, Valérie, describes her experience: "For more than 10 years, I have opened my garden with my heart, in support of charitable organisations. Encouraged in the early days, I dared to take the leap despite my doubts.

"Opening my garden has motivated me to care for it, to create and to innovate. Open days are always moments of joy, sharing and conviviality, filled with encounters, smiles and exchanges. Being able to support charitable causes through my garden has become a true reason for being - and something I intend to carry on."

Stories like this lie at the heart of OGJO. They show how



**Above:** Corinne oversees the Oise area, and **left,** the entrance to Corinne's own open garden, Jardin de Théo

## “For many volunteers, becoming a coordinator is a chance to meet inspiring people and to help something meaningful continue to flourish”

opening a garden can be both deeply personal and quietly powerful, bringing people together while supporting causes that matter.

### A LONGSTANDING CONNECTION

For Corinne, gardening has always been part of her family story. Inspired by her mother and two grandmothers before her, she began travelling to the UK many years ago in search of garden inspiration – and quickly found more than she expected.

Visits to famous gardens such as Sissinghurst, Chartwell and Wisley, as well as smaller, lesser-known places, revealed not only beauty, but an entire ecosystem of volunteers, charities and garden openings organised in support of good causes. It was this model – combining gardening, generosity and community –

that Corinne wanted to bring back to France.

She introduced the concept within her local association, *Parcs et Jardins de l'Oise*, launching garden openings known as *Jardins du Cœur*. From the outset, these events supported the charity *À Bras Ouverts*, which organises weekends and holidays for children with physical and mobility disabilities, with the help of young volunteers.

In 2016, during a plant fair in Chantilly, Corinne met the friendly OGJO team. Their experience and long-established know-how immediately stood out. Recognising the strength of the organisation, her group decided to join OGJO without delay. The transition from *Jardins du Cœur* to OGJO happened smoothly and naturally.

Today, as coordinator for garden openings in the

Oise department in Hauts-de-France, Corinne values the collaboration on several levels: practical organisational advice, flexibility in adapting to local needs and the strong friendships that have grown between teams.

In 2025 alone, 13 gardens opened under her coordination. As in previous years, a shared meal for visitors was organised, with proceeds being donated to OGJO. A plant exchange and *brocante*, organised by committed and generous members of the association, also contributed significantly to the funds raised. At the same time, *À Bras Ouverts* has continued to receive a generous annual donation.

Rather than opening gardens in isolation, Corinne and her team aim to organise groups of openings and create small circuits between nearby gardens. The plots

themselves may not be grand or spectacular, she says, but they all have charm, and their diversity is always engaging for people. Opening six or seven gardens across two neighbouring villages on Mother's Day has even become a cherished tradition.

Over time, she has noticed that sharing the experience encourages hesitant garden owners to take part. Many return the following year, delighted by both the pleasure they receive and the pleasure they give. These open days, she says, are moments outside of time – shared experiences of generosity and happiness.

### BECOME AN OGJO COORDINATOR

As OGJO continues to grow, the association is always keen to hear from people who might consider becoming local coordinators. You do not need any specialist gardening knowledge, nor a large amount of time. What matters most is having an interest in people, a love of gardens, as well as a willingness to help others share their passion.

For many volunteers, becoming a coordinator is a natural extension of enjoying gardens and community life in France – a chance to meet inspiring people, support worthwhile causes and to help something meaningful continue to flourish. ■

**For more information, visit [opengardens.eu](https://opengardens.eu). If you are interested in becoming a coordinator or a garden opener, contact [Susan Lambert](mailto:Susan.Lambert@opengardens.eu) at [president@opengardens.eu](mailto:president@opengardens.eu)**

Manoir La Gozinière is in Theneuille, Auvergne

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# Sing it from the rooftops

**Peter and Carolyn Bear** explain how their 18th-century manoir in northern Auvergne became an opera house

It all began with a rather crazy idea for a house-warming party. Like many *French Property News* readers, we had fallen in love with a French country property and upped sticks from the UK and moved to France. Our *coup de coeur* was the 1758 Manoir de la Gozinière in the heart of *la France Profonde* in northern Auvergne. It took us three years to renovate, carefully preserving its 18th-century character. Once done, we decided to give a slap-up party for the new friends we'd made.

One of the few things we missed in moving to France were our regular outings to the



Carolyn and Peter love opera

opera. In the UK, we'd been accustomed in the summer, to packing up picnics and rugs and heading for 'country house opera'. Unfortunately, the English love of these pastoral events isn't reflected in France. This is partly because there are so many - about 30 - opera houses in the bigger cities. We were near enough to Vichy, where the lovely Art Nouveau opera house provides excellent productions, but tantalisingly few of them.

## BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

So, to celebrate the departure of the builders, we invited a pianist and some young singers from England to perform a few Mozart arias. We enjoyed this event so much, we asked the singers to return the following year to put on a fully staged opera. We chose Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro' based on the 1778 stage comedy by Beaumarchais, which dated from a similar period to the house. The French adore dressing up, so we asked our guests to come in 18th-century costume. One of our naughtiest



Guests dressed in 18th-century costume for Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro'

friends came in full regalia as an 18th-century cardinal while another of our oldest friends got the century wrong, and arrived in doublet and hose, his catwalk legs memorable in ladies' tights.

And so our first country house opera group was born. After Figaro, we had a long discussion about the possibility of setting up our very own opera company. The upshot was 'Opera Loki', named after

our resident dog. Over the years, the company quickly developed, becoming a charity both in the UK and France and in the succeeding summers we put on a total of more than 20 productions.

For each production, we auditioned singers in London, most of whom were studying at Royal College, Guildhall School of Music, Trinity Laban or other major music schools in Wales and Scotland. Many of our

“Over the past 26 years, we have hosted performances of operas by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Rossini”

singers have gone on to enjoy prestigious careers with singing roles at Covent Garden, English National Opera, Glyndebourne and the Bayreuth Festival.

**SINGING THE PRAISES**

Word got around and our opera season grew to include more venues. Most were hosted by generous French friends who were willing to open their châteaux, *manoirs*, abbeys or spacious barns, not only to dedicated music lovers but also to people who might never have considered attending an opera. Opera Loki’s aim was to advance the careers of young singers and also to introduce opera to a wider audience.

Over the past 26 years, we have hosted performances of operas by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and Rossini. We’re now working with London-based Regents Opera, which recently performed Wagner’s ‘Ring Cycle’ to critical acclaim.

Opera at La Gozinière isn’t the only imported fringe opera

run by Brits. Opéra de Baugé was founded in 2002 by John and Bernadette Grimmett at Les Capucins, near Anjou, and more recently, in 2019, Jenny Hemans set up Théâtre Basse-Passière at her home in Perche-en-Nocé in Orne.

You can read more about the trials and tribulations of setting up and running an opera festival in the depths of France in the book written by Chloe Rayban, *How to knit an opera*, available from Amazon.

We’ve had an absolutely enchanting quarter of a century living at La Gozinière, but after so many happy years it’s time for us to move on. So should you want to buy a beautiful manoir that echoes to the enchanting melodies of Mozart, Verdi, Bizet and Puccini, you know where to come.

**Manoir de la Gozinière is for sale at €1.1m. Contact the owners direct at [p.bear@wanadoo.fr](mailto:p.bear@wanadoo.fr) or email Alison Brettell at [abrettell@leggett.fr](mailto:abrettell@leggett.fr)**



The manoir’s dining room has dual patio doors onto the courtyard



Exposed beams and a wood-fired bread oven give the kitchen its character



A graceful curved wooden staircase leads upstairs from the entrance hall



A performance of ‘Rigoletto’



‘Cosi fan Tutte’ set during WWI



Puccini’s ‘La Bohème’ was performed in the attic at Manoir de la Gozinière



The central courtyard has access to the private guest wing and kitchen

©PETER AND CAROL WILBEAR



Capital of the Charente, Angoulême is famous for comics and car racing



# Balcony of the southwest

Overlooking the Charente river, the historic hilltop city of Angoulême is ideal for exploring Nouvelle-Aquitaine, writes **Josie Sharp**



**A**ptly nicknamed the ‘balcony of the southwest’, the fortified hilltop town of Angoulême offers unbeatable views of the surrounding countryside. Capital of the Charente department, the town stands out for its medieval streets, famous comic festival and Unesco-listed old town.

The city makes a great base for exploring the Charente area. Cognac and its world-famous distilleries, the riverside town of Jarnac, and medieval Confolens are all within easy reach, and there are good connections to larger cities like Bordeaux and Poitiers.

The historic centre is an architectural treasure trove, with cobbled streets, elegant fountains and Renaissance and Neo-Classical buildings. The St-Pierre Cathedral, a Romanesque masterpiece, reflects the history of Angoulême stretching back centuries. In the heart of town, the streets are lined mostly with charming apartments, with some traditional multi-

storey stone houses. A few timber-framed *colombage* homes survive, nestled along the narrow, winding lanes of Vieux Angoulême, hinting at the city’s medieval past.

The city is France’s comic art capital, hosting an international festival each January. All year round, Angoulême celebrates *banes dessinées* through eye-catching street murals, speech-bubble signs and large trompe-l’oeil artworks. Beyond its artistic charm, Angoulême comes

alive each September with the Circuit des Remparts, a thrilling classic car race that draws crowds from near and far, adding to the city’s lively calendar of events.

The *centre-ville* district, made up mostly of apartments, puts residents within walking distance of cafés, shops, nightlife and cultural attractions. For those seeking a practical, lively spot for commuting, La Gare is a great option, offering homes and apartments near the river and

train station. Families are often drawn to the St-Cybard and St-Martial neighbourhoods, where quiet streets, green spaces and local schools support relaxed suburban living just a short distance from the city centre and its amenities.

The average square metre house price in Angoulême is €1,614, rising to €1,885 in the popular centre. This compares to €1,289 across the Charente department as a whole, and €1,750 in the wider Nouvelle-Aquitaine region. ■

## On the market

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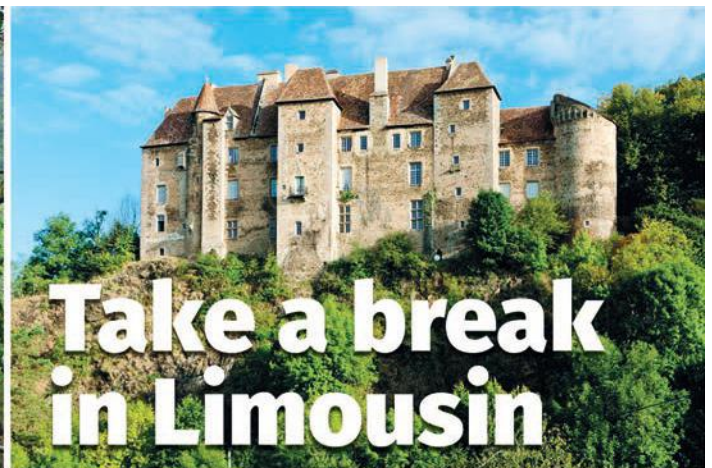
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# THE KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is power and when it comes to buying a French property, it's important to understand as much as possible about the process



VANASQUE PROVINCE © SHUTTERSTOCK

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## **LEGAL COLUMN**

Why someone might refuse a French inheritance such as a property - and the consequences of doing so, both good and bad

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## **MONEY COLUMN**

What should you do with your UK pension when you move to France - leave it where it is, consolidate it, or cash it in?

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## **ASK THE EXPERTS**

Q&As on selling your property, removals pitfalls, choosing the right property for the future, healthcare, visas and more

# Legal column

**Matthew Cameron** explains why someone might want to renounce an inheritance from a French estate



Inheriting assets from a French estate might initially seem like a windfall, but the reality can be far more complex.

For British nationals and other foreign beneficiaries, accepting a French inheritance comes with significant legal, financial and practical considerations that may outweigh the benefits.

Understanding when and why to renounce an inheritance is crucial for making an informed decision.

## TAX LIABILITIES

France's inheritance tax system is one of the most significant factors influencing the decision to renounce. The tax rates are progressive and depend heavily on the relationship between the deceased and the beneficiary. Direct descendants (children and grandchildren) benefit from relatively favourable rates starting at 5% and reaching 45% on amounts exceeding €1.8m, with an allowance of €100,000 per child.

However, for more distant relatives, the situation becomes considerably less attractive. Siblings face rates between 35% and 45% with only a €15,932 tax-free allowance. Nieces and nephews are taxed at 55%.

The tax rate for unrelated beneficiaries is 60% with a tax-free allowance of €1,594.

For British nationals who may have been close friends or distant relatives of the deceased, these rates can make an inheritance financially unviable. When combined with UK tax considerations and reporting requirements, the administrative burden becomes even more substantial.

## DEBTS AND LOANS

One of the most critical reasons to consider renunciation is the principle that accepting an inheritance means accepting it

in its entirety - both assets and liabilities. French law does not allow beneficiaries to cherry-pick favourable assets while declining debts. If the deceased had outstanding mortgages, personal loans, business debts, unpaid taxes or other financial obligations, these become the responsibility of the heirs.

Without thorough due diligence, you might discover that the estate is insolvent or that debts substantially exceed the value of assets. Properties that appear valuable might be encumbered with mortgages or legal claims. The deceased may have provided guarantees for business loans or had tax disputes with French authorities.

We have also seen a number of cases where the deceased died in France, following an illness that resulted in care or hospital fees. Such fees can themselves become a debt against the estate. In one case where beneficiaries sought our advice, the hospital fees alone outweighed the value of the house. The beneficiaries had little practical choice than to renounce, allowing the hospital to sell the property to recoup its expenditure.

Conducting a comprehensive assessment of the estate's financial position is essential before accepting, and if this reveals significant liabilities, renunciation might prove to be the prudent choice.

## EMOTIONAL TOLL

The French succession process is notoriously bureaucratic and must be handled through a *notaire* (a French public official who manages estate settlements). The process involves extensive documentation, official translations, apostilled certificates, and



compliance with both French and potentially UK legal requirements. For non-French speakers, every document requires certified translation, adding to costs and delays.

The timeline for settling a French estate typically extends from several months to over a year, sometimes longer if complications arise. During this period, beneficiaries may need to make multiple trips to France, take time off work, and remain in constant communication with French legal professionals. The emotional toll of navigating a foreign legal system while grieving can be substantial.

Professional fees for *notaires*, lawyers, translators, and cross-border tax advisors can easily reach tens of thousands of euros, significantly eroding the inheritance value.

French succession law includes forced heirship rules that protect certain family members regardless of the deceased's wishes. A portion of the estate (the *réserve héréditaire*) must go to protected heirs, typically children, which can override provisions in a will. This can create situations where you inherit property in co-ownership with family members you may not know well or with whom you have difficult relationships.

## RENUNCIATION RULES

Renunciation can be a strategic tool for family wealth planning. When you renounce a French inheritance from a parent, you will be treated as having predeceased that parent. In this way the inheritance due



the charity is not related to the deceased, so inheritance tax would apply at 60%.

It is possible to qualify for an exemption, but the process is extremely lengthy, and quite onerous. Where the main asset was a house in France, it follows that a charity may be faced with paying the tax and then hoping to reclaim this, whether from the proceeds of sale or from the slight possibility of an exemption being awarded. Faced with those prospects, one can hardly blame the trustees for deciding to forego the legacy.

Renouncing a French inheritance is a significant decision that requires thorough analysis of the estate's financial position, your personal circumstances and long-term implications. While it may seem counterintuitive to decline an inheritance, doing so can protect you from financial loss, administrative burden and ongoing obligations that outweigh any benefits.

In practice, the majority of estates on which we are instructed to advise are not insolvent, and rarely do they lead to other instances where renunciation might be the most suitable choice. Sometimes, however, beneficiaries will have little option but to avoid taking any interest from a deceased person's estate.

Nevertheless, it is always going to be prudent for owners of a French property - whether resident or not - to take detailed advice from legal and tax professionals experienced in cross-border French estates before making this irreversible choice. Identifying potential pitfalls in advance should ensure that you will not leave your beneficiaries with difficult choices to make about accepting or renouncing an estate you have left them.

If you envisage leaving your French estate to more distant relatives, or to charities, then the need to take wills and inheritance planning advice is particularly important. ■

**Matthew Cameron heads the French legal services team at Ashtons Legal**  
**Tel: 0330 1914450**  
**[ashtonslegal.co.uk](http://ashtonslegal.co.uk)**

***“While it may seem counterintuitive to decline an inheritance, it can protect you from financial loss, administrative burden and ongoing obligations that outweigh any benefits”***

to you would then usually pass to your children. If you would prefer a legacy from a deceased parent to pass directly to your children, this may prove to be a good method of passing assets down through the generations.

However, care needs to be taken before deciding to take such a step. Careful planning and professional advice will be required to ensure the outcome aligns with your intentions and does not create unintended consequences. As an example, if your renunciation would lead

to minor children inheriting in your place, the result may actually be a different set of complications: minor children do not have legal capacity to accept a succession, so this would have to be given on their behalf, potentially by a court. The court would have to be involved where a subsequent sale was intended while the child is still a minor.

In addition, you may well find that you are not able to renounce only to part of a deceased parent's estate: if

they had assets in the UK and France, it might be the case that renunciation is ‘all or nothing’.

#### **CHARITABLE AIMS**

Another example - perhaps a rather surprising one - where renunciation might be the most suitable option is in relation to a legacy to a charity. One unfortunate consequence of the UK's departure from the EU is that a UK charity will not automatically qualify for an exemption to inheritance tax. The starting point is that

# Money column

What should I do with my UK pension when moving to France?

**Robert Kent** explains



One of the most common financial questions asked by British residents in France is what to do with their UK pension. Should you leave it where it is, consolidate it, or cash it in?

Many people assume that pensions remain a 'UK matter'. However, once you become a tax resident in France, your worldwide income is generally subject to French tax. That includes pension withdrawals, even if the pension remains held in the UK.

This is why pension planning is one of the most important areas of cross-border financial advice. It is rarely complicated, but it is very easy to get wrong.

## NOT THE FULL STORY

### The UK tax-free lump sum

Under UK pension rules, most defined contribution pension holders can normally withdraw up to 25% of their pension pot as a lump sum, tax-free. This is often referred to as 'tax-free cash'.

It is worth highlighting that 'tax-free' is a UK concept. It does not automatically mean tax-free in France. If you are a resident of France at the time of withdrawal, France will assess the lump sum under its own tax rules.

However, focusing too heavily on the UK 25% rule can distract from a more important question: what is the French tax treatment of pension withdrawals, and are there any special rules that can reduce the tax cost? Is there a money-saving opportunity?

## THE KEY ISSUE

### Tax residency and timing

The most important factor is your tax residency at the moment the pension payment is made. If you withdraw

pension benefits while you are still a UK tax resident, UK tax rules apply. If you withdraw after becoming a French tax resident, the French tax system becomes relevant.

This can create unexpected outcomes. For example, a pension withdrawal taken a few months too late can shift from being taxed under UK rules to being taxed under French rules. That difference can be substantial.

## TEMPTATION TO CONSOLIDATE PENSIONS

### And why it can backfire

When people move to France, they often want to simplify their financial affairs. A common approach is to consolidate several UK pensions into one pot. This can be sensible for administrative reasons, but it can also remove flexibility. Keeping pensions in separate pots can allow withdrawals to be spread across multiple tax years.

Consolidation can encourage large withdrawals in a single year, which is where French taxation can become painful.

In many cases, the desire to simplify can lead to an unnecessary tax cost.

## A FRENCH TAX OPPORTUNITY

### That many people miss

One of the most important points for UK pension holders living in France is that certain pension lump sums may benefit from specific French tax treatment. Some qualifying pension lump sums may be taxed at a fixed rate of 7.5% with a 10% allowance, giving an effective rate of just 6.75%, rather than paying marginal tax rates, which may be significantly higher. Use of this rule, therefore, can be very

advantageous, particularly for those with significant income, whose pensions would otherwise be heavily taxed.

However, this favourable treatment is not automatic. It depends on the type of pension payment, its structure and the taxpayer's circumstances. It also requires careful planning, timing and correct reporting.

One of the main rules of the legislation is that the pension must not be split. If withdrawals have been made or cash taken, this usually ceases to be an option.

This is exactly why pension planning should be done before a large withdrawal. Many people 'cash in' a pension without realising that the 6.75% regime exists, or without structuring or timing the withdrawal correctly to qualify. Once the withdrawal has been made, the opportunity may be lost.

This is one of the clearest examples of how cross-border planning can legally and legitimately reduce tax, provided it is done correctly.

## WITHDRAWING TOO MUCH IN ONE YEAR

Even where a favourable regime applies, it is still possible to create unnecessary tax costs by withdrawing too much in a single year.

France applies progressive income tax rates. The more income you receive in a year, the higher your marginal tax rate becomes. Large pension withdrawals can quickly push taxpayers into higher tax brackets. In addition, France applies surtaxes on unusually high-income years.

## CHARGES FOR HIGH INCOMES

France applies an additional tax known as the *contribution exceptionnelle sur les hauts revenus* (CEHR). This applies when your *revenu fiscal de référence* (reference taxable income) exceeds:

- €250,000 for single taxpayers

Thresholds	Single	Couple
€250,000 or below	0%	0%
Between €250,001 and €500,000	3%	0%
Between €500,001 and €1m	4%	3%
More than €1m	4%	4%

See  
**KENTINGTONS**  
at the *French*  
*Property Exhibition*  
- see the back cover  
for details



(single, widowed, separated or divorced)

• €500,000 for couples taxed jointly (married or PACS)  
No increase is provided for dependants.

The surcharge applies at the levels in the table below. These percentages are applied in addition to the normal income tax bill. A large pension lump sum can therefore trigger not only higher income tax, but also this additional surcharge.

“The desire to simplify by consolidating several UK pensions can lead to an unnecessary French tax cost”

cases, French social charges (*prélèvements sociaux*) may apply to pension withdrawals. Again, this depends on the pension, your age, timing and maybe other points.

#### HANDLE WITH CARE

There are significant financial planning opportunities with UK pensions, and it is vital that these are understood before taking any action, or you may inadvertently trigger unnecessary taxation.

UK pensions offer valuable options, but once you live in France, they need to be handled carefully. The main danger is not the pensions themselves, but the temptation to simplify too quickly and withdraw large sums without understanding the French tax consequences. For many UK retirees, the existence of special French rules means that good planning can yield a far better outcome than expected. However, the benefits are often lost if withdrawals are made without advice.

In pension planning, timing is not a detail. It is often the difference between keeping more of your money or being unnecessarily punished with excessive taxation. ■

**Robert Kent is the founder and CEO of Kentingtons, specialising in French tax and investments - and official sponsor of the French Property Exhibition in Birmingham**  
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Furthermore, France has also introduced the *contribution différentielle sur les hauts revenus* (CDHR). This mechanism is designed to ensure that high-income households pay a minimum effective tax rate of 20%.

The CDHR was initially introduced for income in 2025; however, it has now been extended into 2026. This reinforces the importance of caution when considering unusually large withdrawals in a single year.

Some advisers have suggested that CDHR does not apply to pension lump sums because they are ‘exceptional one-off payments’. France

has mechanisms to address exceptional income, such as the quotient method, which can reduce the impact of certain one-off payments.

However, an income being described as exceptional does not automatically mean it is excluded from surtaxes. Whether CDHR applies will depend on how the pension withdrawal is treated under French tax law and the precise nature of the pension arrangement.

#### A COMMON MISTAKE

We recently dealt with a client who had several UK pensions and wanted to simplify matters. Their goal was to

consolidate everything into one pension pot and take a large withdrawal in a single year. The creation of a single pension pot simplifies life, giving people less to manage; however, doing so without understanding the consequences can lead to punitive, unnecessary taxation. Keeping their pensions separate gave them extra flexibility, allowing them to draw only the amounts they needed and avoid extra taxes.

This is a good example of why pension decisions should not be based purely on convenience.

It is also important to consider that, in some

#### CHECKLIST BEFORE TAKING UK PENSION CASH

Before touching your pension, consider if:

- ✓ The withdrawal may qualify for tax below 7%
- ✓ There will be extra taxation on significant sums
- ✓ Staggering separate pensions will save you money
- ✓ Consolidating pensions reduces your flexibility
- ✓ Whether social charges are applicable and at what rate
- ✓ You can really manage this on your own with no professional advice

# HELP WITH STARTING A BUSINESS

Increasing numbers of people are starting a business in France, but what help can they expect at a national or regional level? **Catharine Higginson** explores the availability of grants and other assistance for entrepreneurs

While France has a reputation for being a nation of *fonctionnaires* (civil servants), the reality is far more nuanced, and the last few years have seen increasing numbers of people starting their own businesses. This is probably in part due to the simplicity of starting up as a *micro-entrepreneur*, but the extensive grants or *aides* available in France also play a part.

Specific *aides* are geared to different sectors of the populace including young entrepreneurs, women, the unemployed, people who have been made redundant and are retraining, and those with innovative projects. And this list is by no means exhaustive!

The type of help available includes tax exoneration and ongoing help and support in addition to financial assistance.

## CASH INJECTIONS

The type of help available can be divided into three main categories. Firstly, there is what is referred to as *les aides financières directes*. These cover cash injections and making access to obtaining loans easier, and are generally in the form of grants, loans at zero percent interest or bank guarantees.

They include *subventions à la création* which allow start-ups to finance initial investments, pay for administrative costs and help with cashflow. They are administered by the state, regional departments or certain government agencies.

Then there are the *prêts d'honneur*, administered by various different networks such as Initiative France or Réseau Entreprendre. They provide a means for the business to borrow interest free and without providing a personal guarantee. There are



General support for your business can be as valuable as financial aids

also *fonds de garantie* available; these make accessing bank loans easier as they provide a guarantee for part of the risk being taken on by the bank.

## SOCIAL CHARGES

The next type of assistance covers what is referred to as *les dispositifs fiscaux et sociaux*. Starting a business may allow you to benefit from lower or exonerated social charges depending on your personal circumstances and location. These tend to apply to the young, unemployed and those in 'priority' zones.

The ACRE (*aide à la création ou à la reprise d'entreprise*) gives partial exemption from social charges over a fixed period and the ARCE (*aide à la reprise et à la création d'entreprise*) provides for the partial payment of unemployment benefits as two 'lump sums' when starting a business. Lower taxes may also kick in if you are in a specific geographic zone,

notably deprived urban areas or rural zones designated as needing development.

## HELPING HAND

The third form of assistance available covers help and support and this can be absolutely invaluable. There are numerous organisations, both public and private, that offer either free or subsidised support. Individual support is also offered by France Travail and structures such as the Chambres de Commerce et Industrie (CCI) and the Chambres de Métiers et de l'Artisanat (CMA) or business incubators. The latter are often supported by public or private funding which has been put in place to support specific projects or groups of people such as younger entrepreneurs, women or people switching careers (*en reconversion*).

There is also assistance to put together the paperwork required to apply for grants.



Those on a low income can seek help with rent and mortgage payments

Given that France is notorious for its paperwork, and that many of the *aides* require detailed documentation, this is a much needed and appreciated part of the ‘help’ on offer.

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

And for what? The most important point to note is that the criteria varies according to personal circumstances and elements such as your professional and social situation, age and the type of project concerned.

If you are registered unemployed with France Travail you may be able to continue to receive unemployment benefits during the start-up phase along with benefits mentioned previously such as the ACRE and ARCE. France Travail will also assist with the business plan and any training requirements, and can steer you towards other partner organisations who may be able to help.

Those aged 26 and under are eligible for a variety of *aides*, often financed by the state, regions and universities. There is the *contrat d'engagement jeune* (CEJ), which offers an enhanced level of start-up support with possible financial assistance; students can opt for the *étudiant-entrepreneur* status which allows for business start-up and support from the PÉPITE network while studying and various regional grants are also available.

There are also numerous programmes designed to support female entrepreneurs such as the FGIF (*fonds de garantie à l'initiative des femmes*). This offers a bank guarantee to facilitate obtaining loans. There are also different regional proposals including grants, business incubators and project/contract tenders which are reserved for women. Numerous specialist business networks for women exist, such as Force Femmes, Action'elles and Bouge ta boîte, which are well worth exploring.

Those in receipt of RSA (income support equivalent) are also eligible for start-up help. Depending on personal circumstances you may be entitled to the ACRE, ARCE, the continued payment of benefits,

You can even get help with the paperwork required to apply for grants



**“From 2023-2024, the government allocated some €12m to support the creation of shops and commercial ventures in isolated rural areas”**

local or departmental grants and assistance along with support and coaching. If you are or have been employed and changing direction, perhaps due to redundancy, or have resigned to start up a business, the *CPF de transition/projet de transition professionnelle* (PTP) will apply. These help to finance a related training course and you may be entitled to unemployment benefits. Those made redundant will qualify for the *contrat de sécurisation professionnelle* (CSP) which provides an extra level of help.

### TAILORED TO YOUR NEEDS

Help is also available for those aged 50 and over. The ACRE

is a possibility along with specific regional grants and assistance, and being able to combine working with drawing a pension.

If you have a project which is considered ‘high value’ in terms of innovation or technology, and are classified as an *entrepreneur innovant*, you may receive extra assistance in the form of help, grants and loans, strategic assistance, financing and the provision of a workspace in a French tech or state business incubator; and should you qualify for *statut de jeune entreprise innovante* (JEI) status, you may be entitled to lower taxation and exoneration from social charges.

And last but very much not least, specific targeted help is available for the disabled to improve and increase their professional autonomy. This includes the AGEFIPH, which encompasses financial assistance with start-up, personalised support and help with ensuring that the working environment is tailored to their needs. They are also able to access the ACRE and ARCE, plus various exonérations depending on the business statute and support with getting the project off the ground.

### LOCAL LEVEL

It’s clear that there is a lot of help available in France for different categories of people wishing to start a business. It’s also vitally important to remember that depending on the type of business, there may be extra help available at either state or regional level.

For example, during the period 2023-2024, the government allocated some €12m to support the creation of shops (including mobile shops) and commercial ventures in isolated rural areas.

With up to €80,000 available per applicant and up to 50% of the cost of acquiring and fitting out premises being met, this type of help has proved invaluable for many small businesses.

Starting a business is never easy and doing it as someone who has moved to France is certainly challenging. But it can be done and the different forms of assistance available, whether monetary or as guidance, will definitely help you on your way. ■

### Top tip

If you’re thinking about setting up a business in France, do your research! Grants vary enormously from region to region, with the less populated and poorer regions often providing far more help and support. So it makes sense to spend time researching exactly what is available in your target area before going any further.

### NEXT MONTH

**Guide to: Grants and assistance for agricultural businesses**

# Q&A Ask the experts

Need advice? Put your problems to our panel

## IS MY PROPERTY 'SOLD AS SEEN'?

Once I've sold my house in France, isn't it 'sold as seen'? How can I protect myself from unpleasant surprises - or legal claims - after completion?

### SARAH BRIGHT of Bright Avocats responds

([brightavocats.com](http://brightavocats.com)): Ah yes, the famous 'sold as seen' idea. I wish I had a euro for every time a seller has said that to me, usually with great confidence and occasionally with a raised eyebrow. Sadly, French law does not quite share this optimism.

In theory, buyers are expected to inspect carefully, ask questions - and if they are really curious - commission surveys (alongside diagnostics provided by the seller), in order to reassure themselves before signing. In practice, however, I see an increasing number of post-sale claims, often months or even years later, alleging that something was wrong with the property



Sarah Bright

and that the seller must have known about it. Welcome to the world of *vices cachés* and imaginative hindsight.

So, what's actually going wrong? The problem is not that most buyers are dishonest - far from it. The problem is that once the sale is completed, the narrative changes. A small damp patch becomes 'a serious structural issue'. A hairline crack becomes 'evidence of subsidence'. And suddenly the seller is asked to explain, justify, or compensate. At that point, the property

no longer belongs to you, memories are selective, and the burden of proof becomes... uncomfortable.

Sellers may be more exposed than they think. French courts take allegations of hidden defects seriously. If a buyer can persuade a judge that a defect existed before the sale and was not disclosed, the seller may face compensation - even if they genuinely believed the issue was minor or insignificant. And no, saying "it was obvious" is not always enough. What seems glaringly obvious to someone who has lived in a house for 10 years is not necessarily obvious to someone who visited it twice with an estate agent and rose-tinted glasses.

Enter the bailiff's *constat* (and no, this isn't overkill). One increasingly sensible - and still under-used - solution is to commission a '*constat d'huissier*' before the sale. This involves a bailiff visiting



French courts take allegations of hidden defects seriously

the property and recording, in a neutral and factual way, its visible condition on a given date. No opinions. No diagnoses. Just what is there, what is visible, and what is not.

If a dispute arises later, this document becomes a rather formidable ally. Judges like bailiffs. They like contemporaneous evidence. They like photographs taken before tempers, lawyers and renovation works get involved. Bailiffs are legal professionals and their *constat* is seen as reliable and unbiased evidence by the court. "But won't this highlight defects?" you might

## CAN I USE AN S1 FORM TO COVER FRENCH HEALTHCARE?

### ARTHUR CUTLER of Navigate France responds

([navigatefrance.com](http://navigatefrance.com)): There are a number of considerations to take into account when looking at this option, and some are not immediately evident.

Firstly let's look at what the S1 certificate is. There is a cross-country agreement between France, other EU countries, and some other countries outside the EU (the UK being one). When a person is entitled to an S1, medical costs arising in France can be covered by the issuing country - essentially this means that although medical care is



Arthur Cutler

provided in France, another country pays the cost.

However, the S1 only provides the same level of cover as you would receive as a French citizen, which is generally not 100%

of the actual cost of medical care. On average, the French healthcare system covers around 70% (but it varies between around 35% and 100%), leaving the patient to pay the balance from their own resources, or via a top-up insurance policy, called a '*mutuelle*'. Some specific major illnesses and treatments qualify for 100% reimbursement.

A UK individual of retirement age is entitled to apply for an S1 certificate from the NHS, and potentially so are individuals with long-term incapacities (note, it is the country of origin that defines this, not France). If one

partner of a married couple (or civil partnership) qualifies, but the other does not because they are not yet of retirement age, then the younger spouse automatically qualifies for an S1 certificate by 'piggy-backing' from the older spouse's entitlement.

Entitlement rules applying in other EU countries vary (see [europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/health/when-living-abroad/health-insurance-cover/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/health/when-living-abroad/health-insurance-cover/index_en.htm)).

The next question is how soon after moving to France does the S1 provide cover, and the answer is not immediately!

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ask, and indeed, this is the question I hear most often.

My answer is always the same: honest defects are not the problem - disputed defects are. A *constat* does not create issues; it fixes reality in time. It can demonstrate that a crack was visible (and therefore not hidden), that damp was localised, or that a particular problem simply did not exist at the time of sale. Used properly, it is not a weapon against the buyer, but a shield for the seller.

More lawyers are quietly recommending this now because we are seeing more

litigation. More buyers encouraged to "see what they can get" after completion. Because a few hundred euros spent before the sale can save many thousands, and several sleepless nights, afterwards. Think of it as legal insurance for people who prefer not to discover, two years later, that their perfectly respectable house has apparently always been on the brink of collapse.

Selling smartly is not about mistrust. It's about foresight. And after nearly 30 years of watching what can go wrong, foresight is something I wholeheartedly recommend.

It can take months because the S1 has to be registered by the local CPAM office (French healthcare authority), and that is usually not possible within the first three months of arrival. Even after that, it can take several more months to become registered.

To ensure you have health cover for this period, you will need private health insurance and if you also wish to be covered for 100% of actual costs, potentially a top-up policy as well.

Once fully registered, the S1 will provide health cover in France indefinitely. The holder will also still be entitled to full medical care

in the country of issue.

In terms of a long-term visa application, an S1 certificate is accepted by the French authorities even though it does not provide immediate cover. However, it is important to take out appropriate private health insurance, because without that, you will have no cover for a considerable time!

Private health insurance policies vary in terms of cover, premiums and whether pre-existing medical conditions are taken into account. Seek alternative quotes and compare cover and cost before deciding.

## MOVING DAY PITFALLS

What are the most common mistakes people make when organising a move to France and how can they avoid delays?

**BEN HINGLEY of Burke Bros Removals responds** ([burkebros.co.uk](http://burkebros.co.uk)): One of the biggest pitfalls is misunderstanding post-Brexit customs procedures. Moving household goods from the UK to France is no longer a simple intra-EU transfer. Customs clearance is now mandatory and those making the move must qualify for 'Transfer of Residence' relief to avoid paying import taxes.

This requires proof that the goods have been owned and used for at least six months, along with evidence of a genuine change of residence. Engaging a removal company experienced in Franco-British moves, and starting paperwork early, is essential to prevent shipments being held at the border.

Documentation errors are another frequent cause of delays. Missing or inconsistent paperwork, such as incorrect addresses, unsigned declarations or mismatched dates, can result in customs queries or inspections. French authorities are meticulous and even minor discrepancies can halt a shipment. Preparing a clear document checklist, including passport copies, proof of address, residency documents and customs forms, helps ensure nothing is overlooked.

Incomplete or vague inventories also create problems. French customs require a detailed, itemised inventory, ideally in French, listing the contents of each box and identifying high-value items separately. Generic descriptions such as 'miscellaneous household goods' can raise red flags and trigger inspections.



Ben Hingley

Timing is another area that is often underestimated. Many people plan their move around property completion dates without accounting for customs processing times, seasonal congestion or French public holidays. Delays of several days, or even weeks, are not uncommon if paperwork is submitted late. Building flexibility into the schedule and avoiding peak moving periods can significantly reduce stress.

Moves to France often involve household effects and possessions going into storage. It's important to discuss this with your chosen removal company and ensure they can make arrangements for this. Items may go into store for weeks or even months, so it's important to discuss this in advance to avoid expensive last-minute solutions.

Finally, don't underestimate access challenges, particularly in rural France. Narrow lanes, weight-restricted bridges and limited turning space will pose difficulties for large removal vehicles to reach a property. It's important that you discuss access issues with your removal company in advance as it may be necessary to arrange a smaller vehicle to act as a shuttle vehicle, for example.

In short, the key to avoiding delays lies in early preparation, detailed documentation and working with professionals who understand both UK and French regulations. A well-planned move is not just smoother; it is also more cost-effective.

## Get in touch!

Ask your questions about French property or life in France...

Email: [karen.tait@francemedia.com](mailto:karen.tait@francemedia.com)

Alternatively, you can post your question on our [Facebook](#) page

# Q&A Ask the experts

Need advice? Put your problems to our panel

## RELOCATION TIMELINE?

We've dreamt of moving to France for years, but we're unsure where to begin. We're browsing properties, yet we have concerns about visas and healthcare – which should we tackle first? It really feels like a chicken-and-egg situation!

### TRACY LEONETTI

**of LBS Paperwork Professionals responds**

*(lbsinfrance.com)*: Feeling excited about French homes yet unsure about visas and healthcare is normal. After 15 years in French immigration and paperwork, I assure you your dream is within reach, it just requires a structured plan. Let's break down the steps for your move.

#### Step one - Lay your

**foundations:** Start by exploring different regions: coast, countryside or town, and refine your criteria such as budget, lifestyle, access to amenities



Tracy Leonetti

and renovation preferences. Get your finances and logistics in order early to avoid surprises. This clarity helps your agent act fast when you're ready.

**Step two - Secure the right visa strategy:** This is where your plans begin to take shape. Before you make any formal decisions, it's crucial to know your legal options for residency. Following Brexit, Brits as non-EU nationals must apply for an appropriate long-stay visa if they intend to live in France for more than 90 days.

You can't just wait and hope; advance planning is necessary.

The central question is: How will you finance your life in France? Are you:

- Retired on pensions?
- Remote worker or freelancer?
- Early retirement?
- Entrepreneur?
- Job seeker?

Each of these situations has a specific visa category. Selecting the right one from the beginning is essential. With good preparation, this step becomes very achievable, and once your visa has been approved, you'll enjoy great peace of mind.

**Step three - Work with the timeline, not against it:** French authorities place a high value on thorough preparation. Drawing from three decades of living in France and assisting hundreds of applicants, I can confirm that visa processes demand organised documents, proof of financial stability, housing plans and valid health



Which visa category will be right for you?

coverage. Instead of viewing these requirements as mere paperwork, consider them as steps toward building your new life with greater security. Each document brings you closer to your goal. With a well-structured plan, the entire process becomes more transparent, manageable and far less overwhelming.

#### Step four - Plan your healthcare transition:

Healthcare is one of the biggest concerns for future movers and thankfully, it is also one of the most straightforward when understood properly. Initially, you may need comprehensive private health insurance for your visa application. Once resident in France, you can

## HOW DO I ACCESS FRENCH HEALTHCARE?

What are the key healthcare and insurance considerations when moving to France, and how can we ensure a smooth transition into the French health system?

### PAULETTE BOOTH

**of Lonemi responds**  
*(lonemi.fr)*: To ensure a smooth transition, it's essential to plan ahead and understand the key steps involved. The process begins before departure. For those applying for a long-stay visa, proof of comprehensive health insurance is mandatory. The policy must include at least €30,000 in medical



Paulette Booth

coverage, including emergency repatriation. It's vital to choose a policy that offers continuous coverage for the entire stay (standard travel insurance, limited to 30 or 90 days, won't meet visa

requirements). Specialist expat policies are designed to fulfil these criteria, helping avoid visa rejection or delays.

UK retirees or benefit recipients should obtain an S1 form, issued by HMRC. This document allows access to French healthcare on similar terms as residents. However, even with an S1, you'll still be responsible for costs not covered by social security, known as the *ticket modérateur*.

Upon arrival in France, registering with local health authorities is your next step. If arriving for work, self-

employment or with an S1, you may apply for a social security number immediately. Otherwise, you'll typically wait about three months after establishing residence.

During this period, maintaining private health insurance ensures you have uninterrupted coverage and protection from unexpected costs. If you submitted insurance cover with your visa application, that should suffice temporarily. Otherwise, it's strongly recommended to purchase a short-term private policy to bridge the gap.

Registering for a French



See ALL THESE EXPERTS AT THE French Property Exhibition - details on the back cover

## FUTURE PROJECTIONS

How can I know whether a French property is truly right for me before I commit to buying it?



Tom Easdown

### TOM EASDOWN of French Plans responds (*frenchplans.com*):

It's easy to get drawn into the dream of owning a French property - the listings and photos create an image of the life you could lead - but before you fall head over heels for the property on paper, it's a good idea to analyse whether it offers the opportunity for you to live that life in five or 10 years' time.

First, identify the purpose of the purchase: a permanent move, a holiday home, investment opportunity or business venture?

If a permanent move, does the property need urgent work? Is it in a good location that works both the day you move in but also in 10 years' time?

If a holiday home, is it easy to get to and offer an opportunity for holiday rentals? Do the potential yields work on a long-term basis, and does the building offer easy and safe access to the public?

The technical side of a property review is relatively straightforward; the diagnostic reports give a great baseline of information, and a structural survey provides that additional level of clarity. The crucial part is balancing that information with your future plans for the property, your budget for the purchase, and your appetite for development or renovation.

Understanding the costs associated with property issues identified in a structural survey allows for accurate budgeting when added to the costs of renovation, extension or development works.

Understanding how a building works now, and what needs to happen to it to enable the lifestyle you want, provides a more accurate idea of the budget to be established before

commitment. The perfect property on paper might end up being less than ideal if the orientation is wrong or the layout doesn't actually match the way you live.

So many people embark on a renovation project without a clear plan of the end result or a definite idea of the likely costs. Most renovation projects don't fail because the building can't be developed - they fail because the budget doesn't align with the aspiration.

We work with our clients not just on the design of buildings but also their long-term aims, and balance that with the property that is put in front of us. We ask hard questions about the actual budget available, the appetite for heavy renovation or development, or the financial targets for both investment and commercial projects. Without a clear ambition for the long-term enjoyment of a property, it is difficult to establish a plan of action and to determine if a property is going to work for our clients not just today but in five, 10 or 15 years' time.

The right property isn't necessarily the one that instantly captures the imagination but the one that can realistically support the way you want to live within the budget and timeframe you are prepared to commit to.

Taking the time to examine that balance before you commit can be the difference between enjoying your dream lifestyle and living in a compromise.

apply to join the French state healthcare system (CPAM). How you apply and the documents would depend on what your status is i.e. retired, working, business. The affiliation process can take four to six months so your private insurance definitely has its place during this interim phase.

With proper planning, you remain fully covered throughout the transition.

**Step five - Proceed with confidence:** Once your visa has been approved and your healthcare plan established, you transition from planning to implementation.

- Your property search becomes targeted
- Your financial resources are

strategically managed  
- Your timeline is clearly defined

- Your visa documentation and related paperwork are in order

At this stage, your French endeavour transitions from a future aspiration to an active undertaking. So what comes first? I'm a great believer in getting clarity: About where you want to live; about your visa pathway and administration situation; and about your healthcare cover.

With those foundations in place, your move to France becomes structured, achievable and entirely within reach.

Enjoy the process!

social security number is crucial. While it may take several months, once completed you will receive a *carte vitale*, which streamlines reimbursements and confirms your coverage.

In the meantime, keep detailed records of healthcare expenses, such as receipts (*feuilles de soins*, known by us English-speakers as the 'brown form'), which can be submitted later for reimbursement.

Transitioning from private insurance to the French system also involves obtaining a *mutuelle*, a top-up policy that covers costs not reimbursed by social security.

A *mutuelle* can significantly reduce out-of-pocket expenses, especially for private hospital stays, dental, optical and other supplementary treatments.

Moving to France requires careful planning around healthcare and insurance. Securing appropriate coverage before leaving, maintaining private insurance during the administrative process, and understanding how to join the French health system are key.

With proactive preparation and expert advice, you can enjoy your new life confidently, knowing your health needs are fully protected.

## Get in touch!

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Alternatively, you can post your question on our Facebook page

# Ups and downs

**Mar Bonnin-Palmer** on avoiding unpredictable exchange rate fluctuations



**We're purchasing a home in Provence for €380,000, but our funds are in pounds. Completion is three months away and we're anxious about the exchange rate changing. How can we protect ourselves?**

You're absolutely right to think ahead. The GBP-EUR exchange rate can shift markedly in just a few weeks, and even a small movement has a big impact on property budgets. For example, a shift from 1.18 to 1.14 would add more than £8,000 to a €380,000 purchase.

A popular way to mitigate this uncertainty is by using a forward contract. This allows you to obtain today's exchange rate and settle the payment at a future date - such as your completion day. In practical terms, this locks in the sterling cost of your French home and shields you from unfavourable market swings.

The good news is that you don't need the full amount upfront. Typically, only 5-10% is required as a deposit on the contract, with the remainder payable when the purchase completes. You can secure the full amount now or just a portion if you prefer to keep some flexibility. Either way, using a forward contract allows for budget certainty for your purchase as you won't be derailed by currency volatility.

**We're taking out a euro mortgage for a house in Dordogne, but all our earnings are in the UK. We'll be making payments every month - how do we avoid unpredictable exchange rate fluctuations?**

Relying on the live exchange rate every month can make long-term budgeting extremely difficult. If the pound weakens suddenly, your euro mortgage payments

can jump with no warning - and over a 15 or 20-year term, this really adds up.

A regular payment plan (RPP) is a simple and effective solution for managing ongoing euro commitments. With an RPP you can automate your transfers at whatever frequency suits your mortgage schedule and choose how you want your rate managed:

- Fix the exchange rate for up to a year's worth of payments
- Use the live market rate for maximum flexibility
- Blend both strategies, securing part of your exposure while leaving room to benefit if rates improve

This is a reliable way

to make your mortgage payments predictable, and many homeowners also use RPPs for property taxes (*taxe foncière, taxe d'habitation*), utilities and building fees.

**We're buying a new-build apartment in Montpellier with staged payments over 18 months. Our funds are in GBP, but the developer's schedule is rigid. How do we protect ourselves from rate movements throughout the build?**

Off-plan purchases in France typically involve several payment milestones tied to construction progress. Each stage is exposed to GBP/EUR fluctuations - meaning a weaker pound partway through the build could significantly increase your overall cost.

Forward contracts are also designed precisely for this scenario. It allows you to:

- Lock in one fixed exchange rate for the full value of your staged payments aligning

with the payment schedule

- Draw down euros in instalments that match the developer's timetable
- Have certainty of your entire construction budget for the full duration of the build

This combination of certainty and flexibility ensures you're never forced to convert funds at a poor rate or rush last minute transfers to meet a builder's deadline.

For optional expenses - such as upgrades, custom fittings or furnishing allowances - some buyers also use market orders to target favourable rates.

Note that some of these strategies aren't always available via high street banks. Many buyers instead work with a specialist foreign exchange provider who offers more tailored tools for international property purchases. ■

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[moneycorp.com](http://moneycorp.com)

**“How can you protect yourself from rate movements between signing the first property purchase contract and completion?”**



# Prepare for the worst

Death, divorce and diagnostics,  
by **Caroline Fell**



**I've purchased my home jointly with my civil partner. We made sure that we included a 'tontine' clause in the purchase deed - should I make a will too?**

As you may already know, if you've bought your home with a *tontine* clause, when either you or your civil partner passes away, the survivor will automatically become the sole owner of your French home.

It is still, however, a good idea to make a will. By making a will it ensures that your home passes as you wish (in so far as that is possible) in the event that you and your civil partner die together. It will also ensure that following the death of the survivor of you both, the property passes as you wish.

It will depend upon your nationality, and family structure, as to how you and your civil partner structure your wills, but we suggest reviewing your estate planning following a property purchase.

**My husband and I, a retired couple, are in the process of separating. We have been living in France for around five years, but I wish to return to England, whereas my husband wants to remain living in France. We are both British nationals and were born in England. We have property in both France and England. Our pensions are in the UK and our children are living independently in England. Where can I issue divorce proceedings?**

When looking at where to issue divorce proceedings, there are three factors to consider:

1. In which country can I issue

divorce proceedings, i.e. is there jurisdiction for me to issue divorce proceedings in that country?

2. In which country is it most appropriate for divorce proceedings to be considered? This is known as *forum conveniens*.

3. Will one country provide a more beneficial outcome to me on divorce? The country in which divorce proceedings take place will then determine how the finances are to be separated in accordance with that country's laws. This can provide a very different outcome if proceedings take place in France, or if they take place in England.

**Jurisdiction:** As you are living in and habitually resident in France, it is possible for either you or your husband to issue proceedings for divorce in France. However, as it seems that you remain domiciled in England, you are also able to issue divorce proceedings in England. There is therefore jurisdiction to issue proceedings in both countries.

**Forum:** If proceedings are issued in both countries, a decision will have to be taken by the courts as to which is the most appropriate forum for proceedings to take place. Consideration will be given as to factors such as where the family have their main home, where the assets are held, where the children are based.

In this example, it seems as though there is rather a fine balance between the two countries: while the fact that the family home is in France may be determinative, the presence of other assets in England (in particular pensions), may give weight to England being the preferred forum.

**Financial outcome:** England is known to be supportive of the

financially weaker party when it comes to divorce law. There are greater powers with regard to the division of pensions and ongoing financial support than exist in France. French courts will not, for example, have the power to divide UK pensions on divorce and this may be a significant factor for a retired couple. However, it is essential that you seek advice from both French and English lawyers to ascertain the likely outcome in each jurisdiction.

It is also very important to work with your husband to try to reach an agreement with regard to the division of your finances. Forum disputes are notoriously expensive and, as outcome is not guaranteed, you are best placed trying to find a resolution through discussion, potentially with the support of an accredited mediator.

**I'm selling my French property. Am I required to organise a buildings survey?**

In France it is not necessary to provide a buildings survey to any prospective buyer of your property. However, in France it is necessary to provide buyers with a *dossier de diagnostic technique* (DDT).

The DDT includes reports on asbestos, electrical wiring, energy efficiency, gas installations, geotechnical risks, lead, natural and industrial risks, radon, septic tanks and termites. It is your responsibility to provide the buyer with this, and you will be expected to pay for the DDT. You should seek a surveyor who is appropriately accredited to ensure that the reports are comprehensive and can be relied upon.

If the buyer wishes to have a building survey, and you agree to this, the buyer would be expected to organise and pay for it. The buyer should do this before formally agreeing to buy your property. ■

**Caroline Fell is a Partner and Head of the Family Law and Mediation team at Stone King, advising British individuals living in France or those with properties in France**  
Tel: 0800 111 4336  
[stoneking.co.uk](http://stoneking.co.uk)

*“The country in which divorce proceedings are issued depends on factors such as where the family, children and assets are based”*



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The weather's warming up and it's a lovely time to be in France, as this May-time shot of St-Remy de Provence shows – avoid the tourist crowds and high summer prices!

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# Joie de vivre

## READ

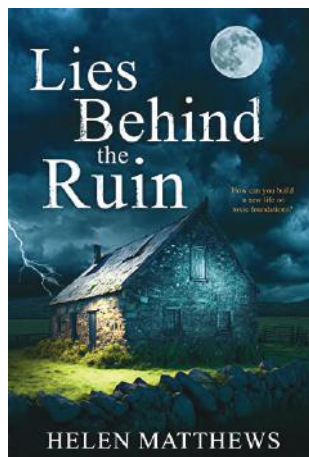
### LIES BEHIND THE RUIN

By Helen Matthews

This psychological suspense follows Emma, whose second marriage promises an end to her single-mum struggles.

On holiday in Limoges, her husband impulsively buys a dilapidated property, which suddenly becomes their only option when they have to sell everything in the

UK. Emma tries to make a new life in the small French village but secrets and deception threaten everything she has.



## WATCH

### LE QUAI DES BRUMES

Watch on DVD

This 1938 film tells the story of Jean, an army deserter who finds refuge in Le Havre and falls for Nelly, a young woman facing her own despair.

Reminiscent of a Bogart film noir, the low lighting, foggy cobbled streets and looming tragedy make this a cinematic classic, capturing the fatalism of pre-war France. Now restored in 4k with English subtitles, it's available on DVD.

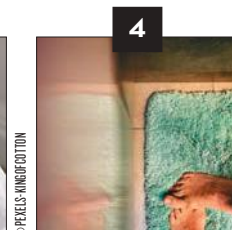


## TEST YOURSELF

### Les associations

Match each image with its French name

SERVIETTE DE BAIN  
TAPIS DE BAIN  
GANT DE TOILETTE  
BATHROBE



answers p100

## DID YOU KNOW?

### FRANCE HAS BAGUETTE VENDING MACHINES

We all know how important it is for the French to have access to fresh baguettes, but did you know that you can even get them from vending machines? This is all thanks to Moselle-based baker Jean-Louis Hecht and his brother Jean-Claude, who invented the automatic hot baguette dispenser back in 2014, winning a national innovation contest. Each vending machine has a chilled unit that can hold up to 120 pre-baked baguettes, which are then individually baked to order in the oven section, and delivered to the customer within 10 seconds. The price is not much different from that in a bakery, but the invention gives French people access to a freshly baked baguette 24 hours a day.



©MABOUQUETTE.COM

## Test yourself



©GEMASTER - STOODA/BETTY MARIS

### PROPERTY TALK

What does 'une plinthe' mean?

1. Pedestal vase
2. Skirting board
3. Architrave

answers p100

# French interiors

Recreate a French *salle à manger* at home – from serving dishes for *apéro* snacks to classy linen tablecloths



Oblong casserole dish, a twist on a French classic  
 ✨ from £363 [lecreuset.fr](http://lecreuset.fr)

Vintage pewter champagne bucket by Jean Goardère  
 ✨ £702 [chezpluie.com](http://chezpluie.com)



Patterned *apéritif* set for stylish nibbles  
 ✨ [latableparisienne.com](http://latableparisienne.com)



Decorated cast-iron trivet wishing 'Bon appétit'  
 ✨ £25 [fabriquedestyles.com](http://fabriquedestyles.com)



Patterned 'Symphonie Baroque' linen tablecloth  
 ✨ from £225 [laredoute.fr](http://laredoute.fr)

## CHEZ VOUS

Send us pictures of your French home to inspire us with your interior design!

# CLICK OF THE MONTH

## HOMESITTING HOMESITTER



The French-based business Homesitting Homesitter offers a service for both absent owners and for individuals looking to discover new areas without paying for accommodation. Founded in 1988, it's a well-established company with a network of 1,500 homesitters (who are retirees) carrying out up to 4,000 stays a year, some of which also include caring for pets. To become a house-sitter, membership starts at €50 a year including civil liability insurance, and if you'd like to employ a sitter, allow €169 for a week and €399 for a month. [homesitting-homesitter.com](http://homesitting-homesitter.com)

## Test yourself



### IDIOM

*“Avoir un poil dans la main”*

1. To have a hand in everything
2. To be hungover
3. To be incredibly lazy

answers p100

# French icon

Discover some of France's most fascinating icons



Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), was born 21st June 1905 in Paris and became one of France's best-known intellectuals. He grew up in the home of his tough maternal grandfather, seeking refuge in reading and writing.

As he recalls in his autobiography, *Les Mots* (1963), Sartre often walked the Luxembourg Gardens with his mother, interacting with groups in the park but never being accepted; his small stature and cross-eyed stare didn't help him to make friends. His mother remarried in 1917, but Sartre regarded his controlling stepfather as an 'intruder', and his early experiences with domineering male figures no doubt influenced his later impulses to rebel against restrictions.

He studied philosophy at Paris' prestigious École Normale Supérieure, where he met Simone de Beauvoir, who later became one of the founders of contemporary feminism. Although she turned down Sartre's proposal in 1932, de Beauvoir became a lifelong

partner, and was instrumental in developing his philosophical framework.

Sartre taught in lycées and studied briefly in Berlin (1933-1934), then was drafted in 1939, spending one year as a prisoner of war. His anti-Nazi feelings clashed with his pacifist stance, further developing his philosophy of existentialism, which focuses on individual freedom, and the idea that each one of us is responsible for creating purpose or meaning in our own lives. Sartre is one of the few great thinkers who was appreciated in his own lifetime, and his work 'Being and Nothingness' (1943) became the bible of existentialism.

Throughout his life, Sartre published novels, plays and philosophical works and was a political activist, declining the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964. He was able to translate complex ideas into accessible literature, linking philosophy to urgent political action against oppression. He remains a truly influential figure of the 20th century.



## What to drink...

Each issue, we take a look at a different French drink. This time, it's 'une noisette'...

Although *une noisette* means 'a hazelnut', if you hear someone in a coffee shop ordering this, they'll be served a small coffee. You might reasonably think that this is a hazelnut-flavoured coffee, but it is so called because its particular colour resembles that of a hazelnut. A *café noisette* - *noisette* for short - consists of a shot of espresso with a small amount of steamed milk, resulting in a nutty color and a smooth texture. Usually served in the same cup as an espresso, a *noisette* (pronounced 'wah-zett') is different from *un crème*, which is made using a diluted espresso and hot milk, and it's not quite like an Italian *macchiato* either, as this is made using frothed milk. This intense hot drink is second only to the classic espresso as the most popular type of coffee served in France - why not try one next time you're ordering?



### ANSWERS:

Skirting board; **Idiom:** Avoir un poil dans la main = to be incredibly lazy  
**Les associations:** 1. Gant de toilette = washcloth, 2. Peignoir de bain = bathrobe, 3. Serviette de bain = bath towel, 4. Tapis de bain = bathmat; **Property talk:** Une plinthe =



# The intrepid châtelaine

**Erin Choa** reveals a new and welcome events trend at the château - luxurious micro-weddings

Summer is a glorious time of year at the château. The lavender trimming the moat is abuzz with bees and the roses and climbing wisteria fill the gardens with heady perfume. The estate feels energised with holiday rentals and our season of weddings, elopements and special birthdays that sees us running between holiday cottage turnovers, swimming pools and garden maintenance. It is a busy time of year but I have found my new favourite event: the arrival of the luxurious micro-weddings.

We usually host big, beautiful weddings with multiple suppliers ranging from string quartets and oyster shuckers to jazz bands. For us behind the scenes, the work is intense and the infrastructure can be complex, especially when you are surrounded by a defensive medieval moat with only one bridge for access!

Seven years of hosting weddings means we have found a seamless system that works within the constraints of medieval engineering. But just as we get used to one thing, the tide turns, and increasingly, we have had a new type of unusual request from couples. The château speaks to them in a different and more personal way - not just as a beautiful backdrop for a champagne reception but often it is the interiors and historic ambience that charms them.

I started to receive messages from newly engaged couples who didn't want to host a large wedding with a traditional



Recent weddings at the château have been more intimate dinners

format; they wanted to enjoy the gastronomy of France with a long luxurious lunch in the intimacy of the original château dining room - just how the château ancestors dined - surrounded only by close family and friends.

"I want to be like a lazy duchess," one bride told me with a laugh. "I want to sit all day on a velvet cushion in this beautiful dining room decked out like a Bridgerton set and surrounded only by our VIPs."

No games, disco, DJs or videographers - this was all about honouring the French long lunch and luxurious fine dining like a movie set with bespoke menus and paired wines. A small guest list meant

they could really spend quality time together across an elegant table, decked with original French antique crockery, that lasted the whole afternoon, in a real home as the only private guests, not a hotel package.

The beauty of running a small business is that new ideas can come unexpectedly and open another door of creativity. I listened and felt the romance of this idea, plus I adore the French *l'art de la table* and it has since evolved into our favourite type of unique event. We create a bespoke menu and go to the market where we are spoilt for choice, picking locally sourced produce that is in season, and then take our menu to the

*caviste* who expertly pairs wines in a way only a French connoisseur, passionate about their craft, can do.

A Parisian chef creates pastries that taste like heaven, and I work with my talented florist friend to create a unique and chic tablescape on various themes for these events, both inside the château and outside, styling with locally grown flowers, and French linens and antiques I have collected from *brocantes* and the château. It is the ultimate crystallisation of the French slow elegance of old-world style that our fast-paced world is missing and perhaps this is why there is this trend for change, to re-find these special family moments that don't involve rushing from canapés to a pool party but the time to slow down, disconnect and enjoy one another's company and luxuriate in the slow-living of a long summer afternoon in France.

I love it so much that for our own wedding, this is exactly what we did. A long, sumptuous lunch for only our immediate family of 14, on the original château dining table that has witnessed many beautiful events over the last 160 years and hopefully, many more to come. ■

**London-born hospital doctor Erin Choa is the 6th châtelaine of Château de Bourneau, where she lives with her French fiancé Jean-Baptiste and bossy cat HRH Oscar. She blogs about their château-life on Instagram @theintrepidchâtelaine @chateaudebourneau**



# “I have learnt nothing...”

In his final column for FPN, **Ian Moore** ponders on the challenges, rewards and surprises of living in rural France

It's a freezing Saturday in February and I've somehow managed to survive the gale-force-driven sleet, flooding and sub-zero temperatures on the dog walk. My ears are numb, my jaw frozen solid and I'm sure my ears have frostbite. "Oh look," my wife says excitedly. "The cranes are returning!"

I can't lift my head up to look, but I hear the excited avian banter as two dozen cranes fly in formation over the garden. I'm not saying that they weren't a welcome sight - any sign of spring after a bleak French winter is obviously pleasing - but I can't help thinking that they've got their timing wrong and that after one look at the damage the winter months are still wreaking, they'll turn about and emigrate for good.

They are not the only birds with issues, however. Fraunders, one of our three hens is suffering, and she needs my help. We call her Fraunders because we had two hens who were called French and Saunders and one of them died, only we don't know which one as they became impossible to tell apart. Fraunders is certainly easy to tell apart from our other two hens Dolly and Tammy, however, because she has a quite enormous and hardened lump of hennish guano attached to her rear end. From a distance she looks almost like an adult male baboon in season.



This is why I braved the elements to disappear on a dog walk, because today, dear reader I have been tasked with cleaning a hen's bottom.

And so we end as we began. Fourteen years ago when I first started writing these missives from the depths of France, I made it clear that the rapid and chaotic intake of local fauna was nothing to do with me. The decisions to adopt every animal within grabbing distance were made between my wife and our three sons. It won't last, I told them, you'll find out just how hard it is keeping domestic and farm animals throughout the year. Ha ha ha, I sneered at them, you'll learn. And

learn they did, very quickly, by outsourcing most of the animal care to yours truly. So, after three horses, one donkey, four goats, six cats, 13 hens, seven dogs, some goldfish, two stillborn mice, a three-legged rabbit and one really angry Monty Python-style Black Knight of a lizard's tail, here I am. I have learnt nothing.

This isn't what I expected when we sold up and moved to France. I expected that I would happily continue my stand-up career, travelling to the UK every week to work the clubs and then return home to bathe in champagne and dab soft-cheese *eau de parfum* behind the ears like one of the

Louis kings. Well, it didn't work out like that. I didn't want to leave every week, I loved being home in France and I still do. So comedy took a backstep and I opened a bed and breakfast here instead, which quickly became a farce before a tragedy, and I shut it for the good of the French hospitality industry. I'm now a best-selling crime novelist, with award nominations to boot. France did this, and I will never forget that.

And if you think that's a tad boastful, and a little un-English, that's because I now also have French nationality, one of the many fallouts of Brexit.

But I will never forget also, that France keeps you grounded. I may be a Charlie *grandes pommes de terre* in some people's eyes, but here I am, in my old mod parka, wearing yellow rubber gloves trying to clean a hen's arse. I feint left, she dives right. Then she hides in the hedge. I tempt her out and she dives left while I dive right. I'm all for giving up when I give it one last effort.

I've never successfully rugby-tackled a hen before and frankly, I've never felt more alive. What a way to go out!  
*Au Revoir.* ■

**Ian Moore is a comedian, writer, chutney-maker and mod who lives with his family in the Loire Valley. His latest book is *Vive le Chaos* (£9.99, [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)) [ianmoore.info](http://ianmoore.info) [lapausevaldeloire.com](http://lapausevaldeloire.com)**



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# Rural riddles

Jeremy Hobson solves more of your pastoral problems



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## MASKED RAIDERS

I see in various newspaper reports published in the Aisne, Gironde, Ardennes and Haute-Loire that raccoons are becoming a bit of a problem, having thought to have killed domesticated rabbits and chickens, and constantly raiding rural dustbins. In Haute-Loire, it is estimated that between 1,000 and 1,500 raccoons were killed both intentionally (by hunters) and unintentionally (road-

kill) during 2024 - and, says Denis Barret of the Haute-Loire Hunting Federation, the raccoon population is "increasing very rapidly". It's not good news for the indigenous French wildlife as raccoons are known to be very capable predators. Wine producers are noticing their presence too - they apparently like the sugar in the grapes. Viticulteur Pierre Julien says that in 2025: "...[by] mid-

August ... they had ravaged everything. We went from 800 kilos to around 200 kilos... It's completely disheartening." In *La Presse* in November 2025, Philippe Teisceira-Lessard explained that raccoons are not native: "The first specimens are believed to have escaped from zoos, fur farms, or even an American military base in the north-west of the country where they were kept as 'mascots.'"

## POPULAR POPLAR

**Q** When we first moved here (Touraine) I planted several tree saplings, one of which was a black poplar planted on the boundary. For no apparent reason, our farming neighbour decided to cut it down. I don't want to start a conflict with him as we otherwise get on well - but wondered whether the poplar will regenerate from the stump?

**Bill Porter**

**A** Fortunately, black poplar (*Populus nigra*) easily regrows. In time, offshoots will start sprouting (you may by now already have noticed this) and eventually create independent trunks. Selected young, pliable branches of poplars can also produce rooted saplings if simply pushed into wet areas so, if your ground is appropriate, you could potentially create several new trees.



Black poplar trees are easy to grow

## PERFECT PITCH

**Q** Out walking in the countryside, my wife sometimes says "listen to all those birds". Some of a certain pitch I cannot hear (a hearing test is long overdue!). Of those I can, I can't always identify the species. Are there any phone apps you know of that can help (with the identification, not the hearing!)

**Jake Drummond**

**A** One which has had several recommendations from friends is the Merlin Bird ID produced by Cornell Lab in the US. It works by making a recording, and comparing that with a database containing a vast number of bird songs and calls, from which it gives you the most likely comparison based on where you are and the season. While it might not be totally foolproof in its identification, it is at least free to use!



I can hear clearly now

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## HORSING AROUND

**Q** On holiday we went to the Carmargue and saw a spectacular amount of wild flamingoes - and herds of wild horses. Knowing that the horses are caught and trained to be ridden, we wondered if they were truly wild - and what their use once trained.

**Mary and Alan Findlay**

**A** It would probably be more accurate to say that these horses are semi-feral rather than wild. They live in semi-



Feral horses can be trained

wild conditions in the marshy, wetland areas of the region, and the herds are managed by *gardians* - a type of cowboy. Some are brought in to be broken, trained and ridden, both for practical purposes (e.g. herding cattle) and for traditional equestrian activities such as the *jeu du bouquet* whereby, according to one online source: "a young woman will offer a rider a bouquet of flowers, and another rider will circle them, attempting to steal the bouquet."

At some larger events, they are used in an activity involving the famous locally bred black bulls. The same online source explains: "In competitions, *raseteurs* [bullfighters] face off against their animal opponents, attempting to tire them out so they can snatch trinkets tied to the bull's horns. (These competitions aren't designed to hurt or kill the bulls, although their human opponents can get hurt if they aren't careful.)"



Hunting organisations are also involved with schemes to protect natural habitats

## HEDGING THEIR BETS

**Q** In both the UK and in France, hunting enthusiasts often claim they are 'conservationists' - and yet I fail to see in what way. Each season, we have them in the fields and vineyards around our house and wondered what on earth they do to earn the title of 'conservationists'?

**Name withheld by request**

**A** By 'hunting', I presume you mean shooting rather than following hounds on horseback. If you are talking of hunting with guns, the *Fédération Départementale des Chasseurs* (FDC) has groups in

most, if not all, departments of France; each of which aims (forgive the pun) to develop and restore habitats beneficial to quarry species and, in doing so, undoubtedly helps create a diverse ecosystem.

According to information from the central FDC office, 75% of wetlands and ponds are managed by hunters and more than 20,000km of hedgerows are planted and maintained annually. Some 500,000 volunteer hunters are involved in: bird-ringing schemes to improve species knowledge; radio-tracking wildlife for

genetic studies; studying and following migratory species to improve knowledge of migratory routes; controlling invasive species that compete with native flora and fauna (and may carry disease); maintaining wildlife crossings on major road and rail infrastructure (including safeguarding and creating wildlife corridors/bridges to avoid the separation of territories); organising 'clean-ups' of fly-tipping etc in the countryside and forests, and providing food and water for wildlife during a hard winter or at other critical times.

## WHAT A BOAR

**T**his was sent to me by email in mid-December (2025) by Kerry Chamberlain who lives near Argenton-Château, Argentonnay: "The boar are squealing in the woods very early this morning - does that mean anything ... overnight they've rooted up our field too, what a mess."

I sympathise with the damage to the fields as we had similar happen when living not all that far away from where Kerry now appears to have her home. As to the noise, I suspect it was a confrontation between two males. Normally fairly solitary creatures, if two happen to meet up in the autumn/winter months - which is their mating (rutting) season - there's a strong likelihood that they will compete for potential territory and available females. Increased aggression, loud grunts and squeals are all part of the competition. As to why they can be heard



Wild boar are common in France's rural areas

more loudly in the morning (and at dusk), wild boar are generally more active at night - and is why a previously pristine field might look a bit like a battlefield in the morning after they have been foraging for roots and vegetation!

**GET IN TOUCH!** If you have any 'rural riddles' for Jeremy, contact him by email at [jcjeremyhobson@gmail.com](mailto:jcjeremyhobson@gmail.com)  
Jeremy Hobson is a France-based writer who specialises in all country matters [j-c-jeremy-hobson.co.uk](http://j-c-jeremy-hobson.co.uk)

# Woody's worries

Ahh, verb drills. The perfect, imperfect and conditional way to learn French, reckons **Ruth Wood**



“Rufus? Rufus! Don’t just sit there like a periwinkle at the bottom of the hedgerow, boy. Conjugate!”

I’ll never forget my A-level French teacher, Mrs Murphy. She could make language learning feel like special forces training.

“Pathetic. Fail. Nope. Why are you even here?” She had more putdowns than the instructors on *SAS Who Dares Wins*, especially if you erroneously used ‘avoir’ instead of ‘être’ when conjugating the perfect tense.

## IMPERFECT DAYS

Unlike most drill sergeants, Mrs Murphy was almost always dressed head to toe in a bright pink Jaeger suit, pink tights and pink heels. She swept her thick, long black hair back into

a bouncy ponytail, held in place with a golden hairband that I swear she’d swiped off a box of Ferrero Rocher.

Poor Rufus. He was the only boy in my class and the only kid Mrs Murphy addressed by surname as if we were at a 1950s grammar school, not a 1980s Yorkshire comp. The fire alarm could be screaming away and she would make us sit at our desks until he’d reeled off the imperfect form of ‘être’.

“J’étais, tu étais, il était, elle était, on était, nous étions, vous

*“I’ll never forget my French teacher, Mrs Murphy – she could make language learning feel like special forces training”*

étiez, ils...” The moment he faltered, she would be on him like a tonne of baguettes. “Well, go on, Rufus! Don’t just stare at me like a startled ferret in the headlights. Do you want us all to burn to death?” He probably did, to be fair.

## PRESENT MOMENTS

Funny thing is, my memories of Mrs Murphy are fond. The verbs she drilled into us with all the tact of a rotary hammer are still with me today. She expected us to do well, and we respected her for that, even though we never admitted it. Behind her back, we parroted her rebukes at each other in fits of giggles. Behind closed doors, we parroted everything she taught us.

Now, nearly 40 years later, my daughter Mabel is about to sit her A-level French exams and my niece Sophie is about to sit Spanish. Modern foreign language teaching has moved on a bit since my day. I never hear Mabel chanting verbs, but I do occasionally see her composing well-reasoned arguments

on whether immigration is positive for French society, whether smartphone usage should be banned in French schools or whether all French-speaking countries have the same attitudes to single-sex marriage. *Oh là là*. It’s stuff I’d struggle to answer in English, never mind French. Her vocabulary and cultural knowledge is off the charts compared with what I knew at school. Her verb conjugations, not so much.

## PERFECT TIMING

Determined to interfere, I recently went to a bookshop and bought Mabel a copy of *Barron’s 501 French Verbs*, which lists all the verbs that matter conjugated in all the tenses, along with loads of useful phrases, idioms, context and verb drills. “Perfect,” I told myself smugly. “*Je suis venue, j’ai vu, j’ai vaincu*.” I came, I saw, I conquered.

So far, the book looks conspicuously unthumbed. But maybe we’ll both get some use out of it someday, if not as a trusted guide then at least as a doorstop. Duolingo streaks are all very well, but to me, verb drills give you a future. Chant them over and over and over again, just like your times tables, and you’ll soon have a huge toolkit of building blocks that you can mix and match for endless role-playing fun.

**Mabel:** *Je mange. Je mange une pizza. Et toi, Maman? Tu manges de la pizza?*

**Maman:** *Non, Mabel. Je ne mange pas de pizza. Je mange de la salade.*

(Two minutes later...)

**Mabel:** *Ah non! Maman!*

**Maman:** *Quoi, Mabel?*

**Mabel:** *Tu as mangé ma pizza!*

**Maman:** *Moi? Non! Je n’ai pas mangé ta pizza. C’était Papa! Papa a mangé la pizza.*

**Mabel:** *Non, c’était toi Maman!*

**Maman:** *Ok, ok, c’est vrai. J’ai mangé toute la pizza. Mais demain, je mangerai de la salade. (Long pause) Mabel? Mabel! Ne me regarde pas comme un furet pris dans les phares!*

In case you didn’t get that last bit, it means: “Don’t stare at me like a ferret caught in the headlights”.

As I say, endless fun. ■



Ruth’s niece Sophie and daughter Mabel revising verbs for their A-levels



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# HADDOCK AND MUSSEL BLANQUETTE

Often called the 'Harvard of gastronomy', the Ferrandi School of Culinary Arts in Paris has trained some of the world's most skilled professional chefs since 1920, and previous recipe books have become enduring kitchen staples. This latest title, **Fish & Shellfish: Recipes and Techniques**, distils a century of teaching into 45 key techniques and 70 accessible recipes, all adapted for the home cook.

Fish blanquette is a classic French dish whose preparation involves sautéing aromatics like onions and mushrooms, then simmering them with cream to create a rich sauce. The fish is usually poached in this sauce until it is tender and flaky, often served with rice or potatoes for a complete meal. It is a dish that is both comforting and delicate, highlighting the flavours of the seafood.

Serves 4

Active time 1.5 hours

Soaking time 2-3 hours

Cooking time 1 hour

## INGREDIENTS

### Haddock

400g smoked haddock fillets  
250ml whole milk  
750ml fish fumet (see additional recipe in book) or fish stock  
300g skinless, boneless fresh haddock fillet

### Mussels marinière

15g butter  
50g shallots, chopped  
1 clove garlic, finely chopped  
1 bouquet garni (2 parsley sprigs, 2 thyme sprigs, and 1 bay leaf wrapped in a leek green)  
750g mussels, cleaned  
250ml dry white wine  
1 tbsp finely chopped parsley

### Vegetables

250g baby leeks  
50ml olive oil  
200g peas in their pods, shelled  
250g button mushrooms  
250g scallions/spring onions  
150g snow peas/mangetout  
100ml water  
4 tsp lemon juice  
Salt

### Sauce

Reserved poaching liquid (see method)  
2 egg yolks  
150ml crème fraîche

50g butter  
50g plain flour  
Reserved mussels marinière liquid

## METHOD

### Preparing the haddock

Cover the smoked haddock with cold water and let it soak for two to three hours to remove excess salt.

Drain the smoked haddock and cut it into 3-4cm cubes. Place in a large saucepan with the milk and fish fumet (both should be at room temperature or cold) and bring to a boil. Poach the smoked haddock for two minutes, then remove it with a slotted spoon and let both the fish and the poaching liquid cool to room temperature.

Cut the fresh haddock into 3-4cm cubes, place it in the cooled poaching liquid, and bring to a boil. Let poach for two minutes, then remove with a slotted spoon and let cool. Reserve the poaching liquid for the sauce.

### Preparing the mussels marinière

Melt the butter in a Dutch oven, then add the shallots and garlic and cook until softened. Add the bouquet garni, mussels, and white wine. Cook for three to five minutes over high heat, stirring often, or until all the mussels have opened. Add the parsley.

Remove the mussels from their shells and strain the liquid through a fine-mesh sieve, reserving it for the sauce.

### Preparing the vegetables

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Wash and trim the leeks, then wrap them in an aluminium foil packet with 4tsp of the olive oil and a little salt. Roast in the oven for 20 minutes.

Clean the mushrooms. Thinly slice the scallions. Cook the shelled peas in a large pot of boiling salted water until just tender, then transfer to a bowl of ice water using a slotted spoon. Cook the mangetout in the same pot until they are crisp-tender, then plunge into ice water. Place the mushrooms in a sauté pan with the remaining olive oil, water, and lemon juice and cook, covered, for eight minutes. Cut the roasted leeks at an angle into approximately 1cm pieces.

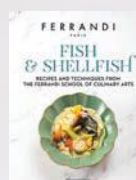
### Preparing the sauce

Reheat the haddock poaching liquid. Whisk together the egg yolk and crème fraîche in a medium bowl. To make a white roux, melt the butter in a large saucepan until foamy, then whisk in the flour until smooth. Whisking continuously, cook for a couple of minutes until slightly thickened, but not browned. Gradually whisk in one litre of the hot poaching liquid and cook over low heat for three minutes, whisking continuously. Whisk in the strained mussels marinière liquid, then remove from the heat. While the sauce is still hot, whisk a little into the egg yolk and crème fraîche mixture to temper the yolks, then whisk this mixture into the sauce. Do not let the sauce boil after this, or the yolks will curdle. Adjust the seasonings and consistency as necessary, then strain through the fine-mesh sieve into a Dutch oven.

### To serve

Gently reheat the sauce, if necessary. Add the fish, mussels and vegetables, scatter over the scallion greens, and serve directly from the pot.



 *Extracted from **Fish and Shellfish: Recipes and Techniques from the Ferrandi School of Culinary Arts** by FERRANDI Paris (Flammarion, 2026)*

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**EXCLUSIVE LA SALVETAT-PEYRALÈS, AVEYRON** REF: BVI72955

**€462,000**



This equestrian property offers an exceptional setting with 12 acres of pasture, 3 recent stables, a paddock, a natural spring, a pond and gently sloping land that is fully fenced. A 3-bed, 3-bath stone house and numerous outbuildings complete the ensemble. There are no close neighbours, yet the property is just 1km from all amenities.

**EXCLUSIVE FUMEL, LOT ET GARONNE** REF: BVI82519

**€299,000**



This lovely 3-bed stone house, set in lush green surroundings is just a stone's throw from local shops. As soon as you step through the gate, you'll be charmed by the stunning stone façade with a beautiful wisteria and a welcoming terrace that invites you to relax and enjoy the open views. The house offers a spacious interior centred around a magnificent living room.

**EXCLUSIVE MANSLE, CHARENTE** REF: BVI84202

**€214,000**



This beautifully renovated home, featuring a modern 2018 extension finished to a high standard, is bathed in natural light. The heart of the house is the magnificent open-plan living and kitchen area, with its cosy fireplace and floor-to-ceiling windows. The space flows seamlessly out onto the private terrace and garden, perfect for indoor-outdoor living.

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**EXCLUSIVE BOUTELLES-SAINT-SÉBASTIEN, DORDOGNE** REF: BV184887

€490,000



This exceptional home is set on a generous, fully fenced, beautifully landscaped plot. Offering 4 bright bedrooms, the property is bathed in natural light and designed to create warm, inviting living spaces throughout. The house is surrounded by lush green gardens, which include mature trees, a large heated pool, terraces and a summer lounge.

**EXCLUSIVE BEAUVILLE, LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: BV175905

€495,000



At the heart of approximately 7700 m<sup>2</sup> of land, this attractive stone property comprises a main house and guest house, complete with a heated swimming pool and private tennis court. Peaceful and private, yet just a short drive from Beauville and local amenities, the property also benefits from a covered terrace ideal for outdoor dining.

**SALLES, TARN** REF: BV181308

€512,000



Just 10 minutes from Cordes-sur-Ciel, this beautiful property enjoys a peaceful countryside setting. The renovated 5-bed stone mill combines original character with modern comfort and comes with a pool, guest apartment, horse boxes and river access, all set on 3 hectares.

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**SAVIGNE (86)** REF: R7454

**€123,650**



Peaceful country home near Civray with four spacious bedrooms, large family kitchen, versatile 175 m<sup>2</sup> barn and garden offering sweeping countryside views - ideal for comfortable living in a charming rural setting.

**NANTEUIL-EN-VALLEE (16)** REF: R7449

**€170,200**



Charming country cottage in a peaceful hamlet near Nanteuil-en-Vallée, featuring exposed beams, two ground-floor bedrooms and a bright living area opening onto outdoor space - perfect blend of character, comfort and easy rural living.

**LA MAGDELEINE (16)** REF: R7452

**€202,120**



Charming country cottage in a peaceful hamlet near Nanteuil-en-Vallée, featuring exposed beams, two ground-floor bedrooms and a bright living area opening onto outdoor space - perfect blend of character, comfort and easy rural living.

**COURCOME (16)** REF: R7455

**€244,680**



Beautiful Charentais stone house in a village near Ruffec, featuring light-filled rooms, abundant character, recent upgrades including a new insulated roof and excellent potential - most renovations completed, ready for comfortable modern living.

**VAL-DE-COMPORTE (86)** REF: R7444

**€249,950**



Character-filled property on 6,430 m<sup>2</sup>, featuring a spacious four-bedroom main house, independent two-bedroom guest house, 100 m<sup>2</sup> stone barn and additional outbuildings - well-maintained and versatile, ideal for family living, guests, or potential rental opportunities.

**LA CHAPELLE-POUILLOUX (79)** REF: R7451

**€259,950**



Charming five-bedroom stone house in a peaceful hamlet near Sauzé-Vaussais, blending rustic character with modern comfort. Features ground-floor bedrooms, exposed beams and stone, updated heating, insulation and a private gated setting.



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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**HAUTE GARONNE** REF: MM2263MD

**€849,000**



A rare estate distinguished by its generous volumes, preserved authenticity, contemporary features and high-quality renovation. Set in a privileged natural environment. Guest house and swimming pool. 1.2 hectares. Lisle-en-Dodon.

**HAUTE GARONNE** REF: MM2192AP

**€500,000**



Idyllic country house with breathtaking views. This magnificent property offers classic Gascon charm with modern comfort. This property offers a generous and bright living space. Swimming pool. 3 hectares. Boulougne-sur-Geese.

**HAUTE PYRÉNÉES** REF: MM2217TC

**€599,500**



This stunning luxury mansion with 450 m<sup>2</sup> of living space, 6 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms A property where every detail has been designed for comfort and well-being. 4.5 hectares. Vic-en-Bigorre.

**HAUTE PYRÉNÉES** REF: MM2209SD

**€675,000**



Exceptional country property with equestrian facilities. Tucked away in the Gascon countryside with uninterrupted views of the Pyrenees, 5 minutes from a bustling market town. Swimming pool. 5.75 hectares. Trie-sur-Baise.

**PYRÉNÉES ATLANTIQUE** REF: MM2280SH **€450,000**



A charming four-bedroom family home created within the stone walls of a mid-19th century bergerie (sheepfold) with beautiful countryside and mountain views. Swimming pool. 1500m<sup>2</sup> land. Sauveterre de Bearn.

**PYRÉNÉES ATLANTIQUE** REF: MM2295LL

**€258,000**



Situated in the heart of this historic village a renovated 4 bedroom house dates from 1765, sold fully furnished. Beautiful mountain views and pretty garden. Just 30 minutes from the ski slopes. Aspe Valley.



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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC707

**€595,000**



Exceptional country house near Penne d'Agenais, set in 1.7 hectares, blending period charm with modern comfort, featuring tower, spacious living areas, guest cottage, pool, lake, outbuildings and beautiful landscaped grounds.

**LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC701

**€595,000**



Historic hilltop residence in Tournon d'Agenais, blending medieval origins with refined modern living, featuring elegant interiors, restored outbuilding, courtyard garden, three bedrooms and timeless character steps from local life.

**LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC704

**€696,800**



Magnificent, restored 18th-century estate on 17 hectares in Saint Maurin with main residence, hamlet, outbuildings, pool, garage, and conversion potential, offering elegant interiors, panoramic views, exceptional privacy in the countryside setting.

**LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC675

**€448,000**



Beautifully restored period townhouse in Tournon-d'Agenais, offering five bedrooms, elegant living spaces, balcony views, historic features, modern comforts and strong rental potential in a sought-after bastide location.

**TARN-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC537

**€475,000**



Charming early 19th-century stone farmhouse set on 3 hectares at the end of a private lane, offering complete privacy, four bedrooms, study, pool, outbuildings and beautiful countryside views near Bourg-de-Visa.

**LOT** REF: WMC706

**€135,000**



Beautifully renovated stone house in the village of Grézels, offering three floors of stylish living, one bedroom, terrace with village views, modern comforts and easy low-maintenance living.

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**TARN-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC654

**€195,000**



Charming restored stone house in Roquecor village offering four bedrooms, open-plan living, private rooftop terrace, rare garage and workshop, blending historic character with modern comfort in a sought-after location.

**TARN-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC555

**€395,000**



Quintessential 19th-century stone village house in St Paul d'Espis, fully restored with modern comforts, offering three bedrooms, open-plan living, barn with conversion potential, heated pool, gardens and countryside views.

**TARN-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC424

**€580,000**



Stylish architect-designed 1975 "Tower House" in Moissac, set in private parkland with pool, garage, outbuildings, six bedrooms, open-plan living, modern upgrades and panoramic views over the old town.

**LOT-ET-GARONNE** REF: WMC670

**€298,000**



Elegant 1846 stone bastide in Beauville village, beautifully restored with stylish interiors, four ensuite bedrooms, open-plan living, valley views, cellar potential and private garden, all steps from shops, restaurants and summer markets.

**HAUTE GARONNE** REF: WMC620

**€475,000**



Luxury 1850s farmhouse with annex in Escancrabe, restored to high standards, offering open-plan living, three ensuite bedrooms, guest cottage, outbuildings, 2.27 hectares of land and stunning Pyrenees views.

**LOT** REF: WMC573

**€279,000**



Charming, restored country house in Lendou-en-Quercy, set in peaceful countryside with far-reaching views, two bedrooms, stylish interiors, modern kitchen, wood burners and beautiful gardens near Montcuq and Lauzerte.

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**EXCLUSIVE CHARENTE, POITOU-CHARENTES** REF: A43498SR16 **€288,000**



Charming 3-bedroom character home near Ruffec with panoramic views, wooded grounds, terrace, pool, barn and convertible loft. Peaceful yet close to shops, schools and station, this elegant French retreat blends charm with modern comfort.

**EXCLUSIVE HAUTE-VIENNE, LIMOUSIN** REF: A30089WV87

**€51,600**



Affordable 3-bedroom village house in central Oradour-sur-Vayres, ready to renovate, with 125m<sup>2</sup> of space, convertible attic, cellar, courtyard and garden. Walk to shops, school and services, with recent roof, double glazing and fibre available nearby.

**EXCLUSIVE DORDOGNE, AQUITAINE** REF: A21343TYS24

**€136,250**



Authentic Périgourdine stone barn in a peaceful Black Périgord hamlet, near Montignac and Lascaux. Recently reroofed, with double-glazed Velux windows and two gîte layouts, private terraces, charm, and superb holiday-rental or lifestyle potential.

**EXCLUSIVE CHARENTE, POITOU-CHARENTES** REF: A42755REC16

**€46,600**



Character stone project with two adjoining houses, outbuildings and panoramic valley views in peaceful south Charente. Near sought-after Aubeterre-sur-Dronne, with reroofed structures, original features and excellent scope for a family home, gîtes or rental investment.

**LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON** REF: A43430AHA66

**€365,000**



1890s manor house in charming Vernet-les-Bains, with pool, garage and self-contained apartment. 10 bedrooms, generous living space and landscaped grounds, this property combines period charm, beautiful mountain setting and exceptional family-home potential.

**MANCHE, NORMANDY** REF: A42438AMM50

**€29,500**



Charming, terraced stone cottage in Normandy, ripe for full renovation. With garden, parking and outbuilding, this affordable Ger property offers exciting potential for a cosy home, holiday base or peaceful retreat in tranquil surroundings.

## LEGGETT IMMOBILIER INTERNATIONAL

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TEL: +33 (0)5 53 56 62 54 / UK : 08700 11 51 51 EMAIL: [info@leggett.fr](mailto:info@leggett.fr) WEB: [www.frenchestateagents.com](http://www.frenchestateagents.com)

**LEGGETT**  
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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**EXCLUSIVE LOT-ET-GARONNE, AQUITAINE** REF: A38593SGU47 €194,000



Charming three-bedroom stone house in a peaceful hamlet near Cuzorn, enjoying lovely countryside views. Set on 1,042m<sup>2</sup>, this character home offers space, tranquillity and authentic southwest France appeal for family living or relaxing holidays.

**EXCLUSIVE ORNE, NORMANDY** REF: A41363NOE61 €196,000



Traditional three-bedroom colombage home in peaceful Normandy village, set on 1,665m<sup>2</sup> with panoramic hill views. Featuring a ground-floor bedroom, south-facing terrace, garden and carport, this charming Gacé property offers comfort, character and tranquil rural living.

**EXCLUSIVE MORBIHAN, BRITTANY** REF: A31628JAM56 €212,000



Hidden gem in central Brittany. Detached six-bedroom longère with beautiful grounds and plenty of space for family and guests. Full of charm and character, this Ménéac home offers peaceful country living in lovely surroundings. (frenchestateagents.com)

**EXCLUSIVE MAYENNE, PAYS-DE-LA-LOIRE** REF: A32114SVM53 €219,350



Spacious four-bedroom country home in Mayenne with swimming pool, barns and large garden. Offering generous living space and peaceful rural surroundings, this charming Le Housseau-Bréteignolles property is perfect for family life or relaxed holidays.

**ALLIER, AUVERGNE** REF: A34271ABR03 €69,500



Detached three-bedroom village house in Hyds with convertible attic, barn and garden. Offering 135m<sup>2</sup> of living space, this charming Allier property combines generous potential, practical outbuildings and peaceful surroundings for comfortable rural family living.

**MAYENNE, PAYS-DE-LA-LOIRE** REF: A31116LRL53 €72,000



Charming three-bedroom stone cottage with tree-lined garden in a peaceful Mayenne hamlet, near Saint-Mars-du-Désert. Detached and full of character, this lovely home offers countryside calm, natural beauty and scope for two additional rooms to enjoy.

## LEGGETT IMMOBILIER INTERNATIONAL

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**LEGGETT**  
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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**TARN ET GARONNE** REF: JK-2605

**€190,800 AFI**



3 bed village house with separate garden - this charming village house set on a mid-level, south-facing position in Lauzerte.

**TARN ET GARONNE** REF: JAS-2606

**€495,000 AFI**



5 bed house, 2 bed gite, barn and pool located in a quiet location with 3 hectares of parklike gardens and pastures. Lovely country views near to Castelsagrat.

**TARN ET GARONNE** REF: JAS-2556

**€769,600 AFI**



A rare equestrian property near Castelsagrat, lovely valley views and 18 hectares of pasture, 11 stables, 3 bed stone house and swimming pool.  
Easy access to village.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: JAS-2554

**€950,000 AFI**



Stunning domaine near Agen with manor house, guardian cottage, large barn for events, lake and 19 hectares. Many opportunities available at this property with extended families, rentals and farming or stud.

**TARN ET GARONNE** REF: JK-2552

**€426,000 AFI**



A beautifully restored stone farmhouse, with guest cottage, apartment, pool and gardens set in a peaceful hamlet near to Bourg de Visa.  
Ideal for extended families or hosting guests.

**TARN ET GARONNE** REF: JK-2603 **€665,000 AFI**



Located just outside Bourg De Visa, a remarkable eco domaine with four dwellings, pool, 6 hectares of pasture, woodland and a lake.



**POPPINS REAL ESTATE**

Touffailles, 82190, France

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**EMAIL:** poppinsrealestate@gmail.com

**WEB:** poppinsrealestate.com

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

LOT REF: JAS-2546

€352,560 AFI



Renovated home near Castelnau Montratier with outbuildings, 2 hectares of flat land. Thanks to new heat pump system and complete insulation, it has an excellent B energy performance rating.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: JAS-2506

€795,000 AFI



A stunning ensemble of stone properties near to Montaigu de Quercy with a traditional 3 bed farmhouse, a fully renovated barn, a guest cottage, swimming pool, 13 hectares of land.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: JAS-2510

€472,500 AFI



Authentic stone farmhouse near Bourg de Visa with 4 bedrooms, a large barn, swimming pool and a manageable 4857m<sup>2</sup> garden. Easy access to the village with local commerce.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: JAS-2523

€685,000 AFI



A wonderful country house a short drive from Moissac, with 5 bedrooms, a guest cottage with 3 beds, swimming pool and 3 acres of gardens plus 13 acres of land.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: JAS-2522

€449,000 AFI



A stunning 3 bedroom stone property, swimming pool, 2 bedroom guest cottage and 8686m<sup>2</sup> of gardens and woodland located in a small hamlet between Montaigu de Quercy and Lauzerte.

LOT ET GARONNE REF: JAS-2544

€315,000 AFI



A recently renovated 3 bed village house in Saint Vite with a guest house and fenced garden, located within easy reach of all the shops at Montayral.



## POPPINS REAL ESTATE

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**CHATEAUNEUF-GRASSE** REF: 00060

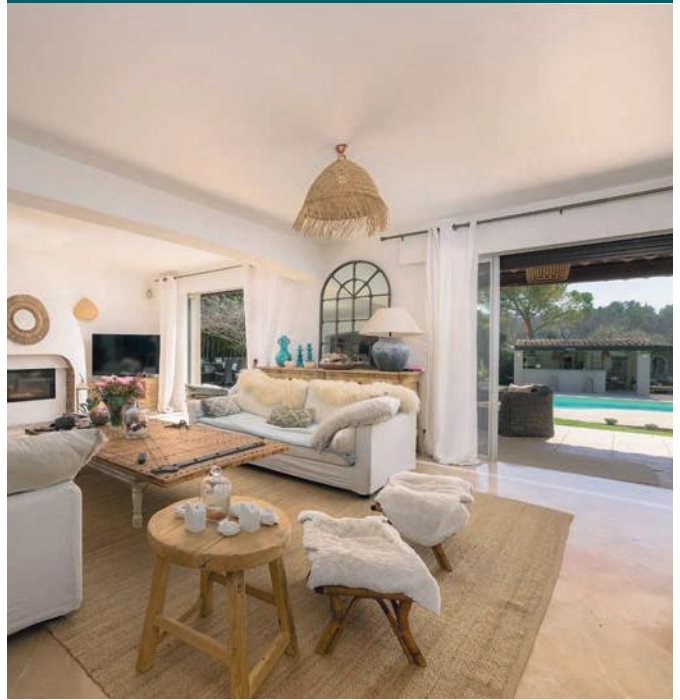
**€1,650,000**



This charming Provençal-style villa offers breathtaking sea and Esterel mountain views. Set on 1,485 sqm of landscaped grounds, it features five terraces, a heated pool, outdoor BBQ and olive trees.

**GRASSE** REF: 00623

**€1,395,000**



This charming 240 sqm villa in Grasse blends Provençal elegance with modern amenities. Set on 1,800 sqm of landscaped land, it features a pool, guest apartment, sunny terraces and peaceful surroundings.

**BEAULIEU SUR MER** REF: 15651

**€950,000**



This renovated Beaulieu-sur-Mer apartment offers stunning sea views from the terrace and living room. With two bedrooms, air-conditioning and walking distance to amenities, it's ideal for both primary or secondary residence.

**CANNES** REF: 00218

**€750,000**



This fully renovated 77 sqm apartment features a bright living area, two en-suite bedrooms, modern kitchen, ample storage and a 35 sqm south-facing terrace with sea and garden views.



**CARLTON INTERNATIONAL**

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WEB: [www.carlton-international.com](http://www.carlton-international.com)

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**TOURETTES SUR LOUP** REF: PIL-00146

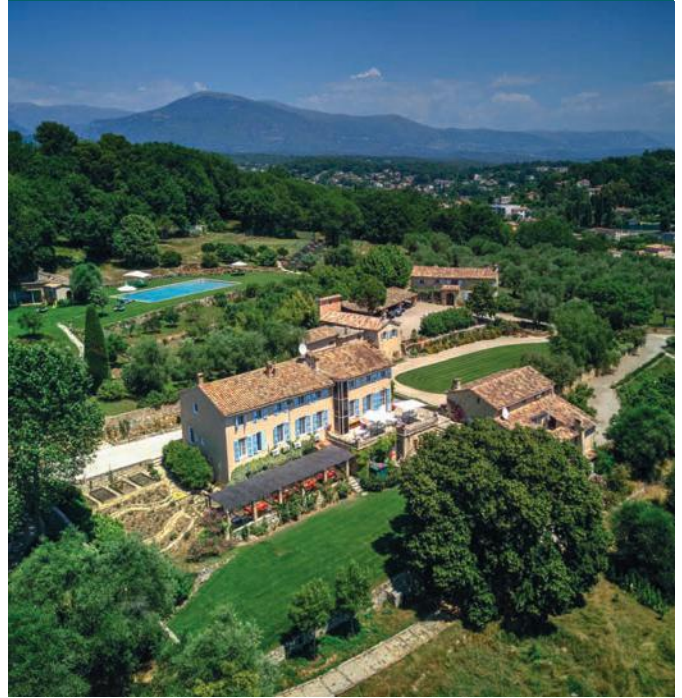
**€1,315,000**



This stunning farmhouse near Tourrettes-sur-Loup offers tranquility amidst lush nature. The main house features three bedrooms, while a separate stone studio provides space for guests. Ample parking and a cellar included.

**VALBONNE** REF: 15114

**€POA**



Steps from Valbonne, exceptional 10-hectare historic estate with olive groves and 17th-century monastery, offering character buildings, pool, pool house, tennis court and serene natural surroundings, combining charm and high-end amenities.

**GRIMAUD** REF: LEO0205

**€550,000**



This renovated 82 sqm duplex in Grimaud blends old-world charm with modern comfort. Featuring stone walls, a cozy living room with a fireplace, and two en-suite bedrooms, it's a unique, authentic retreat.

**CANNES** REF: 00215

**€1,990,000**



Minutes from Cannes centre and sea, this top-floor corner spacious apartment offers 158 sqm a wraparound terrace, panoramic sea and Estérel views, bright living space, kitchen, and three en-suite bedrooms.

**CARLTON INTERNATIONAL**

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WEB: [www.carlton-international.com](http://www.carlton-international.com)



## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: L3424

**€367,500**



A substantial, characterful property near Lauzun village centre. This spacious six-bedroom home offers generous accommodation, a swimming pool, and excellent potential for updating and modernisation, making it ideal for comfortable family living. Land 1,420m<sup>2</sup>.

**PYRÉNÉES-ATLANTIQUES** REF: L3451

**€296,800**



Nestled on the Pyrenees' edge, this charming stone-built home blends character, comfort, and location. In good condition, it offers compliant drainage, strong energy efficiency, and breathtaking countryside and mountain views in a stunning rural setting. Land 8,000m<sup>2</sup>.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: L3454

**€710,000**



An exquisite stone-built estate featuring a main residence, four charming gîtes operating as successful holiday rentals, swimming pools, and expansive grounds. Set in serene countryside on the edge of a picturesque historic village. Land: 4.8 hectares.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: L3445

**€140,600**



A compact stone-built property set in spacious grounds with numerous outbuildings. Requiring updating, it offers strong development potential. Located near a historic village, 10 minutes from amenities, 25 minutes from Bergerac. Land: 1 hectare approx.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: L3442

**€93,500\***



A charming two-bedroom townhouse within walking distance of a picturesque bastide town. Offering bright, low-maintenance living, a private garden, and excellent convenience, it's ideal as a lock-up-and-leave holiday home or comfortable small family residence. Land: 130m<sup>2</sup>.

**DORDOGNE** REF: L3438

**€217,000\***



Three minutes from Eymet, this riverside stone property offers two adjoining homes, terraces, garage, meadowland, private lake, and a ruin to restore. Peaceful cul-de-sac setting with double glazing, central heating and excellent potential. Land: 3 hectares.

## RICHARD IMMOBILIER

7 rue du Chateau 47410 Lauzun

**TEL:** +33 (0)5 53 83 30 46 **EMAIL:** info@richardimmo.com **WEB:** richardimmo.com



\*Agency fees included.

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3448

€351,750\*



A charming maison de maître in a peaceful hamlet with countryside views. Includes stone barns and a separate house for renovation, offering potential for multiple dwellings. A rare, characterful estate at an attractive price. Land: 3,152m<sup>2</sup>.

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3422

€365,000\*



A stone-built farmhouse at the end of a private track, offering complete privacy. Includes a separate gîte, stone barn, swimming pool, and natural pond, all set in large grounds with stunning open countryside views. Land: 1.5 hectares.

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3434

€499,950\*



A beautiful five-bedroom stone property with attached barn and spacious living. Immaculately presented, it features a swimming pool, large grounds with woodland and a private, secluded location just kilometres from a village with amenities. Land: 9,425m<sup>2</sup>

DORDOGNE REF: L3428

€910,000\*



A rare opportunity to own the oldest and most historic part of a 17th-century château, this elegant four-storey residence offers around 440m<sup>2</sup> of beautifully renovated, light-filled living space with stunning views over the Dordogne valley. Land: 1,250m<sup>2</sup>.

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3458

€335,000



An attractive traditional stone property, recently refurbished, offering generous size mature grounds in a tiny hamlet within a 15 minute walk of a village and 10 minutes drive from 3 market towns. 35 minutes from Bergerac and its airport. Land: 5162m<sup>2</sup>

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3334

€451,500€\*



A desirable stone-built Maison de Maître, recently renovated with new pool, roof, electrics, plumbing, and air-con. Features dining area, summer kitchen, smokehouse, barn, workshop, enclosed garden and electric gates, set in peaceful countryside. Land: 7009 m<sup>2</sup>.

## RICHARD IMMOBILIER

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\*Agency fees included.

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**SAUVETERRE DE BEARN** REF: 2243

**€549,000**



Architect-designed property, currently divided into two separate living spaces, in elevated position above Sauveterre de Béarn, offering magnificent views of the Pyrenees and the surrounding countryside.

**MISSON** REF: 2051

**€299,000**



Lovingly restored, spacious and charming, 19th century Landaise-style property, located in a discrete, tranquil environment, surrounded by rolling countryside. Complete privacy assured!

**ARAMITS** REF: 2226

**€399,000**



Four-bed rural property, with garden, swimming pool and superb views of the Pyrenees. Ideal for mountain lovers, cyclists, hikers and general nature enthusiasts!

**SALIES DE BEARN** REF: 2247

**€438,900**



Modern contemporary home, built in 2008, with swimming pool and garden, located in a peaceful rural environment, just 5-minutes' drive from the centre of a pretty thermal spa town.

**SALIES DE BEARN** REF: 2053

**€164,000**



Top-floor two-bedroom apartment in good condition throughout with two private terraces, ideally located just a few steps from the town centre. Sold with cellar and parking space.

**SUS** REF: 2046

**€240,000**



Charming three bedroom, two bathroom, stone village house with 1320m<sup>2</sup> of garden and independent garage. Walking distance to restaurant and village grocery shop.

**SOPHIE FOLLEY IMMOBILIER**

3 Place Jeanne d'Albret, 64270 Salies-de-Béarn, France  
TEL: +33 5 59 38 32 50 EMAIL: [contact@sophiefolley.com](mailto:contact@sophiefolley.com)



**SOPHIE FOLLEY**  
IMMOBILIER

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**LECTOURE, GERS** REF : SNM\_199

**€770,000**



Located within 10 minutes of Condom and Lectoure in the Gers, South West France, in a peaceful setting, this beautiful property enjoys a rare lifestyle environment, offering complete tranquility, while remaining close to local amenities.

**CASTILLON-DEBATS, GERS** REF : SNM\_190

**€346,500**



A superb 156.4 m<sup>2</sup> villa located in Castillon-Debats, offering 4 bedrooms and a very bright living room. Designed for modern comfort, it is equipped with air conditioning, advanced home automation, a connected thermostat, electric roller shutters and double glazing.

**BIRAN, GERS** REF : SNM\_187

**€339,000**



Discover this beautiful house from 2015, measuring 132 m<sup>2</sup> located in Biran, offering an exceptional living environment. With its 4 bedrooms and large bright living room, this property is ideal for accommodating your family.

**VIC-FEZENSAC, GER** REF : SNM\_193

**€546,000**



Discover the charm and tranquility of the French countryside with this exceptional 461 m<sup>2</sup> house in Vic-Fezensac. Surrounded by lush greenery and picturesque views, this expansive property boasts 15 spacious rooms perfect for both family living and welcoming guests.

**AUCH, GERS** REF : SNM\_200

**€420,000**



Discover this beautiful property situated in the heart of Auch, capital of the Gers. Nestled in 4,500 m<sup>2</sup> of wooded garden, this property offers 298 m<sup>2</sup> of living space.

**VIC-FEZENSAC, GERS** REF : SNM\_196

**€380,000**



Discover this character-filled house for sale in Roquebrune, France, offering a perfect blend of rustic charm and modern amenities. This spacious property boasts 7 rooms, including 3 comfortable bedrooms, all kept cool year-round with air-conditioning and double glazing.



**GELAS IMMOBILIER**

19 avenue de Lorraine, 32190 Vic-Fezensac, Gers

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WEB: [www.gelas-immobilier.com](http://www.gelas-immobilier.com)



## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

MOUGINS, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86875691

FROM €1.5M



Private and secure domaine comprising of 10 architect-designed 4 and 5 bedroom villas, elegantly set within approximately 1.5 hectares of lush greenery, at the foot of the village of Mougins. Private garden, pool, garage, fitted kitchens. Low French stamp duty applies.

AGAY, ST RAPHAEL, VAR REF: 86870450

FROM €345,000



Set in the exceptional surroundings of the bay of Agay, a new secure and modern style development nestled at the heart of a landscaped enclave featuring a communal pool. Beach, shops and restaurants on foot. Low French stamp duty applies.

FRÉJUS PLAGES, VAR REF: 86869590

€285,000



Fréjus beach and St Raphael on foot, an ideal location for this lovely pied-a-terre and rental investment with 1 bedroom, 1 bathroom and with more than 50m<sup>2</sup> of living area and a terrace. Air-conditioning. Gated and secure. Low French stamp duty applies.

GOLFE-JUAN, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86855661

FROM €260,000



Between Cannes and Nice, minutes to lovely sandy beaches of Juan les Pins, elegant new development in sought after residential area. 1, 2 and 3 Bedroom apartments available with large private terraces or gardens. Low French stamp duty applies.

THÉOULE-SUR-MER, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 82403176

€1,370,000



Unique 3 bedroom, 3 bathroom ground floor apartment with stunning sea views in one of the most exclusive areas on the Côte d'Azur with 175m<sup>2</sup> private garden, terrace, spa, parking, air-conditioning.

JUAN-LES-PINS, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86853214

FROM €182,000



New contemporary development within walking distance to the sandy beaches of Juan-les-Pins and all amenities, in quiet residential area in the heart of landscaped gardens with access to communal pool. Low French stamp duty applies.



### HALKIN RIVIERA Ltd

London Office, 2 Eaton Gate, Belgravia, London, SW1W 9BJ United Kingdom (by appointment only)

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EXCLUSIVE FRENCH RIVIERA PROPERTIES

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

NICE, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86844682

€445,000



1 bedroom 1 bathroom apartment with access to a West facing terrace with lovely sea views on the 16th floor of an iconic new luxury development designed by award-winning Japanese architect. Low French stamp duty applies.

GOLFE-JUAN, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86171650

FROM €230,000



450m to the famous Marina and opposite the sandy beaches of Golfe-Juan, on a quiet road, just 1km to the town centre, the train station, its local shops and restaurants, a new development in the heart of the lovely seaside resort, between Cannes and Antibes.

JUAN-LES-PINS, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 85695147

€276,000



Ideal as a pied-a-terre and rental investment 800m to Juan les Pins sandy beaches and all amenities on foot. Newly built top floor 1 bedroom 1 bathroom apartment with parking.

GRASSE, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 85369239

€399,000



Top floor 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom apartment with stunning panoramic sea views from its vast 60m<sup>2</sup> triple aspect terrace in new and elegant development located in the exclusive residential area of Le Petit Paris in Grasse. Pool. Parking.

CANNES, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 85579535

FROM €350,000



Ideal pied-a-terre and rental investment 30 mins to La Croisette and 10 mins to all amenities on foot. Newly built 1 bedroom 1, bathroom apartments with private external spaces on the ground, 1st and 2nd floors. Pool. Low French stamp duty applies.

JUAN-LES-PINS, CÔTE D'AZUR REF: 86210635

€449,000



Just 600m from the sandy beaches at the foot of Boulevard Wilson on the Juan-les-Pins side, newly built 2 bedroom apartment in elegant new residence in the heart of one of the French Riviera's most sought-after neighbourhoods. Low French stamp duty applies.

## HALKIN RIVIERA Ltd

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TEL: +44 20 7989 7777 EMAIL: mail@halkinriviera.co.uk



## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**COLOMBIERS** REF: 001NK/OG

**€295,000**



Located in the centre of the village of Colombiers, between Saintes and Pons, and 35 minutes from the Atlantic beaches, this authentic Charente house combines old-world charm with modern comforts.

**MONTPELLIER-DE-MÉDILLAN** REF: 001PB/RH

**€250,000**



Located approximately 5 km from shops, schools and medical facilities, the property offers a practical location while maintaining a peaceful setting. The house offers a simple and comfortable layout, designed for everyday living.

**LA VALLÉE** REF: 02LBMM

**€419,000**



Nestled in the gentle Charente countryside, just 11 minutes from Tonny-Charente, those two exceptional properties combines everything you could wish for in one place: authenticity, space and tranquility.

**NANTILLÉ** REF: 005NK/OG

**€315,000**



In the heart of the charming village of Nantillé, come and discover this magnificent renovated Charente stone house and her 4 bedrooms, combining old-world charm with modern comfort.

**ROCHEFORT** REF: 0006JC

**€440,000**



Located in the heart of Rochefort's historic center, within a characterful setting inside a renovated residence, discover this charming duplex apartment offering pleasant living spaces and valuable outdoor areas.

**DOMPIERRE-SUR-CHARENTE** REF: 010PB/SK

**€530,000**



This lovely stone house has been renovated to high standards of quality and comfort. Simply walk out of one of the downstairs rooms to delight in the bucolic view of the garden and pool.

## COLDWELL BANKER

L'IMMOBILIÈRE INTERNATIONALE

22 Cours National, 17100 SAINTES TEL: +33 5 46 97 77 97 EMAIL: [immobiliere@coldwellbanker.fr](mailto:immobiliere@coldwellbanker.fr)



**COLDWELL BANKER**  
L'IMMOBILIÈRE INTERNATIONALE

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**PONS** REF: 0019FB/PB

**€375,000**



With its cut-stone facade, wooden shutters, and original entrance door, this 18th-century townhouse embodies the architectural nobility of Pons' historic heart, just steps away from shops and amenities.

**FONTENAY-LE-COMTE** REF: 0098AM

**€545,000**



"City of Art and History" where architecture blends Renaissance Villas and Medieval Alleys, this dignified representative of Vendée manor houses offers approximately 260 m<sup>2</sup> of living space on a plot with a wooded garden of 1,631 m<sup>2</sup>.

**ILE DE RÉ** REF: 0200MDC

**€498,000**



Island of Ré in the village of Rivedoux, a stone's throw from the beach and shops. Whether you love water sports, reading, writing, or simply the ocean, this house is sure to delight you...

**SEMOUSSAC** REF: 0020OSK/PB

**€449,000**



Stone-built character property, fully renovated and nestled in a quiet, easily accessible environment, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. This is an ideal location to combine serenity, modern comfort and unforgettable shared moments.

**PONS** REF: 0207MDC

**€420,000**



In the heart of the historic center of Pons. With its cut-stone facade and romantic garden, this 18th-century townhouse embodies the architecture of the historic heart of Pons, just a few steps from shops and amenities.

**MARANS** REF: OFFSL011BLR

**€649,000**



Welcome to your future sanctuary (house and second home) where nature and refinement meet in harmony. Nestling in the heart of the famous Marais Poitevin, this reinvented former lock keeper's house invites you to enjoy a unique sensory experience.

# COLDWELL BANKER

L'IMMOBILIÈRE INTERNATIONALE

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**COLDWELL BANKER**  
L'IMMOBILIÈRE INTERNATIONALE

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 96290

€175,000 AFI



Perfect holiday home with countryside views, surrounded by fields but close to several villages with amenities. Small manageable garden, two bedrooms, two shower rooms.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 102316

€635,000 AFI



Perfect country retreat in excellent condition. Open plan living space for social occasions, outside living area for the whole of the summer, pool, bar and amazing garden.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 101400

€1,190,000 AFI



Chateau with panoramic views in the heart of Lomagne. Four bedrooms, four bathrooms, huge terrace, garden with swimming pool, endless outbuildings, huge potential. Picture perfect.

GERS REF: 101269

€575,000 AFI



Beautiful country property sitting in the middle of its one hectare of flat, well-maintained garden. Huge entertaining area opening onto a walled courtyard. Four bedrooms, two on the ground floor.

GERS REF: 100646

€599,000 AFI



Perfect opportunity for a hospitality project, or a large family home. Nine bedrooms with bathrooms, one small gîte with possibility to create another, pool and pigeonnier.

GERS REF: 93222

€595,000 AFI



A lovely, well maintained stone house with a large barn, surrounded by 8000m<sup>2</sup> garden with fabulous mountain views. Five bedrooms, vast salon, new pool. A must-see!

## LOMAGNE PROPERTIES

EIRL - Resi Limbeek - Character houses in the South West of France

TEL: 0033 (0) 7.60.85.21.76 EMAIL: Lomagne.properties@gmail.com WEB: www.lomagne-properties.com



LOMAGNE PROPERTIES

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

GERS REF: 83529

€370,000 AFI



Beautiful village house, with views of the Pyrénées. Very comfortable family home in lovely condition, with four en-suite bedrooms. Small outbuildings, terrace, pool. Possibility to have a gite.

GERS REF: 99344

€695 000 AFI



Country property in immaculate condition, recently renovated to a very high standard. Three bedrooms, large, light and bright living spaces, lovely garden - a real family home.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 95840

€695,000 AFI



Exceptional village property renovated to a very high standard offering space, comfort, elegance and light. Beautiful private courtyard garden with terraces and raised beds.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 97875

€199,900 AFI



Great village house offering four bedrooms, two offices, fully-fitted kitchen and living room with log-burner. Garden with potential. Walking distance to amenities. A perfect lock-up-and-leave.

GERS REF: 98439

€1,680,000 AFI



A rare opportunity to buy a fully renovated property. Main house with five bedrooms, great entertaining space, large newly refurbished pool area. Gite with its own pool, and numerous outbuildings. Perfect condition throughout.

GERS REF: 84650

€598,000 AFI



A lovely, well maintained stone house with a large barn in good condition, surrounded by 2h of gardens with beautiful views. Private, but only a 5 min walk to a village with amenities.

## LOMAGNE PROPERTIES

EIRL - Resi Limbeek - Character houses in the South West of France

TEL: 0033 (0) 7.60.85.21.76 EMAIL: [Lomagne.properties@gmail.com](mailto:Lomagne.properties@gmail.com) WEB: [www.lomagne-properties.com](http://www.lomagne-properties.com)



LOMAGNE PROPERTIES

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5265

**€134,500 - DPE D**



Charming 105 m² bungalow in quiet Sauzé-entre-Bois, walk to shops. Bright living room with fireplace, open kitchen, 3 bedrooms plus study/4th. Garage, cellar, garden, double glazing, mains drainage, central heating.

**NEAR LEZAY** REF:5226

**€176,550 - DPE D**



Renovated 131 m² stone house near Lezay, bright and spacious. 3 bedrooms, large attic potential, barn, enclosed 1,336 m² garden. Fireplace, double glazing, modern utilities, peaceful village setting.

**NEAR CIVRAY** REF: 5155

**€211,300 - DPE E**



Character stone home near Civray with 3 bedrooms, spacious living area, barn, outbuildings, and pool. Enclosed garden, full of charm and privacy, ideal for family living or a peaceful holiday retreat.

**NEAR CHEF BOUTONNE** REF: 5150

**€212,400 - DPE D**



Charming south-west facing stone home near Chef-Boutonne with pool and open views. Spacious living areas, 5 bedrooms, garage, annex potential. Large garden, full of character, ideal family home or gîte opportunity.

**NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5154

**€186,700 - DPE E**



Charming stone cottage near Sauzé-entre-Bois with 3 bedrooms, spacious living areas, barn with conversion potential and mature enclosed gardens. Peaceful hamlet setting, full of character, ideal home, holiday retreat, or gîte project.

**NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5237

**€109,000 - DPE F**



Charming stone farmhouse near Sauzé-entre-Bois with 4 bedrooms, spacious living areas, large barn, multiple outbuildings and land. Great potential, ideal for renovation project or countryside living.



**IMMO 3C AGENCE IMMOBILIÈRE**

79 Grande Rue, 79190 Sauzé-Vaussais

TEL: 0033 5 49 07 76 88 EMAIL: info@immo3c.fr

WEB: www.immo3c.fr

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5194 **€301,800 – DPE D**



Elegant, renovated maison de maître near Sauzé-entre-Bois with 3 bedrooms, guest studio, heated pool and large garden. Period charm, modern comfort, outbuildings and great potential for home or rental opportunity.

**NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5231 **€44,480 – DPE N/A**



Detached south-facing stone cottage near Sauzé-entre-Bois with 3 bedrooms, garden, and outbuildings. Renovation project with great potential, fibre available, peaceful hamlet setting, ideal holiday home or investment opportunity.

**NEAR CHEF BOUTONNE** REF: 5227 **€145,850 – DPE F**



Charming detached stone house between Chef-Boutonne and Sauzé-entre-Bois with 2 spacious bedrooms, large living areas, barn, outbuildings and mature garden. Period features, renovation potential, peaceful village setting.

**NEAR CIVRAY** REF: 5215 **€119,350 – DPE E**



Charming stone property between Couhé and Civray with 2-bedroom main house, cottage to renovate, barn, outbuildings and over an acre of land. Peaceful, private setting with great rural potential for home or gîte.

**NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS** REF: 5190 **€69,180 – DPE G**



Charming 2-bedroom stone house near Sauzé-Vaussais with bright living room, fireplace, convertible attic and enclosed garden. Peaceful hamlet setting with open views, workshop and great potential for renovation.

**NEAR CHEF BOUTONNE** REF: 5264 **€129,600 – DPE D**



Detached south-facing stone house near Chef-Boutonne with 4 bedrooms, spacious living areas, barn, workshop and garden. Peaceful hamlet setting, charming renovation project with great potential for family home or holiday retreat.

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WEB: [www.immo3c.fr](http://www.immo3c.fr)



## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

ORNE REF: 6165815

€324,250



Immaculate, rural 4 bedroom house with two gites and garage. 1.2 acres. Mantilly.

MANCHE/MAYENNE BORDER REF: 5022215 €252,000



Savigny le Vieux - Manche/Mayenne border. Substantial rural property. 4 bedrooms, 2 receptions, original features throughout. Large garage/workshop. Enclosed gardens.

MAYENNE REF: 5317415

€166,900



Hamlet of four cottages - three habitable, one to renovate. Several outbuildings. Quiet location and stunning environment. St Mars Sur Colmont.

MAYENNE REF: 5317715

€334,400



Elegant chateau with character features and parquet floors. Lassay les Chateaux. Five bedrooms. Convertible attic. Outbuildings and garage.

MAYENNE REF: 5317815

€231,000



Four bedroom spacious family property with one bedroom annexe. Perfect property with letting opportunities. Enclosed garden. Brecé.

ORNE REF: 6162915

€106,500



Completely renovated two bedroom, two bathroom, village property with secluded rear garden and local facilities in walking distance.



**ASI IMMOBILIER**

2 Place du Marché, Passais la Conception, 61350, France

TEL: 0 33 (0)2 33 65 79 26 EMAIL: info@asiimmobilier.fr WEB: www.asiimmobilier.com

## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

ORNE REF: 6165615

€162,750



Totally renovated to a high standard near Saint Simeon. Three bedroom, two bathroom property with modern kitchen. Stone outbuildings. 1/2 acre of garden. Rural location.

ORNE REF: 6162115

€64,300



Rural stone cottage with 2 bedrooms, kitchen, sitting room, storage room, bathroom and WC. Outbuildings and large garden. Passais la conception.

ORNE REF: 6163615

€69,300



Pretty village property with two bedrooms, a convertible attic, garage and enclosed garden. The property is within walking distance to local shops.

ORNE REF: 6143215

€33,500



Stone cottage with two bedrooms, double glazing and central heating. Garage and other smaller outbuildings. Rural location.

ORNE REF: 6163415

€127,200



Circa 1740, this lovely cottage has three double bedrooms. Original features and is located on the outskirts of a village. It also has a large walled rear garden and garage.

ORNE REF: 6165515

€95,850



On the edge of a tiny hamlet, near Passais, not overlooked, this pretty cottage is in excellent condition throughout. Two bedrooms. Fitted kitchen. Garage and enclosed garden overlooking the countryside.



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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**BOUCHES-DU-RHONE** REF: 5843

**€2,685,000**



An elegant 18th-century village residence with generous proportions, garden, pool and terrace. Featuring spacious living areas, three bedrooms, development potential, plus an independent two-bedroom apartment for guests or staff.

**VAR** REF: 2285

**€430,000**



Villa with stunning views in a quiet residential area, offering 130 m<sup>2</sup>, two bedrooms, mezzanine office, bright living space, equipped kitchen, garage, on 2,270 m<sup>2</sup> plot with pool and extension potential.

**MORZINE** REF: KAIRNA301

**€969,000**



New development of 31 chalet-style apartments near Montriond centre, completion Q1 2027. Apartment A301: 2 bedrooms, 2 bunk rooms, 2 bathrooms, dual-aspect balconies. Includes cave, secure parking, bike room, VAT reclaim possible.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: WMC707-PS

**€595,000**



Exceptional 2005 country house on 1.7-hectare park with lake, pool, terraces, and guest cottage. Combines period charm with modern comforts, featuring spacious living, cathedral ceilings, tower bedroom, master suite, garage, and landscaped grounds.

# FRENCHENTRÉE

TEL: 0044 (0) 1225 463 752 EMAIL: [propertysales@frenchentree.com](mailto:propertysales@frenchentree.com) WEB: [propertyinfrance.com](http://propertyinfrance.com)

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## PROPERTY SHOWCASE

**COTES D'ARMOR** REF: TR-5065

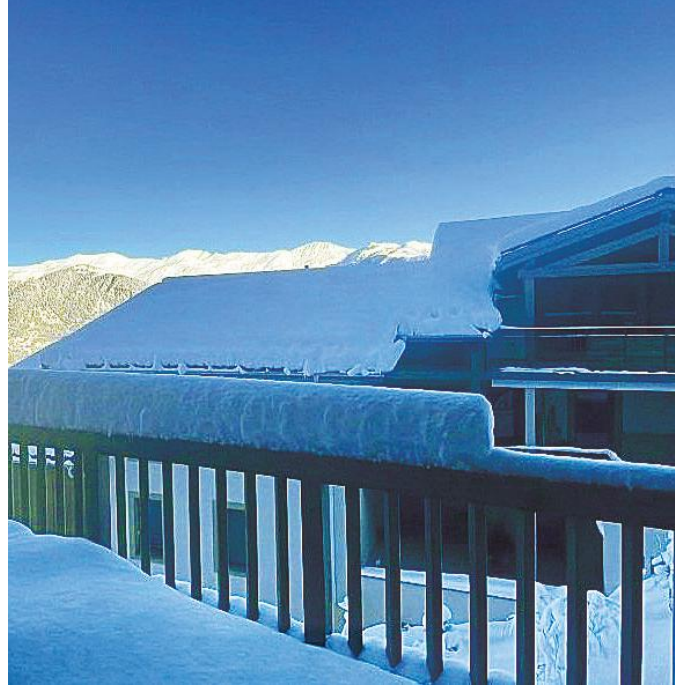
**€106,000**



Village property in Laniscat with potential to modernize and expand. Includes kitchen, lounge, two bedrooms, garage, loft, oil heating, double glazing, garden, off-road parking - ideal as a first home, holiday home, or project.

**SAVOIE** REF: 75011172078

**€678,400**



Rare investment in Courchevel Moriond 1650: modern two-bedroom apartment in Keystone Lodge, 40 m<sup>2</sup> living space, terrace with Alpine views, ski locker, parking, hotel-style amenities, turnkey furnished, ideal for holidays or rental, near slopes.

**DORDOGNE** REF: BV183721

**€328,600**



Recently built Périgourdine-style house in a peaceful hamlet near Cénac-et-Saint-Julien and Daglan. Features oak beams, chestnut floors, 3 bedrooms, office, terraces, garage, garden, and optional pool - ideal as a holiday or permanent home.

**LOT ET GARONNE** REF: BV184508

**€495,000**



Stone property between Lauzun and Castillonnes on 8,000 m<sup>2</sup>, main house with 3 bedrooms, guest cottage with 3 en-suite bedrooms, solar heating, pool, covered terrace, outdoor kitchen, and 200 m<sup>2</sup> barn—peaceful countryside setting.

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## PRIVATE SALES

### Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Lot-et-Garonne 1,195,000€

Castelmoron-sur-Lot

FrenchEntrée Ref FRE112678



#### Stunning turnkey manoir and gîte business in prime location with loyal clientele

Well-established, turnkey manoir sleeping 14, a cottage for 6 and an owners' apartment, all fully equipped for self-catering rentals. Set in a prime location with breathtaking countryside views and excellent access to transport links, it comprises fully equipped, well-maintained accommodation ready for immediate operation and growth.

An award-winning business with a strong reputation, proven marketing strategies and established support team. It generates €95,000-€100,000 annually, with over €80,000 already booked for 2026 and all future booking income transferred to the buyer.

This is an ideal lifestyle, investment, or income-producing opportunity in a top French destination.

**CONTACT:** Liz and Martyn Tanguy  
**EMAIL:** info@francemanoirgite-sale.com  
**TELEPHONE:** 0033 (0) 6 3724 7914

### Nouvelle Aquitaine

Lot-et-Garonne Nearest town: Fumel

### €699,000

FrenchEntrée Ref: FRE112076



#### Beautifully renovated house with stables and Income Potential

This beautifully renovated property, set on nearly 3 hectares, is fully ready to move in. The main house features a bright kitchen, spacious living/dining area with raised terrace, mezzanine, two bedrooms and a stylish new bathroom.

The adjoining guest house, refurbished to a high standard, currently generates income as a gîte but it can also be integrated seamlessly into the main home.

The property also offers extensive stone outbuildings including stables, workshops and a renovated tobacco barn, summer kitchen and a heated swimming pool.

**CONTACT:** Pete Smith **EMAIL:** smithpeter66@gmail.com  
**TELEPHONE:** +44 (0)7842652535

### Nouvelle Aquitaine

Charente

### €214,000

FrenchEntrée Ref FRE16140



#### Fully renovated 3 bedroomed stone cottage in centre of village with shop, pub and pizza restaurant

4km from Aigre. Lounge with wood stove. Large kitchen/dining room with French doors ideal for indoor/outdoor living, opening onto terrace and walled cottage garden replete with rose arbours and pergola.

Downstairs toilet, 2 bathrooms, C/H, double glazing, PVC doors and windows. Laundry, garage and barn. Ideal 2nd home.

**CONTACT:** Janet Bradley **EMAIL:** janet.bradley4743@gmail.com  
**TELEPHONE:** +33 (0)677398138

### Ile de France, Yvelines

Saint Germain en Laye

### 495,000€

FrenchEntrée Ref FRE112676



#### Elegant third top floor apartment with open living space and panoramic Seine views

Set in a prestigious residence with concierge and landscaped grounds, this 80m<sup>2</sup> 3rd and top-floor apartment is a quick walk to town centre and the RER A for access to Paris. In excellent condition, it features a bright 42m<sup>2</sup> living area with balcony offering spectacular 180° Seine views with the Eiffel Tower's beacon visible as it sweeps the skyline, a fitted kitchen, two bedrooms (with option to create a third), a bathroom with bath and shower and separate WC. Recently repainted and insulated, it also includes a cellar, communal parking, bike storage and collective heating.

**CONTACT:** Mélanie Pelleau **EMAIL:** pelleau@immobilierduparc.immo  
**TELEPHONE:** 00 33 (0)1 30 15 53 90

## PRIVATE SALES

### Charente

Near Confolens, Nouvelle Aquitaine

€940,000

FrenchEntrée Ref FP655610



#### Fully renovated historic Chateau with Cottage and Equine facilities

An exceptional 15th century chateau set in the heart of Charente countryside near the charming village of Lesterps. Beautifully restored and offering 462 m<sup>2</sup> of refined living space, this historic residence blends timeless character with modern luxury. The estate includes a 3-bedroom guesthouse with private parking, plus 11 acres of parkland featuring a carp lake, paddocks and stables: ideal for equestrian pursuits or countryside leisure!

With its scale, setting, and immaculate presentation, the property offers exciting potential ventures for a boutique hotel, wedding venue or luxury retreat.

Conveniently located for international travel, with easy access to the airports of Limoges, Poitiers-Biard, and Bordeaux.



**CONTACT:** Frederick Page **EMAIL:** frederickpage12@gmail.com

### Occitanie, Gers

Auch

220,000€

FrenchEntrée Ref CLAR123



#### Charming house in South West France with stunning views of the Pyrenees. A little piece of paradise

The property is located on a very quiet road, with no close neighbours and absolutely stunning views of the Pyrenees.

It is close to a quiet village, Marciac, with all amenities.

The house is well maintained.

The large barn could be a project to develop into the main residence with several bedrooms.

There is a small apartment with two bedrooms which could be used for friends and family or holiday rental.

The gardens are mature and well maintained.

**CONTACT:** Irene Clarke **EMAIL:** irene.clarke2244@gmail.com  
**TELEPHONE:** 0033780506971

### Occitanie, Gers

L'Isle Bouzon

Offers around 420,000€  
or rent for 1,000€ month

FrenchEntrée Ref FRE112677



#### Beautiful traditional Gascony house with gîtes, yoga studio and one hectare of gardens

Attractive traditional Gascony property with many original features, offering both lifestyle appeal and business potential. The main house includes a rustic kitchen with AGA and Polyflam heating, salon with Jøtul woodburner, entrance hall with Godin stove, three to four bedrooms, bathroom and two WCs, with original tiled floors throughout. A room with own entrance is currently used as a yoga studio. Two independent gîtes sit within one hectare of gardens with fruit trees, bamboo, woodland, ponds and streams.

**CONTACT:** Katie Gibbon **EMAIL:** gershhouse32@gmail.com  
**TELEPHONE:** +33(0) 641107229

## PRIVATE SALES

### Nouvelle Aquitaine, Dordogne

Cénac (6km), Sarlat (13km - 15 min)

€470,000

FrenchEntrée Ref: KZIG123



#### South-West, Périgord Noir, in La Roque Gageac, authentic stone house with Dordogne river view, terrace and garden

In the heart of Périgord Noir, in La Roque-Gageac, one of the most beautiful villages in France, this charming, authentic stone house is close to major tourist attractions. Spread over three levels, the property features exposed stonework and beams, tasteful décor, and a beautiful view of the Dordogne River. It offers a 24 m<sup>2</sup> kitchen, a 39 m<sup>2</sup> living room, four bedrooms, two full bathrooms plus one half bath. Additional features include a terrace, cellar, and a small garden with courtyard BBQ. Heating is provided by electric radiators and a wood-burning stove. Resident parking spaces are available.

**CONTACT:** Françoise Deunf **EMAIL:** francoise.deunf@iadfrance.fr  
**TELEPHONE:** (33) (0) 6 48 69 26 53

### Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Drôme

Chanos-Curson

750,000€

FrenchEntrée Ref: MOJ123



#### Elegant provencal 19th century manor with pool, outbuildings and immediate vacant possession

This fully renovated 19th century manor offers 400 m<sup>2</sup> of living space across three levels, including 7 bedrooms, generous reception areas and an independent loft. Set within a secure 1.2 hectare park with swimming pool, summer loft, stables and multiple outbuildings, the property combines historic character with modern comfort. The owner is ready to vacate immediately and is willing to leave all furniture, equipment and contents, officially valued at 70,000€, making this an exceptional turnkey opportunity.

**CONTACT:** Pierre Mojon **EMAIL:** pieralyse@wanadoo.fr  
**TELEPHONE:** 0033475073235

### Aquitaine, Deux-Sèvres

Between Chef Boutonne & Melle

310,000€

FrenchEntrée Ref: FRE109057



#### Stunning renovated stone property with heated pool on Charente border

A spacious and beautifully renovated four-bedroom stone family home, situated in a pretty village in the Deux-Sèvres, on the Charente border. The property offers two lounges, two kitchens, 2 modern bathrooms, fibre internet, air-conditioning and a wood burner. Landscaped, fully enclosed gardens with large covered entertaining terrace, barn and boules court. Heated 10 x 4 shell swimming pool with bar area. Secure electric gates, CCTV and summer kitchen. Conveniently located close to Chef-Boutonne and Melle for shops and services.

**CONTACT:** Kevin Roberts **EMAIL:** Kevingaryroberts@yahoo.co.uk **TELEPHONE:** +33 (0) 786 125 904 +44 (0) 1202 835 839

## PRIVATE SALES

### Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Bresse

€3,500,000

FrenchEntrée Ref: FPS130126



#### Stunning fully renovated 18th century historical chateau

18th century historical Château, completely renovated. Furnished with period furniture, large living room, music room, 5 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, large dining room and kitchen, billiard and games room, private chapel, completely excavated, central heating, swimming pool, pergola, pool house, English stable style outbuilding including orangery, fully furnished apartment and large garage, central heating, huge park with period statuary and central basin, clear view. Ideally situated 20km from Mâcon (Burgundy), 33km from the Beaujolais wine region and 80km from Lyon airport. English speaking owners.

**CONTACT:** Julien Tissot **EMAIL:** j.tissot.71133@notaires.fr  
**TELEPHONE:** 0033 (0)3 85 75 30 11

### Provence

Gard (Beaucaire-Tarascon)

€945,000

FrenchEntrée Ref: 42664m0



#### Unique and special. A stunning and spacious stone-built hilltop villa, pool and gite in Provence

**Urgent Retirement Sale after 23 years - All offers considered**  
Wonderful views. 6 bedrooms, 5 baths etc. Parking for 6+ cars and 2 garages. Magnificent pool with sun terrace, summer kitchen, BBQ, shaded summer lounge. Detached 1-bed gite in the garden. Superbly located, private and exclusive but not isolated. In the 'golden circle' of Avignon, St. Remy de Provence, Arles, Nîmes, Uzès and the Pont du Gard.

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(Optional adjacent land with building permission also for sale)

**CONTACT:** Tony Cremer-Price  
**EMAIL:** tony@villaromantique.co.uk **TELEPHONE:** +44(0) 7836 291791

### Brittany, Côtes-d'Armor

Illifaut

154,000€

FrenchEntrée Ref FRE112618



#### Peaceful south-facing country home with land and orchard

South-facing property set on a fully fenced 4,775 m<sup>2</sup> plot offering peace, space and privacy. The home features two generous double bedrooms, a large bathroom with shower, toilet and double sink, a utility room and an open-plan kitchen/diner with woodburner and radiators. Outside, enjoy a large garden with orchard, vegetable plot, a well for irrigation, double garage and off-road parking. Fibre-optic 5G internet is available, no close neighbours and just a 15-minute walk to the village: ideal for a self-sufficient lifestyle.

**CONTACT:** Ernest Mayzubel **EMAIL:** ernest.mayzubel@univ-rennes.fr  
**TELEPHONE:** 0033789 856162

### Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Deux-Sevres, Faye l'Abbesse

€110,000

FrenchEntrée Ref MOFAYE081



#### Spacious, detached 3-bedroom house in a commune surrounded by countryside in 79350 Deux-Sevres, Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Located in the centre of a commune with shop, post office, library, pharmacy, garage and a short drive to a hospital and large town, this 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom house is ready to move in to. Fully re-wired and decorated in 2022, it retains a French feel. It boasts a large loft space and full C/H. It has secure parking and outside space. Mains drainage. Separate land included. Main home or lock-up and leave. No agency fees and opportunity to pay in Sterling.

**CONTACT:** Adrian Moore **EMAIL:** vanade1966@gmail.com



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# NEXT ISSUE

in

## FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

### 400TH BIRTHDAY!

We celebrate our *quatre centième* issue with some special property picks plus a competition!

### PAYS DE LA LOIRE

River valleys, coastal landscapes, elegant châteaux and authentic French towns...

### COGNAC COUNTRY

At the heart of Charente, this riverside town and eponymous brandy impart a special appeal

### INSIDE OUT

Our French interiors series steps outside to focus on creating an enchanting Mediterranean garden

### CHAMONIX CHARM

Living the dream in the Alps, hosting inspiring walking and yoga holidays for women

### BELLE ÉPOQUE

Discover the architecture, art and culture of this vibrant era, plus some rather special properties

### IN THE BLOOD

Is there a French connection in your family tree? For these case studies, it was meant to be...

### FAMILY LIFE

For expats with teenage children, university applications in France; fees, grants and accommodation

### CYCLE OF LIFE

Househunting along the Tour de France Femmes route, in Jura, Loire and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence

### HOME FROM HOME

A taste of the UK... meet the expats who are making a living bringing Britain to France

### GUIDE TO...

Grants available for anyone setting up a business within French agriculture

### ASK THE EXPERTS

Your legal, financial and property questions answered along with advice on living in France



# Following love to an idyllic Breton village

New Zealander **Ian Fitzwater** followed his wife **Sophie's** ancestral roots to St-Carreuc and found a new rhythm of life and true French hospitality

## How did you discover your village?

We live in the Côtes-d'Armor department, in the Brittany region, in a little village called St-Carreuc. We moved here from New Zealand in 2007, where I met Sophie, who was working in a bed-and-breakfast in Fiordland. We chose this village as it is where four generations of Sophie's family have lived, so we decided to purchase their property to convert into a B&B.

## What aspects of village life do you enjoy?

The peace and quiet, the friendliness of the locals - we are close to a city, but live in the beautiful Breton countryside.

## What is there to see and do in the area?

We are very located for our guests - who come from all over Europe and further - to explore all of Brittany, from Mont-St-Michel (on the Breton/Norman border) to Perros-Guirec, and the pink granite coast, Brest, the Crozon peninsula, Carnac and Quiberon, all of which are within one hour and 15 minutes from our B&B. We are also close to Paimpol, St-Malo, Cap Fréhel, Erquy... a combination of great coastline and also picturesque inland villages.

## How do you get on with the locals?

I enjoy interacting with them and also with our clients. It is a very enriching experience.

## How has it been working in France?

Our B&B, Les Petits Gallais, has five rooms (four ensuite,) with large comfortable beds. We have built up a reputation for great service and great



St-Carreuc is 15 minutes from the popular coastal town of St-Brieuc

breakfasts. We share a lovely large garden and outside area where people can relax and read a book or just listen to the birdsong and enjoy the tranquillity. We both have immense knowledge of our region, which helps visitors make the most of their stay, to explore the area and enjoy the wonderful restaurants and a culture that is unique to this part of the world.

One thing about working here is that you do need to be able to speak French. In a lot of the Breton villages no one speaks English, and I feel it is disrespectful to expect French people to communicate in my language when I've chosen to live in their country. Too often I hear English people insisting that locals "all speak English really - they just make it difficult", which I find unfair.

## How was your French when you arrived - and now?

I only had schoolboy French, but I immersed myself in the French culture, studied at a *lycée* for six months, and to this day continue to try to improve my comprehension and understanding of the wonderful French language.

## What about the local architecture and history?

We are surrounded by ancient history that dates back to 4,500BC, with Carnac being the oldest prehistoric site in the world. Breton history is steeped in all sorts of conflict - with the French (against the Bretons), Romans, Vikings, Spanish, Dutch and the English - leaving a landscape dotted with castles, châteaux, fortifications and burial sites.

## What has surprised you the most about living in France?

Discovering how mixed and varied the French population is living in harmony. The extraordinary generosity and genuine friendships that developed and, of course, all that comes with learning a new culture, and the amazing history that exists in this part of the world.

## What is your favourite French saying?

It has to be 'Oh là là!' ■

**Find out more about Ian and Sophie's lovely home and B&B in Brittany visit [lespetitsgallais.com](http://lespetitsgallais.com)**

Although I now speak French fluently, I am stuck with a Kiwi accent, which sometimes astonishes the locals - they say they find it 'exotic'. I still make mistakes, but continue to improve year by year - it's not a language you can learn in three months.

## Any local speciality that you have developed a taste for?

Brittany is better known for its cider than its wine, but it also has excellent food - particularly seafood, thanks to its long coastline and fishing tradition - as well as outstanding dairy products, butter and cheese.

The traditional village is set amidst beautiful countryside





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