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FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

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ISSUE 401
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026

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Sharing a Provence home with 28 other families!

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In a report looking at quality of life, La Rochelle has been described as the quintessential mid-sized French city

P53
Bayeux is home to the France's first ever ring road, created by WWII Allied troops who couldn't drive their tanks through the town's narrow streets

P92
French mortgage lenders usually require borrowers to keep their total debt below around one-third of their monthly income

This issue's *Agent's dream home* (p25) got me thinking. If you just wandered along the street in front of the house, you might never imagine it was hiding such amazing outside space and views, and lovely interiors. Although undoubtedly charming, the facade is relatively plain – no sweeping drive, turrets or ornate carving. But step inside and you discover immaculate and spacious rooms, while the rear of the house opens onto a stunning garden and pool. While many French properties have picture-postcard facades, built from creamy stone with blue shutters, terracotta roofs and several floors, others present a plainer face to the world. So, when it comes to property, should you judge a book by the cover? In towns and villages across the country, rows of ordinary-looking terraced houses conceal hidden depths. They're often bigger than you'd think, full of charm, perhaps with a secret garden or pretty courtyard. Country homes may seem a little ramshackle, but inside you find sought-after character features such as stone fireplaces, exposed beams and the like. So next time you're browsing French properties online, take care not to discount some of the less obvious beauties. What you're looking for may be hidden in plain sight.



Karen

EDITOR'S PICK

Village house with lovely outside space in Gascony

In the heart of a charming village in the Gers, near Fleurance, this character property has been fully renovated and offers open views over the surrounding countryside. There's a spacious living/dining room with an open-plan kitchen on the ground floor, and upstairs are two bedrooms, one with a mezzanine, plus a modern shower room and a dressing room. But what really caught my attention was the landscaped garden with its covered terrace, well and charming pigeonnier. The price is €210,000.
Orpi Actimmo Gers, orpi.com/actimmogers



GET IN TOUCH!
I love to hear your stories of househunting and owning a home in France
karen.tait@francemedia.com

Contributing this issue...



Sophie Folley

Director of Sophie Folley Immobilier, with 20 years experience of assisting international clients in finding their dream homes in southwest France.

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Arthur Cutler

Navigate France partner Arthur has over 25 years' experience of helping people with French administration and relocation.

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Fiona Watts

Founder of International Private Finance, Fiona has a wealth of experience arranging finance for non-residents purchasing homes in France.

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Annaliza Davis

Between travel-writing and translation projects, Annaliza loves nattering with neighbours and exploring Brittany's coastline with her scruffy Dachsund.

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Dan Brewer

Drawing on 15 years' French property experience Dan founded Healey Fox to help English-speaking buyers find exceptional homes in France.

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Fabienne Atkin

A senior associate with Stone King, Fabienne is a Franco-British solicitor who specialises in French property and estate planning.

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Peter Bear

Writer, journalist and painter, Peter has lived for 27 years with his author wife Chloe Rayban in an 18th-century manor house in the Bourbonnais region.

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Ben Hingley

International removals expert and Burke Bros sales manager, Ben recently celebrated 30 years working for the Midlands-based removals company.

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FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

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EXCLUSIVE

Breton Beauty

Côtes-d'Armor **€477,000**

Ref: A46755 - Stunning 7-bedroom character property with pool.

6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: D Climate class: B



Income Potential

Hérault **€499,000**

Ref: A42350 - Lovely property with two independent furnished gîtes.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: D Climate class: B



Village Life

Dordogne **€259,000**

Ref: A46699 - Elegant 3-bedroom house with private garden and parking.

7% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: D Climate class: B



EXCLUSIVE

Rural Retreat

Manche **€150,000**

Ref: A46697 - Divine 2-bedroom cottage with south facing gardens.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: C



EXCLUSIVE

Barn Conversion

Charente **€199,950**

Ref: A46728 - Attractive 3-bedroom barn conversion with 6000m² of land.

8% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: D Climate class: D



Room to Expand

Morbihan **€194,000**

Ref: A46238 - 3-bedroom Neo-Breton home on constructible land.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: E



Simply Spacious

Vendée **€89,000**

Ref: A46734 - Charming 5-bedroom village house with courtyard gardens.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: E



Blank Canvas

Haute-Vienne **€42,000**

Ref: A46047 - Two stone houses to renovate, with 1571m² of land.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: N/A



EXCLUSIVE

Remarkable Estate

Aveyron **€889,473**

Ref: A46568 - Exceptional private hamlet with 3 houses, lake and pool.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: E Climate class: E



Character Property

Charente-Maritime **€137,000**

Ref: A28960 - 6-bedroom maison de maître with garden and outbuildings.

8% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: F Climate class: F



Endless Possibilities

Corrèze **€243,500**

Ref: A46608 - Large 6-bedroom property with 1 ha and outbuildings.

6% agency fees included paid by the buyer.
Energy class: E Climate class: E



EXCLUSIVE

Southern Charm

Gard **€399,000**

Ref: A44077 - Charming 2-bedroom house with garden and rooftop terrace.

Agency fees to be paid by the seller.
Energy class: D Climate class: B

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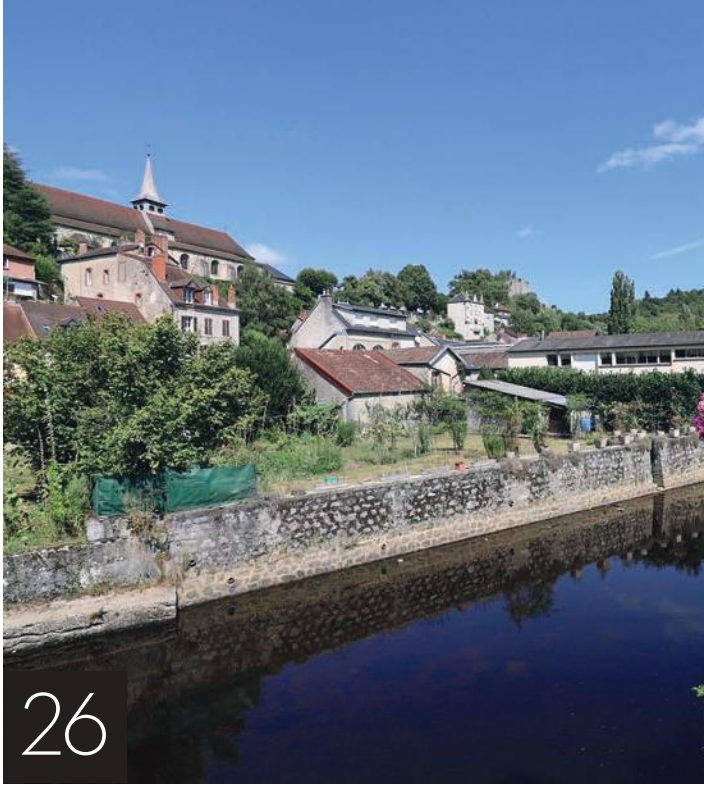


Information on the risks to which these properties are exposed is available on the Geohazards website: www.georisques.gouv.fr

35+ YEARS of French property advice

FRENCH PROPERTY NEWS

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An impressive estate in the Dordogne – see page 18

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Tête à tête

This month's pick of letters and social media

WIN! The author of the star letter receives a year's subscription to FPN

ON FACEBOOK & TWITTER







A character riverside home in Tarn on the market for just €124,200. Dating in part from the 13th century, this property sits in a small hamlet close to the beautiful village of Ambialet. The house offers flexible accommodation over several levels, with two bedrooms, spacious living room, separate kitchen, useful storage rooms and independent guest annexe. Although there is no private garden, there is space to sit outside, and the riverbank is just a few steps away for picnics, swimming or simply enjoying the setting.

Jay McKillop:
Love this one

Marie Piad:
If only!

Julie-Anne Smith:
In love!

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***

A TASTE OF HOME

I read with interest the article about the ladies running shops supplying English foods [*FPN400*]. Readers may like to know there is a flourishing business of the same nature located in the town of Gouarec, situated near Mûr-de-Bretagne (Côtes d'Armor department), Kerbian Farm (*kerbianfarm.com*). I was a regular customer when we lived in Hemonstoir (near Loudeac) and also on subsequent holidays after returning to the UK.

From 2010, Dawn and Paul White kept all manner of animals on their farm, which produced meat for their farm shop direct. Success led them to opening the shop in Gouarec, which had an English butchery counter. Also, through weekly visits to the UK, they were able to provide a great variety of English foods.

I particularly enjoyed being able to buy items I missed such as sliced bread, bacon, Typhoo tea bags, Paxo stuffing and all the ingredients for Christmas fare.

I even served hot cross buns to my French neighbours one afternoon, together with the obligatory patisseries, chocolates and red wine, explaining that we ate them during *Paques* (easter).

On one occasion, Warburtons crumpets were on the counter and I was compelled to write to *Bolton News* to say the firm had made it to the heart of Brittany!

Recently though, through age and ill health, their farming produce has ceased, and beef, gammon, sausages and bacon are now imported from Ireland. The shop, however, is still the Aladdin's cave as it has always been...

Glenys Alice Ellis


Kerbian Farm shop in Brittany

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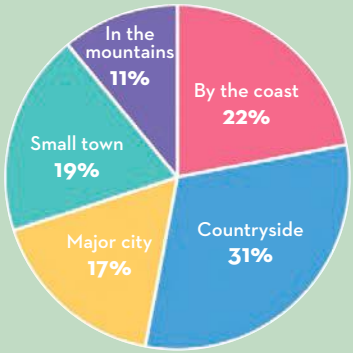


"Enchanting two-bedroom stone house in the medieval village of Nanteuil-en-Vallée, Charente, offering spacious living and private courtyards"

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HAUTE-VIENNE €249,100 HAI
BVI85914 4-bed country farmhouse in 4.7Ha, 5 mins from small town
Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €235,000



TARN-ET-GARONNE €256,800 HAI
BVI73481 Cute 3-bed, 3-bath stone village house with garden and pool
Fees: 7% paid by the buyer Net price: €240,000



GIRONDE €449,000 HAI
BVI85176 Elegant manor house with pool, 30mins from St Emilion
Fees: 5.14% paid by the buyer Net: €474,600



DORDOGNE €48,000 HAI
BVI83856 2-bed character townhouse to refresh. Separate garden.
Fees: €6000 paid by the buyer Net price: €42,000



DORDOGNE €246,000 HAI
BVI83958 3-bed pavillion with large garage/basement and rural views
Fees: 7% paid by the buyer Net price: €229,907



LOT-ET-GARONNE €162,000 HAI
BVI86370 Bastide village house to renovate with shop and courtyard
Fees: 8% paid by the buyer Net price: €150,000



AUDE €530,000
BVI60442 Ideal B&B - 8-bed, 7-bath village house near Carcassonne
Fees: paid by the vendor



DORDOGNE €1,266,000
BVI85646 Gorgeous country estate with designer gardens and pool
Fees: Paid by the vendor



VENDEE €1,148,000
BVI75604 Super 19thC château with 2.5Ha, pool and two guest houses
Fees: paid by the vendor



HAUTE-VIENNE €1,199,000
BVI70277 11-bed 18thC château with pool, spa and tennis in 2.2Ha
Fees: Paid by the vendor



CHARENTE €625,000 HAI
BVI75515 Beautiful 6-bed, 4-bath property near Cognac and the river
Fees: 6% paid by the buyer Net price: €589,623



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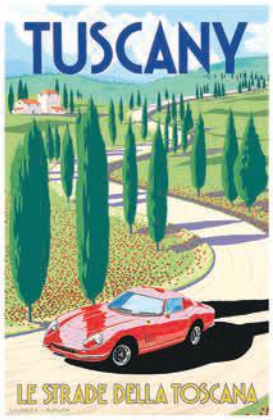
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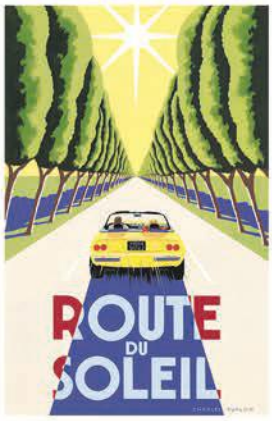
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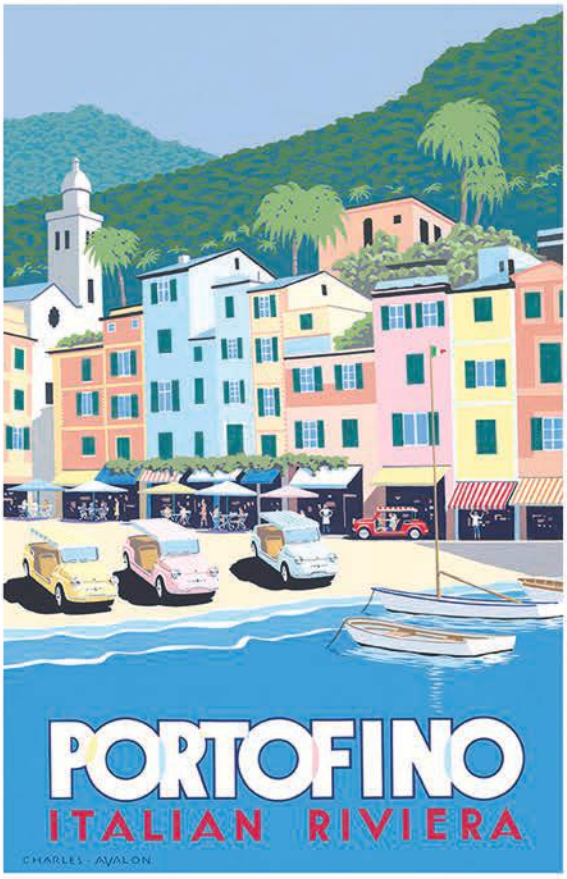
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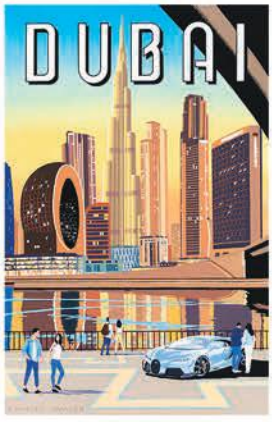


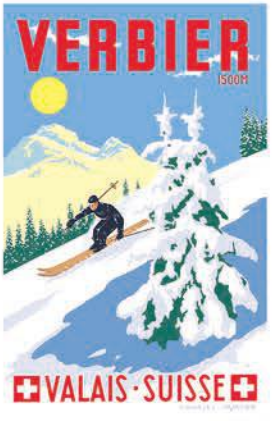


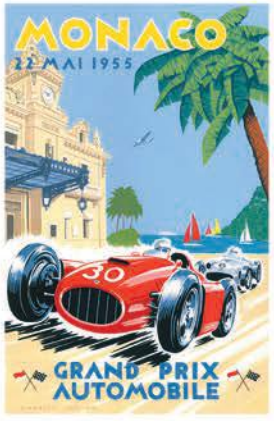


















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AU COURANT

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

WEST IS BEST: TWO NEW FRENCH RANKINGS REVEAL THE TOP TOWNS FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

Western France has come out top in two different surveys looking at the best places to live in France for health and wellness.

In a survey by *Alternatives Economiques* magazine, using their '*indice de bien-être en ville* (quality of life index), the top three cities were La Rochelle, Angers and Bordeaux.

Within the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region and on the Atlantic coast, La Rochelle (population 82,367) and Bordeaux (population 267,991) are both capitals of their individual departments - Charente-Maritime and Gironde respectively - and both have airports serving the UK.

A little further north, in the Pays de la Loire region, Angers (population 161,563) is the capital of the Maine-et-Loire department.

The study measured the wellbeing of residents in 133 French communes with at least 50,000 inhabitants, taking into account categories such as transport, employment, culture, health, education, wages and house prices.

"La Rochelle presents a remarkably balanced profile: it excels in several areas without performing badly in any; it's the quintessential mid-sized city," said the *Alternatives Economiques* report. "Its strengths lie in active transportation, culture and healthcare. It's a city where you can cycle, go to the movies and easily find a doctor."

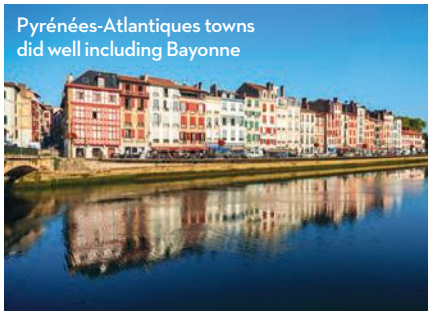
Meanwhile, another ranking published by *Le Figaro Santé* focused on the healthiest French communes with over 10,000 inhabitants.



La Rochelle's picturesque harbour


Angers castle overlooks the River Maine


Bordeaux is capital of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region


Pyrénées-Atlantiques towns did well including Bayonne


Vannes in Morbihan, Brittany

It considered air and water quality, the presence of green spaces, noise levels , heatwave risk, the prevalence of certain chronic diseases, life expectancy and access to healthcare.

For towns and cities with over 50,000 inhabitants, Bayonne in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques came out top, with the report stating: "Renowned for its quality of life, Bayonne is one of those cities that naturally attracts healthcare professionals." In this larger cities segment, Vannes (Morbihan), Pau (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Cholet (Maine-et-Loire) and Angers (Maine-et-Loire) took the rest of the top five positions.

The report notes that in mid-sized towns (population 10,000-50,000), the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department also performs well, with five of its towns in the top 20.

The top five medium-sized municipalities were St-Jean-de-Luz (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Oloron-Ste-Marie (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Orthez (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Meylan (Isère) and Saintes (Charente-Maritime).

These latest two surveys compare similarly to the 2026 quality of life survey from *Villes et villages où il fait bon vivre* (covered in FPN399), where western municipalities also performed well, including Biarritz, Angers, Bayonne Epron and Guéthary, along with Annecy in the Alps.

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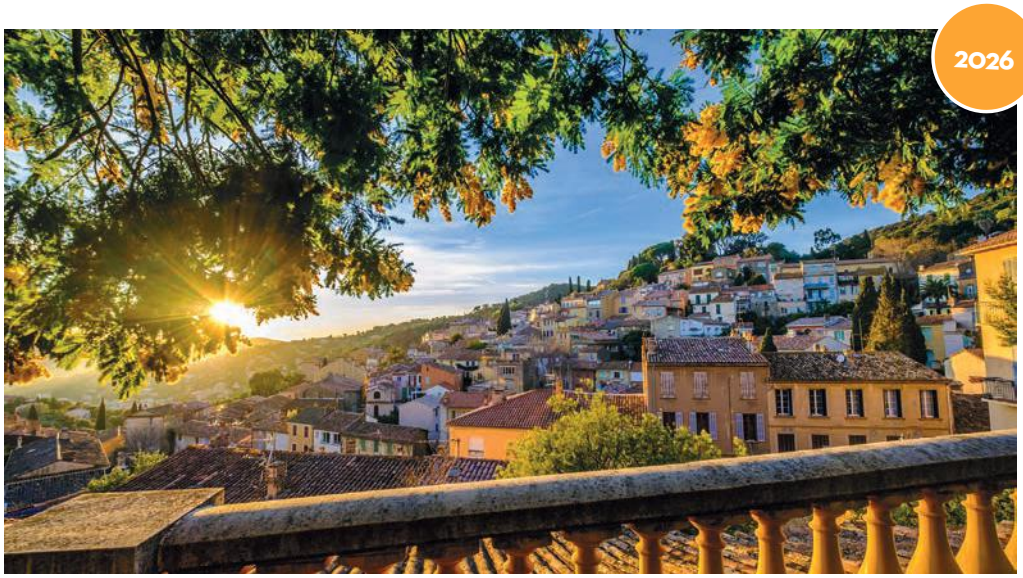
NICE AND EASY

Nice has eased its rules on short-term holiday lets such as Airbnb, after the city council voted to relax restrictions introduced under the previous mayor. The move extends the maximum number of days a main home can be rented out from 90 to 120, and lengthens temporary authorisations from three years to five. The wider policy also adjusts quotas in the most affected neighbourhoods, with some areas seeing more tourist lets than others. Supporters say the changes are a more pragmatic way to balance property rights, tourism and the local economy, as reported by *Le Figaro*. Critics on the left argue that it will worsen the housing shortage in a city already under pressure. The controversy highlights the ongoing tension in Nice and other tourist spots between residential housing needs and the popularity of short-term rentals.



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FRANCE'S FAVOURITE VILLAGE



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Each year since 2012, the French have voted for their favourite village, presented on the TV programme *Le Village preferée des Français*. This year, for the very first time, a village in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region has won the prestigious competition.

Bormes-les-Mimosas in the Var department stands out for its exceptional plant heritage, with over 700 recorded species including, of course, mimosa. Every winter this gorgeous fluffy yellow flower attracts thousands of visitors to the region, enjoying parades and other festivities. Between the Massif des Maures mountains and the Mediterranean Sea, Bormes-les-Mimosas is an authentic Provençal village with medieval streets and charming pink and ochre houses set in an amphitheatre shape overlooking the bay of Lavandou and the Îles d'Or.

Above: Bormes-les-Mimosas in Var is this year's favourite village Right: 2025 winner St-Antoine-l'Abbaye in Isère, and 2024 winner Collioure in the Pyrénées-Orientales





WHAT'S ON IN SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026



©DCA/DRONE EXPERTISE

19-20 SEPTEMBER
ACROSS FRANCE
JOURNÉES EUROPÉENES DE PATRIMOINE

For the annual European Heritage Days, France will open the doors of its most treasured and sometimes hidden heritage sites. More than 1,700 venues will participate, presenting guided tours, exhibitions, craft demonstrations, conferences, concerts and performances.
journeesdupatrimoine.culture.gouv.fr



SEPTEMBER '26 - SEPTEMBER '27
ACROSS FRANCE
BICENTENAIRE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

In 1827 in Burgundy, Nicéphore Niépce created the first known permanent photograph. The French Ministry of Culture will celebrate '200 years of photos' with a year-long programme including 180 exhibitions, festivals, workshops and conferences.
bicentenairephotographie.culture.gouv.fr



UNTIL DECEMBER
BORDEAUX
AROUND THE WORLD IN 50 WINE REGIONS

To mark the Cité du Vin's 10th anniversary, this photographic exhibition celebrates the richness and diversity of the world's vineyards. It highlights the link between humans and vines, and the way in which the winemaking landscape fits into its territory. Free entry.
laciteduvin.com



7-11 OCTOBER
PARIS
FÊTE DES VENDANGES DE MONTMARTRE

Ruturning for its 93rd edition with the theme: 'The 18th arrondissement leads the beat', this is the third-largest event organised by the City of Paris. For five days, the entire 18th arrondissement transforms into a vast open-air stage celebrating music, gastronomy, heritage and community.
fetedesvendangesdemontre.com

YOUR OWN FRENCH ISLAND!









©KRETZ REAL ESTATE

If you have a spare €2.5m knocking around, a beautiful private island off the coast of Brittany could be all yours! The Île de Riec'h in the Morbihan department comprises six hectares with five beaches and two houses. It offers a rare and unspoiled haven where nature reigns supreme. The beaches all have their own character, from secluded coves to long sandy stretches and sheltered inlets. Two residences offer comfortable accommodation: A two-storey main house with a living room, open-plan and fully equipped kitchen, master suite with bathroom, two further bedrooms and a shower room; plus a three-story caretaker's house with a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and shower room.

A pontoon provides easy access to the island from Belz on the mainland, and Paris is within 2.5 hours via Auray train station.

Brittany is home to over 40 islands, with the main ones being Belle-Île, Ouessant Bréhat and Groix.

PARIS TAX RISES

Paris city council voted in late July to double the current tax on empty homes known as *taxe sur les logements vacants* in 2027, with the aim of relieving pressure on the rental market in the capital, hoping to encourage owners to rent or sell these units. The city said in a statement that the surcharge replaces the 1999 tax and that revenue will now be paid directly to the municipalities on the principle that a property that has been vacant for at least one year, in a municipality where the housing supply is insufficient to meet demand, becomes taxable. The calculation is based on the cadastral rental value. For example, a 30m² flat in the 17th arrondissement that had to pay €790 before the reform will pay €1,400 in 2027, then €2,800 from 2028 onwards. According to a report on *FranceInfo*,



©PXHERE

Deputy Mayor for Housing Jacques Baudrier, said there are 150,000 vacant dwellings while the number of applicants is in the hundreds of thousands.

TRAVEL NEWS

- Nine countries, including France, along with Europe's aviation sector have called for continued flexibility for the new EES digital entry and exit system at EU borders. The system – which replaces passport stamps with biometric registration – will not be fully operational until September, a five-month delay from the April deadline. The European Commission granted this flexibility to avoid potential travel chaos during the busy summer season.

- 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 Brits. However, following long delays for some travellers using EES border checks, the Etias rollout could now be delayed until 2027.

- Budget airline easyJet has agreed to a €6.6bn takeover by American firm Apollo. easyJet was founded in 1995 by British-Cypriot entrepreneur Stelios Haji-Ioannou. Apollo said it wants to help the airline grow and has no plans to cut any jobs in the first 12 months.

- Taxi platform Uber is now offering the option to pick up a skippered boat in France in partnership with Click & Boat. The service will be first rolled out in Paris, Annecy, Cannes, Marseille, Nice, St-Tropez and Toulon.

- EasyJet is expanding its winter programme with a new twice-weekly Southampton-Paris Charles de Gaulle service from October, and a new domestic route linking Lyon and Nice.

- Faster and greener TGV M – *Train à Grande Vitesse du futur* – trains will enter service on the Paris-Lyon-Marseille route from September.

- The European Parliament has approved the previously agreed overhaul of EU air passenger rights, ending extra charges for families wishing to sit together, improving ticket price transparency, and making it easier to claim compensation.

GREAT RESHUFFLE

It seems that many Europeans are rethinking where home really is, according to new research from expat insurance platform Feather, which shows a 'great reshuffle' underway. Nearly half of people across the UK, France, Germany and Italy expect to live abroad one day – with the French most keen (57%). Germans are the most motivated movers – one in 10 are actively planning a move right now.

In fact, only around one in 10 Europeans who took part in the survey said they would rule out a life abroad.

Cost of living is the biggest push factor everywhere, but Britons are feeling the squeeze the most with 53% citing it as their number one reason for relocating.



STATE OF THE MARKET

France's property market is settling into a steadier rhythm after a relatively short-lived rally. Transaction volumes reached 949,000 sales in the first five months to the end of May, up 5.7% annually, but growth has slowed since February, when the annual rise was standing at 11.4%.

In their quarterly report, Notaires de France (NdF) frame this as a normalisation rather than a downturn, with the market stabilising around 950,000 annual transactions and buyers taking longer to commit, negotiating harder and facing tougher documentation and financing requirements before sales complete.

Prices for homes (excluding new-builds) are essentially flat, up just 0.2% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026 across metropolitan France, with Île-de-France (Paris region) seeing a rebound (particularly for flats) while the provinces remain broadly stable. NdF said that forward-looking data from preliminary contracts suggests prices could turn slightly negative by the end of July (around -0.6% annually), driven mainly by houses rather than flats.

Financing conditions remain the key variable. Although the European Central Bank has raised rates to guard against inflation, banks have only partly passed this through to mortgage costs. First-time buyers remain the most exposed to any tightening. Buyers increasingly favour well-priced, energy-efficient homes, while properties needing renovation or sitting at higher price points can struggle. New-build housing remains constrained by weak construction launches and limited fiscal incentives.

Overall, NdF describes a market whose fundamentals remain solid, but one where the coming months will be about preserving balance rather than accelerating activity.



©ISTOCK/SUSANNEWOMMONG

AUTOROUTE SCAM

French motorists are being warned about a text-message scam exploiting the country's barrier-free '*flux-libre*' toll system. On these motorways, overhead cameras capture number plates automatically, and drivers are given 72 hours to settle online, with fines rising from €10 to €90 and eventually €375 in case of late payment. The system detects all number plates, regardless of the country of origin, and the payment options are the same for everyone: by toll badge, bank card or at a tobacconist in the network, as reported by *Le Parisien*. Scammers profit from a loophole, sending texts that mimic genuine reminders, banking on drivers' fears of missing the deadline. They reference real *flux-libre* motorways, with the operator's logo. Clicking the link leads to a fake payment page designed to harvest your bank details.

Operator Sanef confirmed that it never requests payment by text or email, advising motorists to check charges directly through the official website or app, or to pay at a tobacconist.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ Looking for a unique feature for your French property? A 14-step section of the Eiffel Tower's staircase has sold at auction for over €450,000. It had been held in a private collection since 1983 when it was replaced by a new lift.



Eiffel Tower staircase auction

■ France's tax authorities have increased the period in which unpaid taxes can be claimed from second-home owners or owners of vacant properties. It's part of France's new anti fraud law, which covers matters such as organised crime, tax fraud and crypto-currency.

■ A study analysing locations featured on TV property show *A Place In The Sun* has revealed that the fourth most popular region is Nouvelle-Aquitaine in France, which appears in 68 episodes. Alicante in Spain came out as the overall dream holiday home destination. UK property investment company ERE Property analysed over 1,000 episodes of the show.

■ The French parliament has adopted the assisted dying law. If the Constitutional Council approves the legislation, France will join Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Canada in legalising assisted dying. The law had been passed by the National Assembly but was rejected by the Senate upper chamber.

■ Occitanie's Cathar castles and Normandy's D-Day beaches have become France's latest Unesco World Heritage Sites, the latter after 20 years of lobbying - see page 52 for a househunting guide to the Landing Beaches.

■ A report published by the *Observatoire des inégalités* has revealed how much money you need to be rich in France. Based on figures from national statistics agency INSEE, a single person would have to earn at least €4,292 a month after tax, for a couple at least €6,438, and for a family with two teenage children over the age of 14, €10,730.

■ France has added six new 'Palace Hotels' to its national collection. The prestigious distinction, above five star, was re-awarded for the first time in seven years. The flagship establishments now total 33.

■ French authorities have confirmed that English-law wills exempt from France's forced heirship rule - read more on page 84.

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Gascon farmhouses

Three of the best

Is there anything more handsome than a Gascon farmhouse? **Ruth Wood** picks out three of her favourites on the market in the Gers and Pyrénées-Atlantiques



€598,000

GERS

On the outside, this is an elegant and traditional Gersois farmhouse set in half a hectare of grounds with pool, barns, workshop and garaging. Step inside, though, and the contemporary refinement of this four-bedroom home will take you by surprise. The designer kitchen is fitted with sleek Leicht cabinetry and granite work surfaces. The theme continues throughout the stylish open-plan space where exposed stone, beams



and terracotta tiles blend with sophisticated features including a luxurious master suite, climate-controlled wine cellar, cinema-games room and air conditioning. Solar panels and heat pumps provide excellent climate credentials for the property, which is in the village of Izotges in western Gers.

lebonheur.immo

€475,000

PYRÉNÉES-ATLANTIQUES

You can be on an Atlantic beach in less than an hour or on a Pyrenean ski slope in 1h30 from this smart farmhouse. It's in a pleasant neighbourhood on the heights of Orthez, a charming medieval town with a TGV station, hospital and a good choice of bilingual schools. The house has been renovated to a high standard, with five spacious bedrooms, four shower/bathrooms, office and attic. On the ground floor, the



generous living space includes two living rooms (one with a woodburning stove), a dining room and a separate kitchen served by a laundry room and pantry. The well-maintained grounds of 8,890m² contain a garage, carport and sheds.

sophiefolley.com





€640,000

GERS

A few minutes' drive from the spa village of Castera-Verduzan, this beautiful stone house sits in 4.2ha of land with an orchard, spring-fed lake and meadows suitable for horses. From the generous entrance hall, an original wooden staircase leads up to four ensuite double bedrooms, two with access to a rooftop terrace with country views and a staircase down to the pool. Downstairs, there's a light-filled kitchen diner, two living rooms with woodburning



stoves, a study (or fifth bedroom), bathroom and games area plus a laundry room which leads up a stunning pool house with shower, storeroom and its own kitchen-diner, perfect for alfresco relaxation with family and friends.

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Stone House

Gers **€380,000 (HAI)**
818502 - Traditional Stone House with Pool and Views of the Pyrenees
Energy Performance - D | Gas emissions – C



Stone House

Dordogne **€235,400 (HAI)**
818334 - Character Stone House with Garden, Outbuilding and Magnificent Views
Energy Performance - E | Gas emissions - C



Farmhouse

Lot **€226,000 (HAI)**
818378 - Farmhouse with Outbuildings. Set on 2.4 Hectares of Meadow and Woodland
Energy Performance - E | Gas emissions - C



Maison de Maitre

Lot-et-Garonne **€549,000 (HAI)**
650387 - Elegant Maison De Maitre with Large Pool in the Heart of Town
Energy Performance - D | Gas emissions - B



Mas

Provence **€840,000 (HAI)**
499143 - Delightful Mas with Pool and Uninterrupted Views of Mont Ventoux
Energy Performance - C | Gas emissions - A



Villa

Provence **€545,000 (HAI)**
816563 - Traditional Villa with Swimming Pool and Garage Walking Distance to Town
Energy Performance - C | Gas emissions - A



Apartment

Cote-D'Azur **€545,000 (HAI)**
86384537 - Apartment with Large Rooftop Terrace
Energy Performance - C | Gas emissions - A



Village House

Aude **€199,000 (HAI)**
645651 - Stone Built 6 Bedroom House with Many Original Features



Villa

Lot-et-Garonne **€213,000 (HAI)**
804636 - Villa with Swimming Pool and Garden Close to Town Centre
Energy Performance - D



Chateau

Pyrenees-Atlantiques **€599,000 (HAI)**
650105 - Superb 19th Century Chateau Set on 4 Hectares of Parkland and Prairie
Energy Performance - E | Gas emissions - B



Villa

Lot-et-Garonne **€189,000 (HAI)**
798442 - Pleasant Villa with Garage, Large Terrace and Landscaped Garden
Energy Performance - D



Village House

Pyrenees-Orientales **€93,000 (HAI)**
734281 - Fully Renovated Village House with Terrace and Lovely Views
Energy Performance - F | Gas emissions - C



French property dreams

Wishlist wonder

In Dordogne's 'Golden Triangle', this meticulously renovated Perigourdine manor now ticks every box for luxury and leisure, discovers **Ruth Wood**

Prehistoric *homo sapiens* must have been ecstatic when they stumbled on the Vézère valley 40,000 years ago. Imagine their eyes widening as they saw the limestone gorge riddled with rock shelters and caves – luxurious ready-made homes in a favourable microclimate. In paleolithic property terms, it's a wishlist wonder.

Today's househunting *homo sapiens* are sure to have similar emotions when they visit this property in Dordogne. For starters, there's its location in the department's 'Golden Triangle', a few minutes' drive from the confluence of the Dordogne and Vézère rivers. Within easy reach are the most celebrated sites of the Périgord Noir – the medieval fortresses of Beynac and Castelnaud, the cliff-clinging village of La Roque-Gageac, the hilltop bastide of Domme, the honey-coloured market town of Sarlat, and the Unesco World Heritage sites of the Vézère, including the Lascaux caves.

Boasting breathtaking, panoramic views, the property comprises a three-bedroom *manoir* and three-bedroom guesthouse set in over 18ha of landscaped grounds with a pool, tennis court, spa facilities and heated four-car garage.

The owners renovated the property over five years, sparing no expense. The main house has a light-flooded open-plan living space featuring oak flooring and stylish furniture, all of which is negotiable in the sale. Exotic hardwood frames the double-glazed doors and windows, including full-height doors opening onto the terrace. At one end of the living space is the main lounge with its monumental fireplace; at the other, a luxury kitchen with a Dekton island and Miele appliances including three ovens and integrated coffee machine. There are no fewer than four cooking surfaces offering induction, wok, teppanyaki and plancha, plus three sinks, one with a Quooker tap for instant boiling water.

Beyond the kitchen and utility area are a cosier lounge and office space, which open onto a terrace with firepit and views of the kitchen garden.

Upstairs are three luxurious bedroom suites, all with copper free-standing baths, shower rooms and space to relax or work. The principal suite measures almost 59m² and incorporates a huge dressing room. There is also a family bathroom on this floor as well as a mezzanine providing useful living space.

The owners built a stunning light-filled atrium connecting the *manoir* to its guesthouse. The exquisite attention to detail continues in another open-plan living space with three ensuite bedrooms above. But this is where the property gets playful as the atrium also connects to a vast games and music room with its own bar, plus a large home gym incorporating a sauna and hammam.

The wellness theme continues outside where the heated pool and tennis court are surrounded by gardens, meadows and woodland.

It's hard to imagine what the medieval pilgrims would have thought if this property had been standing in the 12th century as they passed by on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Harder still to imagine what prehistoric man would have made of the modern biomass boiler, underfloor heating, reversible air conditioning, fibre internet and ultra high-definition CCTV. Clearly, we've come a long way since the Stone Age. ■

On the market for €2.99m
beauxvillages.com

À VENDRE



















Vienne ease

Budget property pick

A parking space in London or a cute cottage and garden in the southwest of France? Your call, says **Ruth Wood**

Crazy but true - there are parking spaces on the market in London for more than the price of this cottage in rural Vienne. At the time of writing, someone in the capital is marketing a space measuring 5.11m x 2.51m for £60,000. Its many charms include the fact that it is underground and can accommodate an SUV.

No wonder Brits become starry-eyed over sunny southwest France. It offers not only natural beauty, rich heritage and an unhurried pace of life, but the chance to own a piece of rural paradise for a fraction of what you could expect to pay in the UK.

Take this charming stone house in southern Vienne, a department just below the Loire and just above Charente and Dordogne. Situated in a sleepy hamlet near the village of Romagne, it has two bedrooms, two gardens, an adjoining barn and a price tag of just €65,000.

The city of Poitiers, with its famous Futuroscope amusement park, is a 45-minute drive to the north and Romagne itself is home to a primate park called Vallée des Singes, which is one of the area's most popular tourist attractions. You can find bars, *boulangeries* and restaurants in the surrounding villages or head to the market town of Civray 12km away for more amenities including shops and supermarkets.

DROP YOUR BAGS

But is there loads of work to do? Well, the good news is you can drop your bags and move in straight away as the house is already comfortably habitable and recently got a new roof. Once you've settled in, there's some internal refurbishment to do, including upgrading the drainage system to current standards. It's worth bearing in mind that having a new septic tank fitted is likely to cost between €7,000 and €11,000.

The wooden front door opens onto a cute country kitchen with traditional units and a handsome fireplace with woodburner. To the right is the living room, which has exposed beams and characterful alcove shelves as well as a wooden-framed double-glazed window.

To the left of the kitchen, a door leads to a downstairs shower room and a separate closet which could house a washing machine or be converted into a toilet.

On the first floor, there's another *salle d'eau* with washbasin, toilet and space to put in a shower. Continuing on, we pass under an oak lintel down a hallway to find two smart double bedrooms, each measuring over 12m^2 with a skylight, wooden floors and exposed beams.

A large gravelled courtyard is accessible from the back of the kitchen. Enclosed on all sides and partially roofed, it's a wonderful secluded haven with plenty of space to lounge and dine in sun or shade.

Meanwhile, if you're looking for somewhere to play ball games or grow vegetables, you're in luck because just across the very quiet lane that runs in front of the property is your own generous-sized garden with grass and trees.

In total, the plot size is 686m^2 - enough space to park at least 53 SUVs - though you can leave the car at home if you're prepared to walk or cycle 5km to Épanvilliers where you'll find a train station! ■

On the market for €65,000
tic-ruffec.com




À VENDRE













Vendange vibes

It's time for the grape harvest in France so we're dreaming of homes surrounded by vineyards...

TEAM FPN'S COUP DE COEUR







I would love the lifestyle that comes with this two-bedroom château apartment at the heart of a former wine estate. With panoramic views over the vineyards towards the Pyrénées, the apartment combines the character of exposed beams with modern comforts like reversible air-conditioning. Facilities include a heated infinity pool, landscaped gardens, mini farm, tennis court, gourmet restaurant in the former wine cellar, concierge services and turnkey rental management. Under five minutes from Capestang, 20 minutes from Béziers and Narbonne, 15 minutes from the motorway and 30 minutes from beaches.
Ref: 695839 (Real Estate Occitanie)
Karen Tait, Editor



Such a dreamy property... surrounded by vineyards and beautiful countryside, who could resist this slice of heaven. The property has old-world charm but with a spacious modern interior. The large windows allow plenty of light within and the kitchen is a definite focal point. With five bedrooms and four bathrooms, there is plenty of room for family and guests. The location is surrounded by villages and towns, most notably medieval Cordes-sur-Ciel and Albi, a Unesco World Heritage Site. But for me, the *pièce de résistance* would be sitting by the saltwater pool, looking out onto the vineyards, whilst sipping on a glass of sparkling Gaillac Mousseux.
Ref: 694325 (Wheeler Property)
David Eachus, Art and Production Director











Having just returned from a holiday in France, which included several wine and champagne tastings, my thoughts have turned to the possibility of owning a wine estate myself! This extensive property in the Luberon in Provence includes a gorgeous manor house, several gîtes and numerous outbuildings, making it perfect for a wine tourism project or private stays. The house sits on a 2ha park around the house overlooking a 12ha vineyard (including 9ha classified as AOC Ventoux and 3ha VDP IG, with new plantings), a 5ha orchard combining sour cherry and almond trees, as well as 9ha of arable land dedicated to cereals and meadows.
Ref: 694715 (Beaux Villages)
Emma Kestin, Advertising Manager



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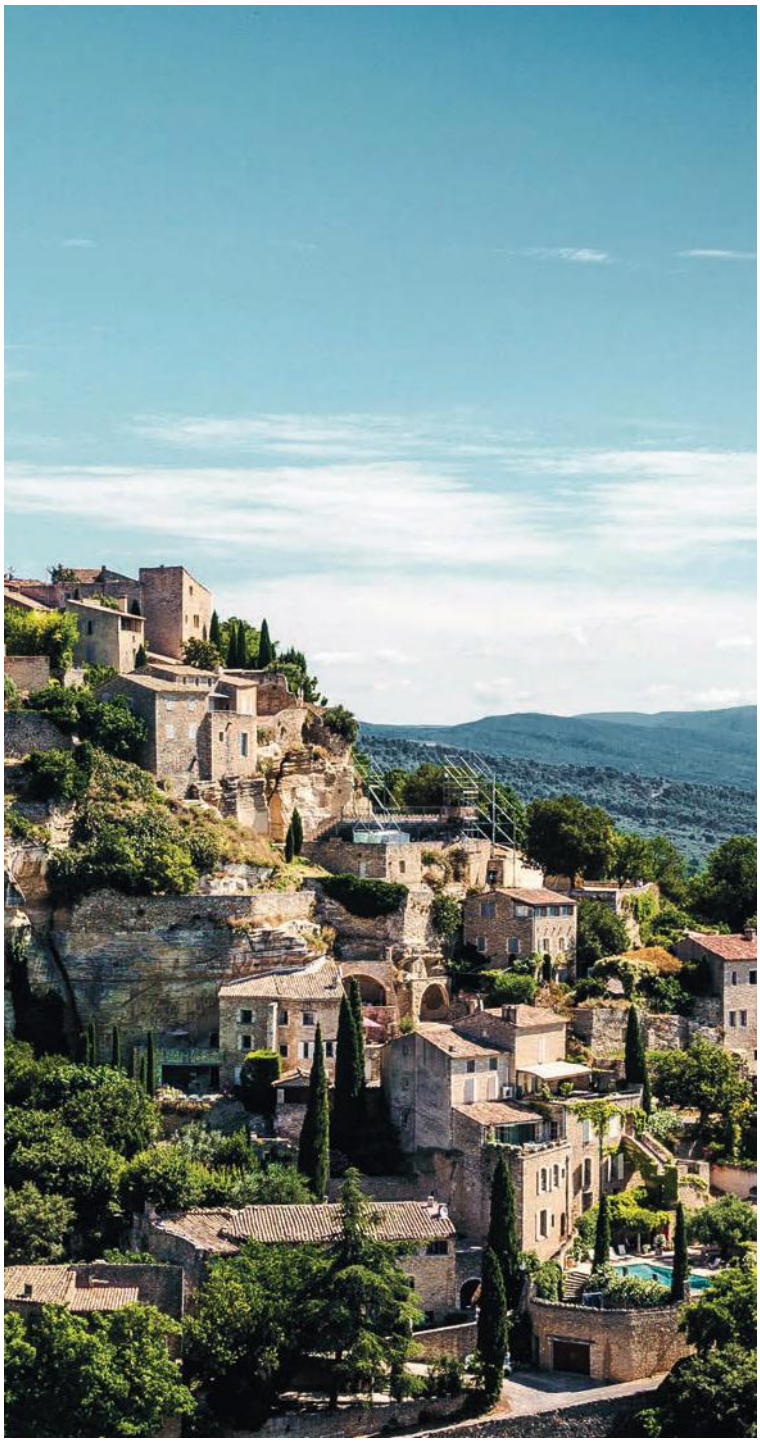
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"The tower sitting within such a beautifully landscaped garden, complete with a pool, makes this property genuinely special..."



SAYS **DAN BREWER**

Every now and then, a house comes along that reminds you why so many of us dream of owning a home in France. This beautiful 18th-century stone house, tucked away in one of those enchanting villages where honey-coloured buildings line winding lanes, is exactly that sort of place.

What I love most is that it feels wonderfully authentic without asking you to compromise on comfort. The current owners have clearly understood that the best renovations don't erase history - they celebrate it. Original stone walls, fireplaces, a graceful staircase and character at every turn have all been lovingly preserved, while the house offers the sort of practical, welcoming spaces that make everyday living effortless.

Then there's the setting. The quiet village in Lot is quintessential rural France, the kind of place where life slows to the rhythm of the seasons. Yet it's the garden that truly stole my heart. Crossing through the wrought-iron gate feels like discovering a secret. Mature planting, peaceful corners and views across the surrounding countryside create a wonderfully private escape. And then comes the surprise...

The magnificent round stone tower standing proudly beside the swimming pool is simply magical. Towers are rare enough, but to find one sitting within such a beautifully landscaped garden, complete with a pool that blends so naturally into its surroundings, makes this property genuinely special. Swimming pools in village properties are a luxury in themselves; finding one paired with such history and charm is rarer still.

This is the sort of home where long lunches drift into warm evenings, where the sound of church bells replaces traffic, and where every window reminds you that you've finally found the France you've always imagined. It's not just a house - it feels like the beginning of a wonderful new chapter. ■

***Daniel Brewer* is the Director of Healey Fox**
healeyfox.com

That tiny detail in your French property purchase could cost you thousands

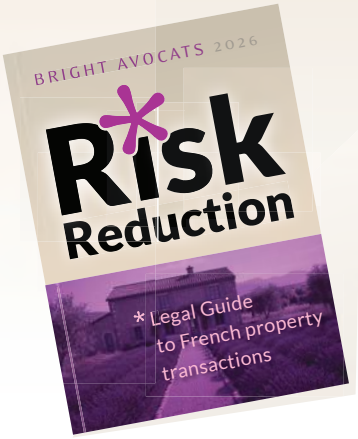
After 25 years unravelling poorly prepared French property purchases, we've seen how often problems come from details buyers didn't know to question.

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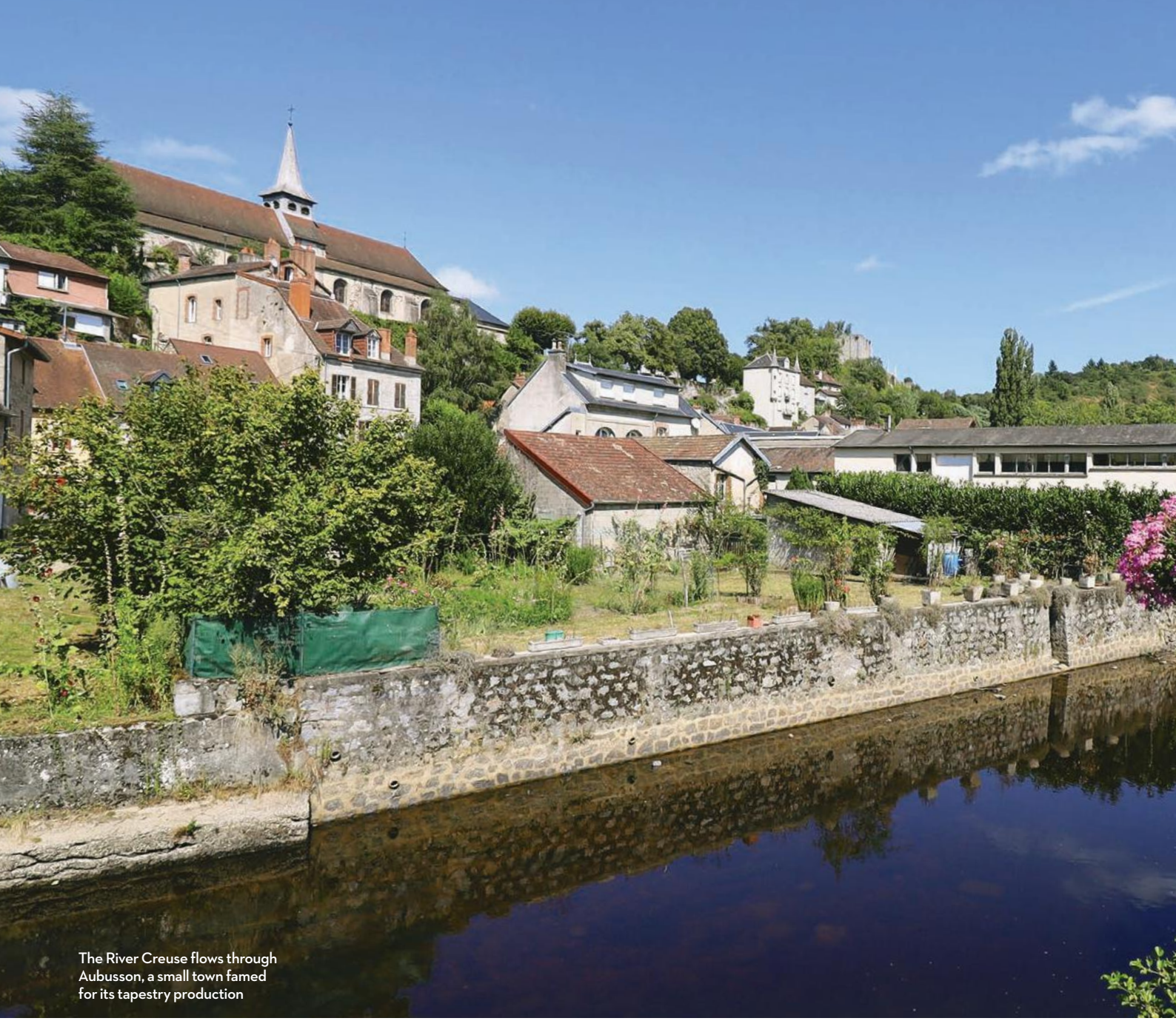
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The River Creuse flows through Aubusson, a small town famed for its tapestry production

Creuse control



On the edge of the Massif Central mountains, Creuse is one of France's most rural areas – with its low population density, it's ideal if you love nature and are looking for a quiet spot in France, says **Annaliza Davis**



Named after the river that winds through the spacious landscape, Creuse is primarily a land of space and silence that sits about four hours south of Paris. It is the second-least-populated department in mainland France, with around 115,500 inhabitants and a population density of just over 20 people per square kilometre, compared to the national average of 121/km². Its capital, Guéret, is a modest town that only has about 12,000 residents, meaning there are no major sprawling cities here, just small medieval towns, hamlets and villages.

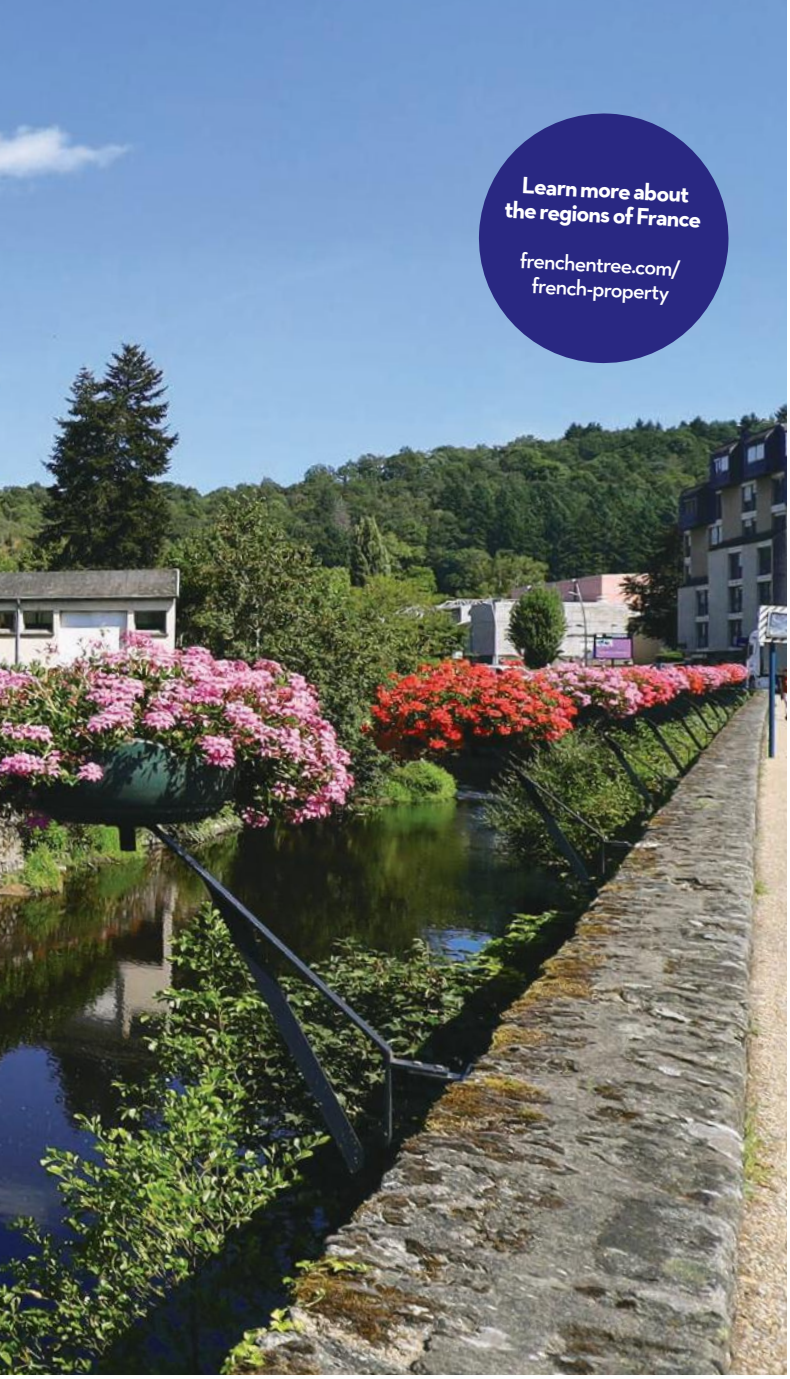
Sitting within the region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Creuse has landscapes of steep valleys and dense forests, and an impressive natural regional park of protected wetlands, lakes and rivers called the Plateau de Millevaches, which you might take as a visual summary of the area.

Given its wealth of natural resources, Creuse also attracts a lot of eco-tourism, mostly centred around the 1,000-hectare Lac de Vassivière, one of the largest artificial lakes in France and a haven for anyone who loves watersports.

As for the climate, it's generally oceanic, offering pleasant summers with highs of around 24°C, although the forests, lakes and rivers can make it humid, while the mercury during heatwaves can reach 39°C and above. Winters are a stark contrast – especially if you're closer to the Massif Central, with lows of 6°C and freezing temperatures at night – and it gets plenty of rain, which explains the lush greenery.

Property-wise, Creuse is famous for being one of the most affordable areas in the

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frenchentree.com/french-property



Sénatorerie Park in the heart of Guéret, capital of Creuse

FOOD AND DRINK

This is the land of rustic, comforting, unpretentious recipes that come from Creuse's high-quality produce. This region is famous for its world-class Limousin and Charolais cattle, so you'll see plenty of beef dishes, alongside a classic potato pie or fondue and various specialities featuring mushrooms, chestnuts and hazelnuts.

Creuse doesn't have the climate or the soil to produce wine, but it compensates splendidly with artisanal beers and liqueurs made from sweet chestnut or walnuts, which are sometimes drizzled over their local sweet treat, Gâteau Creusois. Forget the fussy two-tier concoctions in elegant pâtisseries: Creuse has created its own sweet treat that is a suitable reflection of the region's lack of pretension.



Gâteau Creusois (pictured left) is a moist, golden cake made with ground hazelnuts, flour, egg whites, butter, and caster sugar, crisp on the outside and soft in the centre. To be sold under the official label, the cake must be made by a registered baker who belongs to the recognised association and who follows the traditional recipe to the letter.

You might also hear of the cake's legendary history. Locals will tell you that the recipe was said to be lost in time until 1969 when an ancient parchment from the 1400s was unearthed during renovations of an old monastery in La Mazière-aux-Bons-Hommes. Written in old French, the recipe was translated and went on to become a regional star.



The department's world-class Limousin cattle breed

"Creuse can be a perfect location for a bargain, whether that's for a renovation opportunity, a modest village house or a holiday home"

country, and there are usually more homes for sale than there are buyers. If you're happy to live in a peaceful rural setting, Creuse can be a perfect location for a bargain, whether that's for a renovation opportunity, a modest village house or a quiet holiday home.

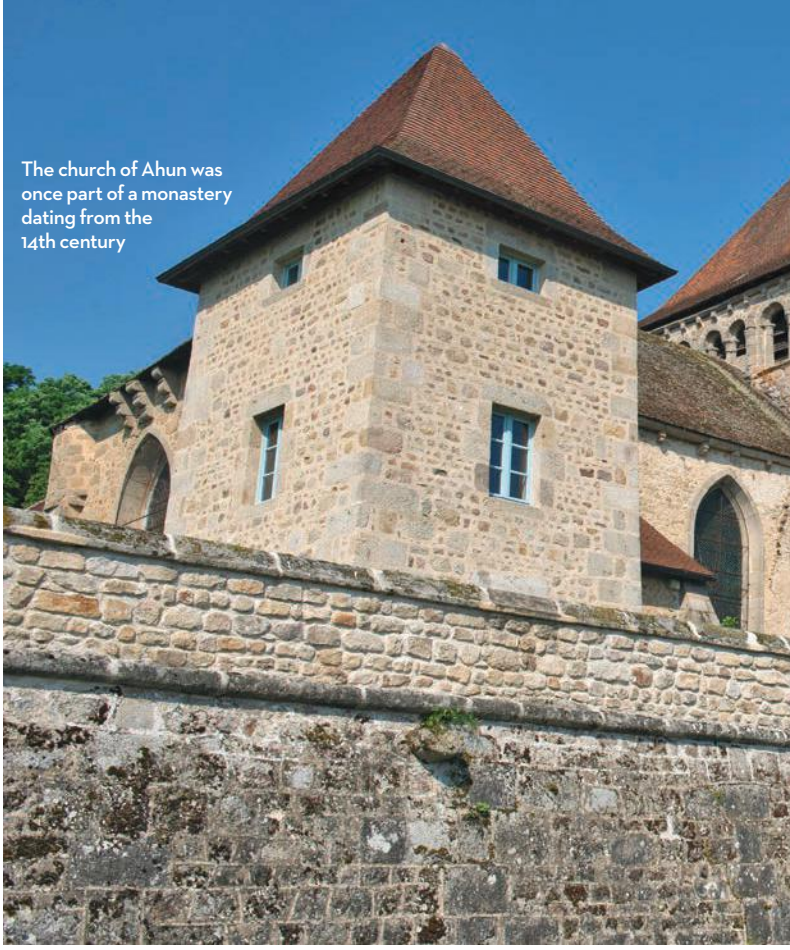
MATCH THE PLACE TO YOUR POCKET

Market data from Meilleurs Agents and SeLoger confirms that property in Creuse is excellent value for money: while the national average is currently at €3,140 per square metre, prices in Creuse are around €1,019/m². This means that you can find detached village houses needing little more than a cosmetic update for less than €100,000 and large farmhouses with plenty of land from just €130,000.

With most regions, there are hotspots around certain cities or geographical features that push up the prices, but even the more expensive parts of Creuse only cost a little more:



Eco-tourism hotspot: Lac de Vassivière, one of France's largest artificial lakes



The church of Ahun was once part of a monastery dating from the 14th century

the hotspots around Guéret or Royère-de-Vassivières fetch around €1,300/m², which still comes in at well under half the national average.

LOCATION: WHERE TO FIND WHAT YOU WANT

The area's capital since 1790, Guéret is located centrally within Creuse, just off the N145 dual carriageway, between Limoges and Montluçon. It is a modest town of 12,814 residents, within easy reach of the Guéret Hills and Chabrière forest, perfect for anyone who loves outdoor activities such as mountain-biking or hiking, and it has several tourist attractions, as well as a year-round programme of live music and cultural events. Although it's the administrative hub of Creuse, properties are still extremely affordable, averaging €1,108/m². In real terms, you can get a detached, four-bedroom home for €159,000, three-bedroom family homes for €125,000 and a two-bedroom, 70m² apartment in the centre for €58,000.

For ease of access, head to La Souterraine (population 4,928), popular for its direct train connection to Paris and location on the crossroads of the A20 and the N145. This historic town has a wealth of heritage, a river running through the centre, a five-hectare lake and medieval remains in nearby Bridiers. Properties here are cheaper than in Guéret, at €849/m², so you can get a two-bedroom townhouse for under €65,000, a detached three-bedroom family home for €95,000 or a grand, six-bedroom detached property for €250,000.

On the edge of the Millevaches Regional Nature Park, Aubusson is a small town of 3,108 residents, dominated by a multicoloured building that houses the tapestry museum. Aubusson has produced tapestry since the 1400s, and its history is clear from the timbered buildings and cobbled streets to its Art Deco town hall. It's a great choice if you have a small budget, as houses average just €723/m², so a three-bedroom home in need of updating costs under €80,000 while a budget of €100,000 could buy a period '*maison de maître*' property with front and back courtyard, or a fully renovated and modernised townhouse.

One of the hotspots in Creuse is the lakeside village of Royère-de-Vassivière (population 572) in the southwest of the department. Ideal for water babies, it boasts two lakes complete with 'beaches', two rivers and watersports centres. It's also a cultural hub with a sculpture park and modern-art centre, and its natural sites include moorland and the Chassagnas Peninsula. Properties here sell for an average of €1,326/m², so a modest 33m² lakeside apartment with one bedroom can fetch €130,000. But away from the lake, a detached stone house with three bedrooms and generous garden might cost just €110,000.

If you're looking for a low-budget purchase, you can search across the whole of Creuse, as there are properties for under €25,000 in various areas, including empty barns, neglected village homes, townhouses to renovate or tumbledown buildings set

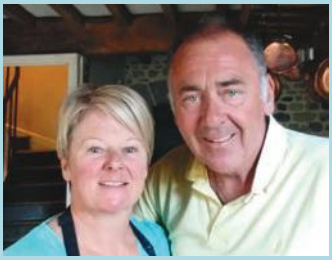


Château de Boussac stands on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Creuse valley





WHY WE MOVED HERE



Nichola and Roy Legge moved to Creuse in November 2025 to run a B&B business named after their cat, Monsieur Morgan.

"This area is so green, like Ireland, with lush grass and lots of healthy cattle in the fields. We were surprised how cold it got in winter, so we quickly learned to stock up on supplies in case we get snowed in, although it is lovely to sit at home in front of a roaring fire with nothing to do other than enjoy delicious French wine and cheese!

"The people have been wonderful, not only in the village of Féniers, but also in the nearby towns; they have been supportive and welcoming. We arrived not knowing where to go for fuel, firewood or amenities and the locals are always willing to help their neighbours. We don't know what we'd have done without them."

© SHUTTERSTOCK




The medieval abbey of Ste-Valerie in the Plus Beaux Village Chambon-sur-Voueize


La Souterraine is a historic town with good train links to Paris

Property types


Properties in the Creuse department are often built from the local stone, such as this renovated farmhouse (€291,500, *propertyinfrance.com*)

Architecture in Creuse is deeply tied to its geography, featuring heavy use of the region's natural local granite and steep, slate or terracotta-tiled roofs designed to handle winter weather.

Longère

A long, single-storey farm building, made of stone, longères are found across rural parts of western France. Historically, the family lived at one end, and their livestock or crops occupied the other. They're popular with buyers looking for open-plan living spaces with period features such as exposed beams. A renovation project starts at €35,000, a two-bedroom longère with 8,000m² of land costs about €150,000 and a lakeside longère with three bedrooms will be €250,000.

Pavillon

You'll find lots of pavillons (pah-vee-yon) in Creuse, often with a garage and store room on the ground floor and steps leading to the upper-storey living areas both outside and from the garage. Typically built from the 1960s onwards, they are often found in small estates or lotissements. A three-bedroom pavillon starts at €75,000, while a two-bedroom version in the centre of Guéret costs around €130,000.

Maison de bourg

Throughout Creuse, you'll find these tall townhouses that are either semi-detached or within a row, lining the streets of ancient market towns like Felletin or Boussac. Rather than large gardens, they tend to have just a small courtyard, making them ideal as a lock-up-and-leave holiday home, and they are often within walking distance of local bakeries and a bar-tabac. A budget of €35,000 buys you a townhouse in need of renovation, while a two-bedroom ready-to-move-into version costs €45,000.

Fermettes

With agriculture the backbone of the economy, Creuse has many fermettes – small, historic farmhouses. A small one-bedroom farm building can cost just €30,000, while a barn conversion with its own garden comes in at under €100,000. A sprawling farmstead with main house, several stone outbuildings and at least 8,000m² of land suitable for homesteading, will be about €200,000.

Demeures and domaines

This is not an area known for châteaux, but you will find elegant estates known as demeures or domaines. These can be grand manor houses, old watermills or upper-class farms with lots of land, private woods, outbuildings and even river access. A budget of €400,000 in Creuse will get you a period property – perhaps with a pool or turret and some land – or a manor house in landscaped grounds.



The atmospheric ruins of the medieval fortress of Crozant in Creuse

within acres of woodland and pasture. As with all renovation projects, you need to check for any restrictions such as your dream home being a listed property. You also need to be realistic about costs, because in Creuse it might make more financial sense to buy a property ready to move into.

As for building plots, a €50,000 budget would buy an incredible 5,000m² in La Souterraine or in Ahun (between Guéret and Aubusson), but be sure to check that the plot is indeed *constructible* as there are many plots in Creuse sold only as 'leisure land', where you can go camping or fishing but cannot build any type of structure.

TRANSPORT

Located some 400km south of Paris, Creuse is fairly accessible: its capital Guéret is a four-and-a-half-hour drive from the capital (including toll roads) and two hours east of Poitiers.

If you're likely to travel by train, La Souterraine is a better bet: it's three hours 40 minutes from Paris by car, and the same by train (Gare d'Austerlitz), thanks to the direct links, whereas Guéret by would be at least another 90 minutes.

The nearest international airport is located in Limoges, with Clermont-Ferrand offering domestic flights, as well as services to a few European destinations.

EMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY

As Creuse is largely rural, it has suffered from an exodus of young people seeking work in cities, so it has an aging population, with 28% of residents aged over 65. However, it has surprisingly low levels of unemployment at 7%, compared to France's average, which is 7.9%.

Forestry and agriculture – particularly beef farming – are vital here, employing 12% of the local workforce, but the biggest employer is the public sector, and services such as healthcare, social assistance and public administration, represent 47% of total employment. As for start-ups, Creuse records 94 business creations per 10,000 inhabitants (below the national average of 141 per 10,000) and these tend to be sole traders and freelancers rather than SMEs. ■

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WHAT THE AGENTS SAY...



A Creuse native, Isabelle Cortot has spent 20 years in the property market.

"Creuse remains one of the least expensive areas in France, where you can still find beautiful properties at very attractive prices. It has charming villages and hamlets, unspoilt natural landscapes such as Lac de Vassivière and a tranquillity that attracts people seeking a change of lifestyle.

"Secluded properties with land and no immediate neighbours are among the most sought-after; and in my opinion, the best value for money here is found in country houses in need of renovation. Buyers can find everything from tiny stone houses to ready-to-move-into homes and even manor houses, depending on their preferences and budget." ***iza-imo.fr***

On the market



UNDER €100,000

Cottage with project

Beautifully restored, this cottage located near La Souterraine has three bedrooms, lots of period features and a garden, as well as a detached renovation project for the next owner to get stuck into.

€72,000

(Property in France, ref: MS-5078)



€100,000-€200,000

Home and gîte

This traditional 195m² stone cottage has rural views and over 8,000m² of land, but is just 15 minutes from local shops and amenities. Adjoining the house is a two-storey barn and there's a one-bedroom gîte for guests.

€159,750

(Property in France, ref MS-5127)



€200,000-€350,000

Farmhouse business

Set within 2.5ha of meadow and woodland, this farmhouse has been transformed into a family home. It comes with two barns, a second property to renovate, plus a guest cottage and glamping pods. Fantastic opportunity in a beautiful setting.

€320,000

(Property in France, ref BVI80054)



€350,000-€500,000

Historic home

Dating from the 1400s, this property comprises two large buildings with seven bedrooms, a private chapel, an additional three-bedroom house for potential income, walled garden and courtyard, plus a garage. Located in picturesque Boussac.

€413,500

(Property in France, ref BVI73449)



€500,000-€1M

Country estate

Located between La Souterraine and Bourganeuf, this rural property has its own 2.5ha carp-fishing lake, over 22ha of pasture and woodland, plus outbuildings. The two cottages have been superbly renovated with original features and have rural views.

€770,000

(Property in France, ref AM-5112)



OVER €1M

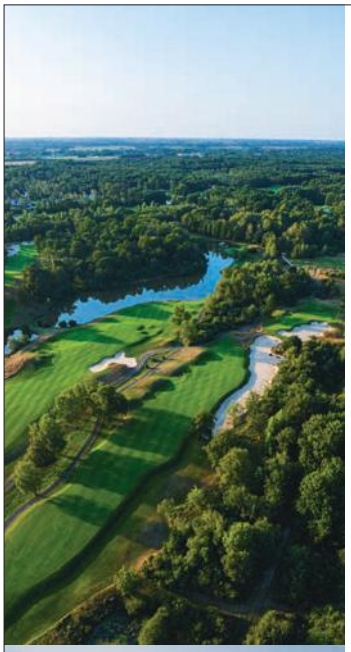
Château life

The 15th-century Château de St-Maixant has many authentic period features such as exposed stone, beams and panelling, plus two apartments, a cinema, a pool and spa. The property sits in an estate of over 12.5ha with a well-stocked lake and helipad.

€5,250,000

(Property in France, ref BVI72270)

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Volunteers at Riviera Lifeline charity

All for a good cause

Gillian Harvey meets the expats who run charities in France

WE OFFER A LIFELINE TO THOSE IN NEED



Former nurse Deborah Cortey moved to France from Brighton in 1980 with her French husband, Adrien, who worked in aeronautics. "At the time I didn't speak a word of French. Initially, we lived in Geneva, on the French side. But I wasn't particularly happy there."

The pair moved to Bouyon on the French Riviera a few years later "and it was as if someone turned the colour back on in life. It's more multicultural and easygoing," says Deborah.

When Deborah's mother died in 1982 aged 62, much of the care for her father fell to her brother and sister-in-law, Simon and Judy, in Sussex. "I'd pop over, but I wasn't able to be very hands on."

As she hadn't been able to help with the care of her elderly father, Deborah wondered if there was another way to give something back. She briefly volunteered for a caring organisation and then, in 2003, set up Riviera Lifeline, an organisation that helps vulnerable elderly people living in the local community, particularly those who don't have the skills or knowledge to access local services.



Deborah at the Riviera Lifeline charity HQ with volunteer Shirley Wrigglesworth

"Many come to live here from overseas in their 30s, but later in life their partner may have died, the money has run out, or they're lonely and isolated. People fall through the loopholes. That's when we roll our sleeves up and get stuck in."

Riviera Lifeline provides important support to those in need, helping older people to stay in their home, have in-home support, and become part of a wider community. This can involve anything from

© RIVIERA LIFELINE

arranging care, covering rent, or helping with paperwork to meeting up with an isolated person for a cup of coffee. "Volunteers might help them with meals, do a little shopping or simply meet up for coffee – it all makes a difference."

The charity also works with local authorities that can point them in the direction of someone in need. "The police and *pompiers* are fabulous," says Deborah. "We get cases referred by doctors, the church, other charities and organisations."

One of the highlights of Riviera Lifeline's work for Deborah is a monthly meal they hold for members. "We provide a lunch for a €6 donation. They have a jolly good homecooked meal, wine and chat in a very nice setting, and a day out. It's rewarding to see the happy faces when people enjoy the lunch."

Deborah's role in running Riviera Lifeline sometimes means working seven days a week, particularly in the winter months. But she's found the work rewarding in more ways than one. "When Adrien died in 2024, I was able to show up and do what I've always done. I probably need the association as much as they need me.

"Anybody can get involved in helping others. No matter what you are doing, you're changing someone's life for the better."

rivieralifeline.org

WE SHARE OUR GARDENS AND RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY



When Sue and Mick Lambert bought their French house in 2004, it was with the intention of using it as a holiday home. But having spent several holidays in Creuse, they decided to make the move full time. "We loved it so much here," explains Sue.

At the time, having run a children's day nursery in Hampshire for 20 years, the pair were able to take early retirement, and leaving behind a six-day working week meant they were more than ready for a break. "We were only 54 and 52, so were very fortunate."

While their new property was small, it came with a huge garden; a field of 2,600 square metres. "I decided I wanted to create a proper garden in the field, and began by digging a vegetable patch on a portion of the land. I've since developed it naturally into sections, including a spring garden, autumn garden, a bit of a forest, a rose garden and a memory garden for my son Tom who passed away in 2010 aged 34."



"Open-garden events raise money for children and young adults with serious illnesses"

A few years after moving, Sue started a French conversation group once a week in a local café. There, she met Lynn, a garden opener and coordinator for Open Gardens. The British-run organisation encourages members to participate in open-garden events each year, to raise money for children and young adults with serious illnesses or disabilities.

"In 2017, I decided to open our garden; I live in a small hamlet, and another resident – a Parisian – asked me if she could join in. Then a couple who own a farm in the hamlet opened their large terrace. It's since become an annual event with people coming, exploring the gardens and sitting having refreshments."

Sue then attended the AGM held at the *mairie* in Vareilles that same year, with Lynn and her husband Tim. There, she met the founder Mick



From top: Sue and Mick's garden; Open Garden volunteers at an afternoon tea event

©OPEN GARDENS



Moates, who was looking for volunteers. Sue joined the *conseil* and was soon asked to be garden development manager - a person tasked to meet gardeners and garner more interest.

And in 2023, Sue became president of the organisation, with husband Mick taking on the job of treasurer. "My job is to lead the team into the future, to continue to get more people interested and opening their gardens," she says. "The organisation has its roots in Creuse, but is now France-wide.

"I love the conviviality of the charity and that we encourage people to garden, which is good for both physical and mental health. We raise money for such an important cause - the organisation has donated €198,000 to good causes."

Having moved to France in order to retire, heading up a large organisation - albeit on a voluntary basis - has given Sue a rather more active life than she'd anticipated. But while she hopes to retire in a few years, she finds the work more than rewarding. "I do work every single day, in one form or another, probably half a day particularly through the working week. But I do it because I enjoy and believe in the whole philosophy of open gardens."

opengardens.eu





Above: Hannah's family (David and Lizzie on the right); artist Lizzie creates stained-glass sunflowers; some of the childrens' books bought by the charity

HANNAH'S MEMORY LIVES ON WITH EVERY BOOK



When the Jones family moved to France in 1996 it was meant to be temporary, however, they all fell in love with the country and decided to make a permanent move. "David, who works as an electronics engineering consultant, was sent over to Quimper in Brittany to work for a year. At the time we had three children and we all loved it. We came back convinced we wanted to make France our home."

The family finally moved out in 2004, choosing a new location in the southwest, and now with seven children in tow. "All of the children had idyllic childhoods and really thrived here," says mum Lizzie.

However, then came a tragic accident. "Hannah [left] had been training to be a teacher. Even as a child she'd always loved books and loved reading to her younger siblings. Sadly, before she could reach her full potential, she was killed in a car crash, in July 2025, aged just 24."

As the family came to terms with her death, they realised they wanted to do something to celebrate her life and the sort of woman she'd been. "We wanted to create a lasting legacy in her name, so *Les Histoires d'Hannah* was born," says Lizzie.

Creating the non-profit association was easier than the family had expected: "We had to provide a list of founding members, which was all eight of us, and give our individual roles: president, treasurer, secretary etc. We had to hold our first general meeting and provide minutes. And we had to create a constitution."

The association, which began life in September 2025, gives away books to children in local schools, children whose lives Hannah might have touched had things turned out differently. They hope to grow the charity's reach further, keeping Hannah's memory and love of reading alive.

"I'm a glass artist and create stained and fused glass. The first day I returned to my studio after she died, I wasn't sure I was up to doing much. But I made a little sunflower on a glass square. I thought maybe I could sell a few for the charity - and ended up selling over 300."

Since this time, members of the family have taken different initiatives to raise money for the fund, including a Christmas carol concert, an artisans' market and a sponsored walk, working together to support each other. "All of us are involved. Everything we've done, we've agreed on. We make sure everyone is happy."

The first set of books was donated to the school in Le Ségur, Tarn, where Hannah was a pupil and spent some of her teacher training in May 2023. The organisation has already raised enough money to donate over 500 brand-new, specially selected books throughout the region, spreading Hannah's message and joy in the written word to a wider audience.

"Hannah's Stories was created so that her passion for education through reading could continue, and her memory lives on through every book offered." ■

"Hannah's Stories was created so that her passion for education through reading could continue"

© HANNAH'S STORIES

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Le Negresco hotel in Nice on the Belle Époque Promenade des Anglais

The beautiful era

Some periods of history stand out as being special – **Joanna Leggett** looks back enviously at the Belle Époque, when life was full of optimism, fun and energy

Think of the Swinging Sixties – noted in France for moody songs and *yé-yé* singers – when imported Tamla Motown and mini-skirts ruled. Before that, after World War One, flappers and *flaneurs* celebrated the Roaring Twenties (*les années folles* in French, the American Jazz Age). More recently, there were the excesses of the Eighties when big shoulder pads and even bigger hair, loaded with copious amounts of hairspray, ruled.

However, the era that arguably beat them all was way back in the 19th century: la Belle Époque. It lasted the longest and was a time when art and architecture, fashion and folly joined in a glorious fusion of *joie de vivre*; a time when new ideas, optimism and creativity abounded. It started in 1871, fresh off the back of the Franco-Prussian War. Napoleon III had lost his throne, was exiled and the Third Republic took power. The Belle Époque continued until August 1914 when, with the start of the First World War, everything changed forever.

LIFE IS GOOD

The Belle Époque was a period characterised by optimism, regional peace, technological innovation with railways opening up France, colonial expansion and a period of stability. French Imperialism was in its prime, and the 1889 World Fair in Paris was a highlight – marking the centenary of the French Revolution. It stimulated the economy and created Paris's most recognised landmark, the Eiffel Tower – originally designed to be temporary.

The Impressionists painted and industrialists made money, creating a new social class: the *nouveau riche*. Haussmann's renovations had already changed housing, creating walkable neighbourhoods in Paris, so new entertainment was required – the Palais Garnier flourished, as did the Casino de Paris, then the Moulin Rouge entered the fray, providing risqué shows. In addition restaurants and brasseries with bars flourished – with going out and travel becoming the norm – and culture never looked back.

Then there was fashion. Newly minted ambitious American mamas brought their daughters to Paris to be outfitted by Worth and other haute couture designers, spending fortunes on wardrobes in their quest to find titled husbands for their daughters. Many succeeded in propping up dukes, earls and other gentry's estates on both sides of the Channel.

In any period of prosperity, innovation in architecture and design naturally follows, and throughout France there are buildings, châteaux, cities and towns brimming with beautiful buildings dating from the golden age of the Belle Époque.

Art Nouveau dominated design with its curved lines drawing inspiration from nature – just think of the ironwork that makes Paris' metro stations so immediately distinctive. The style spread from Paris throughout France, and was adopted in Brussels, Vienna and Prague across the Continent and even further.

With new technology, styles of building could be expanded and changed, and glasshouses created to grow exotic fruits in winter. These advances meant more glass

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"In any period of prosperity, innovation in architecture and design follows, and throughout France there are towns brimming with beautiful buildings dating from the golden age of the Belle Époque"

could be used in construction. Most notably, perhaps, is the architectural icon which is Galeries Lafayette's fabled store in Paris. Art Nouveau grandeur combined with the latest in modern design innovation was highlighted in its central glass dome, rising 43 metres above the roof in a Neo-Byzantine style that encapsulated the ambition of Belle Époque architecture. Its interior was further enhanced by gilded ironwork on balconies, marble galleries surmounted by delicate filigree - even today it's fascinating to visit this beautiful light-filled mecca and just look - you could be forgiven for forgetting to actually buy anything!

GLITTERATI HOTSPOT

Nice has always been one of the most popular towns on the French Riviera. With its wonderful weather and sun-baked Mediterranean beaches, it became the tourist hotspot winter destination for the social glitterati during this period. Belle Époque architecture still rules in some quarters such as Cimiez, and then there's the Promenade des Anglais and Quartier des Musiciens - just look upwards as you promenade through the streets and the curved lines, decorative glass and beautiful balconies are hard to miss - especially in the flamboyant design of the houses of 19th-century winter visitors known locally as *les hivernants*.

Along the Riviera, Beaulieu-sur-Mer is charming, remaining exclusive (read expensive) and steeped in the elegance of the time. Aristocracy and the monied who came here to enjoy mild winters wanted the latest style for their winter homes - exquisite facades, intricate moulding, sculpted pediments with long balconies (enhancing the Haussmann design ethic) reflect the elegance of the period. Large windows created light-filled interiors, and premium materials were, of course, prerequisite.

While many of these properties were originally designed as palaces or grand hotels, some buildings have been reconfigured as luxury apartments with glorious views over the gardens and terraces that line the coast here - with prices to match.

Thanks to expanding rail networks, tourism evolved during this period and the ancient Alpine town of Annecy also became a place to see and be seen, thanks to its glorious setting, hospitality and spas, where visitors could (and still can) benefit from 'treatments'. Its Casino Impérial is considered emblematic of the Art Nouveau building style.

Not for nothing is Biarritz called 'the Pearl of the Atlantic'. Belle Époque was at the heart of design of this and many other elegant resorts, already made popular by visiting royalty including Napoleon III, his Spanish wife Eugenie and Queen Victoria, no less. In Biarritz, the imposing grandeur and façades of hotels constructed during this time, facing the ever-changing Atlantic seascape, make stunning visual impact. Many traditional Art Nouveau villas (albeit with somewhat Basque overtones) still line the coast here and are also dotted around the countryside.

Inland, Pau also became a sought-after resort during this period, when 'the Pearl of the Pyrénées' as it became known became a meeting place for artists, international



Le Train Bleu restaurant at Gare de Lyon, Paris, with its Belle Époque staircase



GRACE AND FAVOUR IN ALLIER

Situated in a charming market town with all amenities, this elegant historic property is in immaculate condition with six ensuite bedrooms, bright reception rooms and an orangery. It has original parquet floors, high ceilings and large windows. The garden surrounds the house, with a large terrace overlooking the swimming pool. Historic villages dot the surrounding countryside and nearby Tronçais forest is great for walking and cycling. The nearest train station is Montluçon.



MINERVOIS VILLAGE SETTING

This maison de maître, close to Narbonne, could make the perfect boutique chambres d'hôtes. With its grand entrance hall, majestic staircase and stunning floors, it enchants at first sight. The large reception rooms are flooded with natural light, on the first floor are four elegant ensuite bedrooms, with five more upstairs offering scope to extend the accommodation. Outside, the private walled garden with swimming pool provides a tranquil oasis. Within walking distance of all amenities, it offers great lifestyle with income potential.



Belle Époque townhouse facades can be seen in Mers-les-Bains, Normandy

aristocracy (especially English and wealthy Americans) who recognised the therapeutic benefits of its climate and revelled in the grandiose palaces and activities. The city grew and the foreign colony left a lasting mark on its landscape, still appreciated today.

In Paris, and around France, the train stations picked up and ran with Art Nouveau architecture too. The Musée d'Orsay on the Left Bank, now rammed full of Impressionist masterpieces (and my absolute favourite museum of all time), started its life as a station, opening in 1900, designed to transport visitors to the expositions in central Paris. Light-filled and with massive glass roofs, it's truly a masterpiece in itself.

AN INSPIRATIONAL TIME

The Belle Époque was the inspiration for many an architectural treasure. While capturing the beauty of the era, the charming film *Gigi* epitomises its elegance and charm. With luscious costumes, settings and music, it showed the era and Paris to its best advantage, the characters enjoying visits to the Bois de Boulogne and daily excursions, promenading in their carriages.

It also highlighted two other seaside resorts which flowered during this time - Deauville and Trouville on the Normandy coast - which continue to retain the elegance and charm of yesteryear, thankfully today coupled with the conveniences of the 21st century. ■

***Joanna Leggett** is the Marketing Director at Leggett Immobilier – view the portfolio of properties for sale in France at leggettfrance.com*

A GEM IN GERS

With superb views of the Pyrénées, this stunning maison de maître was built in 1872 for a family member of the owners of the nearby château. Its architectural integrity has been retained and it still has many beautiful original features including stained glass. Offering generous living spaces, four of the six bedrooms are ensuite. Outside, wonderfully planted gardens wrap around the house and large swimming pool.



€523,000



€145,000

RIVERSIDE IN RIBERAC

Located in the bustling but small market town of Ribérac in northwest Dordogne, this two-bedroom townhouse with large terraced garden has direct access to watersports on the River Dronne. Well maintained, with double glazing throughout, the property has a garage, parking, generous living space and a large elevated terrace with conservatory potential.



€476,000

NORMAN ELEGANCE

Nestled in a peaceful setting in the Belle Époque thermal resort of Bagnoles de l'Orne, this elegant four/five-bedroom home lies within easy reach of the lake, casino, restaurants and all amenities. Well maintained, it would make a perfect family/holiday home or rental property. Designed for entertaining, with generous living spaces including a spacious conservatory with panoramic views over the garden.

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Ref. 4861: Country House in the heart of the Charente countryside. Energy class: E. Climate class: C. Price: €980,000



Ref. 4788: 19th-C. Property with outbuildings, in Southern Burgundy. Energy class: D. Climate class: D. Price: €1,595,000



Ref. 4845: Castle complex set within a moat, in Cher department. Energy class: E. Climate class: E. Price: €935,000



Ref. 4827: 19th-C. Noble Dwelling on the outskirts of Moulins (Allier department). Energy class: E. Climate class: E. Price: €845,000



Ref. 4839: Little Manor House on the banks of a canal in Morbihan. Energy class: D. Climate class: D. Price: €609,000



Ref. 4803: 19th C. Château near Laval, in Mayenne department. Energy class: D. Climate class: B. Price: €795,000



Ref. 4853: 19th-C. Mansion in the « Little Tuscany » of Charente. Energy class: D. Climate class: D. Price: €875,000



Ref. 4821: 19th-C. Château in Loire-Atlantique department. Energy class: C. Climate class: A. Price: €798,000

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Colourful oyster huts in Château-d'Oléron, Charente-Maritime

© SHUTTERSTOCK

A taste of the southwest

Food is very important to the French, and nowhere more so than in the southwest – **Eleanor Hewitt-Coleman** takes us on a tour of the tastiest the region has to offer

One of the things that surprises many people who move to southwest France is how much importance is given to food. Here, lunch is still a proper pause in the day, markets remain social occasions and meals are rarely rushed. Food shapes the rhythm of life in a way that newcomers often find both surprising and deeply appealing.

Throughout summer, village squares across the southwest host *marchés gourmands*, evening food markets where locals gather around communal tables to eat, drink and socialise long after sunset. For many of those new to France, these evenings perfectly capture what makes life here so attractive.

From oyster farms along the Atlantic coast to truffle hunters in the Dordogne, fruit growers in Lot-et-Garonne and cassoulet makers around Toulouse, every corner of the southwest has its own culinary traditions. What unites them is a shared belief that good food deserves time, attention and company. Spend long enough here and habits begin to change. Shopping becomes a pleasure rather than a chore, meals stretch a little longer and the seasons are marked by what's at the market.

WHERE FOOD FOLLOWS THE TIDE

In Charente and Charente-Maritime, food is shaped by two things: the ocean and an unhurried approach to life. Along the Atlantic coast, oyster farming remains more than an industry; it is part of the local identity. Around Marennes and Oléron, generations have worked the oyster beds, and it is perfectly normal to buy oysters direct from local producers. It is not unusual to see locals leaving a roadside oyster shack with a dozen oysters and a bottle of white wine before heading home for lunch. Seafood rarely travels far before reaching the plate.

Away from the oyster beds, food in Charente is as much about hospitality as it is about flavour. Summer brings the unmistakable scent of Charentaise melons, while family recipes for pâtés, *charcuterie* and preserves continue to appear on tables across the region. In many households, visitors are still welcomed with a small glass of Pineau des Charentes before a meal. Refusing isn't considered rude, but you'll often find yourself being gently persuaded to have 'just a little one'.

The local cuisine reflects a philosophy found throughout the southwest: when an ingredient is good, the goal is not to transform it, but to let it shine. *Cagouilles à la Charentaise*, snails cooked gently with garlic, tomato and white wine, may surprise newcomers, yet they embody the region's approach perfectly.

Simple ingredients, local traditions and recipes that have stood the test of time define the region's cooking. There's a quiet confidence to food. Nothing feels designed to impress. Instead, it reflects a way of life that values quality, seasonality and taking time to enjoy them.

Further south, Dordogne's food culture feels richer, both

literally and figuratively. This is a region where culinary traditions are treated with near-religious devotion and some of its most prized ingredients remain shrouded in secrecy.

A GASTRONOMIC TREASURE HUNT

Nothing illustrates this better than the black truffle. During truffle season, markets hum with quiet anticipation. Buyers arrive early, conversations become discreet and successful hunters guard the locations of productive *truffières* with extraordinary determination.

Locals often joke that people are more willing to reveal their bank balance than the whereabouts of a good truffle patch. Many sites have been passed between families for generations, their locations known only to a trusted few.

Truffles may attract much of the attention, but they are far from the only reason Dordogne has earned its reputation for good eating. Alongside the truffle sits another symbol of the region: duck. *Confit de canard* arrives with crisp golden skin and meat so tender it barely requires a knife. Potatoes cooked in duck fat accompany many meals, unapologetically indulgent and all the better for it. Foie gras remains a staple at family celebrations and festive tables, while walnuts appear everywhere, from cakes and oils to salads and liqueurs.

Lunches accompanied by local Bergerac wines can easily drift into the afternoon, with conversations lingering long after the plates have been cleared. There always seems to be time for another story, another coffee or one last slice of *tarte aux noix* (walnut tart) before anyone thinks about getting up from the table.



Punnets of Gariguette strawberries

THE ORCHARD OF FRANCE

Known as *Le Verger de la France* (the orchard of France), Lot-et-Garonne is one of those places where the seasons are impossible to ignore. Orchards, fruit farms and market gardens shape both the landscape and the local cuisine, ensuring that what appears on the table changes dramatically throughout the year.

Here, the seasons remain visible. Spring brings asparagus and strawberries, particularly the fragrant Gariguette variety. Summer fills markets with cherries, apricots and the famous tomatoes of nearby Marmande. Autumn sees the arrival of apples, hazelnuts and the plums that become the region's celebrated Pruneaux d'Agen. Spend long enough here and you begin to notice how closely daily life still follows the agricultural calendar. Local conversations often revolve around harvests, weather patterns and the quality of the year's fruit crop. Markets evolve through the seasons, rewarding those who shop locally and cook with what is available rather than what is convenient.



Dordogne truffles – black diamonds – being sold on a market stall

The region is also home to one of the southwest's most cherished desserts: *tourtière*. At first glance, it appears simple; yet the creation of its impossibly thin pastry remains a skill admired throughout the region. Traditionally stretched by hand until almost transparent, the pastry is layered around apples, Armagnac brandy and sugar before being baked until crisp and golden. Watching an experienced baker prepare it feels less like cooking and more like witnessing a craft being preserved.

Lot-et-Garonne reminds you that food is not simply consumed here. It is grown, celebrated and deeply connected to the changing seasons. Spend enough time in the area and you'll quickly learn that some things are simply worth waiting for.

WHERE OLD RECIPES LIVE ON

The Vienne is not a department that shouts about its food, which may be one reason it remains such a pleasant surprise. Here, culinary traditions are woven quietly into everyday life, passed down through families rather than promoted on restaurant menus. Many local recipes are still learned by watching rather than reading, shared around kitchen tables rather than written down in cookbooks.

One of the best examples is *farci poitevin*, a savoury dish made with seasonal greens and herbs. Every family seems to have its own version and asking for the recipe does not always guarantee a clear answer. Measurements are often estimated rather than recorded,



VAREN, TARN-ET-GARONNE

This three-bedroom, three-bathroom house has an attractive living room, kitchen-diner, office and a small garden. There are separate owner and guest entrances if required. It's well-situated between St-Antonin and Varen, with easy access to Toulouse by train.



SALEIGNES, CHARENTE-MARITIME

Situated in a quiet village in the Néré area, close to Aulnay Forest, this beautifully renovated three-bedroom house comes with a two-bedroom single-storey annex for guests. Its pretty, walled garden is a haven of peace.



LIMOUX, AUDE

In an elevated position close to the centre of Limoux, this lovely gated villa offers comfort, privacy and far-reaching views across the valley and to the Pyrénées beyond. It has a Mediterranean-style garden, a saltwater swimming pool and a pétanque court.



MONBAZILLAC, DORDOGNE

Built using energy-efficient construction principles, this three-bedroom, three-bathroom home enjoys stunning views, a low-maintenance garden, 12x6m pool, garage and motorhome carport. Close to the vibrant town of Bergerac and its international airport.



Aligot mash, the ultimate hearty indulgence, made using cheese and potatoes

learned by watching parents and grandparents at work. It's the sort of dish that lives in the memory rather than on paper.

The close relationship between food and local identity extends beyond family recipes. Goat farming has long played an important role in the region, giving rise to Chabichou du Poitou, one of France's most celebrated goat cheeses. Small, cylindrical and instantly recognisable, it has been produced here for centuries. Despite its reputation, there is something refreshingly unpretentious about it. It appears on family tables, at village lunches and in picnic baskets with equal ease.

Meanwhile, in Montmorillon, visitors in search of macarons often experience a moment of surprise. Expecting the brightly coloured creations found in Paris, they are instead presented with simple almond biscuits that have been made in the town for generations. It is not uncommon to see people leave with several boxes tucked under their arms, having intended to buy one and somehow leaving with half a dozen.

A SOUTHERN FLOURISH

Towards Toulouse, the Aude and the Aveyron, food takes on a more communal character. As temperatures rise and evenings lengthen, meals naturally move outdoors, often continuing long after the sun has gone down.

In the Aveyron, food remains closely tied to rural traditions. The region's famous *aligot*, made by stretching potatoes and cheese into silky ribbons, is still a fixture at village gatherings and family celebrations. Alongside Roquefort cheese and traditional charcuterie, it reflects a culture where recipes

> *"Good food, local wine – some of life's best moments happen around a shared table"*

are preserved as carefully as family heirlooms and where food continues to bring communities together, whether at village fêtes or around family tables across the region.

Further south, around Toulouse and the Aude, the defining dish is cassoulet, a slow-cooked masterpiece of beans, duck and sausage that inspires fierce regional loyalties. Every town claims its own version as the authentic one and debates over the correct recipe remain a favourite local pastime. Fortunately, sampling several versions for research purposes is generally encouraged. Alongside it, Saucisse de Toulouse delivers a flavour that is unmistakably southwestern: robust, satisfying and designed for sharing.

Yet perhaps the most memorable food experiences in the region take place not in restaurants, but at its famous *marchés gourmands*. Throughout the summer, village squares transform into open-air dining rooms. Producers cook their specialities on-site while neighbours and visitors gather at long communal tables. There are no reservations, no elaborate menus and absolutely no rush to leave.

A glass of Blanquette de Limoux often accompanies the evening, while conversations continue long after darkness falls. For many residents, these gatherings represent the essence of life in the southwest: good food, local wine and the understanding that some of life's best moments happen around a shared table.

A REASON TO STAY

Many people arrive in the southwest dreaming of sunshine, beautiful countryside and a slower pace of life. What often surprises them is how quickly food becomes part of the reason they stay.

Somewhere between a market morning, a long lunch and a summer evening spent at a *marché gourmand*, everyday life begins to feel a little different. Doing the food shop becomes something to look forward to rather than a task to tick off. Meals last a little longer.

Before long, you find yourself measuring the year by the arrival of strawberries, tomatoes, walnuts and truffles rather than by the calendar. And somewhere along the way, the southwest stops being the place you moved to and simply becomes home. ■

***Eleanor Hewitt-Coleman* is on the marketing team at Beaux Villages Immobilier**
beauxvillages.com



€475,000

AUBETERRE-SUR-DRONNE, CHARENTE

Two beautiful houses located at the end of a lane, in open countryside, yet just 2km from Aubeterre-sur-Dronne. With six bedrooms and five bathrooms, pool and outbuildings, they're perfect for income generation or multi-generational living.



€490,000

PÉRIGUEUX, DORDOGNE

Nestled in a private setting in the countryside, between Bergerac and Périgueux, just an hour from Bordeaux, this stone property comprises a five-bedroom main house, three-bedroom guest house, swimming pool, outbuildings, stables and paddocks.



€599,000

VILLENEUVE-SUR-LOT, LOT-ET-GARONNE

Close to the bastide of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, this superb six-bedroom stone house combines authentic charm, generous proportions and modern comfort. It offers views of the surrounding countryside and a superb heated pool.



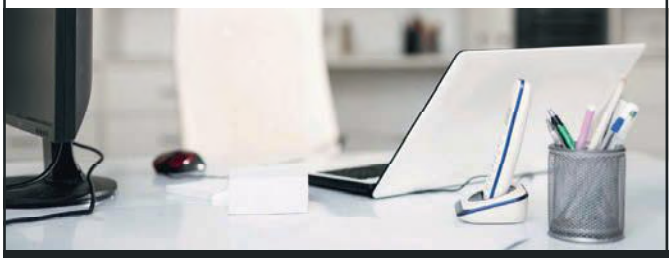
€660,000

MIRANDOL-BOURGNOUNAC, TARN

This pretty six-bedroom, five-bathroom stone house is in a countryside setting, equi-distant from Albi and Rodez. It mixes authentic character with modern comfort, and has far-reaching views, outbuildings, a pool and over 1ha of land.

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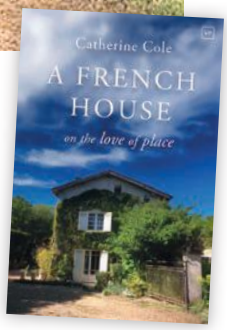
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established in 2002



The photograph of Catherine's house that appeared on the cover of her book (inset)



The dream of a French house

A childhood love of France led author **Catherine Cole** to buy her own home in the Dordogne – and to write a book all about it

Are you thinking of buying a home in France? In 2010, my partner and I bought a house in a small village in the Dordogne. It was the culmination of a longing: a Francophilia, that was set in motion by my childhood reading about France, most significantly by the *Madeline* series by the Austrian-American author, Ludwig Bemelmans. Over the years, this childhood cultural connection grew and matured via French films, literary and language studies and travel.

Perhaps it's no surprise that people like me fall so deeply in love with France. Houses and gardens play a key role in French literature and film. At one point, the French had the highest second-home ownership rate in Europe and these second houses were often the former homes of grandparents or parents kept on as a sentimental family link with places in which the owners had spent idyllic summer holidays as children.

You see it in French films such as those directed by Eric Rohmer or François Ozon. A family arrives at their summerhouse, throws back the shutters, pulls the dust covers off the furniture, sets up the table under the apple trees and spreads a white tablecloth on it as deftly as a cook throws a sheet of marzipan over a cake.



Catherine relaxing with a local rosé

ENDURING LOVE

This love of the French countryside has overtaken Francophiles from dozens of other countries too. "Why not buy a house of our own here?" my partner and I asked on that fateful Saturday in 2010. At the time, we were staying in



The French house of her dreams: flagstones in the kitchen, passed-down furniture and a vase of flowers from the garden

© CATHERINE COLE

"We wanted a house that felt as though a French grandmother had just left it to us"

a rented gîte in the Dordogne, not far from the town of St-Aulaye. We visited the town's estate agent, asking her if she had any houses for sale that we might look at.

I've reflected on that moment a lot over the past 15 years, especially our house selection criteria and how the agent responded to them. We wanted a house that felt as though a French grandmother had just left it to us. After a few houses, lovely but too modern for our taste, she showed us the house we bought. It was owned by two British artists who were heading back to the UK and what made it especially appealing was its authenticity.



Stairs to the attic, which was extended

HOUSE OF DREAMS

The owners had kept the house as French as possible, so much so it perfectly resembled the grandmother's house of my dreams, with a flagged kitchen, old stairs and beams. It also had a lovely garden, an orchard, and a swimming pool as a bonus. We fell in love with it on the spot and made an offer to the shocked owners who'd only had the place on the market for a few days.

Most people take some time to find their dream home in France, but having a clear idea of what we wanted perhaps made our buy less impetuous than it seems. We were only in the area for a few weeks, but already knew the Dordogne well, so had a clear understanding of its attractions. We could get the train from Paris to Angoulême and using a local social media network could engage someone to collect us there and drive us to the house. Being in a village meant there were people who would keep an eye on the place when we weren't there.



As an added bonus, the property came with a secluded swimming pool

The estate agent, no doubt quite astounded at how quickly the house changed hands, was a real help too. She organised all our utilities with the relevant companies and liaised with the *mairie*. She took delivery of some furniture and parcels and even went over to collect a car we'd bought online, driving it to our barn so it was waiting for us when we arrived back in the winter.

THE BIG QUESTION

When I started writing *A French House*, I spent a lot of time reflecting on all the details that led up to and then took us through the purchase, especially what it is that people are looking for when they seek a house in France.

Surveys have shown that this lust for France is largely about participating in French culture, especially village life with its slower pace and cultural activities like fêtes and *vide-greniers*. It's also being in a community that retains so



The house came with a lovely garden as well as an orchard – Catherine says it's the perfect spot to enjoy some peace with a glass of wine after a day in the town

"For many people, this kind of village life feels lost in their home country, and living in France takes them back to more connected times"



many of the values we long for in an increasingly fractured world. People are social and caring, and the local *mairie* keeps an eye on facilities and services. For so many people, this kind of village life feels lost in their home country, and living in France takes them back to more connected times.

CELEBRATING CUSTOMS

There is much to be said, too, about how strongly the French support and maintain traditions: the daily baguette, weekly markets and cultural events that are seasonal and cyclical. Every year, there are music festivals, visiting performers and the Félibrée celebrating Occitan culture.

Rural life may be quiet most of the time, but these events bring people together. Villages ritualise the seasons with summer fêtes and communal *moules-frites* dinners under the stars, autumnal harvests and wintery wine releases and changes in foods. And then there are the cranes flying south or north, reminding villagers of warming or chilling weather. It's a privilege to live in this way, where the environment plays such a key role in your daily life.

In her book, *House as a Mirror of Self*, the American architect and educator Clare Cooper Marcus describes how a desire for a dream or 'soul' house is planted in our childhood, often only resurfacing when we reach middle age. "The innocent openness many people experience in early childhood places a soul-seed in our unconscious," Marcus wrote. I'm sure this quote speaks to many of us who have followed our French house dreams.



From top: Catherine enjoys hunting for bargains at the Sunday *brocante* at nearby Verteillac; her dining room is dominated by an old stone fireplace

Whatever your dream and the ways in which it seeded, a house in France provides peace, pleasure, a connection with another culture and an introduction to numerous more. I often ask my neighbours from other countries including Holland, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Ireland and the UK what drew them to France, and however diverse their responses, it's a pleasure to hear their stories and their dreams.

I especially love to hear the recollections of our elderly neighbours about our house. One called it the 'tortoise lady's house' as the local kids believed a former owner kept tortoises in her garden and they hung onto her gate every day after school hoping to catch sight of one.

With prices ranging from around €60,000 to million-euro offerings, it's easy to find something to meet your French fantasy budget. We didn't do too much renovating on our place – just opened up and extended part of the attic and painted a few rooms.

For anyone wanting to emulate Peter Mayle in *A Year in Provence*, there are numerous opportunities for a 'fixer-upper' and a wide range of tradespeople to assist you. Most importantly, there's the time to get to know French life and culture at its most intimate and to become part of the country's great history, carving out your own small place within it.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Would we do things differently if we were doing it now? Yes and no. I'd probably buy in a larger town with more services and certainly a market. Ask yourself what your own priorities are – peace, quiet and isolation, or the buzz of a town?

Do remember though that little villages have fêtes and activities to involve their citizens and most are only a short drive away from larger places with markets, cinemas, supermarkets and public transport. There's a lot to be said for getting back to your village or *hameau* after a day in town and enjoying the peace and silence of your garden with a glass of local wine.

I'd do it all again in a flash. Following your dreams was never easier than in France. ■

***Catherine Cole** is a former Professor of Creative Writing and her latest book* **A French House: On the Love of Place,** *is published by Valley Press, UK*



The market in Ribérac is a short drive

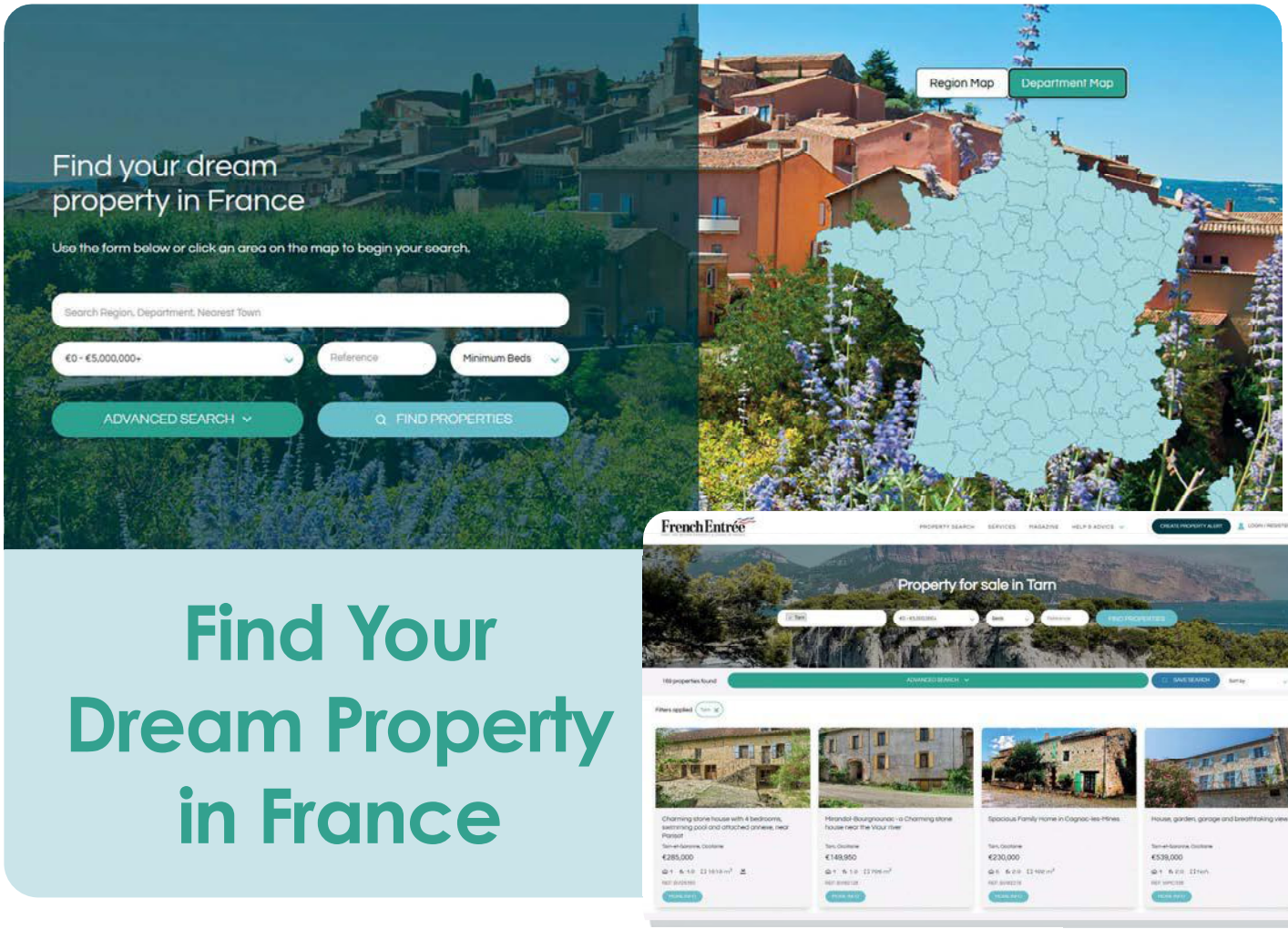
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FRENCH INTERIORS PART 5





French antiques for a showstopping home

Ever wondered what the best-selling antiques in France are? **Susannah Cameron** reveals the most-sought-after pieces

The first antique I ever bought was an ochre-glazed confit pot. I still adore that pot. I remember the moment I found it, captivated by the thick glaze around the rim, the weight of the clay, and the sense that this humble vessel carried a whole Provençal kitchen within it. I didn't know then how many more we would buy, sell, photograph, pack, ship and occasionally keep for ourselves over the next decade.

That is the trouble with French antiques. One piece often leads to another.

After 10 years of sourcing in Provence, through private collectors, specialist merchants and long-standing local contacts, we have learned that the pieces people fall for fastest are not always the grandest or most expensive. Often, they are the ones where history feels closest, shaped by years of use: a mirror with softened gilding, a terracotta pot that still seems to hold the heat of the kiln, a painted garden chair, a copper mould, or an endearing animal sculpture that feels enchantingly lifelike.

These are the pieces that tend not to stay with us for long. Some go to designers working on projects from Paris to New York. Others are sent to clients from London to Sydney, Tokyo and beyond. It is one of the pleasures of our work: seeing objects once made for French kitchens, gardens and salons find their way into homes all over the world.

So, what are the best-selling antiques? They're not always the ones you'd expect.

ANIMAL MAGIC

Antique animal sculptures are among the pieces that create the quickest affection.

A stone rabbit nestled into a garden bed, a pair of doves on a console, a hen for a *potager* or a rooster beside a doorway: these pieces bring wit, and animate a room or garden in a relaxed and easy way.

Many were made for outdoor display, and time changes them beautifully. Moss gathers in the folds, rain softens the surface, lichen settles into the crevices. In a garden, this is part of the charm. Indoors, this patina can bring a country note to a mantel, bookshelf or console.

MIRROR MIRROR

Antique mirrors are among the most transformative pieces that



© SUSANNAH CAMERON/CHEZ PLUIE



you can bring into any room. They do not simply decorate it; they serve to alter its light, depth and atmosphere.

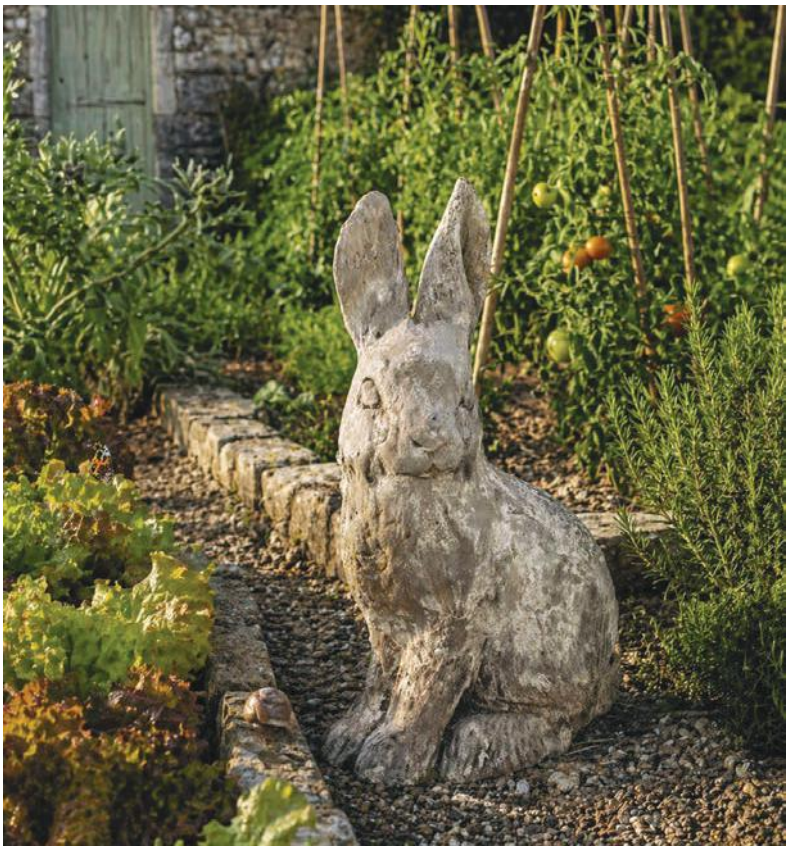
French mirrors are among the most sought-after pieces we source: they are so adaptable and each period brings a different architectural language. A Louis Philippe mirror from the mid-19th century, with its rounded shoulders and restrained ornament, can sit anywhere, from an entryway to a powder room, bedroom or salon.

Earlier Louis XVI mirrors, often adorned with ribbon crests, musical trophies, floral garlands or foliate borders, bring a more classical sense of grandeur to a room. Rococo and Louis XV examples - with scrolling forms, shells and asymmetry - introduce drama, movement and romance.

KITCHENALIA

French kitchen antiques are a joy to collect. Confit pots are a perfect example. Traditionally





Clockwise from far left: Tap into French kitchen antiques and surround yourself with the history of Gallic cuisine; ornate Louis XVI mirrors make a statement; antique animal sculptures add wit and charm









used for preserving food – especially duck or goose – in the days before refrigeration, they were as practical as they were handsome. The glaze around the top made the pot easier to clean and created a slippery surface that little cellar visitors, drawn by the scent of preserved duck or goose, could not easily climb. Below, the bare clay allowed the pot to breathe when it was partially buried in the cool earth floor of an old cellar.

Today, they are loved as much for their distinctive silhouette as for their history. A single confit pot can hold utensils beside a stove, stand on a shelf, become a *cachepot*, or sit among other ceramics on open shelving. Tian bowls, *gargoulettes*, *cruches* and pitchers sit naturally alongside them – especially when gathered in the ochres, greens and warm yellows so closely associated with the pottery of southern France.

Other culinary antiques bring a different kind of appeal. Cake and jelly moulds, butcher's hooks, *daubières* and copper pans belonged first to working kitchens. Their materials were chosen for performance long before they were admired for decoration.

Terracotta cooking vessels have their own regional history. The Provençal *daubière* was designed for slow cooking *daube*, the wine-braised stew traditionally associated with the region. Its recessed lid could be filled with water during cooking, helping to control evaporation as the dish gently simmered.

Copper conducts heat beautifully, which is why it became so important in French cooking. Many old copper saucepans were lined with tin, a softer metal that protected food from direct contact with copper. When the lining is worn, a good pan can often be re-tinned and returned to use.

WORKS OF ART

Paintings are always among the most sought-after antiques. Collected slowly over a lifetime and moved from one



Clockwise from top left: Mirrors are so adaptable – each period has its own stylistic language; confit pots can be decorative or practical; jelly moulds brighten up a corner; paintings change depending on how they are displayed. **Above right:** It looks delicate, but wrought-iron garden furniture is very robust



"Often the pieces people fall for fastest are not the grandest or most expensive, they're the ones where history feels closest, shaped by years of use"

house, chapter or country to the next, they give a home a feeling that is deeply personal and storied. They are also remarkably versatile. The same 18th-century oil portrait might hang as part of a gallery wall in the dining room of an old house, where it feels charming and intimate. Moved to a contemporary interior, placed alone on a clean wall and lit with a single picture light, it can suddenly feel strikingly modern. This is part of the pleasure of buying art: the way that a painting is hung on a wall can completely change its character.

A still life of flowers, a cornucopia of fruit or a humble kitchen scene can bring abundance to a kitchen or dining room. A landscape can give depth to a wall, especially in a room without a view – it's like adding a window.

GARDEN FURNITURE

Wrought-iron garden furniture is a classic ingredient in a French garden. It invites you to enjoy the plot from different vantage points, following the light through the day, or moving with the shade as the sun shifts and the evening breeze arrives.

Part of its appeal lies in the balance between delicacy and strength. Though visually light, antique wrought iron is remarkably robust, a quality especially appreciated in Provence, where the Mistral wind can test almost anything left outdoors. You can see the same principle in the open metalwork *campaniles* that crown many Provençal church towers: they add height and beauty, while allowing the wind to pass through without any hindrance.

The best pieces also have an organic quality that sits naturally among planting. A bistro table with an Art Nouveau base may have sinuous curves that mimic a tree trunk gripping the earth. A twisted wrought-iron armchair can recall the plaited form of an old wisteria vine. The effect is relaxed, practical and unmistakably French.

They also age beautifully. Layers of paint, traces of rust and weathered surfaces give old garden furniture a texture that new pieces rarely achieve. Increasingly, these pieces are used indoors too, where they bring freshness, contrast and a wonderful hint of the garden to the rest of your home. A well-chosen cushion can soften the look and make the piece more personal, whether you pick a bold stripe, a faded linen or a colourful floral.

ANTIQUES THAT ENDURE

What these pieces all have in common is not simply that they are beautiful, old or rare. It's that you can immediately imagine living with them in your home. We take that responsibility seriously when sourcing. Thoughtful curation does not follow trends. We choose each piece as if it might one day sit in our own home, asking whether it has substance, character, usefulness and lasting appeal. The secret is to buy what you love, and you'll never regret it. ■

***Susannah Cameron** is a Director at Chez Pluie Provence, an online boutique selling French antique and vintage pieces*
Tel: 0033 (0)7 84 56 02 37
chezpluie.com

NEXT ISSUE: ***Festive interiors***



At Arromanches, the museum gives an overview of what happened on D-Day, as well as panoramic views

Beyond the history books



Sarah Daly looks at the heritage town of Bayeux and the nearby Normandy Landing Beaches and explores what this beautiful area has to offer those considering calling it home

There is a little corner of Calvados that punches well above its weight in terms of global connections. Imagine Normandy's beaches, and its Operation Overlord, when Allied troops started liberating France and Europe from Nazi occupation that may spring to mind. Think of Bayeux, and the famous tapestry commemorating the Norman Conquest in 1066 is likely to be the first thing you think of. This tiny area has played a significant part in changing the course of European history – twice – but that's really only part of its appeal.

OPERATION OVERLORD

Arriving at Utah Beach in Quinéville, we found a beautiful expanse of sand stretching in each direction. The trademark concrete fortifications that the Nazis planted all along the French 'Atlantic Wall' from Dunkirk to Biarritz are still in evidence, but they no longer detract from its beauty.

The Landing Beaches comprise around 50 miles of coastline; with a village hinterland. The area is home to dozens of museums, exhibitions, monuments and memorials commemorating World War II and the incredible events that took place here from the summer of 1944.

We couldn't possibly visit them all, although if I chose this area to live in, I would certainly make it my mission to do so. Instead, we started with the World War II Museum, which focuses on local life throughout the war, before and during Nazi occupation and as liberation began. This is jarringly different from life in many other Allied countries: Brits experienced the fear and devastation of enemy bombing, but French people lived under enemy occupation.

Young men were called on to move to Germany to work for the Nazi regime, although very few did so unless forced to. Some people collaborated. Others joined the Resistance, risking and often losing their lives. Most lived as 'normal' a life as they could.

At Gold Beach, Normandy Tours guide Jean-Charles tells us about the landings, and the incredible artificial harbour, built largely by British women in the nine months preceding Operation Overlord.

The harbour allowed men and supplies to be unloaded by Allied forces, and the Arromanches Museum explains how events unfolded while offering panoramic views over the beach and the remains of the harbour. From here, the scale of the undertaking to safely provision troops and fuel tanks is clear.

Bayeux's Battle of Normandy Museum explains the challenges faced by the Allies: the *bocage*, a traditional – and now thoroughly bucolic – system of small fields, separated by sunken lanes, hedges and trees, was very easy for the Nazis to defend and the Allied victory here was hard won.

The gun battery at Longues-sur-Mer starkly illustrates just

On the market



€465,500, Bayeux: *Built in 1984, this five-bedroom property would make an ideal family home; it has a garage and large garden, and is near schools, parks and shops* **(cabinetfolliot.com)**



€392,000, St-Vigor-le-Grand: *This three-bedroom house with garden is close to Bayeux; planning permission likely to be granted to build another property in its grounds* **(cabinetfolliot.com)**



€785,000, Tracy-sur-Mer: *Close to the D-Day Landing Beaches, this beautiful home has seven-bedrooms and bathrooms; in a quiet area but close to local amenities* **(cabinetfolliot.com)**



€495,500, Crépon: *A beautiful detached home near Caen with a basement, garage and five-bedrooms, this property has gardens of nearly 2,670m² with a terrace* **(cabinetfolliot.com)**

how daunting the prospect of attacking this coast must have been in June 1944. Four chilling concrete gun emplacements point directly at the beaches. You can even stand behind the original guns in two of them to see the view the Germans had of the coast as they attacked Allied troops coming ashore.

At the same time, as we listen to a lark singing its heart out high above our heads and the coastline spreads out before us, it's clear that natural beauty here prevails. It transcends even the enormous bloodshed this coastline witnessed.

EXPLORING ON TWO WHEELS

Jumping on electric hire bikes, we are able to travel from our hotel in Bayeux to the fishing village of Port-en-Bessin along cycle paths. The whole area links inland routes to the Vélomaritime coastal path (EV4) and, like that route, it uses quiet roads, as well as dedicated bike lanes. Once you leave the coast, you can also cycle to the beautiful Abbaye St-Martin, via the network of trails.

Bayeux has the first ring road, or *périphérique*, in France, which was created by Allied troops who couldn't manoeuvre their tanks through the town's narrow streets. It now includes a cycle path, making accessing the town and surrounding countryside safer and easier.

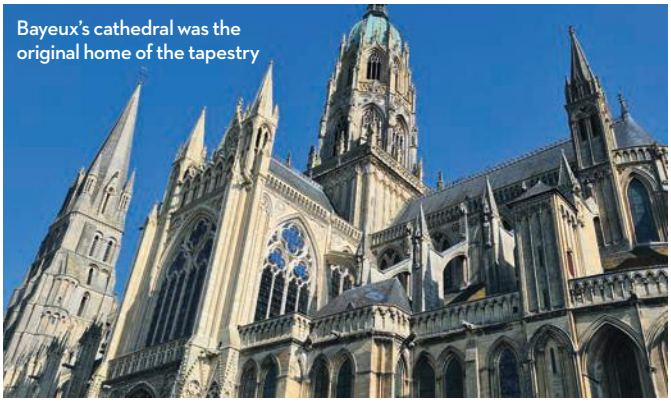
We followed it to the peaceful botanical garden, dating to 1859 and home to an unusual weeping beech tree, classed as a French natural monument for nearly 100 years.

BAYEUX THE SURVIVOR

The town of Bayeux also has strong links with European history. William I was born at nearby Falaise and his successful invasion of England was immortalised in the Bayeux Tapestry - technically an embroidery and probably created in Kent. It was destined for display in the cathedral then under construction in Bayeux by William's brother Odon. It has since become the symbol of his victory, and is the moment that tied the fates - and monarchies - of England and France together for centuries to come.



Christèle revealed Bayeux's secrets



Bayeux's cathedral was the original home of the tapestry

© PADDY DALY



The Museum at Quinéville recreates life under German occupation

"Bayeux, unlike many towns in the area, escaped destruction at several key points in history"

While a purpose-built museum is prepared for it in Bayeux, the tapestry is in England for the first time for nearly a millennium, on display at the British Museum from September 2026 to June 2027. This historic loan agreement represents a much more cordial example of Anglo-French relations than the tapestry itself.

We are shown around this beautiful town by Christèle from Discovery Walks. She explains that Bayeux, unlike many towns in the area, escaped destruction at several key points in history. Not only did it avoid Allied bombing and German destruction during World War II, it also survived France's religious wars and the Revolution - one of the 'liberty trees' planted in 1792 is still flourishing in the cathedral's shelter.

It was in Bayeux that Générale Charles de Gaulle established the authority of the provisional French government just a few days after the Allied landings. The tapestry is another miraculous survivor. Having been rescued from a fire in 1105 and used as a tarpaulin for carriages in the 16th century it was nearly cut up. Nazi plans to remove it to Germany were thwarted by the Allied invasion.

On the outskirts of town, over 3,000 names are recorded on the year markers of Le Mémorial des Reporters.

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM**



€243,900, St-Marcouf: *With sea views, this four-bedroom home very near Utah Beach is currently run as a B&B but could be a single dwelling again with no work* **(frenchestateagents.com)**



€194,400, Isigny-sur-Mer: *These two fishermen's cottages have been combined to form a four-bedroom townhouse with original features and a garage to rent* **(frenchestateagents.com)**



€269,900, Cricqueville-en-Bessin: *Located near Omaha Beach, this property has 1.5ha, a garage and barn, three-bedroom stone cottage and a second house* **(frenchestateagents.com)**



€339,900, Isigny-sur-Mer: *Two stone houses, one with five bedrooms (currently a gîte) and one with two; there's an option to buy a nearby chapel for €1* **(frenchestateagents.com)**



Bayeux's property market is buoyant, with a charm and authenticity buyers like



Katie de Pomereu lives near Bayeux with her family and loves the area

It's a sobering commemoration of those who lost their lives while reporting from war zones around the world. The largest World War II Commonwealth military cemetery in France just across the road from it has more than 4,000 graves, while the Bayeux Memorial commemorates over 1,800 men who went missing in the summer fighting of 1944.

From June to September every year, Bayeux hosts a sound and light show, with a medieval festival in July. For those who love learning, the Université Inter-Age in the town offers courses in language, culture, arts and sports.

There are 35 villages attached to the town and the River Aure, now canalised, winds through it. The banks of the river saw leather tanning and dying and the town was once famous for its soft kid gloves. It even patented its own colour – Violet de Bayeux – made from Iranian ochre. What was once a Roman street, on the road from Paris to Cherbourg, is now lined with elegant homes and the fascinating art and history museum allows an in-depth exploration of the town's past.

LIVING IN THIS AREA

Katie de Pomereu lives in Vaux-sur-Seulles, four miles from Bayeux, with her husband Jean. The couple met in Paris and lived in London for years. "Jean is a complete Anglophone," Katie tells me. "We always spoke English at home, but we wanted our three children to know their French roots, so we moved here in 2007 when they were all quite young. We chose Bayeux because we had both holidayed here, it was close to Jean's family and we could easily visit the UK.

"I love this area. The beaches are glorious and the Norman *bocage* is so distinctive. Because of the Landing Beaches and the tapestry, Bayeux feels very international and I'm often stopped in the street and asked for directions in English. It's different from a lot of rural France in that respect.

"For most people, it's a holiday destination, but we get to enjoy it all year. There are a lot of retirees from Paris and plenty of young families, so there is an active arts, music and literature scene, and with Caen only 20 minutes away, there's something for all ages.

"I've learned French since we moved, but it's easy to underestimate how difficult it is to communicate at first as, even if you speak some French, you miss the nuances. It's surmountable though and I really feel I've had to challenge myself more here than if we'd stayed in the UK, which is no bad thing."

VIEW FROM THE AGENT

"The property market here is buoyant, with a lot of people moving here for the charm and authenticity of Bayeux, and the proximity to the beaches," says Samuel Poprawski, estate agent for Folliot. "Seaside towns like Port-en-Bessin attract second-home buyers and the average price in Bayeux is around €3,000/m². If you want a three-bedroom family home in good condition, expect to pay around €350,000 on average.

"The countryside is really varied, the architecture is beautiful and there's plenty to do. Bayeux is a very liveable town, rich in history and with a great quality of life. The housing market here saw a strong rise after Covid and prices are still increasing gently. If you're thinking of buying here, I would definitely recommend finding an agent you trust to guide you through the process and to get to know the area as well as you can before you begin your search."

BED AND BOARD

Bayeux's Novotel is an ideal base for househunting in the town and beyond, and the restaurant on site offers good French food. As always in France, you're almost guaranteed an excellent meal wherever you go and eating out is a pleasure. Acte 2 in Bayeux offers a great, reasonably priced midday menu, while the aptly named P'tit Resto near the cathedral offers fresh, seasonal cuisine in an intimate setting.

I had never visited this part of France, so knew little about it beyond the headline facts. You'll discover glorious beaches – whether you are exploring the part they played in liberating Europe or settling the kids in with a bucket a spade. And the town of Bayeux is a jewel: it may not redisplay its famous tapestry until next year, but there's no shortage of wonderful things to uncover in the meantime. ■

Visit bayeux-tourism.com



Acte 2 restaurant in Bayeux is famous for its traditional Normandy dishes

© PADDYDALY, JEAN DE POMEREAU

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The beautiful stone house built in Provence by Camilla Wright's parents in 2000

A family home that lives on

Shared ownership made it possible for **Camilla Wright's** family to keep their cherished holiday home in Provence, filled with three generations of memories

What happens when a much-loved family home, enjoyed by several generations over the years, starts to be used less? When maintenance and costs begin to outweigh the benefits of owning it, but selling up is too much of a wrench?

One family, when faced with this situation, found an alternative option. They sold their beautiful stone house in Provence - but bought it back, along with 28 other families!

Camilla Wright's parents originally built the stone house on land they bought in Seillans in Var in 2000. "They wanted a home from home in warm weather for when they retired, and Seillans wasn't too far from the Mediterranean Sea and Nice airport," says 55-year-old Camilla. "They put their hearts into the design and build of the house, taking French lessons so they could manage the build.



Camilla, Lucas and his older sister Amanda on holiday in Provence in 2005



Main: From the pool, there is an undisturbed view of the mountain landscape; inset: Amanda, Lucas and Emily on a trip to the Gorges du Verdon

© CAMILLA WRIGHT, WYHOMES



The spacious and airy dining room seen from above

My father, a lawyer, drew the initial outline himself, choosing a typical Scandinavian style with high ceilings, ceramic floors and big open rooms."

The house was completed in 2002, the year Camilla's son Lucas was born. For the next two decades, Camilla and her husband holidayed in the four-bedroom house, watching their three children - Amanda, Lucas and Emily - grow from toddlers into young adults and often having up to 12 family and friends to stay.

FAMILY AFFAIR

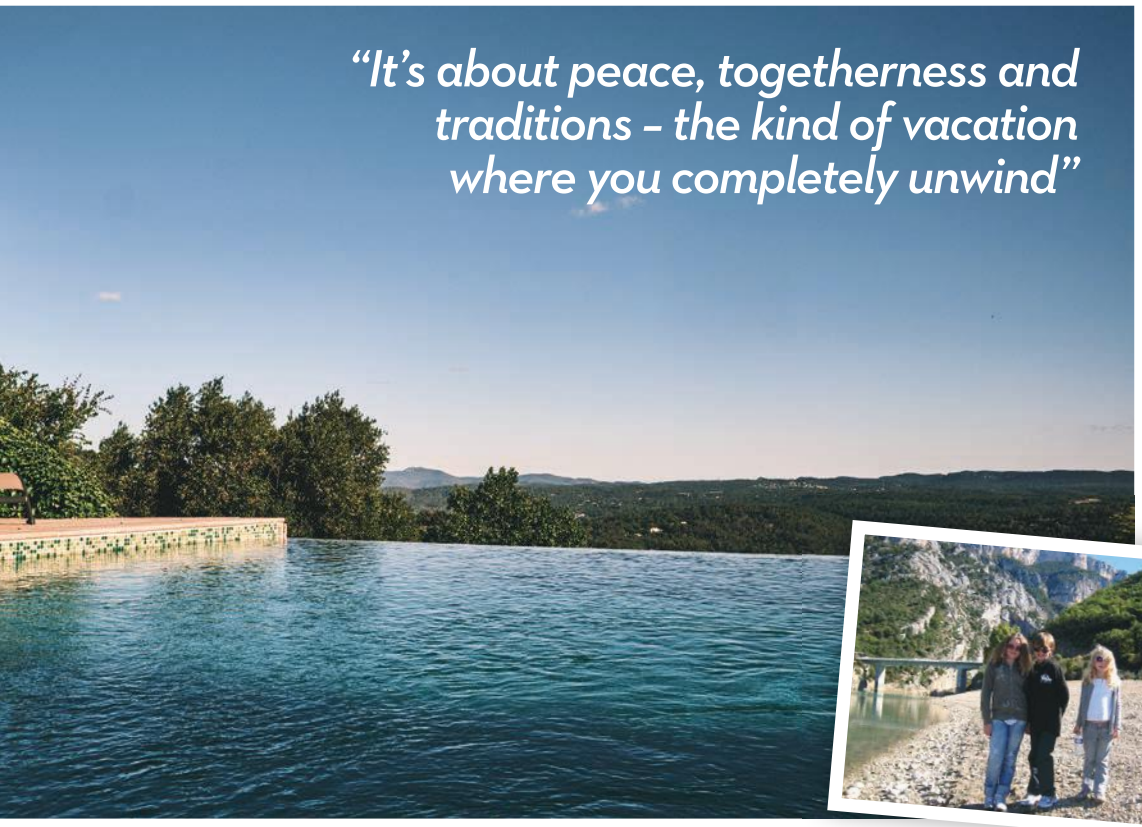
For Lucas, the house in Provence has been part of his life for ever. "I have been visiting there as long as I can remember," he says. "A large part of life there was around the pool - that's where I learned to swim, and where we spent many hours every single holiday." Lucas is currently studying mechanical engineering and living in Copenhagen with his girlfriend, who also has a special connection to the place.

"We actually became a couple there when we were 16-17 years old," Lucas explains. "First, she came along as a family friend... it has since become our romantic getaway."

Lucas began visiting the house on his own with friends when he was 16 and the family holiday home has taken on a very special meaning for him over the years. "It's about peace, togetherness and traditions - the kind of vacation where you completely unwind," he says. "We always walk down the mountain together toward the town and often end up at the same restaurant by the square. They know us down there now."

MOVING ON

After retiring, Camilla's parents spent several months of the year there, with her father taking care of all the maintenance and admin, but following his death in 2020, the job of managing the property fell to Camilla. On top of her own full-time career and busy family life in Denmark, it proved



"It's about peace, togetherness and traditions – the kind of vacation where you completely unwind"





From top: The house is built from fieldstone and features a large covered terrace with a view of the landscape; in the spacious hallway is a reading nook

© CAMILLA WRIGHT, MYHOMES

an onerous task. "It's a big house with a guest house and a small vineyard, as well as the pool, and keeping up with the gardeners and caretakers and managing the taxes and utility bills, I just ran out of steam," she says. "My mother was nervous the upkeep costs would take all her pension, so I promised her I would sell."

In 2024, Camilla put the house on the market while also looking into alternative options, including co-ownership schemes. The family hoped for a solution where the house would be used more and continue to be part of their lives. They discovered the Danish shared housing concept MyHomes, where several families co-own holiday properties. MyHomes handles the purchase, renovation and management of the house, while the owners share the costs of maintenance and gain access to a selection of vacation homes across Europe.

"For us, shared ownership became a way to combine the past and the future"

"Shared ownership became a way to combine the past and the future," says Camilla. "We could let go of the responsibility without letting go of the place that has been the setting for our family's vacations for three generations."

SHARING AND CARING

Camilla agreed a deal with MyHomes in June 2025. The company bought the Provençal home for around €1.5m while she invested in one of their co-ownership associations, paying €310,000 for a share of five European homes.

She now owns these properties equally with 28 other investors, each getting about nine weeks' use across them all every year, while MyHomes manage the booking system, handle all the changeover arrangements and undertake renovations and maintenance.

The MyHomes share is owned by Camilla, but every generation of the family took part in making the decision. "Once I decided to sell, I was totally on board with it and excited that others will experience the house," says Camilla. "My mother has found peace with it too. She came with me to Provence to say a final farewell. She is 85 and lives with us close to Copenhagen. I think you reach an age and know the right thing to do."

The Provence house and four additional properties are now shared by 29 families. By buying into this owner association with MyHomes, the family now co-owns five homes in Europe: an apartment in Mallorca, an apartment in Rome, a country house in Piedmont and a ski chalet apartment in Megève, as well as the Provence house.

"A house benefits from being used," Camilla adds. "When it's only used a few weeks a year, it still requires ongoing maintenance and attention. We were at a point where we either had to completely let go of the house and sell it, or find another solution where it could be used more and still be part of our lives. Luckily, we found that solution." ■

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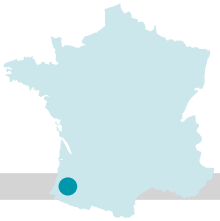


Keen sailor Sophie loves Biarritz on the Atlantic coast



Outdoor paradise

Sophie Folley speaks to **Karen Tait** about her corner of southwest France



How long have you worked as an estate agent in France?
I can't believe it, but it's been 21 years! I arrived in France in April 2005 with a view to staying two years to improve my French (I had a degree in business studies and French but hadn't used the language for 10 years). The agent who had previously showed me around a handful of properties in the St-Emilion area (where my school friend had just bought a château to renovate with her husband) offered me a job opening an agency with her in a new area. I thought, 'why not'! I worked with that agency for nine years, then decided to start up my own.

Where in France do you cover?
We're based in Salies-de-Béarn, a pretty thermal spa town just a 45-minute drive inland from Biarritz. We cover the whole of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the south of Les Landes.

Describe your area in five words
Paradise for outdoor pursuits enthusiasts!

Why is that?
Being conveniently situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenean mountain range, there are a whole host of outdoor activities available on the doorstep, including surfing, fishing, white-water rafting, walking, cycling, skiing (both downhill and cross-country), to name but a few.

What's your favourite spot?
Being a sailor from a very young age, I am naturally drawn to the Atlantic coast, and in particular Biarritz. I love the striking Basque architecture, the sandy beaches, not to mention the delicious seafood! Another favourite day trip of mine is to San Sebastian in northwest Spain (just over an hour from Salies-de-Béarn).

Is the area easy to reach?
Yes, there are regular flights to both Biarritz and Lourdes, thanks to Ryanair. Toulouse, Bordeaux and Bilbao airports are also within an easy two-hour drive along the motorway.

Is it suited to those seeking a holiday or permanent home?
It's ideal for both. With close proximity to the coast and mountains, and consequently all the activities on offer, it's a great place to come for either a relaxing or active holiday, or both! Salies-de-Béarn is 'alive' all year round, it doesn't close down for the winter like some of the coastal resorts. Those looking for permanent residency will find plenty of clubs and associations to join, with people of various different nationalities. One such activity includes regular conversation classes in French and English at the local wine bar!

Are there any property hotspots in the area?
The 'golden triangle' between the market towns of Salies-de-Béarn, Sauveterre-de-Béarn and Navarrenx offers stunning peaceful countryside and fast-flowing rivers against a backdrop of the Pyrénées. Property prices remain very reasonable compared to the increasingly built-up and crowded coastline.

What kind of properties are on offer?
There is really something to suit all tastes, from lock-up-and-go townhouses to manageable country cottages and stone farmhouses, to country domaines with substantial amounts of land. Béarnais houses are particularly distinctive with their high-pitched roofs.

What could people buy for a budget of:
- **Under €100,000:** A plot

On the market



€149,000, Salies-de-Béarn: *Three-bedroom townhouse spread over three floors, just a few minutes from the market square of the lovely spa town*



€235,000, Salies-de-Béarn: *Within walking distance of the spa, shops and cafés, this 1930s house has three bedrooms and a swimming pool with terrace*



€349,000, Salies-de-Béarn: *Renovated townhouse with three bedrooms, balcony, garden and garage in a sought-after neighborhood*

of constructible land, a renovation project or one-bedroom apartment in town.
- **€100,000-€250,000:** Townhouse or country cottage with garden.
- **€250,000-€500,000:** Farmhouse with land or a modern villa with pool, often with views of the mountains.
- **€500,000-€750,000:** Substantial property with guest annexes, outbuildings and land.
- **€750,000-€1m:** Château, *maison de maître* or *manoir*
- **Over €1m:** Up-and-running gîte/bed and breakfast business, or a villa closer to the Atlantic coast.

What's the cheapest property on your books right now?
A plot of constructible land for €55,000, or a townhouse to renovate for €88,000.

What's the most unusual property you have sold?
An old shepherd's hut up in the mountains; very isolated with only a natural water source, but the most incredible views.

What would be your dream home locally?
It would be this charming Béarnaise farmhouse with guesthouse, pool and stunning mountain views (pictured right), for sale at €795,000.

Why do British people buy houses in your area?
The proximity to coast and mountains, and Spain!

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of buying in your region?
Location is so important, so I would suggest making a preliminary trip to visit the area and decide what sort of lifestyle you are looking for (i.e. walking distance to a bustling town, quiet village within cycling distance to commerce or perfect isolation in the foothills of the mountains), then draw up a list of search criteria and get in touch!

What tips would you give to help people settle into life in France?
Get out and meet people, whether it be meeting the neighbours and joining local associations, or attending international club events. Getting to know people around you really helps with settling in.


Sophie's current favourite property is this farmhouse with pool, €795,000

What are your predictions for your local property market?
We are noticing a rise in various different nationalities moving to the area, from British through to German, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish and even some Americans. The secret seems to be getting out about what an attractive and desirable place we live in! ■

***Sophie Folley** runs Sophie Folley Immobilier*
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sophiefolley.com

"The area is conveniently situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenean mountains"


Salies-de-Béarn is a pretty spa town on the River Saleys

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AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES

How much would you expect to pay for:

A detached property with land in good condition?
€250,000 upwards

A three-bedroom townhouse?:
€150,000 upwards

A renovation opportunity? :
Around €85,000

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **PROPERTYINFRANCE.COM** & **FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM**


€389,000, Préchacq-Navarrenx: *Four-bedroom village house with garden and pool, near the 14th-century fortified town of Navarrenx*


€419,000, Salies-de-Béarn: *Former manor house with three bedrooms, pool and views over the rolling countryside; rustic charm with modern comforts*


€599,000, Bérenx: *Renovated nine-bedroom château with four hectares of park and meadows, pool and tennis court; would make a great hospitality business*


€892,500, Sauveterre-de-Béarn: *Stunning six-bedroom manor house with two stone barns on two hectares of land with private access to the river*



With property prices rising, mobile homes can be an alternative way to live the French dream

Upwardly mobile

Is buying a mobile or lodge home in France an affordable dream or a lifestyle compromise? We look at the pros and cons of this alternative to traditional bricks and mortar

For many British buyers, owning a home in France remains the ultimate aspiration. Whether it's long summer lunches overlooking vineyards, weekends exploring bustling markets or simply escaping the British weather, the appeal shows little sign of fading.

Yet rising property prices in some of France's most desirable regions, coupled with increased purchase costs, have prompted many buyers to consider an alternative. Mobile homes and luxury lodges on holiday parks are becoming an increasingly popular route into French holiday home ownership, offering a lower-cost entry point without sacrificing comfort.

However, while they can provide excellent value and an enviable lifestyle, they are not the same as owning a traditional French property. Understanding the differences is essential before making a purchase.

MORE AFFORDABLE

For many buyers, the biggest attraction is affordability. A quality pre-owned mobile home can often be purchased for less than the deposit required on a conventional French house, and even new models and luxury lodges remain considerably less expensive than most bricks-and-mortar properties in popular holiday regions.

For families who simply want a reliable holiday base, this can be an attractive proposition. Rather than spending thousands each year on rental accommodation, owners enjoy the freedom of returning to a familiar place, leaving personal belongings on site and visiting whenever the park is open.

Modern holiday homes have also evolved significantly over the past decade. Spacious living areas, fully equipped kitchens, double glazing, central heating and large outdoor decks are now commonplace, while premium lodges offer finishes that rival many new apartments.

LIFESTYLE ADVANTAGE

Perhaps the greatest appeal lies in the simplicity. Unlike older rural properties, which often require continual maintenance and occasional renovation, holiday homes demand relatively little from their owners. The grass is cut, communal areas are maintained and facilities are managed by the park, allowing owners to arrive and immediately begin to enjoy their holiday.

For families, this convenience can be invaluable. Many parks offer heated swimming pools, restaurants, children's clubs, sports facilities and organised entertainment during the summer months. Grandparents purchasing a holiday home frequently cite the attraction of having somewhere that appeals to every generation, including toddlers and teenagers. There's also the social aspect. Owners often return several times each year, creating a genuine sense of community among neighbours who become familiar faces over successive seasons.



Mobile homes or lodges are great for families who want a reliable holiday base

OFFSET COSTS WITH RENTAL INCOME

Some buyers choose to let their holiday home when they are not using it. In well-established parks close to beaches, lakes or popular tourist attractions, summer demand can be strong, providing useful additional income. Several park operators also offer managed letting services, removing much of the administration from owners.

However, rental income should be viewed as a bonus rather than a guarantee.

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Occupancy depends on location, quality of the accommodation and wider tourism trends. Owners must also allow for cleaning, maintenance and management costs.

ONGOING COSTS

One of the most important distinctions between a holiday home and a traditional property is that you usually own the accommodation - but not the land on which it stands. Instead, the home occupies a rented pitch within the holiday park.

Annual pitch fees are therefore an unavoidable part of ownership and should form a central part of any purchasing decision. These charges generally contribute towards maintenance of communal areas, landscaping, security and the park's leisure facilities.

Fees vary considerably according to the location and standard of the park, so prospective buyers should ask not only what the current annual charges are, but also how future increases are likely to be determined.

OWNERSHIP DETAILS

Although buyers become owners of the holiday home itself, the arrangement differs significantly from freehold property ownership. Your right to keep the home on its pitch is governed by the agreement with the park operator. Consequently, understanding the terms of the licence agreement is every bit as important as inspecting the accommodation.

Questions worth asking include how long agreements last, what happens if ownership of the park changes and whether there are restrictions on selling the home in the future.

LIFESTYLE NOT INVESTMENT

One misconception is that a mobile home should be regarded as a property investment. In that context, it is closer to purchasing a luxury caravan than buying a house.

Most mobile homes depreciate over time, although premium lodges often retain their value better. Unlike traditional French property, which may appreciate over the longer term, depending on location and market conditions, holiday homes should primarily be viewed as lifestyle purchases.

That need not be a disadvantage though. Many owners measure value not by financial return but by years of family holidays, memorable experiences and the convenience of having a permanent base in France.

CHECK THE RULES

Not every park operates in the same way. Some remain open throughout much of the year, while others close during the winter months. Many also have planning restrictions preventing permanent residence, meaning owners can only occupy their property for specified periods. For British buyers considering extended stays, or spending much of their retirement in France, these conditions deserve careful attention.

Likewise, anyone intending to rent out their holiday home should clarify what the park's policies are regarding subletting, the insurance requirements and any commission that is payable on bookings.

THE RIGHT CHOICE?

For buyers seeking an affordable holiday base with minimal maintenance, a mobile home or lodge can offer exceptional value. It provides many of the pleasures of owning a place in France without the financial commitment of purchasing a traditional property.

However, buyers looking for long-term capital growth, complete freedom over their property or a permanent home in France may find that a conventional house better suits their ambitions.

As with any significant purchase, success lies in asking the right questions before committing. Take time to understand exactly what is included in the price, the level of annual fees, any restrictions on occupancy, resale procedures and the terms of your agreement with the park operator.

Buying with realistic expectations - and viewing the purchase primarily as an investment in your lifestyle rather than your portfolio - will help ensure your French holiday home provides you with years of enjoyment.

For many British owners, that's precisely what it offers: a place to unwind, entertain family and friends, and enjoy everything that makes France such an enduring and favourite holiday destination. And sometimes, those experiences prove far more valuable than bricks and mortar. ■

"Mobile homes and luxury lodges offer a lower-cost entry point without sacrificing comfort"



A quality pre-owned mobile home can cost less than a deposit on a house

On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM**



€9,995: *Three-bedroom mobile home on a small family-run site in the Périgord Vert within 10 minutes of Brantôme; needs a little TLC*



€14,995: *SunRoller mobile home, with three bedrooms, a large wooden decking fitted in 2024 and a new water heater fitted in 2025, in Dordogne*



€90,500: *Luxury two-bedroom mobile home from the Willerby range, on a Dordogne site with facilities including a large outdoor swimming pool*


Karen and husband Julian

Even better than the dream

Does the reality of owning a home in France live up to the dream? After eight years of ownership, **Karen Grant** weighs up all the pros and cons

Let's buy a house in France, she said – it'll be fun, she said... and it is! We are Karen (65) and Julian (72) and Dexter the crazy cockapoo (four). We have owned our own little piece of French heaven for eight years. It's a stone-built village house with a walled courtyard garden situated in Sauzé-Vaussais, a small town in the Deux-Sèvres department.

When we first found the house, it was habitable but needed some updating. We have decorated throughout, replaced the bathroom and the water heater, rejigged the kitchen and replaced all appliances, renewed some wiring and lighting, replaced the log burner (the only source of heat in the property!), replaced french doors, painted all the shutters and windows (several times) and painted all the walls in the garden.

We had fun finding furniture. Our favourite pastime is to visit the local *brocantes* and charity shops to find bargains for the house. I have upcycled several things and love nothing more than being outside painting. My work table is covered in all the colours I have used (for those who know me, yes, pink features heavily!). Black metal paint has become my best friend; I have brought many metal items back to life with the simple swipe of a brush.

The highlight of our year is the annual *brocante* held in our town. It is usually around mid-August and we always make sure we're there for the event. The stalls are spread through the town and you can spend many hours wandering around looking for a bargain, or just what you need for that corner of the room. We have supported it in all weathers. On one memorable occasion, it was pouring with rain (yes, it does rain in August) and we bought a glass for €1. The vendor had to get out of her dry van and tip the rainwater from the glass for us.

SHORT BREAKS

When we first owned the house, we were both still working and relying on our annual leave to visit. That meant two weeks in the summer and several long weekends flying over (before Dexter joined us!). During the Covid pandemic, we were unable to visit the house for a year; that's the longest we have left it for. I was working from home during and after Covid and was able to work from France periodically. We had to make sure that we had a good internet connection as I was



One of Karen's passions is upcycling her *brocante* finds with a lick of paint


Karen loves to sit in the garden with friends, chatting over a drink and food


Dexter, the couple's crazy cockapoo


The house is in Sauzé-Vaussais



"Our favourite pastime is to visit the local brocantes and charity shops to find bargains for the house"

delivering training programmes remotely using Zoom.

Once I retired in 2023, we were able to spend longer periods of time in France (obviously within the Schengen restrictions). Since we bought the property, it's costing more to do the journey each time. We always use the Channel Tunnel as it is easier with Dexter, but that cost has risen dramatically. Factor in the fuel prices and tolls and it makes sense to now do less frequent but longer visits. Our longest trip was last summer when we stayed for 11 weeks. Heaven!

So, those of you who dream of owning a property in France, do you imagine it is all socialising and sipping French wine in the garden? Well, there is a lot of that. We have made great friends in our area. But there are always jobs to do once you arrive (unless you can afford to pay someone to maintain the house and garden for you).

We were there for three weeks in March and it took me three days to sort the garden out (and this is a relatively small area). Due to a damp problem, we had a spongey kitchen floor that needed to be taken up and new flooring laid (by a professional), I painted the kitchen and a wall in the dining room, we had to replace the gas pipe from the bottle outside to the kitchen, we made several trips to the *déchetterie* (French dump) and every room needed cleaning and clearing of cobwebs.

So no, it's not all drinking wine and eating cheese in a pristine garden in a flowing frock with a flower in your hair!

DO YOUR RESEARCH

If you're thinking of taking the plunge and buying a property in France, be prepared to work hard when you are over for short and long visits. Do lots of research, look at different areas; how easy is it to pop over for a long weekend? Where is the nearest airport, does your local airport in the UK fly there? Do flights run all year round? Some only operate a summer service.

Can anyone keep an eye on the house when you're not there? Are you going to pay someone to look after the garden/land, or are you prepared to clear it every time you visit? It costs more to pay for maintenance jobs in France and you often have to wait longer for the better tradespeople.





It's amazing what a coat of black metal paint can do for rusty junk-shop gems



The couple spruced up the house's pretty blue shutters and storage shed

So, are you now questioning your desire to buy a house in France? Please don't! Despite all of the above, we don't regret our decision one bit! It has been the best adventure we've had in our time together. We had so much fun looking for a property, we did three trips and viewed more than 30 places.

And, yes, once all the jobs are done - or even before - we happily sit in the garden with friends having a drink and food and leisurely chatting. We have lovely lakes to enjoy locally and every amenity on our doorstep. We have a massive SuperU, a smaller Spa shop, DIY stores, two *boulangeries* for wonderful bread, a bar and a restaurant.

We had a list of what we wanted when we were buying the house, and one of the main ones was to be able to walk to buy a baguette. We can do that in five minutes and it is often still warm when we get home.

Buying a house in France is a real adventure and we look forward to it continuing for many years, despite all the setbacks thrown at us since 2017. It has been worth every restriction, language barrier (we have come a long way with our language since we bought the house, just by putting ourselves in everyday situations and having a go), every financial burden and every worry.

So, if you are thinking of buying a place in France, do your research, make a list of what you want (you might not get everything on the list, so prioritise) and just go for it! You won't regret it - even when the weeds have grown taller than you, and you lose the dog... *Bonne chance*! ■



Evening on the Place de la République, Villedieu-les-Poêles

Material gains

The rebuilding of Notre-Dame in Paris after it was gutted by fire was epic – **Carolyn Reynier** looks at property in three of the pretty spots where the materials used were sourced

I'm sure you will remember the fire at Notre-Dame-de-Paris in April 2019 – difficult to forget the sight of the spire designed by France's visionary 19th-century architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc crashing down into the flames. It took two centuries to build the medieval Gothic cathedral.

Paris was due to host the 2024 Olympic Games; President Macron said they would rebuild the cathedral in five years, and they did. A fascinating documentary focused on the work of the artisans involved in the massive reconstruction project and showed the places providing the raw materials. I'm going to tell you about property in three of them.

The eight bells came from medieval Villedieu-les-Poêles in Manche, Normandy, famous for its copper foundries. In a verdant setting with ancient *lavoirs* (wash houses), this *Site Patrimonial Remarquable* is traversed by the Sienne.

Famous for its oak trees, the Bercé forest in Sarthe, Pays de la Loire, supplied timber. It lies southeast of prefecture Le Mans and the circuit for the annual June endurance automobile race, the *24 Heures du Mans*. Just to the south of the forest is the Loir valley and La Chartre-sur-le-Loir whose vineyards produce the appellations Jasnières and Coteaux-du-Loir.

Stone for the vault arches came from La Croix-Huyart quarry at Bonneuil-en-Valois in Oise, Hauts-de-France. This picturesque village, dating back to Gallo-Roman times, and its four hamlets are on the Aisne border and the edge of the Retz forest. It's an ideal starting point for walking or cycling along the 7km Upper Automne Valley route.

VILLEDIEU-LES-POELES

Villedieu-les-Poêles was a Commanderie of the Knights of Malta so it goes back a long way, says Emilie Chales of Cabinet Folliot. It wasn't destroyed during the Second World War so there are still stone houses with small courtyards. It's an artistic town – labelled *Ville et Métiers d'Art* – you'll find ceramicists, leather-workers, artists and jewellers.

In the town centre, there are apartments above ground-floor shops in old stone buildings. Emilie is currently marketing an entire building with shop, a 100m² apartment and a small 30m² one for €195,000.

Within walking distance of the centre there are terraced stone houses and detached properties with small gardens (€250,000-€300,000), then modern properties dating from the 1960s. Small two/three-bedroom detached houses on the banks of the Sienne sell for €180,000-€200,000 and usually need work.

If you're minded to move into a mill, you may find one on the nearby Airou river. Emilie says there are currently two on the market priced at around €400,000 – both renovated and with land. "The Airou had lots of mills in the past and we regularly have them for

On the market



€359,000, Villedieu-les-Poêles: *Located in the town centre, just two kilometres from the motorway, is this pretty six-bedroom stone family house with cellar* **(Cabinet Folliot)**



€237,900, Villedieu-les-Poêles: *South-facing, this house has four bedrooms (one on the ground floor), is close to shops and services and 5km from the motorway* **(Cabinet Folliot)**



€399,500, Percy-en-Normandie: *With country views, this four-bedroom home has a basement plus a two-bedroom gîte in tree-filled grounds near the town centre* **(Cabinet Folliot)**



€149,500, Villedieu-les-Poêles: *A three-bedroom stone property in grounds of 4,918m² with an outbuilding and double garage; close to shops, station and motorway* **(Cabinet Folliot)**

© OT VILLEDIEU | ANIBAS PHOTOGRAPHY, PASCAL BELTRAMI

sale," she continues. Last year she sold an abandoned one with three hectares of land for €70,000. She currently has an entirely renovated one for sale at La Lande-d'Airou (where she knows an English owner is also selling one).

In surrounding villages - Montaigu-les-Bois, Le Mesnil-Garnier and Ste-Cécile, for example - you can often find fine spacious country properties, for renovation or not, with gardens of between 5,000m² and 6,000m². Emilie explains that today this is an area of large farms. Although the old small farmsteads (*fermettes*) no longer exist, there are barns, stables or other outbuildings if you're interested in a project.

"*On a une accessibilité qui est géniale*," she says. We're right by the A84 motorway, so half an hour from the sea, Caen in an hour, Ouistreham in 90 minutes. You're in Brittany's capital Rennes in an hour and in Paris in three by train.

"We have all the shops and services, and excellent local artisans where we eat well," she continues. "Life is quiet compared with other towns. There are no traffic jams, we can go for super walks in the St-Sever forest just 15 minutes away and the undulating countryside is beautiful."

At certain high points, such as St-Martin-le-Bouillant you can see the Mont-St-Michel. "*C'est génial, en fait. C'est une vie sereine.*"

LA CHARTRE-SUR-LE-LOIR

La Chartre-sur-le-Loir also has *lavoirs* on branches of the Loir. The river here flows through bucolic countryside to eventually join the Sarthe north of Angers, which in turn enters the Loire. The little town is also on the *Voie Verte*, a path for cyclists and walkers that links Montval-sur-Loir (twinned with Westbury in Wiltshire) to Bessé-sur-Braye passing vineyards, châteaux and mills along its route.



Cycling through the vineyards in the Loir valley near La Chartre-sur-le-Loir, Sarthe

"Villedieu-les-Poêles is an artistic town – you'll find ceramicists, leather-workers, artists and jewellers"

Alain Descotes of Arthurimmo.com Ad Foncier has many foreign clients - British, Dutch and German - and he says the area is also popular with Parisians buying holiday homes, with some settling here permanently. "We're close to Indre-et-Loire and are actually slightly nearer to Tours, its prefecture, than Le Mans," he adds.

Numerous antiques and secondhand dealers (*antiquaires* and *brocanteurs*) attract lots of visitors. The town is also well known by British motor racing fans thanks to its Hôtel de France, a discreet venue discovered in the 1950s by the Aston Martin race director who put up some of the most famous Le Mans winners there. Today annual car shows - modern, sports, old and deluxe - still bring in the fans.

The building material here is mainly *tuffeau* stone - a local porous Loire valley limestone - with slate roofs. In the town centre, terraced townhouses have a *jardinet* or a larger, long rear garden. Alain is currently marketing a renovated 100m² house for €149,000. The town is spread out, so there are also detached properties, which come with ground and price tags of €200,000-€300,000.

You will also find properties along branches (*bras*) of the Loir. He explains that they're not liable to flooding because the flow is regulated by locks. Have a look, too, along the road to Marçon to the west and Ruillé-sur-Loir to the east, where he's selling a large property with two hectares for around €230,000. "We have lots of villages where you can

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM**



€234,000, La Chartre-sur-le-Loir: *Former six-bedroom hotel on a branch of the Loir near amenities; it has river access, studio and large cellar* **(Arthurimmo.com Ad Foncier)**



€243,800, La Chartre-sur-le-Loir: *1920s four-bedroom property in need of work; it sits in about a hectare, with a pontoon, boathouse and small lake* **(Arthurimmo.com Ad Foncier)**



€364,000, La Chartre-sur-le-Loir: *Renovated 'hôtel particulier' with nine bedrooms, two kitchens with outside access, outbuilding, and garden bordered by the Loir* **(Arthurimmo.com Ad Foncier)**



€229,000, La Chartre-sur-le-Loir: *Town centre property on the Loir; four bedrooms and room for more, garage, atelier, two terraces, 3,543m² plot* **(Arthurimmo.com Ad Foncier)**



Cycling at Fresnoy-la-Rivière near Bonneuil-en-Valois, Oise

find detached houses," he adds, mentioning also Chahaignes, Poncé-sur-le-Loir and, just over the border in Loir-et-Cher, Villedieu-le-Château - all just 10 minutes from La Chartre.

BONNEUIL-EN-VALOIS

At the gates of Paris, the Pays de Valois, with its châteaux and abbeys, is the birthplace of the Valois dynasty. Bonneuil-en-Valois and its four hamlets are in the Automne valley. The river rises near Villers-Cotterêts in Aisne and flows past picturesque villages into the Oise upstream of Verberie on the edge of the Parc Naturel Régional Oise-Pays de France.

Bonneuil-en-Valois has small terraced 19th-century village houses, which were occupied by rural farm workers, according to Frédéric Giordano of Cabinet CERI. Built with locally quarried Valois stone with slate roofs, prices for a basic three-bedroom 85m² worker's cottage are circa €2,000/m². "They are liveable in but don't have today's level of comfort," he explains - poorly insulated with oil or maybe wood heating. A handful of fine tall, square, detached bourgeois houses - 160m²-200m² with outbuildings and often 1,000m² gardens - sell for upwards of €300,000.

In the Retz Forest, 12th-century Haramont is not far from Villers-Cotterêts and the train to Paris. In the Automne valley have a look, too, at Morienval. "*C'est coquet!*" (stylish, trendy) - with small terraced houses, cobblestone lanes and Romanesque abbatial church. It's only 20 minutes from subpecture Compiègne, through the 14,500-hectare Compiègne forest.

Orrouy, a listed village with small stone houses, has the Champlieu Gallo-Roman ruins nearby. House prices in these villages, which have preserved their heritage, rise as you approach Compiègne. "It's around €150-€200 per square metre more than at Bonneuil."

"North of Bonneuil, Pierrefonds with its shops, services and château is popular with clients looking for permanent homes," says Frédéric, and also attracts a Parisian clientele enamoured with the environment of the Compiègne Forest.

The château was dismantled in the 17th century and reinvented in the 19th by Viollet-le-Duc. The architect, whose many restorations include Carcassonne's ramparts, was awarded the Royal Gold Medal in 1864 by the Royal Institute of British Architects in recognition of his substantial contribution to international architecture.

"A similar village house at €160,000 in Bonneuil will be €220,000 in Pierrefonds," says Frédéric. There are also town-centre bourgeois houses set in large grounds. "It was a spa resort and there was money in the 19th century, so there were some lovely villas built," he adds. British buyers who have purchased second homes often convert another abandoned house on the property into gîtes or *chambres d'hôtes*. "When you visit one it's always '*très cottage*', very comfortable and prettily decorated," he says.

A big advantage of living in this part of Oise is the proximity of the N2 to reach the Paris region. Many folk work at Charles de Gaulle airport, a large local employer. It takes them less than an hour to get to work, yet they're living in a green, tranquil environment. Frédéric uses the expression "*se mettre au vert*" (to get out into the countryside).

So be it Manche, Sarthe or Oise - *mettez-vous au vert.* ■

villedieu-les-poeles.fr
lachartresurleloir.fr
vallee-du-loir.com
paysdevalois-tourisme.fr

3 REASONS TO BUY HERE

These are verdant, tranquil northern France destinations in Normandy, Pays de Loire and Hauts-de-France with easy access to Paris

You'll find stone terraced and detached bourgeois townhouses here, also mills and riverside homes, countryside properties with tourist accommodation conversion possibilities

Easy ferry access from the UK - Cherbourg for Manche, Ouistreham-Caen or Le Havre for Sarthe, Dieppe for Oise

© OFFICE DE TOURISME DU PAYS DE VALOIS

On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **PROPERTYINFRANCE.COM**



€149,000, St-Etienne-Roilaye: *Close to Pierrefonds, a village property with ground-floor bedroom, studio and attic for conversion, garage, cellars and garden* **(Cabinet CERI)**



€360,000, Pierrefonds: *At the base of the château, this town house built in 1900, has four bedrooms, converted attic, cellar, atelier, boiler room and 'jardin de curé'* **(Cabinet CERI)**



€299,000, Bonneuil-en-Valois: *Spacious four-bedroom family property with terrace and garden, attic for conversion, cellar, garage and woodshed; needs a bit of freshening up* **(Cabinet CERI)**



€239,000, Morienval: *Renovated 1890 village stone house, with beams, tomettes floor tiles, two bedrooms, attic for conversion, cellar and garage, set on an enclosed plot* **(Cabinet CERI)**

NAVIGATE FRANCE

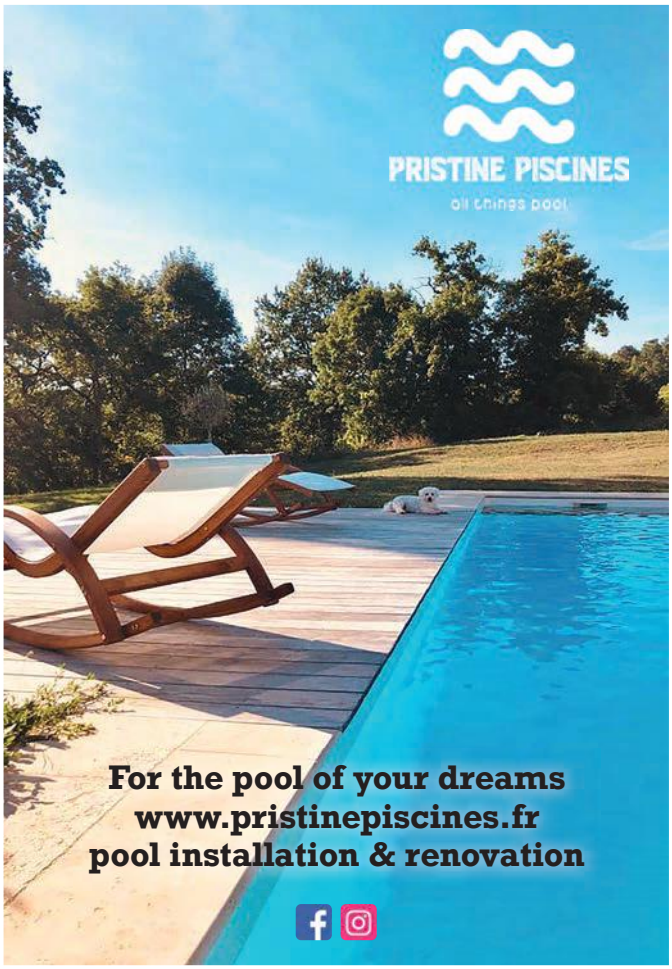
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Work and stay



Arthur Cutler offers an essential relocation guide to visas and residency

While no visa is required for Brits holidaying in France, if you wish to stay longer than 90 days in any 180 (in the EU), you must apply for a long-stay visa. This application forms the start of the process of relocating.

For the purposes of this article, we'll look at the two main types of visa affecting people moving to France on a permanent basis: non-working, and working as a self-employed individual in one capacity or another (visas for people on French employment contracts are dealt with by the employer).



UK passport holders only need a visa for stays over 90 days in France

NON-WORKING VISA

There are three main requirements for a successful outcome to your 12-month, long-term, non-working visa application – ultimately leading to residency (VLS-TS visa):

1 Financial resources. An individual will need a minimum of about €1,800 gross per month in income (€22,000 for the year). Alternatively, if you have no regular income, you'll need savings, investments etc equal to the annual requirement.

You can also achieve compliance with a combination of both income and savings. All forms of income and savings can be taken into account, including pensions, shareholdings, ISAs and so on. For a couple, married or otherwise, the monthly requirement is €2,500 per month gross, or equivalent in savings (or a combination of both). Note that one person can financially provide for all the others in a group; it isn't necessary for each member to comply with individual financial requirements.

2 Private health insurance. Your Schengen-compliant health insurance must tie in exactly with the full 12-month duration of your visa. It's important to note that this is not an annual travel insurance policy, it must be Schengen specific.

3 A verified address in France for the full 12 months. This can be a property you own, rent, or where you are staying with family or friends, providing there is written confirmation issued, countersigned by the local town hall (*mairie*).

Potentially, you could have two addresses from consecutive six-month rentals; however, a series of Airbnb stays is unlikely to be accepted. There are various ways to achieve a 12-month rental contract if you don't own or are not immediately buying a property.



The first stage of the application process is in the UK at a TLScontact office

The main stages of the visa application process:

1 First of all, you will need to complete an online application, filling in forms about you and any members of your group (whether family or others) who will be travelling and staying together.

2 In the UK, the independent organisation TLScontact has been appointed by the French Consulate to deal with the initial physical application process. As part of this, you'll need to make an appointment to visit one of its three UK offices (London, Manchester or Edinburgh). For a fee, it is also possible to elect for an 'apply anywhere' option, meaning TLScontact will come to your home or meet with you at a convenient location.

Note, TLScontact does not decide whether your application is successful or not, it is just a handling agency.

3 Following your appointment, TLScontact will send your dossier and passport to the French Consulate in London for a decision to be made, and your visa will be issued if your application is successful.

You cannot go direct to the Consulate to make an application; it can only be dealt with via TLScontact.

4 A complete visa application dossier depends to some degree on your personal circumstances. Errors or omissions will mean a rejection of your application, often without you being given the actual reason for the refusal. For example, you may receive a refusal on the grounds that 'your application was missing one or more

documents', with no further details given.

It's advisable to employ a specialist to assist you with the process, as it can be complex and daunting. Many service providers offer re-submission for free in the event of a refusal.

5 Once your application has been processed by the French Consulate, your passport and visa will be returned to TLScontact for collection, or you can pay for a courier return service to save you having to visit again.

WORKING VISA

Essentially, the process of applying for a 12-month self-employed working visa leading to residency (VLS-TS *entrepreneur/profession liberal* visa) is the same as for a working visa, but there are extra steps to take in advance:

1 You must prepare and submit a viable business plan to show that your work will provide the minimum financial requirements to support yourself, and others in your group if relevant.

The plan must cover income and trading projections for a minimum of three years. Some occupations are regulated and in those cases evidence of relevant qualifications and/or experience must be provided as part of the plan. A recent police check (ACRO) is also required. The plan and other documents must be in French, with translations by a French court-appointed translator.

The plan must be sufficiently detailed for the independent assessor to be able to verify its feasibility. This does not mean it should be 100 pages long. Typically, the main points can be presented in a four/five-page document.

Note, the plan must be based on a specific address from which the business will operate, it cannot be a vague 'somewhere in France', even if it is remote work. You will need to have an address in France of some kind - owned, rented etc - but you must have this for your visa application, whether you intend to work or not.



If you are simply holidaying in France, you will not need to apply for a visa

"You must have an address for your visa application, whether you intend to work or not"

2 Once your plan has been approved, and not before, you can apply for your working visa. On top of the non-working visa requirements above, there are additional documents and registration forms needed for this visa type.

NEXT STEPS

There are several things you need to do to ensure your ongoing stay and life in France is kept on track:

- **Validate your visas.** This must be done while you are physically in France, and within three months of your arrival date (sooner for a working visa). Don't wait until the last minute - get it done as soon as possible.
- **Join the healthcare system.** The first step in joining the French healthcare system is to apply to OFII (*Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration*) for a health certificate. This will involve having a medical with a local doctor appointed for the process. They will issue you with a certificate.
- **Apply to your local CPAM.** The next step is to apply to your local CPAM office (*caisses primaires d'assurance maladie*). This is the regional public administrative body and is responsible for managing mandatory health insurance. It will require a copy of your medical certificate. You will be issued with a French social security number and medical card (*carte vitale*), meaning you are entitled to full healthcare.
- **Working visas.** Your business must be registered as soon as you enter France, which will automatically kickstart entry into the French healthcare system without making a separate application.

Note, the process for holders of an S1 certificate (a UK healthcare form entitling you and your dependants to state-provided medical care in the EU (and beyond) is different.

- **Titre de séjour.** To extend your long-stay visa for the next 12 months, you will need to apply for a residency card. This is initially an online procedure, followed by a visit to the prefecture. You'll need many of the documents you used to apply for your visa. Residency can be renewed for additional yearly periods, and at the end of five years, a multi-year card can be obtained. ■



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To be able to work in France, you must apply for the correct type of visa

Arthur Cutler** is a Director at Navigate France, French administration and help service **navigatefrance.com

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A slower pace of life

Victoria Garnham explains why the Gers is the hidden gem of southwest France – a place where you can rediscover space and simplicity

Tucked gently between Toulouse and Bordeaux, the Gers is one of those rare places that still feels undiscovered. There are no crowds, no rush and very little that feels forced. Instead, life unfolds at its own pace, shaped by the seasons, the landscape and a strong sense of place. For many buyers arriving here for the first time, the reaction is immediate – and often the same: why didn't we come here sooner?

The appeal is not dramatic or showy. It is quieter than that. The Gers department doesn't try to impress; it simply offers something increasingly rare – space, authenticity and the feeling that life can be lived a little more fully.

The scenery is the first thing people fall for – it's a landscape that invites you to slow down. Rolling hills stretch endlessly across the horizon, patchworked with vineyards, sunflower fields and woodland. *Bastide* villages appear in the distance, their stone façades glowing softly in the southern light. There's a feel of openness here that is hard to describe: big skies, uninterrupted views and a sense of calm.



The Gers is a land of rolling hills covered in vast fields of nodding sunflowers

DAILY LIFE

Unlike more polished regions of France, the beauty of the Gers feels natural rather than curated. It is a place where you notice the changing light, where mornings begin with mist rising from the valleys, and evenings end with long sunsets over the hills. For those coming from cities – or even busier parts of rural

© VICTORIA GARNHAM, SHUTTERSTOCK



Lavardens in Gers is one of Les Plus Beaux Villages de France

"The Gers doesn't try to impress; it simply offers something increasingly rare – space, authenticity and the feeling that life can be lived a little more fully"

France – this sense of space is truly transformative.

To live in the Gers is to adopt a different rhythm. Days are shaped less by schedules and more by small rituals: the weekly market, a coffee on the square, a chat with a neighbour that lasts longer than expected.

Towns such as Condom, Lectoure and Auch offer a perfect balance between practicality and charm. They are big enough to provide everything needed for daily life – shops, schools, healthcare – yet small enough to retain a genuine sense of community.

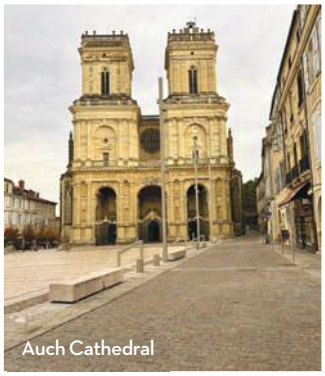
In places like Condom, for example, daily life includes not only supermarkets, pharmacies and restaurants, but also a cinema that regularly screens international films – a small detail, perhaps, but one that speaks volumes about the quality of life here. This is not a region preserved for tourists. It is lived in, year-round, by people who value connection, tradition and a slower way of living.

SPACE, CHARACTER AND VALUE

For many, the decision to stay – or to return – here is shaped by the property market. The Gers offers something that is becoming increasingly difficult to find elsewhere in France: space at a reasonable price. Compared to neighbouring areas such as the Dordogne or Provence, property here remains refreshingly accessible. Stone farmhouses, elegant townhouses, converted barns and even small estates can often be found at prices that would seem unimaginable in more established markets.



The town of Condom on the River Baïse is one of Gers' two sub-prefectures



Auch Cathedral

Just as important is the character. Many properties retain original features – exposed beams, stone walls, fireplaces – elements that give a sense of history and authenticity that buyers are actively seeking.

And then there is the setting. Houses are rarely overlooked, often surrounded by land, with views that stretch across the countryside. It is not unusual to find a home where the only sound is birdsong and the occasional passing tractor.

For international buyers in particular, this department represents an opportunity to purchase not just a home, but a lifestyle, without the premium price tag seen elsewhere.

FOOD AND COMMUNITY

Life in the Gers is deeply rooted in its agricultural heritage, and nowhere is this more evident than in its food. Markets are at the centre of daily life. Seasonal produce dictates what is on the table, from summer melons and tomatoes to autumn mushrooms and winter duck. Meals are not rushed. They are shared, extended and enjoyed.

There is also a strong sense of community. Villages and towns

On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM**



€215,000, Condom: *Located in the historic heart of the town, this charming three-bedroom townhouse has a terrace and garage, plus views over the town, park and cathedral*



€348,000, Vic-Fezensac: *Beautiful stone house with three bedrooms; outside there's a large landscaped garden with swimming pool, pétanque court and several outbuildings*



€530,000, Condom: *Character property comprising a main three-bedroom house, a three-bedroom guesthouse and a one-bedroom apartment, all set in about 3.5ha of land*



€424,000, Castéra-Verduzan: *Country house with five ensuite bedrooms, exposed beams, fireplace and conservatory; outside there's a swimming pool and outbuildings*



Montréal-du-Gers is a charming medieval village with a central *bastide* square surrounded with covered stone archways

host regular events, festivals and gatherings throughout the year, bringing people together in a way that feels natural. New arrivals are welcomed, but integration happens naturally, through neighbours, markets and local events.

For families, retirees, or those seeking a second home, the appeal is clear: less stress, more connection, and a healthier balance between work and life.

Despite its rural character, the Gers is far from isolated. Toulouse airport is within easy reach, providing connections across Europe, while rail links provide easy access to Paris and other destinations beyond.

There is a distinct sense of stepping away from the pace of modern life though. There are no motorways cutting through the landscape, no overdevelopment and very little sense of urgency. Travel takes a little longer, but that is part of the appeal. This balance between accessibility and tranquillity is one of the region's quiet strengths.



Harvesting grapes: Gers is in the heart of Gascony, known for its wine



A Plus Beaux Village de France, Larressingle is France's smallest fortified village

UNDER THE RADAR

Interest in the Gers has grown steadily in recent years, particularly as buyers reassess what matters most - space, lifestyle and a sense of wellbeing. Yet, compared to other parts of southwest France, it remains largely under the radar. This creates an opportunity. Buyers are not competing in an overheated market, and there is still genuine choice available - whether they are looking for a permanent move, a second home or a lifestyle project.

Increasingly, we are seeing a diverse mix of buyers: families relocating, retirees seeking a gentler pace and international clients looking for a base in France that feels authentic rather than seasonal.

Beyond all the practical considerations such as price, location and infrastructure, there is something less tangible but equally important: how the Gers makes people feel. There is a sense of breathing room, of stepping back from the pressures of modern life. It is not about luxury in the conventional sense, but about something more meaningful: time, space and authenticity.

For those willing to look beyond the familiar, it is not simply a hidden gem - it is a place that stays with you. And increasingly, it's a place people are choosing to call home. ■

Victoria Garnham runs Gelas Immobilier in Gers
Tel: 0033 (0)5 62 06 52 91
gelas-immobilier.com

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On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON **PROPERTYINFRANCE.COM**



€525,000, Mirande: *Château with views of the Pyrénées, set in more than 13.5ha of pastureland; well-proportioned rooms filled with natural light, high ceilings and numerous original details*



€370,000, Valence-sur-Baïse: *Magnificent four-bedroom maison de maître with elegant reception rooms and garden in the heart of Valence-sur-Baïse near all amenities*



€599,000, Lectoure: *Beautifully renovated countryside house of 200m² with five bedrooms, bright living spaces, new pool, private lake, and peaceful views in the heart of the Gers*

FACTFILE

REGION: Occitanie
DEPARTMENT: Gers (32)
PREFECTURE: Auch
SUB-PREFECTURES: Condom, Mirande
AREA: 6,257km²
POPULATION DENSITY: 30.79/km²
NEAREST AIRPORTS: Toulouse, Bordeaux, Biarritz, Lourdes
AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE: €1,854/m²

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GERS, MIRANDE
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Ref MM 2244 TC **Price 380000€**



GASCON FARMHOUSE WITH POOL
GERS, MIELAN
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Ref MM 2372 SD **Price 365000€**

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Main: The couple's home in rural Brittany; (inset) drone footage shows the surrounding landscape



Hard-to-beat Brittany

After 27 years as second-home owners in Brittany, **Chris Slade** takes a look back at how life changed after finding their property

Twenty-seven years is a fair chunk of anyone's life, especially when it's the result of a chance encounter while hopping round France's northwest coast on a hastily arranged escape from the day-to-day of running a marketing consultancy.

We had a habit of getting pleasantly 'lost' on our daily excursions, often saying to each other, "don't worry, we might find our next house down here...". This is exactly what happened when we came upon a house that has become as important, loved and cherished to us as any limb.



Happy days: Micki and Chris Slade

Cost-wise things have changed somewhat as many of you will be well aware of. In 1999, the Brittany Ferries fare was just £90 return! The young woman on the check-out in duty-free later filled the role of Maria in the crew's production of *West Side Story* - we saw it during a force 9 gale, it was hilarious and brilliant in equal measure.

CHANGE OF DIRECTION

When we first saw it, the house was almost a ruin. There were holes in the roof, carefully placed buckets and basins overflowing with rainwater, peeling paint and dry rot throughout the main salon's oak floor - and that was just what was immediately apparent. But we still fell in love with our remote *corps de ferme* in central Brittany.



A roaring fire creates a cosy feel in the dining room to enjoy a winter *repas*

Oh the plans we had! Convert the barns for use as dormitory space for an arts-based residential centre... ads in *The Lady*... stained-glass courses, pottery, creative writing, with literary luminaries joining us each week to lead poetry fans towards pride in their prose... Well, that never happened!

What did happen, however, as we realised how different the buying process in France was to the UK, was the creation of a website with a natty name - ahouseinbrittany.com - that would lead likeminded folk through what, back then,

"The market went nuts – suddenly owning a house in Brittany had become a career move for us"





A winding staircase leads down from the first floor – it needed a lot of TLC

seemed like a minefield of unfamiliar protocol. By good fortune, we met some fledgling estate agents; we were working with around 25 at one point.

The notarial system, which had ruled over property transfers in France since time immemorial, was starting to include *immobiliers*. We advertised our existence and were inundated with enquiries. The market went nuts. Suddenly owning a house in Brittany had become a career move for us. Everything was exhilarating and exciting!

Brexit, both before and after the referendum date, turned the initial high interest in property abroad down to a simmer, and Covid trampled over many would-be UK buyer's plans. The French domestic market, despite some expected peaks and troughs, has been a mainstay for agents and *notaires* alike. As time has passed, there has been a gradual rekindling of interest from British buyers. Uncertain political horizons strengthen some people's resolve to move 'abroad' - but not too far abroad - and France and Brittany figure highly on the list of 'places to buy'. One chastening fact is that if we were to be able to pick up our house in Brittany and drop it into England's southern counties in its now-renovated state, it would undoubtedly be worth over £1m! In rural Brittany though, the asking price would be about €272,000 (plus *notaire*'s fees). You'd better get a move on if you want to beat the General Election rush!

All in all, we have enjoyed our Brittany adventure beyond words, all 27 years of it - it's played a major part in our lives. France will, of course, still feature in our travels, this time for relaxation rather than renovation. Then again, you never know. We both feel we might just have one more 'doer-upper' in us! ■

Micki and Chris's property is for sale on their website ahouseinbrittany.com





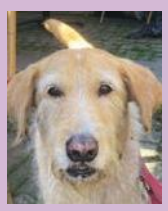
Micki and Chris had the attic space boarded and created an art studio

DOS & DON'TS

What the Slades have learned during their 27 years:

- **DON'T** take on too much land! You will either spend too much of your time at your 'roses around the door' hideaway tending the land yourselves and/or being disappointed at your trusty local gardener's/grass cutter's foibles.
- **DON'T** employ labour from the black economy. Use registered traders only, those who pay tax and register with the prefecture for their speciality. By law, they must offer a 10-year guarantee for their work. We have heard of people who have used 'casual' workers and not only does the dodgy artisan fall foul of the law, but it can reflect badly on the 'client' too. One of the results can be refusal of permission to enter the country. A wonderful deterrent!
- **DO** make sure that you always ask artisans for a *devis* (quote/estimate) for work you are having done and do make sure to keep all of your *factures* (invoices). These will mitigate against charges and taxes that will be levied when/if you sell the property.
- **DO** learn as much of the language as you can. Your neighbours and other locals will appreciate it and you'll be happier knowing that you've made an effort.
- **DO** toe the line when travelling to and fro between Blighty and La Belle France. If you are to remain outside of the French immigration system while visiting your French get-away, you are restricted to 90 out of every 180 days in the country (or EU as a whole). Failure to observe this could result in you being embarrassed at the docks or the airport with a resounding "*non*!". Keep a weather eye on a 'Schengen calculator' to help you work out the number of days you have available to you. If you wish to stay more permanently in France, you must apply for a French long-stay visa, visiting the embassy offices in the UK. For longer stays, attendance at the relevant French prefecture is required: i.e. Rennes for Brittany, Rouen for Normandy and so on.

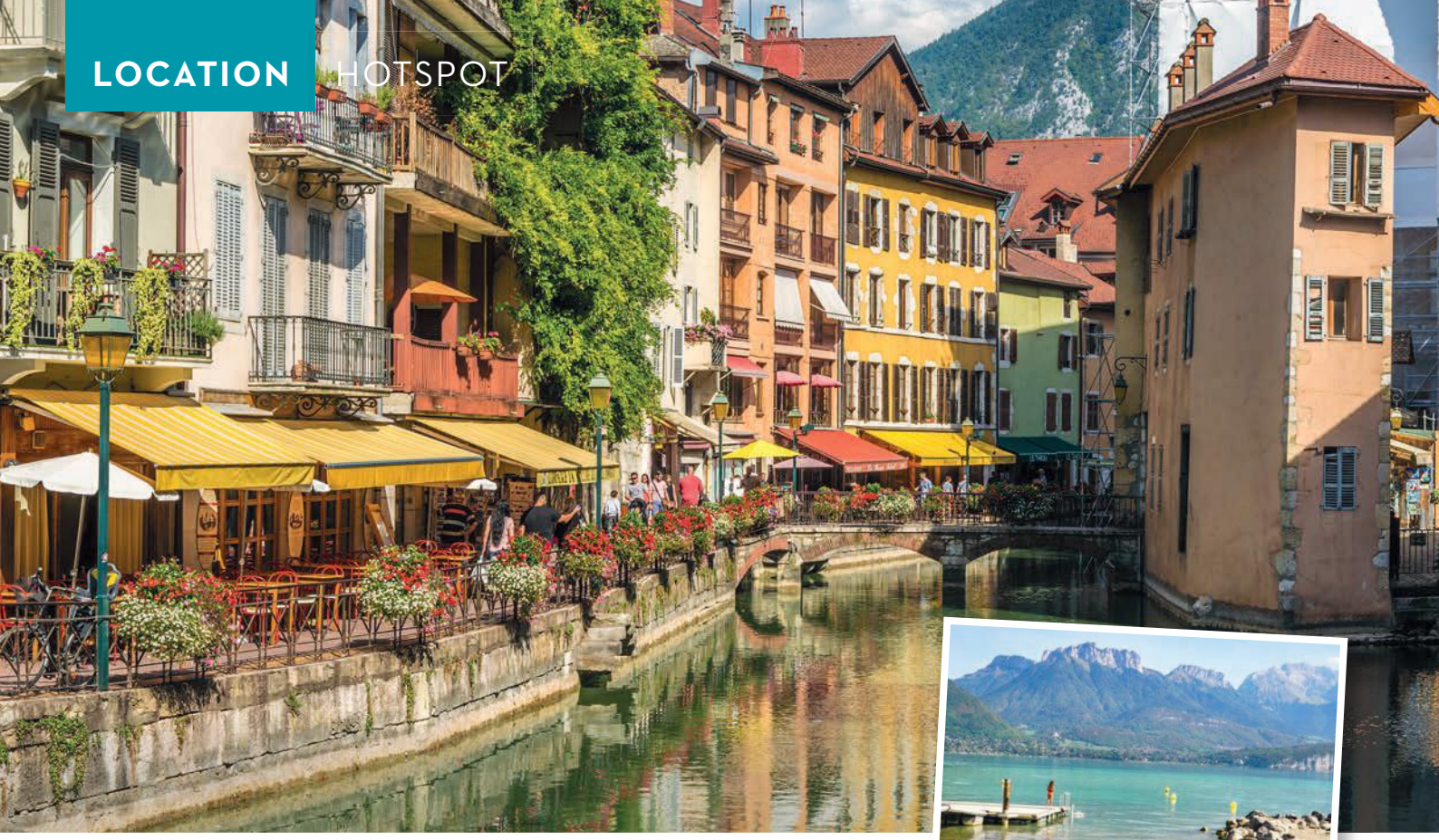
TRAVELLING WITH YOUR PET



This has been a big thing for us. For 10 out of the 27 years of our Brittany home ownership, Rudy has been with us and if you're to-ing and fro-ing, as we have done, there's a certain amount of rigmarole. Earlier this year, in April, the rules affecting cat, dog and ferret (yes, that's right) travel changed yet again for those travelling from the UK into the EU, unfortunately taking a retrograde step in our opinion.

For 10 years (following Brexit), things jogged along, with UK owners of a holiday home in France still being able to use a EU pet passport. Now, however, a single-use animal health certificate (AHC) is required, valid for six months. Those with a main residence in France can still use a pet passport.

On the plus side, ferry companies now cater more adequately for pet transportation, with much improved logistics including pet-friendly cabins and dog-walking deck areas. But, of course, the fare increases with every additional positive feature.





Venice of the Alps

With its waterways, colourful buildings and mountain backdrop, Annecy is one of France's most desirable locations, writes **Karen Tait**

Nestled between the crystal-clear waters of Lake Annecy and the dramatic peaks of the French Alps, Annecy is often described as one of France's most beautiful places to live. For international buyers, it offers a rare combination of lakeside tranquillity, Alpine adventure, historic atmosphere, easy access and year-round appeal for holidays or relocation.

Known as the 'Venice of the Alps' thanks to its charming canals and pastel-coloured old town, Annecy blends historic character with a vibrant year-round lifestyle. Cobbled streets are lined with independent boutiques, restaurants and cafés, while weekly markets showcase the local area's celebrated cheeses, wines and fresh local produce.

One of Annecy's greatest attractions is its four-season activities. Summer brings sailing, paddleboarding, cycling and swimming in one of Europe's cleanest lakes, while winter places some of the Alps' finest ski resorts within easy reach. Resorts such as La Clusaz, Le Grand-Bornand and Chamonix are all popular day-trip destinations, making Annecy an excellent base for outdoor enthusiasts.

Connectivity is another major advantage here. Geneva airport is less than an hour's drive away, offering flights to numerous UK airports.

From a property perspective, Annecy remains one of France's most desirable markets. Demand is consistently strong, supported by both domestic and international buyers attracted by the exceptional quality of life, thriving economy and proximity to Switzerland.

Although property prices are higher than many other parts of France, they reflect the town's enduring popularity and limited supply of homes in sought-after lakeside locations.

Whether you're searching for a stylish apartment overlooking the canals, a contemporary lakeside villa or a traditional chalet in the surrounding mountains, this town offers something for every lifestyle.

The average property price in Annecy is €5,991/m², rising to €6,867/m² in the heart of the town. Neighbouring lakeside village Annecy-le-Vieux is more expensive still, at €6,942/m².

In comparison, the average for the whole of the Haute-Savoie department (which includes pricey ski resorts such as Chamonix, Megève and Morzine) is slightly less, at €5,119/m². ■

On the market

FIND MORE PROPERTIES ON FRANCEPROPERTYSHOP.COM & PROPERTYINFRANCE.COM



€182,000: *Studio apartment with modern open-plan design, large terrace and storage cellar, in a new development*



€367,000: *In the heart of the old town, stylish one-bedroom apartment with cellar storage in a renovated historic building*



€539,000: *Spacious lakeside apartment with panoramic lake and mountain views, located in the village of Talloires*

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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



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LEGAL COLUMN
Find out about the latest developments in relation to election of English law in succession planning and France's forced heirship rules

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Q&As on French healthcare, capital gains tax, currency exchange, inheritance – and taking a ride-on lawnmower from the UK to your second home in France!

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Legal column

Fabienne Atkin discusses developments regarding France's forced heirship and the election of English law in succession planning



A defining feature of succession law in England and Wales is testamentary freedom: subject to limited statutory intervention, individuals may generally decide who benefits from their estate and in what proportions. This principle often underpins estate planning for British nationals. French law starts from a different position. Testamentary freedom is limited by the *réserve héréditaire*, which reserves part of the estate for protected heirs, principally children. As a result, a child cannot ordinarily be wholly disinherited under French domestic law.

This creates practical difficulties for Brits living in France, owning French immovable property, or with family and assets in both jurisdictions - particularly where an English will provides for beneficiaries other than the children, or where a testator wishes to exclude a child from their inheritance, in a way that conflicts with children's fixed entitlements under French law.

French estate planning techniques can mitigate forced heirship but rarely offer a complete solution. For example, a couple buying a French property may do so *en tontine* - ownership passes by survivorship on the first death and the property falls outside the first deceased's estate. However, this must be arranged at the time of the acquisition, it applies only to that property and does not deal with the position on the second death.

UK married couples living in France may also adopt a French matrimonial property regime, such as *communauté universelle*, often with a full attribution clause in favour of the surviving spouse if they wishes for them to become the sole owner and have full control of the couple's assets on the first death. The common assets pass outside the succession, but a French marriage regime may be difficult to enforce in a foreign jurisdiction, and may not suit blended families, as it requires the agreement of children from previous relationships.

EU LAW COMPLIANCE

Against this background, Regulation (EU) No 650/2012, the EU Succession Regulation, was an important development. It applies to deaths on or after 17 August 2015 and seeks greater unity and predictability in cross-border succession. Although the UK did not opt in, it remains relevant where a participating member state, such as France, has jurisdiction over the succession or assets within its territory.

Article 22 permits a person to choose the law of their nationality to govern their succession as a whole. For English or Welsh nationals, for example, a properly drafted election for the law of England and Wales can be a valuable estate planning tool as it may disapply French forced heirship rules.

However, Article 35 of the same Regulation allows participating member states to set aside foreign law where it is manifestly incompatible with their international public policy.

In 2021, France introduced a new paragraph in Article 913 of the French Civil Code, creating the *droit de prélèvement compensatoire*. It does not invalidate a choice of foreign law, but where that law offers no mechanism protecting children, each child or their issue may claim compensation from French assets to restore the reserved share they would have received under French law. It applies only where, on death, the deceased or at least one child is an EU national or habitually resident in an EU member state. This includes dual British/EU nationals.



This right caused concerns for many British nationals resident in France, or who had the intention of moving to France as it appeared to reintroduce forced heirship, thereby limiting the effectiveness of a valid English law election, raising questions about compliance with EU law.

REASONABLE DOUBTS

In response to a number of complaints considered by the European Commission, the French authorities confirmed that the reform was intended to give effect to Article 35 of the EU Succession Regulation. However, they also stated that it should only apply where the chosen foreign law does not "allow any reserved portion mechanism to protect the children".

It was accepted that the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975 (the '1975 Act') offers a functional equivalent to the French reserve, and therefore, where English/Welsh law is the applicable law of succession, the 1975 Act should prevent Article 913 from operating.

Although the Commission considered the uncertainty around Article 913 resolved, doubts remain. The basis of



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"Article 22 permits you to choose the law of your nationality to govern your succession – but Article 35 allows member states to set aside foreign law if it is incompatible with their international policy"

the claim, timescales, burden of proof and awards under the 1975 Act and Article 913 differ significantly. The French reserve gives an automatic entitlement based on the number of children and estate value, whereas the 1975 Act provides a discretionary remedy, particularly uncertain for adult children who would have to establish financial need for their maintenance for the claim to succeed.

It remains unclear whether a French court would apply foreign law and use discretionary powers to assess both the merits of a claim and the level of compensation.

DOMICILE DISPUTES

Domicile is also likely to be a central issue since it is a prerequisite condition for the 1975 Act to apply that the deceased died domiciled in England or Wales. A British national long resident in France, habitually resident there and intending to remain permanently may no longer have an English domicile. This creates a possible mismatch if they made a valid Article 22 election: English/Welsh law may govern the succession, while the statutory mechanism relied on as equivalent to the French reserve may not be available to their disgruntled children.

In practice, where a French domiciled British national made a valid election of English/Welsh law, a decision will have to be made as to whether that law applies as a whole, including the 1975 Act (thereby disregarding the question of domicile), or whether Article 913 must apply instead, on the basis that the protection mechanism granted to children is circumvented in such circumstances.

This in any event is likely to increase preliminary disputes over domicile, which often requires a complex, fact-based assessment of the deceased's situation, as well as proof of intention, which makes the outcome difficult to predict.

Pending further guidance, the French courts are likely to look to earlier case law, including the Cour de Cassation's decisions of 27 September 2017 (*Affaire Jarre*). In cases involving Californian law, the court held that a foreign law lacking reserved heirship rights is not automatically contrary to French international public policy, but also considered whether it would leave children in economic hardship.

This suggests that the court may be willing to set aside a foreign law where its application results in a situation of economic precariousness or need, thereby adopting a similar approach to that in England and Wales.

The immediate take is that an English law election remains an essential, albeit not risk-free, estate-planning measure for anyone with assets or ties in France wishing to leave their estate to beneficiaries other than the children.

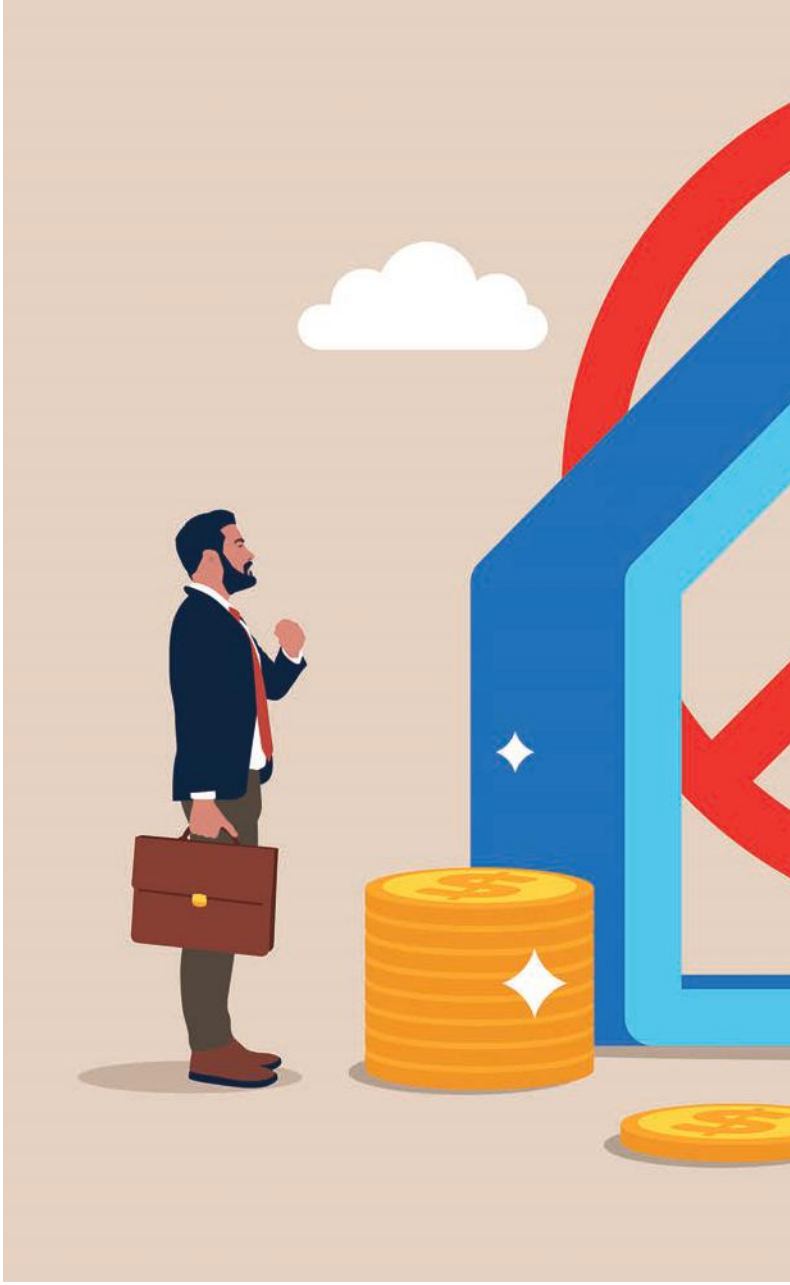
Wills should include a clear choice of law clause, while wider planning should consider residence, domicile, matrimonial arrangements, asset location and nature, family finances, and future residence changes. Until further guidance is issued, individuals and practitioners alike should approach Franco-British succession planning with caution. ■

***Fabienne Atkin** is a Senior Associate and English-qualified solicitor in Stone King's international and cross-border team, specialising in French law*
stoneking.co.uk

Money column

Fiona Watts on why many French mortgage applications are refused





Buying a property in France with a mortgage can be more challenging than many buyers expect. In a 2022 industry survey, 40% of French credit intermediaries reported that at least 40% of their submitted mortgage cases were being refused. In the UK, industry estimates that figure to be 5-10% from brokers in the UK. The French figure includes both resident and overseas buyers, highlighting just how complex the French lending process can be.

As a result, all related parties such as the vendor, French estate agent and *notaire* can be very cautious about a non-resident buyer, especially those who are needing finance to help purchase the property.

For international clients, the challenges can come as a shock. French banks assess applications very differently from lenders in the UK, US and beyond. As a result, buyers who believe themselves to be financially strong may still find themselves declined.

This is where specialist advice makes all the difference. In 2025, IPF achieved a mortgage approval rate of over 90% thanks to our in-depth understanding of French lending criteria and our long-established relationships with leading French banks. Understanding the most common reasons applications are refused can help buyers prepare effectively from the outset.

1. Affordability rules are stricter than buyers may expect

One of the biggest surprises for overseas buyers is how French banks assess affordability. French lenders typically require borrowers to keep their total debt commitments below approximately one-third (33%) of their monthly income.

This includes existing mortgages, personal loans (including interest-free loans), car finance and the proposed new French mortgage.

There are differences between lenders on whether they will include gross or net income and exactly what income they will include. For example, some will only include rental income if there have been three years' history of renting on a long-term basis, not all will include bonuses and many will discount income for those nearing retirement.

This differs significantly from lending practices in other countries. For example, UK lenders often use an income multiplier when calculating borrowing capacity, typically around four-and-a-half times annual income. US lenders are generally more familiar with debt-to-income calculations, but often allow ratios of around 43-45%.



For example: An employed borrower earning a salary of £120,000 per year with:

- An existing mortgage payment of £1,500 per month
- A car loan/finance payment of £300 per month

Could potentially borrow:

- Up to £461,000/€530,150 (€1.15) in the UK
- Up to €250,000 in France

As a result, many buyers are surprised to discover that their French borrowing capacity is considerably lower than they expected.

2. Self-employed applicants face additional scrutiny

Self-employed applicants can certainly obtain French mortgages, but the requirements are often more demanding than in many other countries and some lenders only lend to salaried borrowers.

Most French banks require at least three full years of company accounts and focus primarily on income that has actually been drawn from the business before considering an application.

French banks will typically use an average of the last three years' salary and dividends. They won't include directors' loans repayments.

By comparison, lenders in both the UK and the US will often consider applicants with only two years of trading history and will consider retained company profits.

As a result, business owners who appear highly profitable on paper can sometimes find their French borrowing capacity unexpectedly restricted.

3. Insufficient personal contribution

Borrowers must have sufficient personal savings to cover their deposit, fees and associated costs. In addition, most banks



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"It is important that all of your accounts are in credit and there are no missed payments or bounced direct debits"

want to see that there will be money left over after their French property purchase.

Importantly in France:

- The funds cannot be borrowed against an existing property or in the form of a loan
- The money cannot simply be sitting within the borrower's business
- The banks don't like to see the deposit coming from a gift.

This can come as a surprise to overseas buyers, as lenders in both the UK and the US are often far more flexible regarding the source of the personal contribution – and they are willing to accept a much smaller deposit, typically 5% versus 15-30% in France.

4. Management of finances

It is important that all of your accounts are in credit and there are no missed payments or bounced direct debits. This one often catches people out as we are so used to using overdrafts here in the UK, and borrowers often feel if they have more than enough money across their accounts that this wouldn't be a negative, but they are wrong.

Overdrafts are not common in France, and frequent use suggests to a French lender poor management so it is viewed extremely negatively.

5. Excluding a partner

Often potential buyers plan to buy in their sole name to remove their partner from the equation, perhaps as they have recently set up a business or simply this is something they want to purchase in their own name. However, a French bank will look at the income and outgoings of the 'household' and so they will include all of the outgoings, even if in practice they are shared or paid entirely by the other person.

6. Moving to France and buying a main residence

A French bank will be cautious about any borrower who is planning to make the new property their main home. They view it as a big life change and will only lend when they can be certain that any income will remain unchanged and that there are additional funds to allow for travel back and forth to the UK where required and necessary accommodation.

If the borrower is employed, they will ask for a letter from the employer to confirm the role can be carried out from France and any requirements to be present in the UK to be clearly stated.

7. Are there exceptions?

There can be more flexibility for larger borrowing requirements – typically above €2.5. However, private banks still need to understand clearly how the mortgage will be serviced. Strong and demonstrable income remains essential.

8. How can you reassure the vendor and estate agent?

It is worth doing your research ahead of making an offer to ensure you qualify for a French mortgage. Speaking to a specialist broker like IPF can help you do this. We have a simple affordability calculator on our website allowing potential buyers to input their income and outgoings at their leisure to find out how much they would qualify for.

Alternatively, they can speak to a member of our team, who will carried out an in-depth consultation going through a potential buyer's full financial circumstances and then being able to explain how much they would qualify for, anything they can do to improve that. Quite often clients will return three to six months later once they have followed our advice and are then in a stronger position to apply.

In addition, we can often obtain an agreement in principle from a lender, confirming that the initial study of the client's financial situation has been done, and based on that information they would be willing to lend. This can help reassure all parties and even improve the buyer's negotiating position when making an offer. ■

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GUIDE TO

FIND OUT MORE
Read our guides to living in France on *frenchentree.com*

DECLUTTERING

Whether you're clearing a French property you've just bought or tidying out your cupboards, don't just dump the contents, says **Catherine Higginson**. Recycling or selling online or at a *brocante* or *vide-grenier* is good for the planet, good for your pocket and can be a lot of fun



Declutter on a regular basis so that things don't get out of control

Whether you've just bought a property in France or have lived in one for a while, I can guarantee that decluttering will be on your 'to do' list. Why? For the simple reason that almost every French property sold comes with a selection of random items left in the loft, basement or outbuildings, and if you are the happy owner of a French property, over time your loft, basement and outbuildings will also become home to said collection of random items.

Sorting and clearing this type of stuff can be daunting but it becomes a whole lot easier once you know where you can dispose of the items you no longer need or want.

TRASH OR TREASURE?

The starting point should always be to assume that one person's trash is another person's treasure, and you should begin by working out what could be re-used by someone else. Having said that, there are clearly going to be items that are beyond repair, as well as things like random breeze blocks, bits of damaged plasterboard and so on that are only fit for the tip.



For items that are beyond repair, it's a trip to the local *déchetterie*, or waste tip

In France, every household has access to a local dump or *déchetterie* and your local commune's website or *mairie* will be able to advise you on both location and opening hours. If you have a large amount of stuff to take to the tip and have no means of getting it there, it is possible to hire a skip (*une benne*) in France; however, these are not widely available and are expensive.

Items such as clothing, shoes, fabric, belts and small household items of little value can be placed in specific recycling bins. Not every commune will have one, so you might need to ask around. Items should be clean and deposited in sealed bags.

If you have what is known as a *brocante solidaire* close by, they will (generally) happily take almost anything and everything that can be re-used, from plant pots to pushchairs. The idea behind these is that people donate items that are then resold at very low prices to enable those on low incomes to equip their homes and buy clothes, toys, books and games etc. They are also a great place to find all kinds of treasures. Just be careful not to come away with more than you donated!

LARGE ITEMS

If you have large items to donate, you may be able to get the *brocante solidaire* to collect, but another way to dispose of things without having to transport them yourself, is to list them on a donation site such as Donnons (*donnons.org*). It is easy to use and items go fast.

Donating items or selling them yourself is almost always



Brocante shops may buy your vintage items or sell them on your behalf



Many towns have secondhand markets, including the popular weekly event on the Cours Saleya in Nice

a better option than involving a house clearance service, known as *débarras de maison*. Even if such companies imply they will buy items, the cost of removing the things they don't 'want' to buy, is normally higher than any payment they offer. To be avoided, or *à éviter* as they say in French!

If you have household items, tools, furniture, paintings and so on to sell, then Facebook Marketplace or local Facebook groups are probably the best option in terms of ease and speed. You could also take these to a *dépôt vente* where they will be sold for you; the fee is usually a percentage of the sale price, or some offer a system where you 'rent' a stand or space and a percentage fee may or may not be charged as well.

If you have good-quality secondhand clothes, shoes or bags, you can either use an online site such as Vinted (*vinted.fr*) or take them to a local clothing *dépôt vente*, known as *une friperie*. These vary enormously in terms of pricing, turnover and what they will and won't accept, so be prepared to do some research online before you take your stuff in.

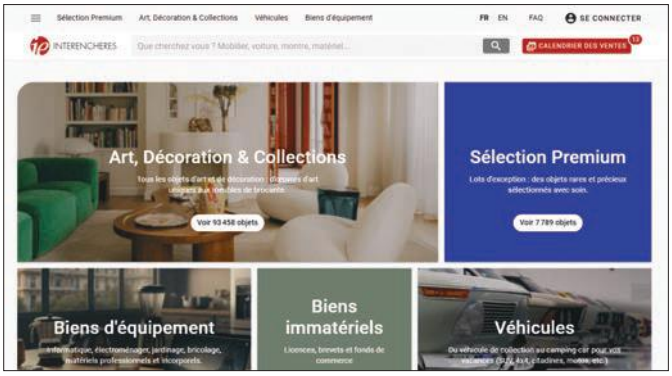
Unless they are rare and sought-after editions, books are much harder to sell – either online or in person and, sadly, there are now very few bookshops left that will buy or even accept secondhand books. If they are in good condition, you can try your local library, but the best option is probably to leave them in a local 'book box'. These come in all shapes and forms from a simple box to an entire small building – our village has turned the old telephone box into a book depository. If you're not sure where the nearest one is, ask at the *mairie* and keep your eyes peeled too when you are out and about as they are an excellent way to stock up on new reading matter.

ATTICS AND AUCTIONS

If you have enough stuff, it is definitely worth doing a *vide-grenier* – literally 'emptying the attic' – or car boot sale. The best site to discover what is coming up and when in your locality is *vide-greniers.org*; this also lists *brocantes*, flea markets and *vide-poussettes* (sales geared towards selling baby equipment and children's toys and clothes etc) along with specialist sales of more collectible items.

Top tip

Decluttering is a lot easier and goes a lot faster when you sort everything into piles at the outset. Be ruthless and divide items into dump, donate or sell, and be realistic about prices if you are planning to sell things. Declutter on a regular basis so that things don't get out of control! Emmaus (*emmaus-france.org*) is the best known (and nationwide) *brocante solidare*, but there are many others throughout France.



Get an idea of auction pricing and categories on the Interencheres website

Very often people also do a *vide-maison* at the same time as the local *vide-grenier*. A *vide-maison* is a house clearance or yard sale and you can, of course, do one, at any point, not just when the village car boot sale is happening, but you will need a special permit from the *mairie* whenever you do it, and it makes sense to do a yard sale on a date when there are already people coming to the *vide-grenier*.

Prices vary enormously at *vide-maisons* and *vide-greniers*. Often prices are far too high, so if you set your pricing low and make this clear with lots of signs and price stickers, you should do extremely well. Always remember that the object of the exercise is decluttering and a successful day is when you go home with a lot less than you arrived with!

The final thing to mention is auctions. These are almost certainly the best way to dispose of anything valuable or collectible, but there are auctions for anything and everything in France so if you are looking to sell a collection of watering cans or old bar glasses, there will be a sale for you. The best site to give you an idea of pricing and categories is Interencheres (*interencheres.com*) and you will need to take the items to your local sales room or auction house.

The idea of clearing out a load of clutter can be daunting; it's not just the sheer volume of stuff, but having to work out what can be disposed of and where can be challenging when you first arrive in France. However, once you're aware of the different options, it should be a whole lot simpler. Happy decluttering! ■

NEXT MONTH

Guide to: *Buying at auction*

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Q&A Ask the experts

Need advice? Put your problems to our panel



MOVING WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS

In April 2023, we were about 10 days away from the start of our six-month French visa to start our plans to move to France when my partner was diagnosed with cancer. We had no option but to cancel our plans. Three-plus years on, now aged 72 and 71, we are preparing to move to France but are struggling to find out how to approach healthcare and insurance. We understand the rules if you are moving in good health and at our age (i.e. in receipt of state pension and fully retired) but where do you begin if you have a condition that will need reviews and maybe further treatment. It is a non-invasive form of bladder cancer; the last check-up showed no return of the cancer and we are waiting to hear biopsy results following the last check-up.



Paulette Booth

PAULETTE BOOTH of Lonemi responds *(lonemi.fr):* Firstly, we are incredibly glad to hear your partner's recent check-ups show no return of the cancer, and we send our best wishes for the upcoming biopsy results. Facing a diagnosis right before a life-changing move is devastating, but your resilience in returning to this dream three years later is deeply inspiring.

Moving to France at your age with a medical history can feel daunting, but as retirees, you have a distinct advantage. Here is how to approach your health insurance and visa application.

Step 1: The S1 form is your golden ticket (UK/EEA): Because you receive a state pension, you can apply for an S1 form from your home country's health authority (like the NHS BSA in the UK).

The S1 is a reciprocal agreement where your home country funds your French state care. The French consulate accepts it in place of private health insurance for your visa application. Crucially, the French state healthcare system (PUMa) cannot reject you or charge higher premiums for pre-existing conditions.

The essential S1 'bridge' policy: While the S1 covers your visa application, it does not give you instant access to healthcare the moment you step off the plane. It can take several weeks or months for French authorities to process your paperwork and issue your social security number. Until that number is active, you are liable for the full cost of any medical care.

To protect yourself, we recommend setting up a temporary private health insurance (PHI) policy to cover accident and emergency (A&E) during your first few months. This policy is significantly cheaper than standard visa health insurance, as its job is strictly to protect you against unexpected emergency costs while you are in this administrative limbo.

Note: Most PHI policies exclude pre-existing conditions. Any emergency or treatment directly linked to your partner's cancer would not be covered by this temporary policy. You must budget to cover any immediate cancer-

CAN I TAKE MY MOWER TO FRANCE?

I would like to take a spare ride-on mower over to my house in the Orne and leave it there. I've had it since 2004 and its value is about £1,000. How should I go about it, post-Brexit?

BEN HINGLEY of Burke Bros responds *(burkebros.co.uk):* As the ride-on mower is being taken from the UK into France permanently it is treated as an import into the EU. In principle, that means it should be declared to French customs when it enters France.

As the mower is used, owned by you since 2004, and worth around £1,000, this is not a commercial shipment, but customs formalities still technically apply. The simplest and safest route is...



Ben Hingley

1. Take proof of ownership and age: Bring any paperwork you still have, old receipt, manual, service records or anything indicating you have owned it since 2004.

2. **Carry evidence of value:** A realistic secondhand valuation of around £1,000 is sensible. Customs are interested in current value, not what it cost new.

3. Be prepared for VAT/duty: French TVA (VAT) may be payable based on the mower's current value. Duty may also apply depending on classification, though on a used personal mower this may be modest.

4. Declare on arrival in France: If transporting it by trailer, van or as part of a removals shipment, it should be listed on the inventory. It may also need to be declared directly to French customs depending on the entry route.

5. If it is genuinely part of moving household effects: If you are transferring residence to France or formally moving possessions as part of a household move, reliefs can sometimes apply. But for a second-home owner simply taking equipment over to leave there, that exemption usually does not apply.


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related care out-of-pocket until your S1 is fully registered.

Step 2: Your healthcare journey on arrival: Once you arrive, focus on getting registered into the permanent healthcare system:

1. Register with CPAM: Submit your S1 form to your local French health insurance office (CPAM) to start the application for your *carte vitale*.

2. Receive your social security number: Once processed, CPAM will issue your number, fully activating your state healthcare rights.

As soon as you receive your social security number, get in touch with us or other provider to arrange your permanent French top-up policy (*mutuelle*). By law, *mutuelles* cannot ask medical questions or exclude pre-existing conditions.

The standard 30% state shortfall is only an average. The state covers very little for dental and optical care. It only reimburses an average of 70% of a fixed base rate, leaving patients to cover the rest out of pocket.

France's system is designed to care for you when you need it most - you are closer than ever to your move!

6. Consider using a removals company experienced in EU moves: A professional international removals firm can include the mower in a full inventory and advise on whether it can be covered under household effects relief or whether formal import declaration is required. This avoids delays at the border.

In practice, used domestic machinery of this kind is routinely moved between the UK and France, but compliance with declaration requirements is important to avoid complications or unexpected charges.

In short, include it on a removals inventory, carry proof of long-term personal ownership, and ensure it is correctly declared as a used personal item entering France.


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WHERE WILL WE PAY TAX?

We currently have our main home in the UK, owned for almost 27 years. We also have our *maison secondaire* in France, owned for over 10 years. If we choose to move to France on a permanent basis (effectively becoming tax resident) and then decide to sell our UK home to downsize our UK property (or just to sell up completely), would we be liable for any capital gains tax in France (or the UK)? I believe in France CGT becomes zero once one has owned a French property for more than 22 years but is it the same if one sells a UK owned property while living in France.



Robert Kent

ROBERT KENT of Kentingtons responds *(kentingtons.com):* Whether you pay capital gains tax depends less on where the property is located and more on where you are tax resident when you sell it.

If you sell your UK home before becoming tax resident in France, France would not normally have any right to tax the gain, as you were not a French tax resident when the disposal took place.

However, if you first move to France and become French tax resident before selling your UK property, the position changes. As a resident of France, you are assessable in France on your worldwide income and capital gains, so the sale must generally be declared on your French tax return, even though the property is in the UK.

Thanks to the UK France tax treaty, it means you don't pay tax twice. The UK has the primary right to tax gains on UK real estate. France also calculates the gain under its own rules, giving a credit for any UK tax paid, preventing double taxation.

Many UK homeowners may qualify for 'principal private residence relief', meaning there may be little or no UK capital gains tax to pay. Whether this relief applies depends on your individual circumstances, including how the property has been used and the timing of the sale.

As you might expect, French and UK rules for assessing capital gains are not the same. French capital gains tax on a second property is generally eliminated after 22 years of ownership; however, social charges, or the solidarity levy, where applicable, are only fully removed after 30 years.

For anyone planning a permanent move to France, the timing of a property sale can, therefore, have a significant impact. In many cases, selling a UK home before becoming French tax resident is the simpler option and may avoid unnecessary administrative complexity.

As every situation is different, particularly where there have been periods of letting, multiple residences or other complicating factors, it is sensible to seek professional advice before deciding when to sell. A little planning beforehand can often make a considerable difference to the eventual tax outcome.



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Get in touch!

Ask your questions about French property or life in France...

Email: karen.tait@francemedia.com

Alternatively, you can post your question on our **Facebook** page

Delegating authority



Sophie Hearle tackles some interesting legal situations

My husband and I own a holiday home in France. We do not have any children and wish to leave the French property to our seven nieces and nephews when the second of us dies. We are already aware of the French inheritance tax which will be payable. We would like to authorise one person to sell the French property and then distribute the sale proceeds amongst all of the beneficiaries. Is this possible?
Yes, it is possible to arrange for one person to handle the sale and distribution of your French property to your seven nieces and nephews, though this requires careful estate planning to ensure your wishes are properly executed.

Under French law, when you leave property to multiple beneficiaries, they typically become co-owners *en indivision*. This means all of the beneficiaries would need to agree on any decisions regarding the property, including its sale. This can become complicated and time-consuming, particularly when a large number of parties are involved.

The most effective solution is to appoint an executor (*exécuteur testamentaire*) in your French will. Your executor could be one of your nieces and nephews, and they can be given broad powers to:

- Take control of the French property upon the death of the second spouse
- Arrange for the property's maintenance and security during the administration period
- Instruct estate agents and manage the sale process
- Sign the sale deed (*acte de vente*) on behalf of all the beneficiaries
- Receive the sale proceeds
- Distribute the funds equally among all seven beneficiaries according to your wishes

This approach effectively bypasses the need for all seven beneficiaries to be involved in the sale process and avoids the potential complications of the *en indivision* arrangement.

Your will must be carefully drafted to clearly grant these specific powers to your executor. The wording needs to be precise to ensure the executor has unambiguous authority to act.

The executor's mandate typically lasts for two years from the date of death, though this can be extended if necessary.

During this period, the executor has a duty to act in the best interests of all beneficiaries and must keep proper accounts of all transactions.

When selecting your *exécuteur testamentaire*, choose someone who is organised, trustworthy, and ideally has some familiarity with French property transactions and legal procedures. You might also consider appointing substitute executors in case your first choice is unable or unwilling to act when the time comes. This provides continuity and avoids potential complications.

It is advisable to discuss your intentions with your executor beforehand to ensure they are willing to undertake this responsibility. Managing a French property sale from the UK involves coordinating with *notaires*, potentially dealing with language barriers, and understanding French conveyancing and succession procedures.

Before we moved to France we completed lasting powers of attorney in case one of us might lose mental capacity and not be able to manage finances or sell the house. Are these valid in France?
A lasting power of attorney (LPA) is valid for use in France, their validity documents in other jurisdictions being governed by an international convention. However, in practice it can prove to be quite onerous.

In the first instance, an LPA will of course be in English, and must be translated into French by a certified translator before it could be relied upon.

In addition, it is reasonable to expect that while an LPA would easily be recognised at a UK bank, law firm or other institution, that would not be the case in France.

It follows, therefore, that a formal legal opinion from a suitably experienced lawyer in the UK would be required to confirm that the document is correctly prepared and registered, to set out what restrictions may apply to it, and who is entitled to act as representative. Inevitably, that legal opinion would itself have to be in French.

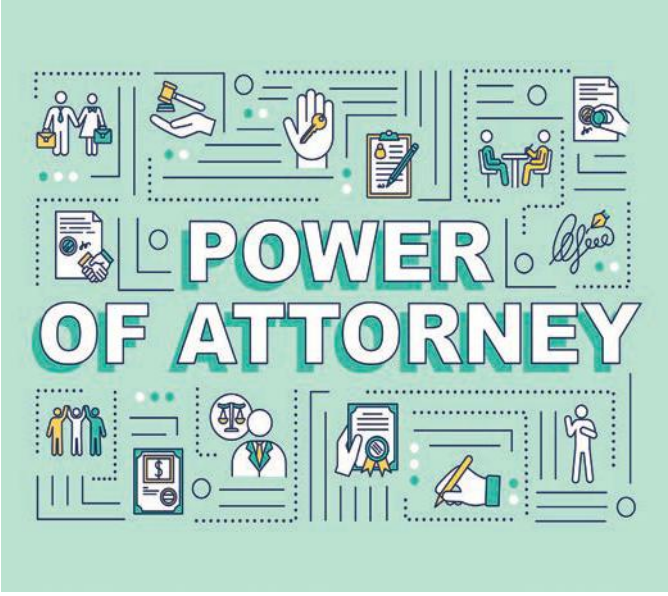
These steps will appear costly and onerous. While that is indeed the case, we are often instructed in such matters. If a house in France needs to be sold and one owner, having lost capacity, had prepared an LPA, then there is unlikely to be much choice.

If they had no such document, however, it would be necessary to seek a court order authorising someone to represent them; that could be either the UK or French court, depending on the circumstances.

You may therefore consider establishing the French equivalent of an LPA, known as a *mandat de protection future* (MPF). This would need to be prepared by a *notaire*. It may be prudent to ensure that the same people are named as attorney in both documents, to avoid any conflict.

Hopefully, neither the English nor French version would ever be needed. But losing capacity without having prepared them can cause great difficulty for your family. ■

"You may consider establishing the French equivalent of a power of attorney, known as a mandat de protection future"



***Sophie Hearle** is a Senior Associate in the French Legal Services department at Ashtons Legal*
ashtonslegal.co.uk

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Protecting budgets

Mar Bonnin-Palmer on handling unwanted exchange rate fluctuations



Foreign exchange can be a real challenge when budgeting for a property purchase in France. As completion will take place in euros, buyers holding funds in another currency need to understand how exchange rate movements can affect the final cost of their property.

Even if the agreed purchase price remains unchanged, adverse currency fluctuations could significantly increase the amount you need to pay.

My budget is tight, and I cannot afford any increase in the agreed property price. What is the best way to avoid this?

Consider a forward contract:

If your budget is fixed and you cannot absorb any increase in costs, a forward contract may be the most suitable solution. A forward contract allows you to lock in an exchange rate today for a future property purchase.

This means that regardless of what happens in the currency markets between now and completion, you will know exactly how much your property will cost in your home currency. By reducing exchange rate uncertainty, it may be easier to budget with confidence and manage impact from adverse market movements.

For many property buyers, particularly those working within strict financial limits, a forward contract provides valuable peace of mind throughout the purchasing process. Buyers often spend months negotiating the purchase price yet overlook the risk of exchange rate movements that could sometimes cost more than the discounts they negotiated in the first place. For buyers working within a fixed budget, predictability is often more important than trying to achieve a slightly better exchange rate in the future.

We are at the very early stages of finding a property in France and are keen to establish a budget. How can we plan in advance if we do not know the exchange rate we will receive when the purchase completes?

Plan ahead, understand your options, and speak with a foreign exchange specialist early in the process:

One of the biggest challenges for overseas property buyers is budgeting with an unknown exchange rate. Currency markets can be volatile, and even small movements can have a significant impact when exchanging large amounts for a property purchase.

By speaking to a specialist foreign exchange provider at an early stage, you can gain a clearer understanding of your purchasing power and the tools available to manage currency risk. They can help you model different exchange rate scenarios and explain solutions such as forward contracts and market orders.

Planning early allows you to make informed decisions, set realistic expectations, and avoid unpleasant surprises later in the transaction.

Rather than budgeting based on the best possible exchange rate, many buyers find it helpful to build a range of scenarios. For example:

- Optimistic exchange rate
- Current market exchange rate
- Conservative exchange rate

This approach can help reduce risk of disappointment and provide greater visibility over costs, even if the markets move against you.

I am hoping the exchange rate will improve before completion so that I can stretch my budget further. However, there are no guarantees, and I am concerned that an adverse movement could cost me more money. What are my options?

Consider targeting a preferred rate with a market order while managing your exposure to adverse exchange rate movements with a stop loss order:

Many buyers hope exchange rates will move in their favour before completion, enabling them to achieve better value and increase their purchasing power. While this is possible, currency markets are unpredictable and rates can move either in your favour or against you.

A market order allows you to target a specific exchange rate that is more favourable than the current market level. If that rate becomes available, your currency can be purchased automatically. To help manage the impact of adverse market movements, a stop loss order can be placed alongside the market order. This sets a worst-case exchange rate, helping to limit potential losses should the market move against you.

By using both tools together, buyers can pursue potential opportunities if exchange rates move in their favour while helping to mitigate the impact of adverse currency movements. This approach may suit those who are prepared to take some risk but still want to maintain control of their budget.

However, it is important to remember that no strategy can guarantee you the best exchange rate. The objective is not to perfectly predict the market, which is impossible, but to manage risk sensibly and reduce the impact of exchange rate movements on the overall cost of property purchase.

"The objective is not to perfectly predict the market but to manage risk sensibly"



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FINAL THOUGHTS

When buying property in France, the exchange rate can have a significant impact on overall costs. Whether your priority is gaining a greater cost visibility through a forward contract, early budget planning with specialist guidance, or seeking a better rate through a combination of market orders and stop loss orders, understanding your options can help you make informed decisions and avoid costly surprises at completion. ■

Mar Bonnin Palmer **is Head of Partnerships at Moneycorp**
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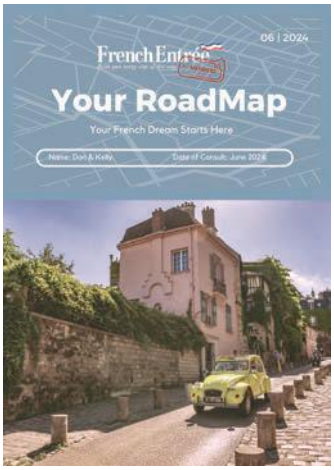
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The grape harvest season in France, known as 'la vendange', typically begins in September and can extend into October

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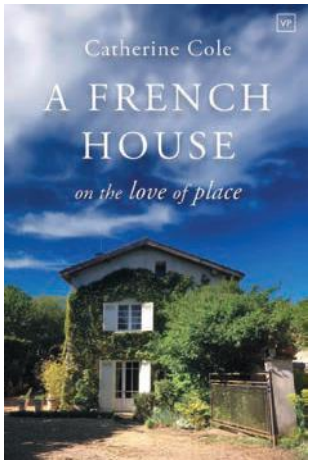
Joie de vivre

READ

A FRENCH HOUSE (2026)

By Catherine Cole

Many readers will relate to the dream of owning an authentic French village house and you'll enjoy Cole's descriptions of how she found exactly that in the Dordogne in 2010. An Australian-British author and creative-writing tutor, Cole captures how you can irrationally fall in love with a country, how a house can be a story in itself, and how dreams can become real in France. *(See Cole's article on p44.)*



WATCH

LARGUÉES (2018)

On Netflix and other streaming channels

This French comedy focuses on two very different sisters, Rose (Camille Cottin) and Alice (Camille Chamoux) who disagree on most things, but agree that they need to help their mother, who was recently dumped for a 30-year-old. They decide that a resort on Île de la Réunion is the ideal place to cheer her up and get her back into dating. A frothy comedy with bittersweet moments.



TEST YOURSELF

Les associations

Match each image with its French name

VOILAGES
RIDEAUX
VOLETS
STORE





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answers p99

DID YOU KNOW?

OCCITANIE IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF BLUE JEANS

In southern France between Montpellier and Avignon sits Nîmes, known for its Roman remains and wool and silk fabric manufactured in the 1700s. This evolved into a cotton twill with a diagonal weave of indigo and unbleached yarns that inspired modern denim – 'de Nîmes' meaning 'from Nîmes'. In the late 1800s, Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis used this durable fabric to create heavy-duty trousers for miners and railroad labourers, which then led to what we know as denim jeans. Jeans gained global popularity through cinema, moving from workwear to practical everyday wear and fashion items across the world. In Nîmes, you can visit the Musée du Vieux Nîmes to learn more, or Atelier Tuffery, which continues the handcrafted denim tradition.



© NIMES-TOURISME

Test yourself



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PROPERTY TALK

What does 'un traversin' mean?

1. A manual worker
2. An imperial-metric converter
3. A bolster pillow

answers p99

French interiors

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aufeminin.com

Test yourself



IDIOM

"Mettre les pieds sous la table"

1. To expect to be waited on
2. To make yourself at home
3. To outstay your welcome

answers p99

French icon

Discover some of France's most fascinating icons

ALICE GUY-BLACHÉ (1873-1968)

Although Hollywood is struggling to achieve gender equality, its first female film director was working over a hundred years ago – and she was born in France. Alice Guy-Blaché was a secretary for Léon Gaumont, whose company sold camera equipment and film.

In 1895, she attended the Lumière brothers' première of their innovative moving pictures and was inspired. While Gaumont partnered with the Lumière brothers for picture-arcade films, it was under Alice's direction that they began making short films with narrative scripts, on the proviso that she kept up her office responsibilities.

Within months, Alice had written, directed and produced the short film *La Fée aux Choux* (The Cabbage Fairy), which played at the 1896 International Exhibition in Paris. She pioneered close-up shots, hand-tinted colouring and synchronised sound – essentially the technical foundation of modern cinema – but most importantly, she turned from documentary filming to human stories, the other founding principle of the films we like to watch. This included *La Vie du Christ* (1906), an ambitious 30-minute movie featuring 25 sets, various exterior locations and over 300 extras.



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By the end of 1906, Gaumont's film division represented nearly 90% of the firm's profits, and at 33, Guy was fully in charge of production. One year later, she married the firm's UK representative, Herbert Blaché, a man nine years younger who was born in England to a French father. The couple emigrated to America where they continued to work with Gaumont, founding the production company Solax Studios and directing movies.

Over 20 years she made 1,000 films, most of which were lost over time, then she disappeared from public consciousness. Director Pamela B Green spent 10 years tracking down Alice Guy-Blaché's history to create *Be Natural* (2018), a biopic with detective elements that reveals the story of this fascinating and pioneering woman.



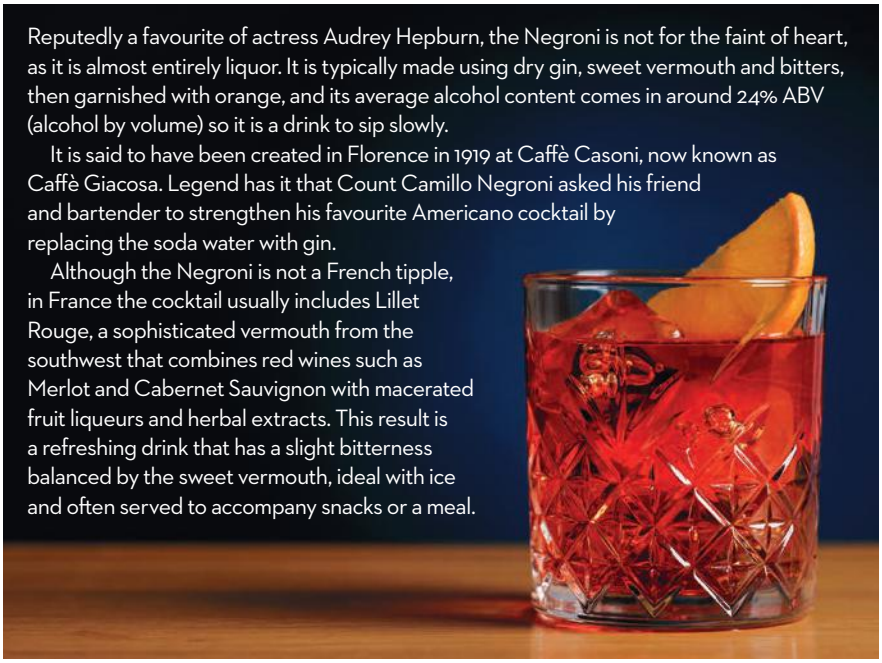
What to drink...

Each issue, we take a look at a different French tipple. This time, we're looking at the sophisticated cocktail, the Negroni...

Reputedly a favourite of actress Audrey Hepburn, the Negroni is not for the faint of heart, as it is almost entirely liquor. It is typically made using dry gin, sweet vermouth and bitters, then garnished with orange, and its average alcohol content comes in around 24% ABV (alcohol by volume) so it is a drink to sip slowly.

It is said to have been created in Florence in 1919 at Caffè Casoni, now known as Caffè Giacosa. Legend has it that Count Camillo Negroni asked his friend and bartender to strengthen his favourite Americano cocktail by replacing the soda water with gin.

Although the Negroni is not a French tipple, in France the cocktail usually includes Lillet Rouge, a sophisticated vermouth from the southwest that combines red wines such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon with macerated fruit liqueurs and herbal extracts. This result is a refreshing drink that has a slight bitterness balanced by the sweet vermouth, ideal with ice and often served to accompany snacks or a meal.





WIN

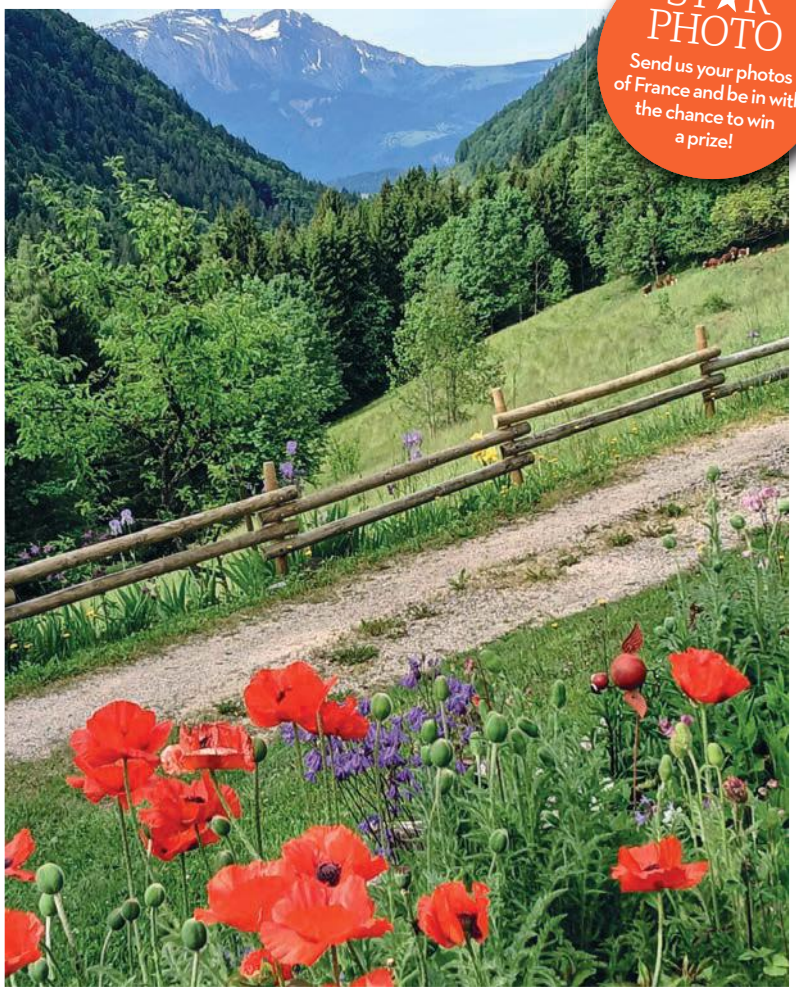
This issue's star photographer wins a year's subscription to *French Property News!*

READERS' PHOTOS

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David Withers spotted this quirky doorway in Carennac, Lot



STAR PHOTO Pam Gilham captured this glorious image of poppies blooming in the Alps near Les Gets



This moody shot of the iconic white chalk cliffs near Étretat, Normandy, was taken by **Bruce Ayling**

ANSWERS:

Les associations: *1. rideaux = curtains, 2. volets = shutters, 3. store = blind, 4. voilages = sheer/net curtains ;* ***Property talk:*** *Un traversin = 3. a bolster pillow;* ***Idiom:*** *Mettre les pieds sous la table = 1. To expect to be waited on*

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“Pressure on the purse...”

In his first column for FPN, **Peter Bear** reveals the ups and downs of living in the depths of La France Profonde



Cost of living crisis? Never heard of it. Complaints about price rises? You must be joking.

While Brits love to talk about crippling mortgage payments, horrendous car insurance premiums and the like, the French think it vulgar and impolite to discuss anything to do with dosh. Back in Blighty, it's perfectly normal to moan about rising food prices in supermarkets, but the French have a different attitude. Where we live in the heart of northern Auvergne, they love to splay out on food. In our local weekly village market, I watched someone who works as a cleaning lady on a modest income buy two trout, a fistful of prawns, a couple of cod fillets, and so it went on. She happily paid over €50. It's a matter of pride to pay for the best, all part of that age-old French tradition.

When we moved to France from London at the turn of the millennium, we had little idea of how it would change our life. With hindsight, the biggest difference was a feeling of going back in history - not just from a 1910 London townhouse to a 1758 *manoir*. And not simply from the bright lights of a throbbing cosmopolitan city to the hidden depths of La France Profonde.

Unlike life in a capital city, we found ourselves cut off from the world - a blessing in this day and age. We're surrounded by farmland; all we hear are nightingales and a lusty chorus of other birdsong. Our visitors are pine martins, red squirrels and deer. It's like living in East Anglia back in the 1950s.

Take shopping, for example. We buy much of our food in the nearby village where I can pull up by the front door of the *boulangerie*, the post office, chemist and bank. No parking meters, no restrictions, no yellow lines. In our local supermarket there are no self-service check-outs. It's all very human.

It's not quite like the village shop in Suffolk nigh on 80 years ago where you could buy a couple of ounces of Liquorice All Sorts poured out of an enormous jar into a paper bag. But they still do a fine job at the baker's when you point at a trio of homebaked cakes which they tong up into a paper carton and tie in a fancy ribbon. You need to allow 10 minutes hanging around just to buy a single baguette while the punters banter endlessly over the pros and cons of chocolate versus coffee eclairs.

That said, you do need a basketful of patience. The French are very sociable shoppers. They love to chat both to whoever is serving and all the others in the queue. It can take an age, exacerbated by much foraging in handbags for pen and cheque book, slowly filling in the cheque, having it checked while chatting a lot more. At Thursday's weekly market, it took 15 talkative minutes for me to buy three scallops.

If you are going to time-travel back to the rural way of French life, where property is still ridiculously affordable, then you need to take the ups with the downs. Even after quarter of a century immersed in French joie de vivre, you never quite lose that feeling of Branston Pickle flowing through your blood.

Mind you, it's relieved somewhat by knowing that you can make a sortie to Lidl in the nearest town to buy a refreshingly summery bottle of Costière de Nîmes rosé for as little as €1.99 or a Côtes de Rhône Villages for €3.89.

Yes, it's unbelievable. But that's what I call living in the good old days. And coping with pressure on the purse. ■

For the past 27 years, writer, journalist and painter Peter Bear has lived with his wife, author Chloe Rayban, in an 18th-century manoir in the Bourbonnais in the middle of France

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Rural riddles

Jeremy Hobson solves more of your pastoral problems

A FINE VINTAGE



On the hunt for a classic tractor

Q We have a mature orchard in France. To assist in orchard maintenance (but in reality, more for fun), I'm thinking of trying to buy a narrow tractor like I've seen in old photos of viticulture. A vintage type quite appeals but I wouldn't know where to start looking!
Mike Barraclough

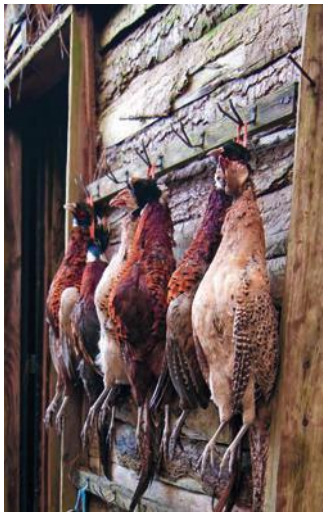
A Assuming that, for whatever reason, a garden tractor is not for you, there are some makes of vintage tractors that might possibly be small/narrow enough to fit in and around your trees.

Having contacted friends with more knowledge than I have, it seems that some older tractor models are particularly suited to orchard work. One such was the Ferguson FF30 GV but an example is, so I'm told, rarely for sale. A classic 'little grey Fergy' as they are affectionately known might be easier to locate. Alternatively, Fiat produced the Someca 615 in the 1960s - which was often used in vineyards and orchards. Of similar vintage is the classic Deutz-Fahr used in France and throughout Europe in the same era. You are more likely to be successful in your search if you look in the regions of France noted for small-scale agriculture or winemaking - several suppliers advertise what's available regionally online. These include *agriaffaires.co.uk*, *tractorhouse.fr* and *europe-agriculture.com*.

FAIR GAME

Q Last winter, a neighbour regularly gifted us pheasants he'd shot. We plucked, cooked and ate them fresh but, on the assumption he might do the same again this winter, wondered what might be the best way to freeze them?
Janine Beaumont

A If you are intending regularly freezing an amount of game, it might pay to invest in a vacuum-pack machine. However, if you don't think such a purchase necessary, plastic ziplock bags work quite well. Lightly oil the meat and wrap it in baking parchment before bagging it up - then roll the bags in such a way as to extrude as much air as possible before finally zipping up the bag. Excluding as much air as possible will help prevent freezer burn. Packing any sort of meat in vacuum bags undoubtedly helps it defrost quickly and evenly in the fridge. Alternatively, it can be done by placing it (still in the bag) in a sink of cold water. Change the water once it chills and do so two or three times - this enables the meat to defrost relatively quickly without raising its temperature too much.



Left out in the cold

SNAIL TRAIL

Q Around a stone gatepost in rural Brittany, we noticed a fair amount of snail shells littering the ground. As I doubt very much that they were the edible snails of which the French are supposedly fond of consuming, I wondered what else may have taken a shine to poor old Brian the snail?!
Benjamin Edwards

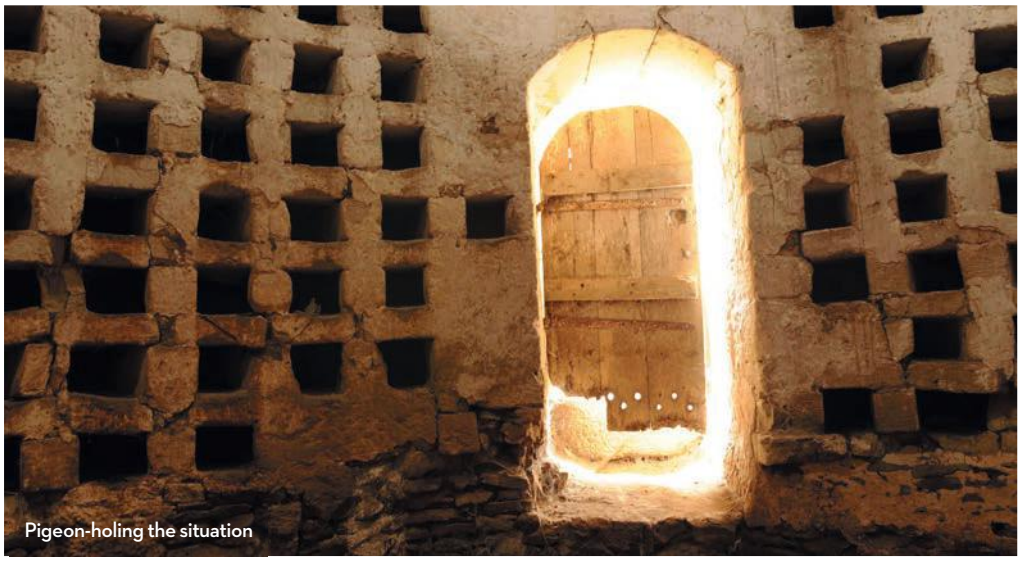
A It was almost certainly the work of a song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). The fact that you mention the gatepost is a further clue as they are notorious for using a hard surface as an 'anvil' in order to remove small molluscs from their shell. They will quite often use the same anvil for long periods of time - hence why you noticed a number of shells rather than just the odd one.



Although an unfortunate end for the snail, shell residue left at an anvil can often be beneficial to other wildlife. Researchers have found that numerous species of birds benefit from the calcium the shells provide - especially during their egg laying/breeding season. Studies carried out in western Poland identified 54 bird species collecting fragments of broken shell.

Also, I was recently told by a naturalist that certain types of bees sometimes lay their eggs in a complete snail shell before then sealing them up with moss or something similar.

STINKY STATUS SYMBOL



Pigeon-holing the situation

Q While looking around a local château we wandered into the old pigeon loft. There was no guide to answer our questions but presumably the holes in the walls are for pigeons to roost and nest?
Martin and Claire Gregson

A In addition to medieval manor houses where circular stone-constructed pigeon lofts frequently contained several hundred birds kept intensively, monasteries often included pigeon and dove cotes to ensure a readily available supply of fresh meat no matter what the time of year.

Many of the examples still in existence today clearly show the niches built into the wall, on which the birds would lay their eggs and rear their squabs. A long ladder which could be moved around the circular walls from a central point provided access to all the ledges by the loft-keeper, who was often employed full-time to feed and otherwise take care of the pigeons in his charge.

In France, before the Revolution, it was only ever possible to have one of these buildings (known as *pigeonniers*) having gained the express permission of the king and, therefore, the only people able to put pigeon meat onto their dining table were members of the aristocracy or higher clergy – as a consequence of which, *pigeonniers* were very much a status symbol of their time.

TOO CLOSE TO HOME

Q We took early retirement and moved to the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region earlier this year. We've plenty of enthusiasm but limited French (we are taking weekly lessons) and very friendly neighbours. Recently one (we think!) told us that we should clear around our previously neglected new home as the undergrowth was a fire risk. He seemed to be suggesting that it was mandatory to do so. We asked at the *mairie* and they (we think!) said something similar. Can you help?
Jodie and Harry Osborne



Clearing undergrowth can help prevent wildfires

A In some areas of France – particularly those with a high fire risk – it is indeed a requirement that undergrowth likely to quickly burn in the event of a forest fire is cut back/cleared away from at least 50 metres (some authorities say 100 metres) around homes.

Not knowing your exact situation, it's impossible to comment specifically, but in some areas '*débroussaillement*' (brushwood clearing) rules applies to all buildings situated within and less than 200 metres from forest or similar fire risk areas. For the best advice about whether your particular locality is affected by any such regulations', go to *georisques.gouv.fr* – it's in French but it's likely that it can be translated via your computer, laptop, tablet, iPhone or equivalent device.

MESSY OR MARVELLOUS?

Q Why are people so against moss in lawns? It looks great, feels soft and bouncy and doesn't require mowing. A section of my garden is now almost all moss. Should we rake it out and reseed with grass?
Beth Palmer

A There are plenty who are in favour of moss – and not just for the fact that, unlike grass, it doesn't need cutting. Moss thrives on neglect and in damp conditions. Well established, it's said to capture carbon and it's a favourite of wildlife. Burrowing bees make their home in it – as do many other beneficial insects. The downside to that, however, is the fact that birds (particularly rooks) will tear lumps out of the moss in search of them – and leave bare, somewhat unsightly patches.



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Moss thrives on neglect

In a dry French summer, moss will dry out and turn brown, but it quickly recovers once the rain starts again.

You could try planting a few chamomile plants in amongst it and make an old-fashioned chamomile lawn, or try sowing wild flower seeds. Alternatively, if you're bothered about drainage, you can grow some shrubs or trees to suck up moisture in the hope that the moss will die back and your grass will reestablish itself.

GET IN TOUCH! *If you have any 'rural riddles' for Jeremy, contact him by email at* ***jcjeremyhobson@gmail.com***
Jeremy Hobson is a France-based writer who specialises in all country matters ***j-c-jeremy-hobson.co.uk***

Woody's worries



Could you survive in France without a car, asks a saddle-sore **Ruth Wood**

"Can you overtake?" I ask my husband Jon. "Think I've got a thistle stuck in my pants." He whizzes past me on the towpath, probably a bit concerned to see me rummaging in the back of my shorts.

We've cycled about 55 miles from our holiday home in central Brittany on our electric bikes. And now, within a mile of the campsite, suddenly my bum is sore. Call me naive but, being the most fair-weather of cyclists, it has never occurred to me that 'saddle soreness' – as in chafing – is a literal thing and that there's a cream for that. You live and learn... and burn.

Our home for the night was 'Twiggy', a cute caravan at Camping de Gouarec in the department of Côtes-d'Armor. Much of our ride had been along the Nantes-to-Brest canal. This Napoleonic-era towpath, extending 360km across Brittany, is a fantastic traffic-free byway, connecting market towns, villages, lakes, rivers and historical sites. More than 200 lock-keeper's cottages mark the route – some inhabited and bedecked in flowers, others isolated and romantic with large black and white photographs recalling pre-railway heydays when the canal bustled with barges. One lockhouse, outside Pontivy, has even been turned into a brilliant 'inclusive cafe' where young adults with learning disabilities served us coffee and sat down to chat with us.

The canal is now part of the Vélodyssée, France's most popular long-distance cyclepath, linking the Channel port of Roscoff with the Atlantic resort of Hendaye. It's also part of EuroVelo EV1, a 10,650km stretching from Norway to Portugal.

TOP GEAR

"So," I said to Jon the next morning as we pedalled home on our freshly charged batteries. "Do you reckon if we come to live here, you could survive without a car?" "Oh yeah, definitely," he replied.

"What if we needed to get back to England urgently?" I challenged. "We could put our bikes on the bus, go as foot passengers on the ferry and then do the train and cycling at the other end," he countered.

"What if you needed to get to hospital in a hurry?" "I'd cycle there," said Jon, casually flicking into turbo mode to pass an elderly man in Lycra who'd previously overtaken us on his road bike. "How would we get to Aldi on a dark, cold, wet day?" "We'd wait till it stopped raining and cycle to the market instead," Jon assured me. "Honestly Ruth. These electric bikes are a game changer."

A few minutes' later, as if to literally dampen my husband's enthusiasm, the skies darkened and growled with thunder. "Oh crap," said Jon.

WET, WET, WET

Seconds later, we were beneath a downpour that turned into a torrent that turned into a deluge. Jon whipped out the special cagoule cover we'd brought for the bikes. E-bikes can survive a shower but this was bordering on biblical. We huddled under a tree but the storm seemed lethargic about moving on, layers of cloud inching past each other in opposite directions so that the sky stayed grey and grumpy.

Drenched and starting to feel the chill, we abandoned the tree and limped on to a nearby lock-keeper's cottage, rolling the cagouled bikes along with us. We sheltered in a doorway still radiant with the heat of the day. "Ooh, there's a spider on your head," I told Jon, brushing a harmless harvestman from his helmet. "Huh, there's one on your back too," said Jon. "And there. And there. And there." It soon dawned on us that we were sheltering from the rain with about 20 of these Daddy Longlegs-style creatures.

After about 20 minutes, the elderly Lycra-clad man whizzed past us on his road bike, his tanned face streaming with raindrops. "*Bonjour*!" we sang out from our damp doorway. "*Jour*," came the stoic reply.

After an hour, we made a dash for home, sheltering briefly from another deluge under the eaves of a public loo. As we turned the corner into our hamlet, the sun came out and our English neighbour Brian, just setting off to a birthday party on his smart Brompton bike, looked surprised to meet a couple of drowned rats pedalling towards him. The 65-year-old told us how he regularly travels by rail from his home in the Midlands down to the ferry port, then cycles to our hamlet from the other side. On his push bike, this is. He wouldn't be seen dead on an e-bike.

That evening, I woke up with a start on the sofa where I had collapsed with my sore bum and aching limbs. My phone pinged – a message in a Whatsapp group chat from a friend whose 18-year-old son has just cycled 1,300 miles from Bristol to Portugal, following the Vélodyssée down the Atlantic Coast and the Camino de Santiago across the Pyrénées and Spain.

"How's his bum?" someone on the group chat asks, taking the words right out of my mouth. "Well," she replies. "He's very glad he took the bum cream." "Boy genius," I write. "He'll go far." ■

"It had never occurred to me that saddle-soreness is a literal thing – you live and learn... and burn"







© RUTH WOOD

Ruth and Jon took their e-bikes along the Vélodyssée cycle path, stopping in a cute caravan along the way

The devil is in the detail with French property purchases

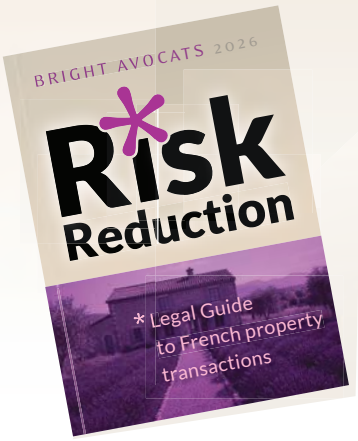
The real risks in a French property purchase aren't obvious; they're buried in clauses, assumptions and "standard procedures."

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Our Risk Reduction Guide highlights every critical moment in the process with a **whopping great asterisk*** — so you can spot risks early.

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- Understand what's not explained
- Make informed decisions

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[flə] QUALITÉ

PISSALADIÈRE

This tasty recipe comes from the latest book from the Ferrandi School of Culinary Arts in Paris. Often called the 'Harvard of gastronomy', it has trained some of the world's most skilled professional chefs since 1920, and previous recipe books have become kitchen staples. **Fish & Shellfish: Recipes and Techniques** distils a century of teaching into 45 key techniques and 70 accessible recipes, all adapted for the home cook.

Pissaladière is a traditional Niçoise flatbread topped with caramelised onions, anchovies and black olives. Although it is often compared to pizza, it has a thicker, bread-like dough and doesn't use cheese or tomatoes. The name comes from the Niçoise word '*pissalat*', a type of salted anchovy paste, derived from the Latin '*piscis*' meaning 'fish'. The first recorded recipe dates back to 879 in Provence. Traditionally served as an appetiser, snack or light meal, Pissaladière reflects the Mediterranean influence of nearby Italy, sharing similarities with focaccia and other flatbreads. Enjoy it hot or cold, with a glass of chilled white wine.

Serves 4

Active time: 30 minutes
Rising time: 1 hour
Cooking time: 1 hour
Storage: 3 days

INGREDIENTS

Dough
300g plain flour
Generous half tsp salt
20g fresh yeast
200ml water, divided
20ml olive oil

Onion compôte
500g onions
1 clove garlic
10 salt-packed anchovies
Leaves of quarter-bunch thyme
Quarter-bunch rosemary
100ml olive oil

To assemble
12 anchovies
12 Taggiasca olives
12 rosemary leaves

METHOD

Preparing the dough
Sift the flour into a large bowl, then whisk in the salt. Dissolve the yeast in 50ml of the water. Make a well in the flour and pour in the yeast mixture, the remaining water and the olive oil. Stir until the mixture comes together into a smooth dough. Shape the dough into a ball, place it in a lightly oiled bowl, and cover with a dish towel. Let rise for one hour at room temperature.

Preparing the onion compôte
Peel and thinly slice the onions. Peel and chop the garlic. Chop the anchovies and thyme. Singe the rosemary using a kitchen torch or a gas burner, then chop the leaves. Warm the olive oil in a skillet over low heat, then add the onions, garlic, anchovies, rosemary and thyme. Cook until the onions are fall-apart tender and lightly golden. Adjust the seasonings if necessary.

Assembling and baking the pissaladière
Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6. Cut the anchovies at an angle into 3cm pieces. Drain the olives and chop them if necessary. Roll the dough into a 30cm disc, 5mm thick, and place it on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Spread the onion compôte across the dough, leaving an approximate 1.5cm border all the way around. Bake the pissaladière for 15 minutes, then remove it from the oven and arrange the anchovies, olives and rosemary leaves on top in staggered rows. Return to the oven and bake for five more minutes.



*Extracted from **Fish and Shellfish: Recipes and Techniques from the Ferrandi School of Culinary Arts** by FERRANDI Paris (Flammarion, 2026)*

©RINA NURRA





The intrepid châtelaine

Erin Choa has bats in her belfry as she prepares the château for its annual Halloween spectacular

It is our privilege to host beautiful weddings and events at Château de Bourneau over the summer season but when summer drifts into autumn, it is our post-season treat to host our own private party: our annual Halloween dinner.

When we first arrived in France, our local friends had barely heard of Halloween and so it was always entertaining trying to explain the concept of adults requiring a costume to our sceptical French friends. They soon got into the spirit of creativity, however, and amazed us with their effort for what has now become an anticipated tradition.

It is also the only time of the year when our resident bats and the sweep of unreachable cobwebs are a decorative asset, as I transform the château into a haunted house and create a new tablescape for the Halloween feast!

At the beginning, I didn't realise that Halloween wasn't an event that had reached rural France. I prepared as I normally would in the UK, stocking up on sweets for local children 'trick-or-treating' and decorating the château. After all, you can't be the local haunted castle and not make an effort for Halloween! And so we carved pumpkins and lit up the long drive, donned scary costumes and lay in wait.



Look out for the bats!

That year, only had a handful of village trick-or-treaters were brave enough to walk the length of our dark, candle-lit drive. I could hear the children daring each other on at the entrance and by the time they reached the castle door, that was my cue to drift out of the door brandishing a guttering candelabra with my cauldron of sweets. The 19th-century door naturally has the perfect creak and as I slowly emerged with the flickering flames draped in a long veil, I was met with three pale little faces gaping at me in frozen horror, a tiny tear silently tracking down the face of the smallest boy.



Erin's spooky Halloween costume has at times proved a little too realistic...

I quickly dropped the scary act and tried to be reassuring as I filled their little baskets with sweets and as I shut the door, they suddenly plummeted into action as they ran screaming up the drive. "Too much?" I said to JB, worried I'd just formed some new core trauma memory for them. We realised that we would have to tone it down for rural France.

As the years pass and Halloween has become more prominent, word has spread and we are proud to provide the local horror and host the village children, creating an unexpected community event. The school now visits us and we often have 60 trick-or-treaters daring to cross the threshold of our haunted castle.



The fancy dress party has become a popular local tradition

Last year, one of the teenage boys admitted he was that six-year-old I accidentally made cry the first year. I told him how sorry I was and it was meant to be fun, not terrifying.

"No, it was so cool! We couldn't stop talking about it," he said. "Obviously, we know now it was just acting."

"I'm so relieved to hear that," I admitted. "Even our real ghosts saw the funny side."

His eyes widened and for just a moment, I caught the tiniest flicker of him wondering... ■

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 @theintrepidchatelaine @chateaudebourneau



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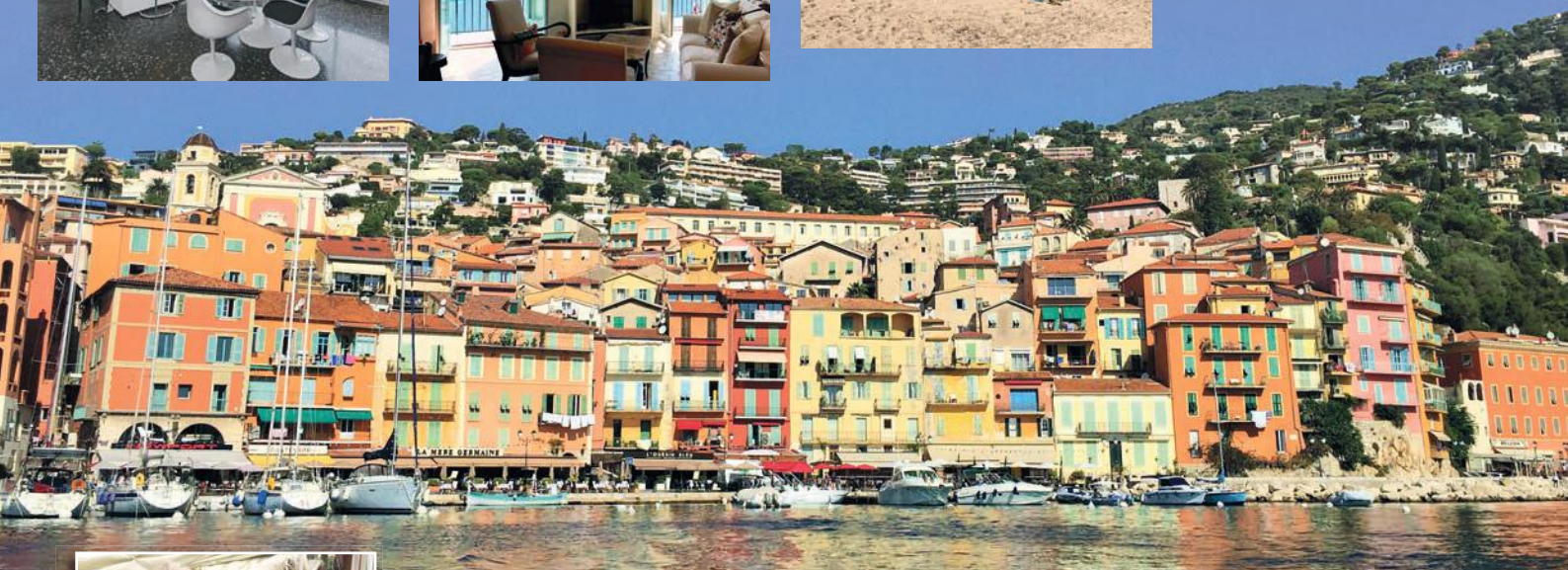














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EXCLUSIVE **HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES** REF: A45906CMC65 **€149,000**



Charming Gascogne-style home in peaceful Bazordan, offering three bedrooms, three shower rooms, farmhouse kitchen, beamed living spaces, terraces, garden, countryside and mountain views, plus walking and cycling from the doorstep.

GIRONDE REF: A43083MGD33 **€403,700**



Beautifully renovated stone home in a peaceful Gauriac hamlet, offering four bedrooms, characterful living spaces, vineyard views, landscaped gardens, swimming pool, terraces, outbuilding and excellent family or holiday-home appeal nearby.

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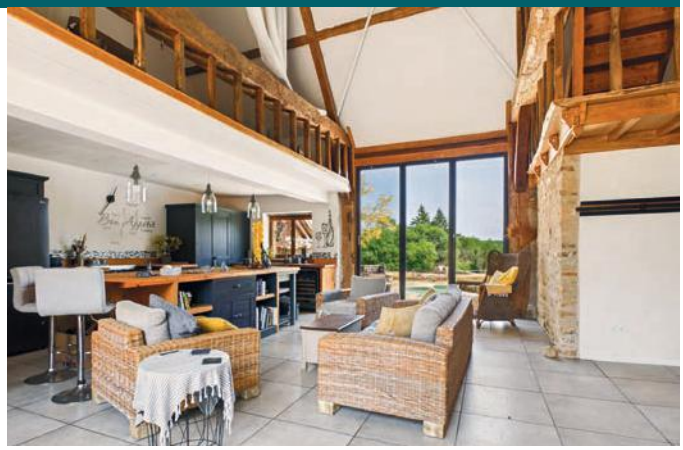




This renovated 4-bed house is situated in a peaceful location in the heart of the countryside, in extensive grounds including fields, meadows and a large pond. The 400m² barn and the old stables of around 40m² make the property ideal for a smallholding or keeping horses.

EXCLUSIVE BÉLÂBRE, INDRE REF: BVI66284 €399,500





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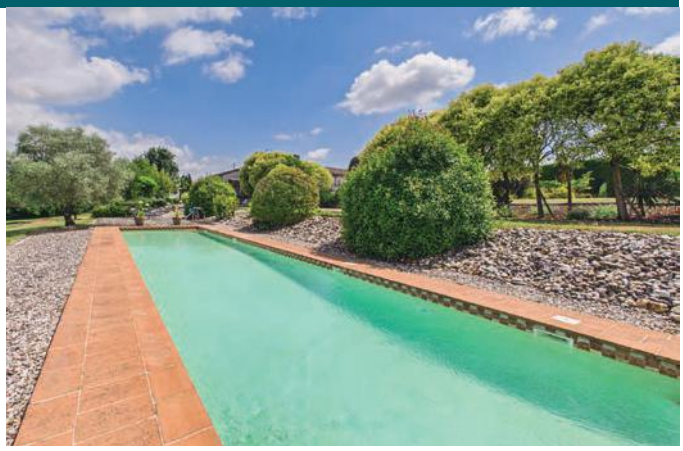
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PROPERTY SHOWCASE

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APARTMENT LE CANNET REF: FRE-00881 €795,000



90 m² top-floor penthouse, sea and mountain views, 280 m² terrace, 2 bedrooms, garage, extension projects already approved by the town hall.

CARLTON INTERNATIONAL

CARLTON INTERNATIONAL

1240 route des dolines, Buropolis 2, 06560 Valbonne

TEL: +33 4 93 95 11 11 **EMAIL:** info@carlton-group.com

WEB: www.carlton-international.com

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

APARTMENT CANNES CALIFORNIE REF: FRE-00871 €1,850,000



New 92 m² apartment in a secure residence with caretaker, panoramic sea view over Cannes bay, 3 en-suite bedrooms, heated indoor pool.

VILLA SAINT-PAUL-DE-VENCE REF: PIL-00281 €1,495,000



Charming 164 m² villa near the village, 3 en-suite bedrooms, pool, pétanque court, terrace and summer lounge, quiet residential area.

PROPERTY AURIBEAU-SUR-SIAGNE REF: PIL-00310 €2,750,000



Historic 1,000 m² Provençal estate near Cannes: main house, guest house, sheepfold, 9 bedrooms, landscaped gardens, large pool. Needs renovation.

APARTMENT SAINT-TROPEZ REF: 12893 €1,890,000



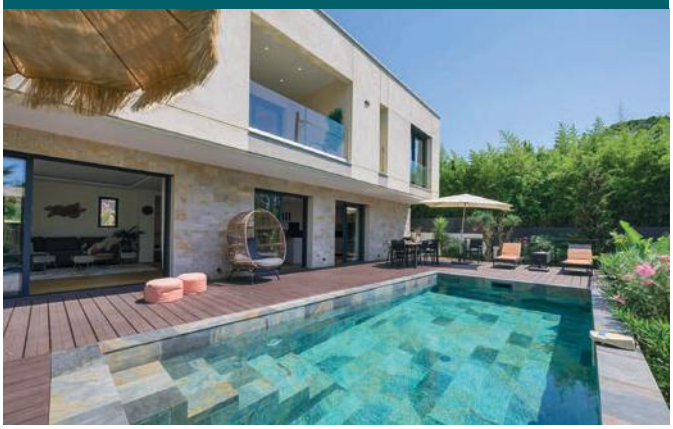
Two apartments (duplex + independent unit) totalling 109 m², in the heart of the village, one minute from La Ponche beach, air-conditioned, 4 bedrooms.

VILLA GRASSE REF: 1087LT €6,900/month



New 203 m² villa in the Grasse countryside, 5 bedrooms, chlorine pool, garage, 1,665 m² plot, air conditioning, pétanque court.

VILLA MOUGINS REF: 1097LT €12,000/month



Furnished contemporary 260 m² villa between Cannes and the countryside, 6 bedrooms, pool, garden, reversible air conditioning, built in 2024.

CARLTON INTERNATIONAL

1240 route des dolines, Buropolis 2, 06560 Valbonne

TEL: +33 4 93 95 11 11 **EMAIL:** info@carlton-group.com

WEB: www.carlton-international.com

CARLTON INTERNATIONAL

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

NEAR LEZAY REF: 5270 €199,500 – DPE F



Beautiful traditional stone house near Lezay offering rustic charm, spacious interiors, and character features. Includes large barn, mature garden, and peaceful countryside setting with open views.

NEAR MELLE REF: 5269 €243,800 – DPE VIERGE



Charming stone Maison de Maître near Melle with panoramic countryside views. Generous living spaces, original period features, elegant reception rooms, multiple bedrooms, outbuildings, and extensive grounds offering strong renovation and lifestyle potential.

NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS REF: 5247 €124,200 – DPE F



Detached stone house in hamlet offering full renovation potential. Spacious interior with large convertible attic, outbuildings, and garden. Ideal countryside project with scope to create a charming family home or holiday retreat.

NEAR CHEF BOUTONNE REF: 5151 €164,780 – DPE G



Fully renovated detached character home near Chef-Boutonne offering stylish modern comfort blended with original charm. Spacious living areas, fitted kitchen, 3 bedrooms, garden, and outbuildings in a peaceful village setting.

immo 3C agence immobilière

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

NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS REF: 5174 €144,855 – DPE E



Charming stone house near Sauzé-entre-Bois with garden and outbuildings. Offering character interiors, spacious living areas, and countryside appeal, this property combines rustic charm with renovation potential in a peaceful rural setting.

NEAR RUFFEC REF: 5244 €103,550 – DPE E



Stone house near Ruffec to renovate, offering great potential with land and barn. Spacious interiors with original features, outbuildings, extension scope, set in a rural location close to a popular bar and restaurant.

NEAR SAUZÉ-ENTRE-BOIS REF: 5195 €207,000 – DPE E



Well renovated stone house near Sauzé-entre-Bois offering stylish comfort and character features. Spacious living areas, fitted kitchen, three bedrooms, garage, and garden with open countryside views in a peaceful rural setting.

NEAR RUFFEC REF: 5277 €77,490 – DPE E



Pretty stone property near Ruffec offering renovation potential with barns and garden. Full of original character, spacious rooms, outbuildings, and scope to modernise, set in a peaceful rural hamlet with countryside charm.

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

CONDOM, GERS REF: SNM_221 €215,000



Located in the historic heart of Condom, along the Way of St James pilgrimage route, this charming townhouse – known as La Providence – offers a wealth of original features, approx 187 sqm of living space and open views.

CONDOM, GERS REF: SNM_211 €530,000



Located in a peaceful and unspoiled environment, just 5 minutes from Condom and 20 minutes from Lectoure, this character property enjoys an ideal setting combining tranquility with easy access to amenities, set on approximately 3.5 hectares.

VALENCE-SUR-BAÏSE, GERS REF: SNM_183 €370,000



Discover this beautifully renovated maison de maître in the village centre, steps from shops and amenities. Offering 330 sq.m of elegant living space, it combines authentic period charm with modern comfort.

FLEURANCE, GERS REF: SNM_106 €1,560,000



Beautifully renovated hamlet in a peaceful natural setting, offering authentic charm, quality finishes and exceptional potential for tourism, events or an outstanding family retreat.

JEGUN, GERS REF: SNM_241 €545,000



Discover this beautiful property of 235 sq.m situated in the countryside with numerous outbuildings and a swimming pool on about 9000 sq.m of wooded land.

VIC-FEZENSAC, GERS REF: SNM_242 €349,000



Located in a peaceful hamlet less than 10 minutes from Vic-Fezensac, this charming stone house offers about 225 sq. m of living space including an independent gîte. Perfect for a family home or business.

GELAS IMMOBILIER

19 avenue de Lorraine, 32190 Vic-Fezensac, Gers

TEL: +33(0) 7 70 66 84 30

EMAIL: contact@gelasimmo.com

WEB: www.gelas-immobilier.com

MONTRÉAL-DU-GERS, GERS REF: SNM_236 €320,000



Located less than 5 km from Montreal-du-Gers and 11 km from Condom, in the heart of the countryside, this charming character home offers approx. 177 sqm of single-level living space and great potential with a garden of 3000 sq.m.

AGEN, LOT ET GARONNE REF: SNM_232 €680,000



Just 20 minutes from Agen, this beautifully renovated 18th-century stone property offers nearly 400 sqm of living space, complete privacy, panoramic countryside views, and over six hectares of land.

MIRANDE, GERS REF: SNM_206 €525,000



This character château, dating back several centuries, offers 520 sqm of living space in an unspoiled setting, blending authentic period features, generous volumes, timeless charm and refined character.

LECTOURE, GERS REF: SNM_220 €599,000



Located between Condom and Lectoure, at the end of a private lane within a small hamlet, this beautifully renovated home offers approximately 200 sqm of living space in a peaceful setting, with stunning views.

AUCH, GERS REF: SNM_200 €420,000



Discover this beautiful property situated in the heart of Auch, capital of the Gers. Nestled in 4500 sq.m of wooded garden, this property offers 298 sq.m of living space.

VIC-FEZENSAC, GERS REF: SNM_217 €348,000



Less than 10 minutes from Vic-Fezensac, this charming stone house offers 170 sqm of comfortable living space, a landscaped garden, swimming pool, pétanque court and complete privacy.

GELAS IMMOBILIER

19 avenue de Lorraine, 32190 Vic-Fezensac, Gers
TEL: +33(0) 7 70 66 84 30
EMAIL: contact@gelasimmo.com
WEB: www.gelas-immobilier.com

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 107112 **€699,000 AFI**



Beautifully maintained five-bedroom property in a peaceful setting, featuring a new pool, secluded mature garden and a large barn in good condition.
A must-see.

GERS REF: 109707 **€550,000 AFI**



Beautiful stone cottage, mostly single storey (one bedroom upstairs), light and airy, with lovely, mature private, fully fenced garden with a pool.
In very good condition.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 108571 **€1,225,000 AFI**



Picture perfect private property with fabulous views across the rolling countryside, off the beaten track. Five bedrooms, four reception rooms, family kitchen, artist's studio, workshop.

GERS REF: 106890 **€1,090,000 AFI**



An elegant estate with pool, two guest houses and 1,6 hectares of land, situated just 5 mins from a popular market town and less than 50 mins to Toulouse airport.

GERS REF: 107229 **€1,670,000 AFI**



Hunting lodge with a gite and a park of over 4 hectares - full of history and original features. Four floors offering spacious and comfortable living in the countryside around Lectoure.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 109848 **€750,000**



Fabulous opportunity to buy a fully renovated three storey dwelling with great outbuildings, a gîte, a pool and over 5 hectares of land, suitable for animals.

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

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.

GERS REF: 109979 **€599,000 AFI**



Maison de Maître with four hectares of land, a private lake and fields of wildflowers. All bedrooms en-suite, fabulous outside living area with pool and pool house. Renovated with taste.

TARN ET GARONNE REF: 109622 **€1,260,000 AFI**



Grab this opportunity to start your business from day 1. House and grounds in perfect condition, six-bedroom property with 12 guest suites, yoga room, pool, land, outbuildings – all ready to go.

GERS REF: 102753 **€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.

GERS REF: 104318 **€599,000 AFI**



Beautifully renovated cottage with five bedrooms, pool, lake and panoramic views, combining comfort, privacy and authentic Gers countryside charm.

GERS REF: 109930 **€2,990,000 AFI**



Fully renovated authentic family estate, comprising a manor house and equally sized guesthouse on 33 hectares of unspoilt land. Two pools, fully furnished, energy efficient, high-end, turnkey property.

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

DORDOGNE REF: L3428 €875,000*



A 17th-century château with 440 m² of beautifully renovated living space, four bedrooms, vaulted reception rooms, private gardens, pool, wine cellar, and stunning Dordogne vineyard views near Bergerac. Land: 1250m².

DORDOGNE REF: L3502 €749,000*



Exceptional 500 m² country estate with elegant reception rooms, six-bedroom main house, guest cottage, barn, orangery, cellars, and 8,000 m² of landscaped grounds near the River Dronne and Périgueux.

DORDOGNE REF: L3514 €535,000*



Charming stone country home with three bedrooms, separate two-bedroom guest house, 12m pool, covered terrace and private setting near medieval Issigeac, just minutes from Bergerac and its international airport. Land: 5527m².

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3497 €522,000*



Stunning countryside property with 360° views, swimming pool and outdoor kitchen, currently arranged as two homes or one large residence, enjoying complete privacy just five minutes from nearby villages. Land: 7601m².

LOT ET GARONNE LAUZUN REF: L3459 €378,000*



Exceptional four-bedroom stone Maison de Maître with swimming pool, mature gardens, woodland and conversion barn, enjoying complete privacy near Lauzun and just five minutes from the popular town of Eymet. Land: 3.3 hectares.

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3487 €359,000*



Stylish 1950s architect-designed home with four bedrooms, swimming pool, extensive garaging and beautiful gardens, peacefully located on a village edge just five minutes from shops, restaurants and amenities. Land: 5000m².

RICHARD IMMOBILIER

7 rue du Chateau 47410 Lauzun

TEL: +33 (0)5 53 83 30 46 **EMAIL:** info@richardimmo.com **WEB:** richardimmo.com

RICHARD IMMOBILIER

*Agency fees included.

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

GIRONDE REF: L3448 €341,250*



Charming French Maison de Maître with countryside views, traditional stone barns and a separate renovation house, offering outstanding potential to create multiple dwellings in a peaceful hamlet setting. Land: 3152m².

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3507 €160,000*



Stone Maison de Maître with 360° countryside views, renovated kitchen, spacious living, two bedrooms, attached barn, 5,000m² grounds and further potential, offering a peaceful rural lifestyle opportunity. Land: 5000m².

CHARENTE REF: L3465 €99,500*



Charming two-bedroom chalet bungalow with panoramic countryside views, open-plan living, garage, 2,345m² grounds and terrace. Move-in ready, offering rural tranquillity near Rougnac with easy access to Angoulême and airports. Land: 2345m².

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3162 €390,000*



Restored stone farmhouse with heated pool, panoramic views, double garage, barn and outbuildings. Set near a charming village bakery and café, offering peaceful countryside living close to picturesque Bastide towns. Land: 5500m².

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3442 €77,000*



Charming two-bedroom townhouse with private garden, bright low-maintenance interiors and an excellent location within walking distance of a picturesque bastide town, ideal as a holiday retreat or family home. Land: 130m².

LOT ET GARONNE REF: L3248 €315,000*



Stone-built six-bedroom home with separate cottage, barn, pigeonnier and chai, all in excellent condition. Enjoying a countryside setting near historic Lauzun, with gas central heating, double glazing and amenities nearby. Land: 4000m².

RICHARD IMMOBILIER

7 rue du Chateau 47410 Lauzun

TEL: +33 (0)5 53 83 30 46 **EMAIL:** info@richardimmo.com **WEB:** richardimmo.com

RICHARD IMMOBILIER

*Agency fees included.

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

AUTEVIELLE SAINT MARTIN BIDEREN REF: 2074 €399,000



Beautifully designed property offering a perfect blend of contemporary style and natural serenity. The exterior boasts picturesque landscaping, a charming pond and private access down to the Saison river.

SUS REF: 2046 €220,000



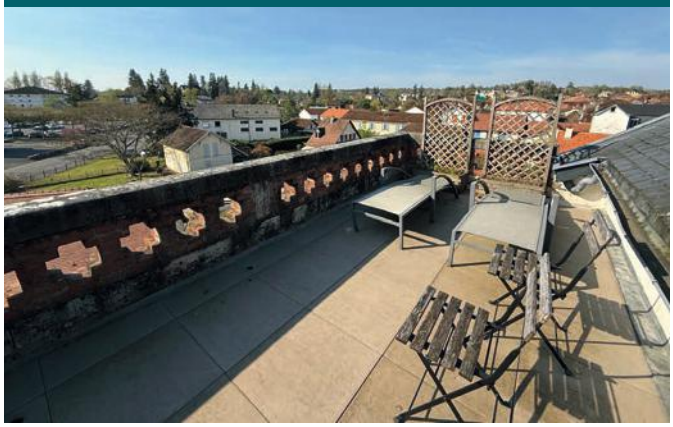
Price reduction for this three bedroom, two bathroom, stone village house with 1320m² of garden and independent garage. Walking distance to restaurant and village grocery shop.

PRECHACQ-NAVARRENX REF: 2070 €389,000



Four-bedroom village house with garden, pool and outbuilding, located close to the 14th century fortified town of Navarrenx and just over an hour away from the nearest ski resort!

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.

SALIES DE BEARN REF: 2062 €349,000



Immaculate townhouse with garden and garage, located in quiet residential area. Beautifully decorated, the property offers three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one with sauna). A few minutes' walk from town.

ORTHEZ REF: 2047 €399,000



Spacious architect-designed house with swimming pool and mature garden located on the heights of a medieval town. Built on five half-levels, the property offers several distinct living areas.

SOPHIE FOLLEY IMMOBILIER

3 Place Jeanne d'Albret, 64270 Salies-de-Béarn, France

TEL: +33 5 59 38 32 50 **EMAIL:** contact@sophiefolley.com

SOPHIE FOLLEY
IMMOBILIER

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

SAUVETERRE DE BEARN REF: 2040 €495,000



Price reduction for this architect-designed property, currently divided into two separate living spaces, in elevated position, offering magnificent views of the Pyrenees and the surrounding countryside.

SALIES DE BEARN REF: 2059 €419,000



Former Bearnaise farmhouse, lovingly restored, with pool, double garage and views over the rolling countryside. In a rural setting, yet only a few minutes' drive from popular thermal spa town.

SALIES DE BEARN REF: 2056 €149,000



Beautifully renovated, three-bedroom townhouse, ideally located within easy walking distance of the thermal spa facility, shops, bars and restaurants.
Living accommodation is offered over three floors.

SAUVETERRE DE BEARN REF: 1935 €300,000



Neo-Béarnaise four bedroom/two bathroom house, with 1930m² of mature garden, offering stunning views of the Pyrenean mountain range. A large garage and wine-cellar complete the property.

SALIES DE BEARN REF: 2038 €235,000



Unique 1930s semi-detached townhouse, on three floors, with pool and courtyard garden, located within walking distance to the thermal spa, shops, bars and restaurants.

ARAMITS REF: 2031 €359,000



Four-bed rural property, with garden, swimming pool, and superb views of the Pyrenees. Ideal for mountain lovers, cyclists, hikers and general nature enthusiasts!

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3 Place Jeanne d'Albret, 64270 Salies-de-Béarn, France
TEL: +33 5 59 38 32 50 **EMAIL:** contact@sophiefolley.com

SOPHIE FOLLEY
IMMOBILIER

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

GERS 32 REF: EL5348 €895,000



This estate offers a manor house, attached barn, guest house, independent barn and pool, with over 30 hectares of rolling countryside and wooded parkland, combining exceptional views, privacy, versatility, and tranquillity.

HAUTES PYRENEES 65 REF: LC5262 €449,000



Charming character home, brimming with French country charm. with spacious living areas, four bedrooms, pool, covered terrace, large attic, garage, on 2,503m². Set in Madiran hills, near Maubourguet, Plaisance and Marciac's renowned Jazz Festival.

HAUTES PYRENEES 65 REF: LC5340 €395,000



Character home with five bedrooms, independent apartment, barn, swimming pool and mature gardens on 2,503m². Spacious living areas, modern amenities and rental potential, conveniently located near shops, services and transport.

HAUTES PYRENEES 65 REF: LC5358 €383,000



Renovated character home with three bedrooms, heated pool, jacuzzi, summer kitchen, outbuildings and Pyrenees views. Land - 6,509m². Private setting near Marciac, blending modern comfort, countryside charm with further potential.

HAUTES PYRENEES 65 REF: EL5360 €385,000



Charming Gascon farmhouse with five bedrooms, panoramic Pyrenees views, renovated barn living spaces, saltwater pool, pool house, orchard and large garage/ workshop, combining historic character, privacy and exceptional mountain views.

HAUTES PYRENEES 65 REF: EL5365 €450,000



Beautifully renovated Gascon farmhouse with five bedrooms, spacious entertaining areas, swimming pool, landscaped grounds, barn dining space and over one hectare of gardens, blending traditional charm with modern comfort.

AGENCE LE BONHEUR
GASCONY | PYRENEES | BEARN

96 Place de Liberation, 65700, Maubourguet, France
TEL: +33 (0)670730741 **EMAIL:** contact@lebonheur.immo **WEB:** www.lebonheur.immo

PROPERTY SHOWCASE

EURE REF: 696966 **€329,000**



Charming Norman home blending authentic character with modern comforts. Four bedrooms, spacious living areas, a landscaped 1,963m² garden, garage, recent renovations, and excellent amenities, it offers peaceful countryside living within easy reach of Paris.

DORDOGNE REF: 696952 **€2,280,000**



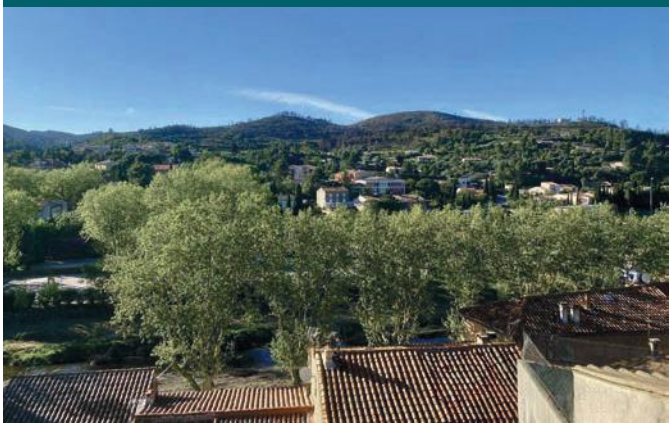
A true gem nestled in a lush green setting in the commune of Domme within more than 3 hectares of landscaped grounds with breathtaking view over the Dordogne river, with a heated swimming pool.

EURE REF: 697217 **€369,000**



Tastefully renovated 150m² Norman home on a peaceful 1,320m² plot, with three bedrooms, bright open-plan living, heated pool, terrace, outbuilding, modern heat pump and excellent access to Le Neubourg, Rouen and Paris.

AUDE REF: 697148 **€60,000**



Charming furnished 36m² stone village house in historic Durban-Corbières, featuring a fireplace, bedroom, shower room, roof terrace and separate storage shed, just 30km from the Mediterranean and local amenities

INDRE-ET-LOIRE REF: 696879 **€550,000**



Elegant 197m² traditional home with four bedrooms, spacious living areas, full basement, heated covered pool, exotic wood terrace, landscaped gardens, carport with EV charger, fruit trees and peaceful surroundings.

YVELINES, PARIS REF: 694883 **€495,000**



Charming 225m² family home in Hargeville with four bedrooms, spacious living areas, heated swimming pool, landscaped 1,000m² garden, shaded terrace, secure parking and excellent access to Thoiry, Septeuil and the N12.

SEXTANT PROPERTIES

183 Avenue Charles de Gaulle 92200 Neuilly Sur Seine

TEL: 0033 (0) 1 84 78 46 60 **EMAIL:** info@sextantproperties.com **WEB:** www.sextantproperties.com

SEXTANT

HERAULT REF: C420120E **€420,120**



Beautifully renovated villa with 5 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and a garage on a landscaped 681 m² plot with heated swimming pool and petanque court.

HERAULT REF: RSO539000E **€539,000**



A beautiful property comprising a main residence with guest rooms, plus a self-contained holiday cottage, set on 949 m² of land.

HERAULT REF: VR183600E **€183,600**



A charming stone house with 90 m² of living space, vaulted cellars and a large courtyard.

HERAULT REF: BB399000E **€399,000**



A beautiful, fully renovated village house with 4 bedrooms set on 306 m² of land with a swimming pool.

HERAULT REF; SL209000E **€209,000**



Charming village house with 101 m² of living space, 4 bedrooms and a lovely sunny terrace

HERAULT REF: M225000E **€225,000**



A house with medieval character, offering 165 m² of living space and a superb terrace with views.

REAL ESTATE LANGUEDOC

TEL: +33 (0)6.09.58.54.26 **EMAIL:** frueda@aol.com **WEB:** www.realestateoccitanie.com

REAL ESTATE LANGUEDOC
AGENCE IMMOBILIÈRE - REAL ESTATE AGENT

RUFFEC REF: R7480 €99,950



3 bedroom stone house for sale near Ruffec 16700. Two bedrooms, a shower room, and a toilet on the ground floor. Upstairs, there is enormous potential to create more living space, but already with a recent bedroom and dressing room very good condition.

CIVRAY REF: R7501 €103,375



Well kept 3 bedroom property in a no through road in Civray 86400.
The property is in excellent condition throughout and has a lovely low-maintenance fenced garden offer sun or shade and privacy.

CHAUNAY REF: R7500 €107,500



Old schoolhouse to renovate with outbuilding and garden. 6 minutes south of Chaunay in a quiet village. There are 2 large ground floor rooms totalling a little more than 100m², with lots of natural light and a large convertible attic.

VILLEFAGNAN REF: R7479 €129,950



Charming three-bedroom stone village house with study, enclosed gardens and character features, located near lively Villefagnan with shops, schools, sports clubs and cafés, perfect for relaxed French village living.

MAUPREVOIR REF: R7477 €159,570



Detached stone property With 4 bedrooms and a beautiful garden of over an acre. Located in an enviable position at the edge of the pretty village of Mauprévoir. With a beautiful mature enclosed garden of over an acre, and just a short walk to a small supermarket, bar, and pharmacy.

RUFFEC REF: R7483 €186,000



Spacious farmhouse with 1.9 hectares of land – ideal for horses. The main house offers three large bedrooms, one of which is on the ground floor with a dressing room/office. It is equipped with oil-fired central heating and partially benefits from double glazing.

TIC IMMOBILIER
AU COEUR DU POITOU
RUFFEC : 05 45 71 00 46
www.tic-ruffec.com

AGENCE TIC RUFFEC

31 Place des Martyrs de L'Occupation, 16700 RUFFEC
TEL: 00 33 (0)545710046
EMAIL: info@tic-ruffec.com
WEB: www.tic-ruffec.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 PLAGE, 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 50m² 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 175m² 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
EXCLUSIVE FRENCH RIVIERA PROPERTIES

HALKIN RIVIERA Ltd

London Office, 2 Eaton Gate, Belgravia, London, SW1W 9BJ United Kingdom *(by appointment only)*
TEL: +44 20 7989 7777 **EMAIL:** mail@halkinriviera.co.uk

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 60m² 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.

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CHARENTE REF : 696545 **€140,000**



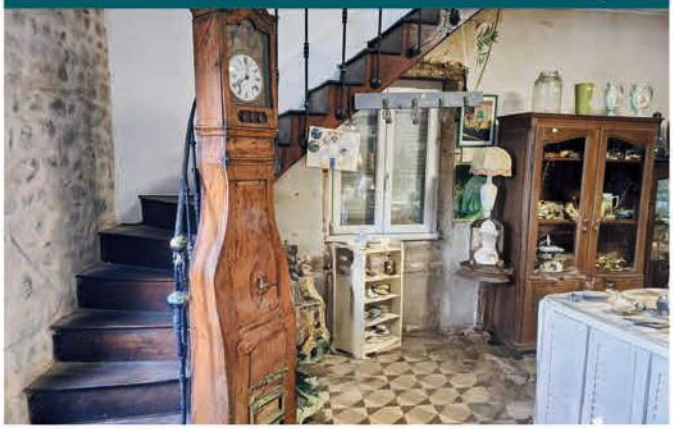
Three bedroom 19th century stone house with open views of the countryside.

GERS REF : 695140 **€370,000**



Beautiful character home with outbuildings and woodland just a few minutes to Lectoure

SAÔNE-ET-LOIRE REF : 686826 **€99,500**



House with large outbuildings suitable for living and/or various projects

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EURE Ref: 75011174132 **€369,000**



Tastefully renovated three bedroom Norman home near Le Neubourg with heated pool, terrace, outbuilding, enclosed 1,320m² garden, modern heat pump and excellent access to schools and amenities.

VENDEE Ref: 00079BLV **€1,095,000**



Beautifully redesigned 214m² marina home with four bedrooms, heated pool, ocean views, spacious terrace and garden. Steps from Port Bourgenay, plus a short walk to Veillon Beach.

DEUX-SEVRES Ref: R7537 **€69,180**



Charming single-storey cottage near Sauzé-Vaussais with two bedrooms, spacious living area, convertible attic, enclosed garden, workshop and countryside views. Ideal as a peaceful holiday home.

SEINE-MARITIME Ref: 75011174120 **€364,400**



Renovated 152m² former wine press on the edge of Eawy Forest, with character features, three bedrooms, pool, landscaped gardens, outbuilding, garage and excellent access to amenities and A28.

CHARENTE-MARITIME Ref:0224MDC **€785,000**



Architect-designed four bedroom family home, multiple reception areas, office, music room, private suites, landscaped garden, pool, outdoor kitchen, two garages and exceptional comfort throughout.

COTES-D'ARMOR Ref: KM-5217 **€235,000**



Stylish four-bedroom home set in peaceful countryside near a river, with terraces, gardens, separate land, excellent, modern comforts and endless potential as a family home or holiday retreat.

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VAR Ref: PE-00259V **POA**



Exceptional sea-view villa between Cannes and Saint-Tropez, offering private coves, landscaped gardens, seawater pool, five bedrooms, wine cellar and direct access to the Mediterranean coastline.

LOIR-ET-CHER Ref: LN-YP4Z8 **€950,000**



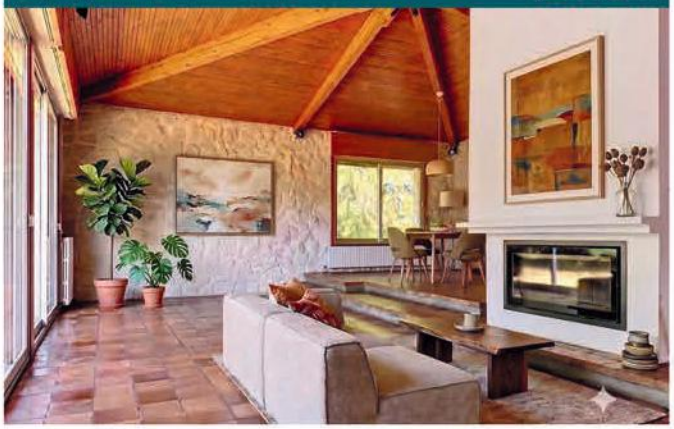
Prime location near Beauval Zoo Parc and the Loire Valley châteaux, offering excellent potential for a second home, gite or rental investment. Surrounded by vineyards, with easy access to Paris.

SEINE-MARITIME Ref: 75011173636 **€175,000**



Charming 1909 stone house in Villers-Ecalles on a 1,000m² plot, offering three bedrooms, modern kitchen, spacious living, countryside views, covered terrace, cellar and fibre internet.

CHARENTE Ref:06MDCMR **€399,000**



Spacious 1970s family home full of character, offering six bedrooms, generous living areas, fireplace, terrace, wooded garden, independent lower level, double garage and excellent potential for modern living.

PYRENEES-ATLANTIQUE Ref: 2072 **€263,750**



Peaceful family home in Orthez offering four bedrooms, living space with fireplace, fitted kitchen, double glazing, covered terrace and beautiful garden, combining tranquillity and access to amenities.

ROUEN Ref: 75011174077 **€278,000**



Elegant 90m² apartment in Rouen's Cathedral district, featuring two bedrooms, bright living space, fitted kitchen, oak parquet flooring, modern bathroom, cellar, lift, secure access and stunning city views.

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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 m² 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

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Bresse

€2,700,000

FrenchEntrée Ref: FPS130126






Stunning fully renovated 18th century historical château

Direct sale by the owners

Price includes the existing furniture and the vintage Mercedes Benz Anno 1984 in perfect running condition. 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, salted water 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: Michel Lang **EMAIL:** michel.lang912@orange.fr

Normandy

Manche, Nearest town: Brécey

€395,000

FrenchEntrée Ref n/a






Renovated old beamed property set in its own grounds, surrounded by beautiful countryside

Full of charm and character and close to Brécey village, a 5 bed 2 bath farmhouse with large living accommodation, lending itself to a B&B with 2 staircases giving a separate space for two families. A large snooker/games room/bar for entertaining. Ideal primary residence or a holiday home in Normandy. Excellent location in West Normandy and 30 minutes to Mont Saint Michel and 60 minutes to Caen-Ouistreham port.

CONTACT: Mrs T.A. Wallace **EMAIL:** m.t.wallace@outlook.com
TELEPHONE: 0044 (0) 7880894961

Britanny, Côtes-d'Armor

Nearest town: Pleubian

€1,240,000

FrenchEntrée Ref HERB1234





House and guest house with exceptional sea views

Overlooking an uninterrupted 10 kilometers of Breton scenic wild coast, on a piece of land of 4020 m², at the dead end of a private road, these two houses with ten living rooms. (7 bedrooms-3 bathrooms-2 kitchens) for a total and estimated 201 m² benefits of an exceptional maritime atmosphere. The property has been restored during these last 3 years. Work in the guest house has been completed this year. Pedestrian access to a sandy beach. All commodities within 1 mile.

CONTACT: Hervé Bré **EMAIL:** hb@enezgreen.com
TELEPHONE: 0033614473300

Nouvelle Aquitaine

Pyrénées-Atlantiques (64) Lescar, Pau (20 mins drive)

€265,000

FrenchEntrée Ref BPJ1234






Charming countryside retreat with barn and extensive grounds in the heart of Aubertin

Discover the tranquillity of rural Béarn with this detached stone-built home. **Ground floor:** Welcoming kitchen, comfortable lounge and shower room. **Attic level:** A large, light-filled bedroom suite. Set on 17,915 sqm of private outdoor space including lush meadows, moorlands and coppice woodland, ideal for small-holding, equestrian use or nature enthusiasts. This property offers a perfect blend of living space, functional outbuildings and natural beauty.

CONTACT: Bruno Petit-Jean **EMAIL:** bdpetitjean@gmail.com
TELEPHONE: (0)7596314271

Nouvelle Aquitaine

Charente, Cherves-Châtelars

€265,000

FrancePropertyShop Ref 694476






Beautifully renovated Charente farmhouse with four bedrooms, outbuildings and nearly one hectare of land

Nestled in the peaceful village of Cherves-Châtelars in the heart of the Charente, this beautifully renovated farmhouse offers over 9,164m² of open land surrounding 220m² of characterful living space. The property is in excellent condition throughout with, amongst other high ceiling rooms, three bedrooms, a mezzanine and two bathrooms. The traditional outbuildings are full of potential, with two large barns and a hanger perfect for storage or conversion into a gîte or guest house.

CONTACT: Lucy Esposito **EMAIL:** lucyespositoconseil@gmail.com
TELEPHONE: +33 (0)7 67 70 78 24

Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Var

Pignans

€539,000

FrenchEntrée Ref PIF12704





7-bedroom fully renovated house: a blend of authentic period charm with contemporary luxury. Move-in-ready!

Nestled in the heart of historic Pignans, this exceptional property delivers nearly 270m² of turnkey luxury living. Meticulously renovated with premium finishes, the property marries period character with contemporary elegance across six impressive levels: including an equipped kitchen, seven bedrooms, multiple en-suites and a vaulted wine cellar.

The private, walled 100m² garden is a true entertainer's paradise, complete with a salt-water pool with counter-current system, sun-drenched terrace, and functioning ancient well.

Turnkey opportunity, ready to move in straight away!



CONTACT: Mira McEniff **EMAIL:** del.mira@yahoo.fr **TELEPHONE:** 00353892256999

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Drôme — 750,000€

Chanos-Curson

FrenchEntrée Ref MOJ123






Elegant provencal 19th century manor with pool, outbuildings and immediate vacant possession

This fully renovated 19th century manor offers 400 m² 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 imme diately 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

Nouvelle Aquitaine — €205,000

Charente

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

Charente — €940,000

Near Confolens, Nouvelle Aquitaine

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 m² 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

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LIVING IN FRANCE



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We clear up any common misunderstandings and provide clear, easy to understand answers to your questions about moving to France, including:

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- Which visa do I need if I want to run a gîte?
- If I'm eligible for an S1 form, do I still need health insurance?

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FRENCH PROPERTY



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Côte d'Opale: French property location guide

Dicover the Opal Coast, with its shimmering sea, wide sandy beaches and popular resort towns like Le Touquet, Berck-sur-Mer, Wimereux and Étaples-sur-Mer, plus properties that range from seaside villas and apartments to country homes.

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FRANCE RELOCATION



Real life: The Brits who moved to France to have alpacas, horses and chickens

For some, having extra space to keep animals is one of the key drivers for buying a property and moving to France. Meet three sets of expats who have fully embraced country life in France, complete with a menagerie of animals.

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FRENCH LIFE

How to complain like a local in France

It is often said that complaining is part of French culture, indeed, it's almost seen as a national sport! From everyday noises of disapproval to handy phrases, this vocab is essential for life in France.

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ASK THE EXPERTS
Your legal, financial and property questions answered along with advice on living in France

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Art of living

Dutch-born artist **Frank den Os** swapped Rotterdam for a tiny village in the historic area of Berry and never looked back

Why did you choose Crozon-sur-Vauvre?
We are in the Indre department, on the border with the Creuse, exactly in the middle of the country. My husband and I came here in 2014 from Rotterdam to house-sit a friend's property for a few months, while working on different writing projects. What was intended as a break from city life turned into a permanent change of lifestyle. In 2017 we bought our current house. We have travelled to other parts of the country and considered moving elsewhere, but always come back to the beauty and calm that made us want to stay here in the first place.

What aspects of local life do you enjoy?
Between 2017 and 2023, Indre and Cher were among the departments in Centre-Val de Loire that lost the most inhabitants. The population continues to decline, so you'd think this must be a horrible place to end up. For us though, the opposite is true: lots of space and opportunities to build a comfortable, honest life without feeling caught up in the constant race for more. It's all very low-key and the community spirit has increased over the years, with lots of local activities and celebrations.

What is there to do locally?
Tourism professionals would probably point to rustic retreats among the vineyards, cosy B&Bs, and places related to novelist George Sand, who remains, 150 years after her death, the number one attraction in the historic Berry province. For us, the appeal is less immediately spectacular: quiet roads, old villages, walking country, local markets, and a landscape that reveals itself gradually.

How is your French?
My mother sent me to school early on weekdays for private language lessons from the age of six, so I feel I had a solid foundation, although less in practice. After a month here, I started dreaming in French. I have little difficulty speaking and understanding French, but am nevertheless still rather limited in the number of ways to express myself.

How do you find interacting with the locals socially?
One of the things I appreciate most is that people generally take you as you are. It takes time before you're really accepted, but then relationships tend to be long-lasting. Coming from the Netherlands, where social calendars often have to be planned weeks in advance, I enjoy the more spontaneous rhythm of life here. At the same time, living in a sparsely populated rural area means you have to make an effort. Community doesn't simply appear. Over the years we've become increasingly involved in local cultural events like the international art exhibition 'Dans les Collines' that we help organise each year.

Has living in France changed your work as an artist?
It has changed the conditions in which the work can develop, rather than the work itself. The foundations were already there before I moved to France, but living in a quiet rural environment has given those ideas time to mature. For example, 'A Measure of Days', my ongoing project of making one collage every day since February 2024, is rooted in consistency rather than intensity, relying on showing up at the studio every morning. That rhythm fits well with life here. There is less distraction, more continuity and a greater sense that time is something to inhabit rather than chase. While it is made quietly in the Berry countryside, my work reaches an international audience through exhibitions and online platforms.

Have you developed a taste for any local food or wine?
Living in France inevitably changes the way you think about food because everyday quality is taken seriously. Local cheeses, seasonal vegetables from our veggie garden and nearby markets, and a good loaf of bread quickly become part of daily life. I also enjoy discovering the wines of the Loire Valley. More than specific dishes, it's the culture around food that has become part of our lives: taking time, eating together and appreciating simple ingredients.

What about the local architecture and history?
One of the pleasures of living here is that history isn't confined to museums. Medieval churches, old farmhouses, Romanesque buildings and centuries-old villages are part of the everyday landscape. And there's the legacy of George Sand, whose presence is remarkable. Whether or not you're familiar with her novels, it's impossible not to become aware of the cultural imprint she left on this part of France.

What has surprised you most about living here?
Probably how much richness can exist in a place that many people overlook. Areas with spectacular scenery often don't need to explain themselves, whereas regions like the Berry reveal their character much more slowly. What initially feels quiet can, over time, prove remarkably layered. I've also been surprised by the growing international community here. You regularly meet people from across Europe and beyond who have chosen this part of France for reasons similar to our own.

Do you have a favourite French saying?
I've always liked '*petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid*' (little by little, the bird builds its nest). It expresses something I recognise in life and my work: meaningful things rarely appear all at once. They emerge through small, consistent acts repeated over time. ■



Frank's village is on the Indre and Creuse border

To discover Frank's artwork visit frankdenos.com or follow him on Instagram @frankdenos

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