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MONDAY NOVEMBER 19 2018



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OVERSEAS

## French retreats: the best homes on the market

Our enthusiasm for a home over the Channel is as strong as ever. Try these for size

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Emma Wells

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November 18 2018, 12:01am, The Sunday Times

This half-timbered 18th-century manor house in Normandy sits halfway between Caen and Deauville airports (see the property, priced at €997,000, in this article)



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There's not much that can put off Brits who harbour a dream of *La vie en rose*. The recession dampened enthusiasm only briefly, and our impending exit from the EU has galvanised many into making their move sooner rather than later.

According to Karen Tait, group editor for French Property News, Living France and France Magazine, it is not just retirees considering life across the Channel, but also young families who yearn for a more traditional, timeless way of life.

They are looking to the usual tried and tested favourites — homes in rural villages and small towns in southwest France — although the remote, run-down farmhouse in need of renovation has been knocked off the wish list by the desire for a bargain stately pile, largely inspired by the TV series Escape to the Chateau.

There are some frustrations, though potential investors remain optimistic. The exchange rate is increasingly off-putting and, as Tait says, “We still don’t know the final details on issues such as healthcare provision, but many buyers who want to move permanently have decided to install themselves there as soon as possible, in the hopes they will be treated favourably.”

Here’s our pick of the best homes on the market today.

MENU

MONDAY NOVEMBER 19 2018



## Occitanie, €1.25m

This dreamy mini chateau is in need of a new chatelaine. On the outskirts of the 14th-century bastide town of Revel, in Haute-Garonne, a 45-minute drive from Carcassonne and an hour from Toulouse, it was built in 1902, next to the 165-acre Lac de St-Ferréol — perfect for sailing adventures and beachside picnics. The 10-bedroom, three-reception house was renovated in the 1990s (including being reroofed), though there's still plenty of scope for some decorative updating.

It has lush views over the Haut-Languedoc natural regional park, but also stands in its own 18 acres of parkland, woodland and meadows. Despite the rural setting, you won't feel cut off — there are restaurants within walking distance. At weekends, you'll find Revel's 600-year-old covered market, topped off by a bell tower, still thriving and selling local produce, so you can ditch trips to the supermarché. 020 8144 5501, [home-hunts.com](http://home-hunts.com)

MENU

MONDAY NOVEMBER 19 2018



### Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, €1.45m

Owned for many years by a New Yorker — who says the country walks to Gordes for fresh bread and long lunches in the surrounding hilltop villages are two of the area's highlights — this extended and renovated 18th-century Provençal farmhouse comes with its own vineyard. On a 4.7-acre plot, the secluded house has four main bedrooms, beamed ceilings and a covered outdoor living area, as well as a one-bedroom guesthouse. Keep your own produce — or favourite local tipps — in the vaulted wine cellar. *020 7467 5330, [groupe-mercure.com](http://groupe-mercure.com)*



**Normandy, €397,000**

Recently reduced in price from €1.1m, this half-timbered 18th-century manor house sits halfway between Caen and Deauville airports. In Beuvron-en-Auge, often cited as one of France's most beautiful villages, and a 20-minute drive from the beaches of Cabourg, the house has four main bedrooms and underfloor heating provided by geothermal energy. *020 7201 2071, [chestertons-international.com](http://chestertons-international.com)*

**Pays de la Loire, €399,500**

The medieval riverside town of La Ferté-Bernard, in Sarthe, less than two hours' drive from Paris, simply groans with fabulous gothic architecture and Renaissance treasures. In a quiet hamlet nearby, this four-bedroom house probably dates from the 16th century, and comes with two acres of land and a small guest cottage. It sits on the edge of the beautiful Perche natural regional park. *0870 011 5151, [frenchestateagents.com](http://frenchestateagents.com)*



### Nouvelle-Aquitaine, €278,200

British buyers looking for typically French village life will find a local boulangerie in St-Bonnet-de-Bellac, in Haute-Vienne, just over an hour's drive from Poitiers. This renovated three-bedroom house dates from the 18th century and has a large garden and barns; the price has been reduced by more than €20,000. *0870 011 5151, [frenchestateagents.com](http://frenchestateagents.com)*



### Nouvelle-Aquitaine, €2.652m

A 25-minute drive from Biarritz airport, deep in southwest France's Basque country, this renovated blue-shuttered house in St-Jean-de-Luz has six bedrooms, several terraces, a fabulous

swimming pool and sea views. The local beaches are surfer heaven—and there's plenty of storage for stashing boards. 020 7467 5330, [groupe-mercure.com](http://groupe-mercure.com)



### Occitanie, €8.9m

Owned by “Monuments Man” Douglas Cooper between 1950 and 1977 — he famously tracked down Nazi art looters and their stolen works — the sumptuous seven-bedroom Château de Castille, close to the market town of Uzès, near Nîmes, sits in a 4.9-acre park. An avid collector of modern art, Cooper was friends with Paul Klee and Picasso — who drew figures on the terrace walls, which are still in situ. 00 33 4 66 03 10 03, [sothebysrealty.com](http://sothebysrealty.com)

MENU

 TIMES

MONDAY NOVEMBER 19 2018



### Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, €1.25m

Seemingly a typically trad Provençal bastide, this four-bedroom home was actually built in 2003 by its present owners. In the village of Cotignac, in the Var, the house has a wisteria-shaded terrace, a 20-tree olive grove and pool. Head to La Table de Fanette, nearby, to sample the local gastronomy and bonhomie.

*07725 869724, [secondhome.ch](http://secondhome.ch)*



### Paris, from €412,000

Once known as the haunt of cabaret artists and penniless painters, the 18th arrondissement is undergoing a regeneration. On Rue Damrémont, this eight-storey new-build development

will have 34 homes, from studios to four-bedroom houses. Set to be completed in 2020, their prices go up to €2.2m. *020 7471 4500, [athenaadvisers.com](http://athenaadvisers.com)*



### Nouvelle-Aquitaine, €235,400

Its interiors and pool need a total revamp, but the French idyll beckons at this four-bedroom period home — with an attached two-bedroom gîte — in Le Dorat, near Bellac, in Haute-Vienne. There's plenty of space to grow veggies and keep animals, and it's 30 miles from Limoges, served by daily flights from the UK. *0870 011 5151, [frenchestateagents.com](http://frenchestateagents.com)*



MENU

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2018

## Nouvelle-Aquitaine, €3.7m

With a steamy history — it was built for the king of Navarre's mistress — and a regal 75 acres of land and 16,000 sq ft of renovated buildings, this stone castle is a 25-minute drive from Agen and 1½ hours from Bordeaux airport. It has an orangery, woodland and swimming pool. *00 33 5 56 79 63 62, [bordeauxsothebysrealty.com](http://bordeauxsothebysrealty.com)*

*The France Show, with experts including the Sunday Times writer Anthony Peregrine, is at Olympia, London W14, January 25-27, 2019. To buy tickets for £4 (normal price £12), quote STFRANCE. Offer available until December 7 and is limited to 300 tickets; 01242 264777, [thefranceshow.com](http://thefranceshow.com)*

# £1,650,000

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**Rebecca Bartleet** · 21 HOURS AGO

I know people who spend six months here and six months abroad, but where is home?

I know people who come and go more frequently, but they spend all their time hacking back the weeds in the garden.

Others manage to spend hardly any time there at all, but still have all the costs and hassle of ownership.

**Why bother to buy a property abroad when it's so easy to rent**

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**BIANCA PELLET** → Rebecca Bartleet

If you are spending 6 consecutive months in France · 20 HOURS AGO · Edited then 6 consecutive months in Britain then you are already violating your treaty rights (see the 90-day rule) and that's even pre-Brexit.

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**Rebecca Bartleet** → **BIANCA PELLET** · 15 HOURS AGO

That's interesting, I didn't know that. I know two couples who do this, one in France and one in New Zealand.

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**Mary Kennedy** → Rebecca Bartleet · 15 HOURS AGO

Speaking from personal experience you're absolutely right. For many years, my husband and I rented a house in Provence every summer - the same house each time, so it really felt like home - but with no responsibilities whatsoever. Bliss!

When the time came to move to France full-time though, it was another matter. We certainly couldn't have afforded to buy a house in Provence, which anyway has now, I'm afraid, reached the 'deceptively simple' stage, and is in reality quite competitively chic - and I am not just talking about the Cote d'Azur. Nor are the locals always overwhelmingly friendly and hospitable to the deluge of incomers. Our choice instead was the Languedoc, which we have yet, years later, to regret.

My advice to anyone contemplating buying in France is to take as much care with choosing the (very) local area as the house itself. Will you be near a village with shops? It may be idyllic to be halfway up a mountain in summer, not so much in February, when the nearest bottle of milk is several miles away, down windy roads covered in deep snow. Is there a good local doctor who will take you on? The supply of GPs in rural France is drying up alarmingly. Are there a lot of other Brits living in your proposed village/town? Some people like an expat life, others (us for example)

prefer to 'live French'. How easy is it to find good builders (your 'new' house is bound to need a fairly serious amount of work doing to it). And be prepared for everything to go at snail's pace - operation escargot as they say.

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 **Joseph Kenneth Malone** · 23 HOURS AGO

I think it is a mistake to cover the full range of French domestic architecture in one short article. France is a mixture of races cultures and subcultures, Provinces differ in architectural styles as much as do many countries. I have to some extent read on the sixteenth and seventeenth century architecture of Normandy and the Loire which had the most influence on early Canada, If one was so inclined one could make a life's work on either of those subjects without scratching the surface

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 **Underwhelmed** · 1 DAY AGO

I spent 2 years working and living in France and my wife and I were married there. Given we still won't tax wealth in the UK, and it is unlikely we will ever be able to afford a house in London, our dream is ultimately to move to the south west of France. However, right now Brexiters are trying to ensure that is taken away from us as well. I'm just hoping to get my Irish passport in time for the birth of our baby. It would be nice to see a piece written on the ability to move, buy a house and work in Europe post the idiocy of Brexit.

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**Mary Kennedy** ➔ [Underwhelmed](#) · 15 HOURS AGO

Fingers crossed - at the moment it is looking as if that will still be possible for 'new entrants' so to speak. At least that's what the draft withdrawal agreement says, though you may have to find yourself a job before you come, or at least within three months of arriving.

In the ghastly scenario of 'no deal' though (oh please no) goodness knows what the position will be. Worth making an effort for - life in the south west is lovely.



FruiTbun · 1 DAY AGO

A few comments below childishly confusing France and the EU.

If you love Europe, countries, cultures and peoples, you must hate the illiberal, antidemocratic, xenophobic and jingoistic EU, the shame of Europe.

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Gerry Westerby → FruiTbun · 1 DAY AGO

Give it a rest, most ordinary folk on the continent take free movement and the gifts it bestows for granted and cannot conceive of the British stupidity as a panacea for their everyday woes.

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FruiTbun · 1 DAY AGO · Edited

I called France home for a decade and a half, country pile and city pad for the profession.

There's a reason they're cheap. Do yourself a favour and if you ever find yourself thinking of moving to MacDonalds-land, distract yourself until the feeling goes away. We ended up having to take a half-million hit just to get out and start again from scratch. But at least we're out.

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Los Angeles → FruiTbun · 1 DAY AGO

Great comment - my cousin has a big 19th century house in Normandy that he also bought cheaply. It rains 400 days a year :-) and he has constant water intrusion / damp and needs to spending 10K euro per year just to keep it up. Total pain for him - hopefully your house was in the south.

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