

MY DREAM HOME

Sarah Francis plumps for a château in Gers with six hectares and a chapel



Sarah Francis of Sifex explains why this historic 10-bedroom home near Auch, on the market for offers in excess of €1,690,000, gets her vote

Why does this property stand out for you?

This delightful château is located in one of my favourite parts of France, in a peaceful setting that is secluded but not isolated. It is spacious rather than overwhelmingly vast – what the French would describe as *de taille humaine*. The property looks out over a patchwork of fields with stunning uninterrupted views of the Pyrénées on the horizon. I especially like the Italianate feel of the pretty walled courtyard with its wrought-iron railings, the ancient chapel and the fully functioning clock tower – a rarity of its kind.

Why is it a great buy?

It is becoming increasingly rare to find authentic, unspoilt châteaux in which period features have been carefully restored and the property well maintained with an efficient heating system and a watertight roof. With parts dating from the 10th, 14th and 17th centuries in such good condition it represents quite a find – the restoration of historic

properties generally involves eye-watering amounts of money.

What is the wow factor?

The adorable 17th-century pink brick and beam *pigeonnier* perched on its ancient stone legs, overlooking one of the large ponds and the south façade of the château. Saved from ruin by the present owner, it now compels writers and artists to beg to use it for the creation of their latest *oeuvres*.

Who would it suit?

Highly versatile, it could appeal to a variety of buyers: a celebrity seeking privacy and tranquillity, an individual wishing to work from home or run a wedding venue business, a retired couple wanting to escape the rat race or simply a family looking for a really gorgeous home in south-west France. Most of all, it deserves an owner with the energy and means to cherish and maintain it, who would value its un-ostentatious character and lap up the surroundings.

What is your favourite room or feature?

The beautifully carved wooden *coquilles* over doorways and on mantelpieces, which serve as a reminder of the links the château had with pilgrims visiting its chapel while travelling to St-Jacques de Compostelle.

What is the immediate location like?

It's an unspoilt, rural landscape of wide valleys of sunflowers, maize and vines. Largely home to agricultural communities, Gers is akin to one great rolling farm punctured by hilltop *bastide* towns and villages, all set against the breathtaking backdrop of the snow-capped Pyrenees.

What's the appeal of the area?

The weather is great, there is good food and aged armagnac, and a slow-paced lifestyle redolent of a bygone era. The locals are courteous and friendly, and within easy reach are a plethora of attractions: the Béarn and the Basque country; Andorra; the coastal towns of Biarritz, St-Jean-de-Luz and San Sebastian; Pau with its castle, shops and restaurants; the university city of Toulouse; and the UNESCO site of Bordeaux. The annual international Marciac Jazz Festival is held about 25 minutes' drive away.

How easy is it to get to?

The area is well served by flights from the UK – Lourdes/Tarbes, Toulouse and Pau airports are both approximately an hour and a half's drive from the château, with Bordeaux a little further. ■

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