



LIVING IN A PIECE OF FRENCH HISTORY

A far cry from the property market in large French cities like Paris, where the cost per square metre may be over 10,000 euros, there are several little gems of provincial heritage that are not only reserved for billionaires.



Opening to its national policies in favour of the preservation of historic buildings, France abounds in exceptional residences, scattered all over the country. Although the market for second homes has collapsed in the last few years, chateaux, manor houses, windmills, hunting lodges and other properties of architectural or historical interest still find purchasers. From listed medieval ruins in the Dordogne to early-20th-century houses architects built for themselves along the Rhine, it is hard to draw up a precise typology for these homes whose prices vary between 100,000 and several million euros (averaging between one and two million euros). “For connoisseurs of these buildings, which often require major restoration and upkeep, the “love-at-first-sight” element overrides the purely speculative dimension,” explains Patrice Besse, an estate agent who specializes in character properties. These clients may be English, American, Russian, Chinese or French, are often well-informed and all share the same passion for national heritage. Combined with their personal sensibility is the idea of enhancing a site that may have an impact on the cultural heritage of the region. “One must look outside the stereotyped view of converting these properties into bed-and-breakfasts or renting them out for weddings,” declares Patrice Besse. “By researching their history and highlighting their architecture, interior decor or gardens, one may envisage a cultural vocation for these buildings.”

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Left-hand page, top: House on Gerzido beach, on the Isle of Bréhat, Brittany (©Emile Garcin Bretagne) Bottom: Chateau in Languedoc (©Immobilier Foch, Sotheby's International Realty) 1. 17th-century manor house in Luberon (©Emile Garcin Aix-en-Provence) 2. Prestigious residence in Uzes la Boissière, built around a 9th-century Templars' fortified tower (©Immobilier Foch, Sotheby's International Realty) 3. 18th-century manor house, 35 minutes from Deauville, Pays d'Auge (©Emile Garcin) 4. Architectural prowess in the Cathar Country, unique reconstruction of a listed fortress and its outbuildings, on a 92-hectare estate (©Agence Patrice Besse)