

INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE

# House Hunting in France: In Brittany, a Medieval Makeover for \$1.2 Million

The coastal region has remained popular with foreign buyers, and the pandemic has sparked a new surge of French buyers from larger cities.



A Stately 15th-Century House in Brittany

By Alison Gregor

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## A Six-Bedroom Stone Home in Northwest France

**\$1.2 MILLION (1.016 EUROS)**

This Medieval six-bedroom [home](#) sits on a quiet cobblestone alleyway in the walled Breton town of Dinan, in northwestern France. The property comprises two conjoined buildings — one dating from the 15th century with an enclosed timbered-frame porch that extends over the main entrance, and the other with a pediment dormer and red shutters and trim.



Called La Maison Pavie, the 2,900-square-foot property was once the home of the French diplomat and explorer Auguste Pavie, and has been operating as a bed-and-breakfast for about a decade, said Béatrice Viel, a regional partner with Patrice Besse, which has the listing.

Above the entrance to the four-story granite masonry-and-stone buildings, the centuries-old porch has three large symmetrical windows topped by a dormer with a slate-tiled bell roof. The entire dwelling was renovated in 2010, though an original staircase to the top floor and an old latrine were preserved.



A second-floor living room that extends into the enclosed porch has bookcases hidden behind period woodwork and a fireplace. Courtesy of the Patrice Besse Group

The entrance hall is paved with the original granite slabs, and the central wood staircase has wrought-iron balusters. The ground floor has a large living room with 18th-century wood paneling and a fireplace, Ms. Viel said. There is an adjacent study and one of two kitchens, which opens to the rear courtyard. A bedroom with half-paneled walls and a fireplace accesses a bathroom.

Furniture is not included in the asking price, but is negotiable, Ms. Viel said.

The second floor has another living room extending into the enclosed porch, with bookcases hidden behind period woodwork and a fireplace with a molded surround. Nearby is a light-filled dining room with a red accent wall and shelving, opposite a second



kitchen. Also on the second floor is a bedroom with views of the rear patio and an en suite slate-tiled bathroom with a double Italian-style shower.

The third floor has three bedrooms with en suite baths, and the attic has one bedroom with dual views of the rear courtyard and the 12th-century Saint-Sauveur Basilica. The room has vaulted ceilings with exposed beams and an en suite bath.

The inner courtyard has a Japanese maple and camellias, and a picturesque patio opens onto a paved courtyard with stairs along a high stone wall leading up to a terrace.

La Maison Pavie is in a conservation district in the center of Dinan, a historic hilltop town of about 11,000 residents in France's Brittany region. The area, which abuts the English Channel, is known for seaside golfing, horseback riding and dining on scallops. The coastal city of Saint-Malo, about 30 minutes away, has a high-speed rail station with connections to Paris, as well as a port with ferries to the Channel Islands and England. Rennes, the capital of Brittany with about 215,000 residents, is 45 minutes south and has an international airport, as does the city of Brest, a two-hour drive west of Dinan.



A light-filled dining room has a red accent wall and shelving. Courtesy of the Patrice Besse Group

## Market Overview

Brittany, a peninsular region in western France with dramatic



coastlines and ancient megaliths, has remained popular with foreign home buyers and is now seeing an influx of French buyers from larger cities, said Gilles Durin, the regional commercial director in Brittany for Patrice Besse.

“The interest in Brittany has not changed for foreign buyers, particularly the English, who have always appreciated it,” he said. “On the other hand, Brittany is attracting more and more French people. This one of the areas where prices have increased the most.”

A July report issued by the Notaires de France showed the median price per square meter of older apartments in Rennes, the capital of Brittany, increased by 8.7 percent in the first quarter of 2021 over the previous year, to 3,360 euros (\$362 a square foot). The median sale price of older homes in Brest, the region’s second-largest city, increased by 10.3 percent to 204,000 euros (\$236,660), according to the report.

“The pandemic has added further heat to an already hot property market in Brittany,” said Lisa Greene, the Grand-Ouest regional coordinator for the brokerage Leggett Immobilier. “Many French buyers wanted to move out of cities and acquire a home or holiday home in the countryside, plus the international demand did not abate. We actually sold many homes just from videos.”

Even if home prices are spiking in Brittany, they are still a bargain compared with some parts of France, including the Côte d’Azur, Perche, Sologne and any location within about 60 miles of a major city, Mr. Durin said.

“Brittany has become a ‘refuge region,’” he said. “The quality of life, good universities, proximity to Paris and the possibility of working remotely have been decisive. Above all, there is a climate that doesn’t make people fear global warming.”

Very few locations in Brittany are more than an hour from the sea (and therefore an abundance of fresh seafood), so foreign home buyers tend to be scattered throughout the region and can immerse themselves in the Breton lifestyle, said Chris Slade, who runs A House in Brittany, a real estate consulting firm, with his wife, Micki Slade.



A third-floor bedroom with garden views has an en suite bathroom with Italian-style shower.  
Patrice Besse Group

There are, however, some notable areas: Sailing enthusiasts may favor Saint-Malo, La Roche-Bernard or Saint-Quay-Portrieux. Beachgoers prize the seaside resorts in Dinard, on the Côte d'Émeraude. And medieval towns, such as Josselin, Rochefort-en-Terre, Moncontour and Auray, also attract foreigners, brokers said. Those seeking more sun head toward Morbihan and its namesake gulf with its dozens of picturesque islands, Ms. Greene said.

A four-bedroom house with a garden in Brittany may range in price from 150,000 to 350,000 euros (\$174,000 to \$405,000), Mr. Slade said.

A waterfront location or sea view adds a premium, Mr. Durin said.

“For a house with a full sea view, we will be on a budget that starts around 1 million euros (\$1.16 million),” he said. “Very pretty character properties, a manor house or mansion, with land are offered for sale at around 500,000 euros to 600,000 euros (\$580,000 to \$695,000).”

## Who Buys in Brittany

Brittany is sometimes called France's “Little Britain,” and while Brexit has strained close relationships in the region, British home buyers still predominate among those coming from outside of France, brokers said.



“Brittany is a land loved by the English and has been for a long time,” Mr. Durin said.

Other foreign buyers tend to come from Northern European nations including Belgium, Holland and Germany, and from the United States and Australia, brokers said.

## Buying Basics

There are no restrictions on foreign home buyers. Almost all sales are handled by notaries working on behalf of the government, for both the seller and the buyer.

Home buyers should anticipate paying 7 to 8 percent of the sale price in taxes and fees, including the notary fee, Mr. Durin said.

Obtaining a mortgage from a French bank can be difficult for some foreigners, including Americans, but not impossible, Mr. Durin said. “It’s easier, however, for nationals of the European community than for others,” he said.

Mr. Slade recommended that prospective buyers of landed properties have the budget for year-round maintenance. “If you’re not here full-time or don’t have deep pockets to pay a gardener, then don’t buy a place with too much land,” he said.



On the side of the 15th-century timber-framed porch, a diagonal wooden brace breaks the regular vertical lines of the half-timbering.  
Courtesy of the Patrice Besse Group

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