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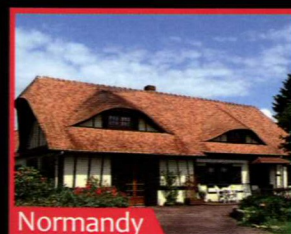
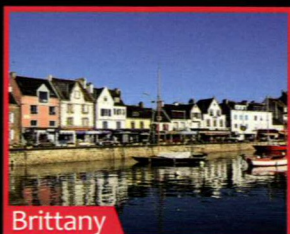
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# Southern belle

PAM SHEARER EXPLAINS WHY SHE AND HER HUSBAND TONY FELL IN LOVE WITH THEIR HOME IN THE TOWN OF ST-RÉMY-DE-PROVENCE



The Shearers have enjoyed many visits to their home in St-Rémy-de-Provence



Pam loves the Provençal lifestyle



The house was in good order and just needed some finishing touches



The Shearers wanted a property with a low-maintenance garden



The living room is a great place to relax



French doors lead from the living area out onto the sunny terrace

**B**ased in west London, Pam Shearer is a retired marketeer in the financial sector. Her husband Tony is a chartered accountant who was previously CEO of a bank and worked extensively in financial services.

**What type of property did you buy in France?**

In October 2009, my husband and I bought a lovely three-bedroom country house in St-Rémy-de-Provence. Strictly speaking, I probably shouldn't call it a country house as St-Rémy is a town of approximately 9,000 inhabitants but it has a lovely country feel. Our house was most probably used previously for animals or storage. The adjacent building to the left used to be a flour mill which was likely to have been owned by a wealthy industrialist who would have lived in the building.

**Where is St-Rémy located – it is not as well known as other parts of the south of France?** St-Rémy is a hidden gem in

Provence. It is about 20km south of Avignon (in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region), which is located inland behind the famous coast of St-Tropez and Cannes.

**Why did you want to buy in France?**

We wanted to live in this part of Provence because we love the area so much and we love the lifestyle. My husband gets very frustrated with the awful

transport and weather in London. It's humid in France whether its winter or summer but it's the lifestyle really that we wanted and the property prices are cheaper.

**What features do you particularly love about your French property?**

It's a very pretty stone house built in the mid-19th century. I have to say it's what most Brits look for when they go to France! Like most houses in this area, the nice ones tend to be built to take advantage of the weather so our property is typical in the sense that the windows are very small on the north side but it has lovely big windows on the south side so they get the sun. The garden is mainly at

the front of the house and we have a fantastic sun terrace.

**Do you use your French property as a holiday home?**

Some people have holiday homes and literally just use them in June and July. However, we didn't really want to do this as our French

property would then never really feel like home. Our property is more than a holiday home to us because we tend to spend two weeks in our home in France, then two weeks in London. Generally speaking, we spend July and August in France but we tend to spend less time there around January and February. So at the moment, our time is split between the two countries but we haven't decided yet how that will continue.

**Are you not tempted to rent your property for a few weeks of the year to get some return on your investment?**

No, we don't want to rent it out as it's actually more like our home. We wouldn't think of renting our London house out when we weren't there and we feel the same about our French home. However, I believe you can make plenty of money renting properties in Provence.

Our neighbours are Parisians and they hardly ever visit their house in St-Rémy but they do

rent it out for approximately four months a year, which probably pays for the entire running costs.

**Do you think your property has appreciated in the two years since you bought it?**

I'd say so; we've certainly made a lot of improvements to it.

**Are you considering an early retirement in France?**

My husband would love to be early retired anywhere but at the moment he has commitments in London. He is now able to work from our French home because we've got telephone, internet, Skype and everything we need to communicate with the outside world. Wifi doesn't work too well here though.

**So do you work from home?**

Neither of us are employees. If we were both employees, we'd look at spending the month of August in France and that's about it. Tony has portable work.

**In your experience, what type of people tend to buy in your area?**

You would be amazed. The people around us are often very arty types – there are sculptors and painters. There is a massive range of people.

**Did you ever consider buying a property in an other country?**

We have often holidayed in France but we'd always fantasised about living in Italy. I actually prefer the food in Italy and always had this idea of buying a ruin there.

We don't speak fluent French but we get by here with our handle on the language. Neither of us knew any Italian or Italy itself so it was a bit too daunting to buy there.

**What was your experience of buying a French property?**

I was trying to sort out a viewing schedule by myself as we were serious buyers. However, although we were telling estate agents that we wanted to live in a town and wanted a house with no need for renovation, they would nonetheless send us to

look at a ruin in the middle of a forest and with an attic containing a nest of owls. I felt that many of them were just hopeless or lazy and wanted to off-load things that they'd had on their books for the last three years.

Also my big problem was that I didn't know the area very well. I'd arrange viewings – one in the morning and one in the afternoon – 200 miles apart! Trying to organise viewings from London was actually impossible. You really do need someone to do it for you.

So we enlisted Nicola at Home Hunts, who helped to organise a viewing schedule for us and was good at lining up things she thought were suitable. She was also very helpful in terms of negotiating the practicalities with owners – to leave the curtain rails for us, for example.

We picked her brain on a number of things and she's become a friend, but at some point you have to stand on your own two feet!

**What else was on your list of requirements?**

We particularly wanted to be within walking distance of shops and services and wanted a house that had been renovated or didn't require much work. We also didn't want a garden that was too big or had vast spaces of land that would be too much work.

Essentially, we wanted a manageable garden, swimming pool and a house that had been renovated and was on the edge of a village that had life in it. We didn't want to live in a place where everything is closed on a Saturday night!

We have spent two Christmases at our home in France now and there's always something going on in the town and the surrounding area, such as wine tasting, the market or car boot sales. ■

*The Shearers bought their property through Home Hunts  
Tel: 0033 (0)9 70 44 66 43  
www.home-hunts.com*