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5

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LIFE'S RICH TAPESTRY

Ben Palfreyman falls in love with the fabric of this soft-toned home

The southern department of Gard is an unassuming place. Quietly caught between the popular Provençal coast to the east, and the regional parks of the Grand-Causse and Cévennes to the north and west, you could be forgiven for not quite being able to put your finger on where it is on the map.

As famous for its plentiful sunshine as next-door neighbour Provence, skiing in Languedoc-Roussillon is an option too if you head to the Cévennes. Of course, you'll probably want to make the most of those sun-filled skies, and as Gard happens to be home to the longest stretch of beach in the region there's plenty of sand to sunbathe on.

A listed natural site, La Plage de l'Espiguette runs for miles to the borders of the Petit Camargue, and is also close to the fortified town of Aigues-Mortes with its preserved medieval city walls.

The areas around the Cévennes, including Ardèche and Gard, were the most important silk producers in Europe from the 13th to the 19th centuries, mainly due to domestic farmhouses and cottages that took advantage of the flourishing mulberry trees, home to silkworms. If you explore the area there are as many as 150 silk mills that remain.

HOUSE AND HISTORY

As picturesque and peaceful as the department itself, this beautiful, warm-toned home is situated in the quiet village of La Bruguière.

Built in the mid-1800s, the style of the house could be described as a *mas du bas Vivarais*, traditional farmhouses made from limestone, a style more prevalent across the nearby Ardèche border.

These farmhouses had semi-open earthen ground-floor rooms with vaulted ceilings where the sheep were kept and agricultural machinery was stored. On the first floor was the farmer's living accommodation, often with a covered balcony, such as you can see in the image above, known as a *couradou*.

The top floor was used for grain storage and often doubled up as a silk worm factory. Situated near the important fabric market towns of Uzès and Alès, it is most likely that this home would have participated in the manufacture of silk in some capacity.

MODERN LIVING

Renovated to provide excellent living accommodation, the vaulted ground floor now houses a large kitchen, dining room, and lounge, all leading out onto the south-facing

courtyard garden.

On the first floor there is a further reception room with open fireplace as well as two bedrooms and two bathrooms (one en-suite). There is a charming first-floor terrace with views over the village and countryside which also has direct access to the courtyard.

On the second floor are three further bedrooms and two bathrooms.

The exterior courtyard has a covered terrace for al fresco dining while in the garden there is a sunny swimming pool.

The property, on the market for €570,000, is the perfect rural home without being isolated, and is extremely pretty. "This charming and authentic house, set in a peaceful Gard village, is just a short drive away from the beautiful market town of Uzès," says local estate agent Nicola Christinger. "The property offers spacious accommodation and lovely views of the village and is a perfect hideaway without being isolated. An affordable dream!"

VIBRANT VILLAGE LIFE

The traditional village is mostly made up of *villageois* of a certain age, with a recent resurgence of young families, and while there aren't many facilities, a successful crèche has



recently opened in the ancient *presbytère*.

Being so rural, there are no shops in La Bruguière, although there is a *pain dépôt* service so you can have fresh bread delivered to your door each morning by a local baker. There is also a small village with shops about five minutes' drive away.

With a strong community presence, there is plenty to get involved in and each summer the villagers get together for la Fête de St Jean (in late June) and la Fête Votive (early July). Both are popular and well attended, attracting the inhabitants of the surrounding local *communes* to the village.

Further afield, there are a number of lively events including the annual Festival d'Avignon and a music festival in Uzès, which is just a 20-minute drive away.

There are plenty of opportunities to indulge your love of outdoor pursuits such as walking and cycling with no less than four regional parks within an hour's drive, while nearby Uzès hosts weekly markets and continues to be a successful place to buy and sell fabrics. ■



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