



A hobby harvest

Rachel Johnston explores an exquisite vineyard property near Monflanquin

Having researched the brewing ‘business of the month’ and read Lynette Eyb’s article on buying a vineyard (see page 46), I knew this issue was going to have booze appeal when I came across this *domaine* in Lot-et-Garonne. After all, with Valentine’s Day approaching, romance and alcohol and a general *joie de vivre* are on everyone’s minds.

Fortunately, this property can offer all three. It’s the dream of so many to escape to southern France and make their own wine, made even more alluring by Peter Mayle’s book *A Year in Provence* and subsequent film *A Good Year*. Current owners Doug Hart and Sally Martyn actually began their househunt in Provence before being drawn to Lot-et-Garonne, where the large, character stone houses on which their sights were set were easier to come by.

“While parts of Provence can almost guarantee great weather, the traffic can resemble that of the UK, meaning getting around can be a nightmare,” explains Sally. Currently, Lot-et-Garonne seems to have escaped the level of tourism of Provence, and of Dordogne just over the border. But this *domaine* is by no means lacking in beautiful scenery: the green hills of the Lémance valley surround the estate, and it’s within a 50-minute drive of Bergerac airport.

Exclusive terroir

A total area of 21.6 hectares is on offer here, five of which are vineyards with Chardonnay, Syrah and Grenache grapes. Since their arrival three years ago, the owners have installed a boutique winery with steel and concrete vats,

all of which are included in the sale. Most attractive is the relative ease with which you can set yourself up as an amateur winemaker.

Neither Doug nor Sally had any direct experience; Sally’s background in farming was helpful but not an essential key to the enterprise. They have learned enough from a short spell at winemaking school to enable them to manage one hectare of vines themselves, leaving the rest to be lovingly tended by the *vigneron* – their very own Francis Duflot, for those who know him. Doug and Sally would be happy to give the new owner an overview of the workings of a vineyard, as well as pass on their tips for a healthy crop.

Kirsten Pollard, manager of south-west France for Home Hunts, the agency marketing the property, adds that the new owner could take the *domaine* to the next level and increase production if desired. At present the contracts are renewable on a year-by-year basis, giving optimum flexibility, and there will be ongoing consultancy available through the agent.

Country retreat

Of course, if becoming a winemaker sounds too much like hard work, there is plenty more to this *domaine* to allow the relaxed enjoyment of its spoils. “The property is approached by a gravel driveway with the vines to one side,” explains Kirsten. “There are no properties around it – it’s a truly private setting.” Sip a glass of your own wine beside the 14x7m pool, knock a ball around on the all-weather tennis court, or take a romantic wander through the six hectares of woods. A further 10 hectares

comprise verdant meadows, suitable for horses or other livestock.

The current owners’ green fingers have roamed beyond the confines of the vineyard to the rest of the outside space. “Besides vines, the previous owner appeared to have an aversion to anything that had the potential to produce leaves!” Sally tells me. “As such, the odd olive tree and the ubiquitous wisteria have gone a long way in creating the feel one would expect from a property in this region.”

Sophisticated living

The property itself is in immaculate condition. Doug and Sally have increased its value by adding a new kitchen, but the other rooms were already stunningly finished when they arrived. There are five bedrooms in the main house – one of which is a suite on the ground floor – and a further bedroom in the guest house across the courtyard. The first floor is crowned by an impressive mezzanine balcony and period features abound downstairs, with two large fireplaces and original stone sink.

The property’s stylish furniture is available by separate negotiation, thereby providing a fabulous turnkey solution. On the market for €1,400,000, the *domaine* has great commercial potential as a luxury holiday rental, but would equally make a beautiful year-round home. For quick getaways, fly in and out by helicopter; there’s even a helipad. ■

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