

BORDEAUX: A CITY TO DRINK IN

Homes are a fraction of Paris prices and rail times are about to be slashed. It's time to buy in a wine capital, says **CATHY HAWKER**



Wine tourism is one of the region's main attractions, with architect Jean Nouvel's Château La Dominique (above) one of the most eye-catching tourist spots

BOB EDME/AP; JEAN-PIERRE MULLER/AFP

Classical architecture meets urban renewal with spectacular effect in Bordeaux, a Unesco World Heritage city on the banks of the Garonne river.

A 10th the size of Paris and with some 5,000 listed buildings, Bordeaux is a perfect city in which to wander, awash with grand, 18th-century traffic-free squares and Europe's longest pedestrianised shopping street. The city's wine heritage only adds to its dizzying elegance. This is the capital of France's largest wine-producing region and the names associated with it — Margaux, Latour, Pétrus — are legendary.

Bordeaux's urban regeneration is thanks to its long-term mayor, Alain Juppé. The former French PM lovingly strong-armed the city into the 21st century, obliging residents to clean centuries of grime off their buildings, tearing down the warehouses that blocked the city from the Garonne to create inviting pedestrian areas, and introducing quiet and clean modern trams.

The Bordeaux population boomed in the past 20 years, making it France's sixth-largest city. What's more, the extension of the Paris-Tours TGV line will shave a third off the train journey to the French capital, putting it just two hours away by 2017. So with property prices two fifths of those in Paris, is it time to consider a Bordeaux weekend bolt-hole?

A CITY-CENTRE HOME

"Bordeaux is an affluent university city where property represents good value compared with many other French cities," says Doug Storrie of Maxwell Storrie Baynes. "It's well placed for day trips to the Atlantic coast around Arcachon, Cap Ferret and the Pyrénées."

Two-bedroom flats of 900sqft in the city centre start from £300,000. Grisel Immobilier has a studio in trendy Chatrons for £241,000 and a beautiful 2,220sqft three-bedroom flat with high ceilings for

£737,000. A grand three-bedroom flat on the second floor of an 18th-century building facing the river is £1,121,000 through [Home Hunts](#).

TAKE THE TOUR

Bordeaux's location on the Garonne created economic prosperity from the 16th century, built largely on the wine trade. Now, just like the city centre, the notoriously secretive world of Bordeaux wine production is being revitalised.

Under pressure from the New World, producers are adding modern architecture to their historic estates and opening their doors to wine tourists.

"Wine tourism is steadily improving in Bordeaux," says Alex Hall, a Briton who moved there in 2004. "There's the Fête le Vin, the world's largest wine tourism event, held on the river quays in June, and the Grand Crus weekend in May, the only time the general public can taste wines from 100 top producers in one place."

Hall's company, Vineyard Intelligence, advises people buying vineyards in Bordeaux.

WINE AND DESIGN

To highlight Bordeaux's current obsession with modern architecture, Hall points out the Norman Foster-designed cellars that are under construction at Château Margaux and the dramatic, curvaceous cellar designed by Pritzker Architecture Prize-winner Christian de Portzamparc at Château Cheval Blanc.

Next to Cheval Blanc on the borders of Pomerol and Saint-Émilion, Château La Dominique, an acclaimed vineyard owned by French producer Clément Fayat since 1969, unveiled its own wonderful new cellar this spring.

Designed by Jean Nouvel and covered with concave metal strips in graduated shades of red that reflect the vines, the audacious building puts a new mark on the rural landscape, without disturbing it.