

SOUTH of the RIVER

In ever-popular Dordogne, Rachel Johnston hops from the plane to a perfect property

We saw dozens of frogs before we found our Prince", declares the owner of this dream home in Dordogne, "but when we did, it was love at first sight". If this doesn't sound like a French property fairytale, I'm not sure what does.

Hailing from South Africa, Stuart and Arlene Klein bought this house near Issigeac, less than 20km south-east of Bergerac and the Dordogne river, as a second property in 1999. With its honey-coloured stone and sage shutters, nestled in five and a half hectares of meadows and woodland, it has afforded them years of undisturbed pleasure in this pretty corner of south-west France.

Well connected

The Kleins say the area was a conscious choice, both for its picturesque countryside and its excellent transport links – there are year-round flights to Bergerac from London Stansted and seasonal flights from many other UK airports, making quick weekend getaways manageable. Regrettably, travelling between Hexagone and South Africa is not such a convenience, and these logistics now force the sale.

Originally the main house on a large farm that was broken up over several generations, the property needed restoration when the

Kleins arrived, but they have surpassed requirements and created a truly special home with fine furnishings and painstaking attention to detail. Taking care to maintain the original exterior beauty and a sense of the building's heritage, Stuart and Arlene almost entirely gutted the interior, transforming it from dilapidated to dreamy with high-quality fittings and finishes.

Many homeowners consider the kitchen to be the hub of a property and this one doesn't disappoint, but while the Kleins have kitted it out with ultra-smart appliances, the wooden slatted ceiling and country cupboards stop it looking too modern. The three bedrooms are all en suite, with bathrooms elegantly finished in cream travertine.

The master suite on the ground floor boasts a sleigh bed, its own fireplace and double doors leading outside, so you can step straight out of bed for breakfast on the terrace. At the edge of the lawn near a magnificent umbrella pine, it enjoys long hours of sunshine in total peace and privacy.

The rest of the house considered, the real 'wow' factor is delivered by the living room, which has exposed stone walls on all sides, a terracotta-tiled floor and a maze of beams zigzagging across its high ceiling. The

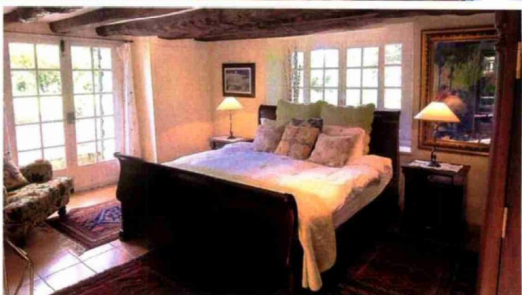
centrepiece fireplace and wrought-iron Italian chandelier give the space grandeur, but it's still the perfect place to relax and feel at home, and at the back is an area with an eight-seater table reserved for informal dining. The house also benefits from oil-fired central heating, a double garage and several useful outbuildings.

Enchanting forest

When I asked about her favourite feature, Arlene said it was very difficult to choose. "If pressed, I'd say the approach to the property through our little forest of trees is pretty special," she says. Indeed, the house is set on its own, well away from neighbours, but it's far from isolated. Essential shops are two minutes away by car or a short walk, and the medieval *bastide* village of Issigeac is just beyond.

Roads spiral around inside the old circular walls and are lined with unusual 14th-century, timber-framed houses, and in the village square stands the impressive Palace of the Bishops of Sarlat. On Sunday mornings, the local community is abuzz with food-fuelled discussion at the market.

A 20-minute drive from the property is Beaumont-du-Périgord, the chief town of the *canton* with a thriving artisanal food industry that includes beef and dairy produce, duck,



In 20 minutes

strawberries, plums and walnuts. The area is also famous for its wineries, the most famous – Le Château de Monbazillac – producing exquisite dessert wines.

Turnkey tailoring

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this sale is the chance to purchase the furniture by separate negotiation, all of which has been carefully selected and contributes to an overall look that would be hard to recreate. Even the caretaker couple, who currently live in the two-bedroom guest house next door, can stay on to look after the main house and grounds.

"The only part left to do is the fun bit – dreaming up your ideal swimming pool and watching it come to life – and then the property will be Dordogne perfection incarnated," says Kirsten Pollard, manager of south-west France for Home Hunts.

It is certainly the case that no expense has been spared in renovating this property and, if there was room in the budget for a pool after buying it at €795,000, it really would become the Prince Charming of French homes. ■

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