

I heard it through the Grapevine

France

The Fruits of French Investment

Britain's love affair with France isn't just about holiday homes or the new lifestyle you've always dreamed of. Many investors are now realising the true potential of turning their vision or hobby into profit. **Grahame Anderson has this special report.**

The wine business is fast becoming a green light for those who seek an exciting fresh challenge in Europe. In fact, growing interest from UK and international buyers seeking both hobby and investment vineyard properties has lead UK based Home Hunts to launch a bespoke vineyard service, with a specialist and experienced team to help direct people through the entire buying process.

The launch coincided well with the pound being at its strongest against the Euro since March 2008 and buyers will now be getting more vines and property for their money. Rory Ramsden, Home Hunts consultant and vineyard expert says: "Home Hunts' vineyard sales in France boomed in 2014 and are up 35 per cent when compared with data from the previous year, and this is likely to continue with the bargains currently found in the Euro-zone."

For example, a stunning 80 hectare vineyard estate overlooking the Luberon National Park in Provence, on the market with Home Hunts for

€9 million today - that's £6,700,000 - would have cost £7,900,000 in the summer of 2013 when the pound was worth just €1.14 - a stunning saving of £1,200,000.

Some agents have no more than 10 per cent of the vineyard properties for sale on their books. And of course, vineyard owners are particularly discreet as they don't want their competitors or staff to know their property is on the open market. Buyers have to dig deeper as a result. This is where Home Hunts' extensive market intelligence and carefully established connections come into their own. They have access to more vineyards than any other estate agent because it's a buyer's agent, with access to all real estate on sale by partner estate agents. Their specialists cover vast areas of France including Bordeaux, St. Emilion, Pechartmant vineyards near Bergerac, Provence and Languedoc Roussillon.

But before the process of locating and purchasing can begin, potential investors must ask themselves an important question as Rory Ramsden explains: "It is vital to establish whether the buyer's primary aim is to buy a business and make money, or to simply live in a wonderful French property and keep themselves occupied by looking after a few vines?"

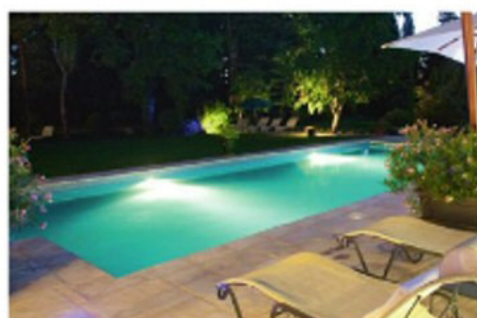
In France, eight to 10 acres of premium grape-growing land can yield long-term investment returns of as much as 20 per cent a year, depending on market demand for contract grape purchases. Though this of course is perhaps the highest realistic rate. Olivier de la Selle, manager of Agri France, a Paris subsidiary of BNP Paribas, the French bank says: "With a good sales system and a good vineyard, owners can aim for a four per cent annual profit selling grapes in France."



Bordeaux vineyard properties with renovation potential are highly sought after at the moment. Funding of between three and five €million can secure a beautiful Gironde château situated on a hill overlooking its vineyards. It consists of 85 hectares of land of which 58 hectares are vineyard. There is a 19th century Maison de Maître with Tower offering five bedrooms and several superb reception rooms. The property also has an impeccable stone building with a renovated wine cellar, offices, tasting room and a laboratory. All viti/vini material for the proper functioning of the enterprise is included in the offer. (bordeauxbeyond.co.uk).

When it comes to budget, around 75 per cent of enquiries and sales are for properties in the €0-1 million bracket. Around 20 per cent are looking for properties between €1-5 million, 4 percent are searching in the €5-15 million range, and just one per cent are looking at properties worth more than €15 million.

Ramsden's tip for finding good value for money in France is to look in the Pechamant Appellation, a well-known wine in the Dordogne department. This AOP (Appellation d'Origine Protégée) can be found in the hills to the north of Bergerac. "It is only 461 hectares, but the wines compare to those from Lalande de Pomerol in price, yet the land is only €30,000 per hectare compared to €220,000 per hectare in St Emilion." *see page 54*



Elsewhere a vineyard estate is currently available in Hérault, Montpellier-Languedoc consisting of 215 acres, 30 of which are Organic and AOC vineyards (red and white varieties). It also has 87 acres of organic grain crops, fruit trees, olive production and scrub alongside wood pines etc. In terms of housing You'll get a 19th century Castle built on Roman ruins with heated pool, greenhouse and magnificent gardens. A building has been recently renovated into a couple of apartments (two and five bedrooms), and there's an air-conditioned luxury spa (Jacuzzi, sauna ...) very up-scale. A second building contains seven guest rooms and two suites, with a third carrying two apartments and offices used by staff. Other highlights include a huge winery, cellar equipment and cultivating material. Wine stocks are included in the price of €10, 500,000. (homehunts)

It's best not to rely on any estate agent valuation figure as their duty is to get the best price possible for the property. Some estate agents will overprice properties, or there could be details about the properties they deliberately choose not to share.

Home Hunts will provide buyers with expert instruction and advice throughout the entire buying process, from the initial stages of looking for a vineyard right through to after-sales care service, whether it is to help smooth the transition to running a wine *⇒ page 58*



Holiday France Direct - Properties that are booked direct with owner

Holiday France Direct is ideal for owners who prefer to maintain control over their lettings and contact with their guests. It offers holidaymakers one of the largest portfolios of independently owned holiday property in France and Spain. And because its owners are independent, each property on offer is unique, allowing guests more choice so that they can find the perfect holiday home.

It successfully and consistently markets a great variety of self-catering and B&B holiday rentals and properties – from town apartments to beach chalets and mobile homes to châteaux. Owners benefit from direct access to the popular website www.holidayfrancedirect.co.uk to showcase their property, including listings, photos, rental rates and availability calendars. There is also the Quickbook (pay per booking) option where the customer can secure their booking on-line with a £29 fee, advertisers simply deducting this from the rental each time. It's quick and easy to sign up online and straight away benefit from HFD online marketing, press advertising and PR coverage across national, local and Francophile press, plus HFD offers owners and customers 20% off Brittany Ferries fares. **Holiday Homes - Properties that are sold as part of an inclusive holiday package**

Meanwhile, Holiday Homes is a hassle-free letting service managed on the owner's behalf by Brittany Ferries Marketing, enquiries, bookings and rental payments (direct to a French or UK bank account) are all taken care of. Plus owners enjoy the bonus of an off-peak Channel crossing for £75 (for a car and all passengers) and a 20% saving on ferry fares throughout the year.

Properties are marketed via Brittany Ferries' website, and a popular brochure – *Cottages and Villas*. With over 1,300 holiday homes on offer, Brittany Ferries is one of the largest self-drive tour operators to France and northern Spain – the perfect credentials for offering holiday home owners a first-class managed letting service.

Property owners wishing to find out more can do so by calling 0330 159 6868 or by visiting www.brittanyferries.com/letyourproperty

business, finding the right school for children or helping with renovation work.

The fully operational vineyard (en ferme) located within 5 minutes of Duras in the Lot et Garonne, 40 minutes from Bergerac airport presents a superb investment opportunity. The property comprises a modern style five bedroom house, open plan living room, newly fitted kitchen and swimming pool. There are views over the vineyard, 10 hectares of grounds of which 8.5 hectares are planted to vines with Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc grape varieties. You'll get a state of the art winery with large storage barn, insulated wine store and office/sales/tasting room. A Large storage barn and insulated wine store, Brand and website are included in the sale priced at €682,500 – that's £505,323, offering a huge saving of £93,641 from exchange rates offered in the summer of 2013. (homehunts).

Always get the best legal advice you can and do lots of in depth research before taking the plunge – investing in a vineyard can be a huge under-taking. Companies like Home Hunts will be a very good starting point.

The fruits of your vision await.

