

REAL ESTATE

House Hunting in ... France

International Real Estate
By ALISON GREGOR FEB. 21, 2018

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Gabrielle Volinet for The New York Times

A CONVERTED 18TH-CENTURY MILL IN PROVENCE

\$1.8 MILLION (1.48 MILLION EUROS)

This six-bedroom, four-bathroom home in the village of Maussane-les-Alpilles, in Provence, was built in the 18th century as a mill where olive oil was produced. Although part of it was always used as living quarters, the entire structure was converted into a residence in the second half of the 20th century, said Jérôme Louis, the director of Espaces Atypiques, which has the listing. That was also when the 13-by-23-foot swimming pool was installed in a former stable, he said.

In addition to the 5,274-square-foot main residence, the quarter-acre property also includes a 753-square-foot annex unit, a storage building and parking for four cars, Mr. Louis said.

The front door, which has stained glass from 1726, opens to a grand entry with walls of stone from the Alpilles mountains and old terra-cotta tiles on the floor, as well as under-floor heating and vaulted ceilings, which continue throughout the ground level.

"The shape of the roof on the ground floor is typical of this type of oil mill," Mr. Louis said, adding that most of the home's furniture and the mill's "original press system made of massive pieces of wood" are included in the asking price. "All these original pieces will remain in the house."

Off the entry are cavernous spaces that contain the kitchen, library and office, as well as the dining room and a living room with a staircase to the second floor. The open kitchen has walls and floors of Alpilles stone and a large island with a Brazilian granite countertop. The heavy ceiling beams are not original to the mill, Mr. Louis said, but were added when the kitchen was expanded.

The dining room has an adjacent sitting area and dramatic lighting that accentuates the vaulted ceiling and the massive olive press, which is still intact. This room opens to a patio with a vine-covered arbor and a pétanque court.

In the office is a large stone vat once used to store olive oil, Mr. Louis said. The living room has a massive fireplace and a stone stairway with an ornate forged-iron railing that leads to the bedrooms on the second floor.

The master bedroom has a high ceiling with heavy beams that were added when it was raised a decade ago, Mr. Louis said. This bedroom opens to a large terrace and also has an en-suite bathroom. There are four other bedrooms in the main house and an additional one in the annex.

The village, Maussane-les-Alpilles, has about 2,254 residents and plenty of shops, markets and restaurants. It is about a 30-minute drive from Arles, a coastal city with population of about 53,737, whose best known resident was Vincent Van Gogh. There are many tourist attractions in the region, including the Parc Naturel Régional des Alpilles. The closest international airport is the Marseille Provence Airport, which is about an hour's drive.

MARKET OVERVIEW

In recent years, the housing market in Provence has been sluggish, as it has throughout France. But in the past year or so it has been gaining momentum, said Andrea Bichi, owner of Your Provence, a real estate agency in Goulit.

"The last few years, we had a decrease in prices and demand, but now we have the feeling that prices are more stable," Mr. Bichi said. "The market is picking up again a bit, and I think prices will follow."

Much of this has to do with increased confidence in France following the election of Emmanuel Macron in May 2017, which helped put the country back on the map for international investment, said Tim Swannie, managing director of Home Hunts, an agency in the South of France. "President Macron and his new government brought a lot of optimism to the French property market in general," Mr. Swannie said.

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The most pronounced bump has been seen in areas popular with home buyers including Paris, the French Alps and Provence, brokers said.

In Provence, both domestic and foreign buyers are attracted to areas like the Luberon and Alpilles, lured by the sunshine, picturesque countryside and laid-back lifestyle. And home prices that are lower on average than in neighboring Côte d'Azur also appeal to some

buyers, brokers said.

But Provence is a vast region, so prices can fluctuate, sometimes rivaling those in the Côte d'Azur, Mr. Swannie said. And buyers in Provence, he added, are usually seeking a different kind of property than those looking in the Côte d'Azur. "The majority of clients search for older, more authentic properties in Provence, particularly stone-built properties," he said, "whereas there is more demand for more modern villas on the Côte d'Azur."

A typical *mas*, or Provençal farmhouse, of about 2,150 square feet could sell for 450,000 euros to 900,000 euros (or about \$558,000 to \$1.1 million), Mr. Louis said. A large, well-restored country house with land and a pretty view might fetch upward of 1.2 million euros (or about \$1.5 million), brokers said.

WHO BUYS IN PROVENCE

Most of the foreign home buyers in Provence are from Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the United States, brokers said. "However, now with Brexit, we've lost many British clients," said Mr. Bichi, of the real estate agency Your Provence.

Smaller numbers of buyers come from Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Australia and South Africa, brokers said.

BUYING BASICS

There are no restrictions on foreign buyers in France.

Notaries handle all home sales, and the practice of using two (one for the seller and one for the buyer) is becoming more common in transactions involving foreign buyers from countries where "it is important to have a lawyer for each party," said Marie Vere, an English-speaking notary in Ménébes.

Buyers typically pay between 7 and 8.5 percent of the purchase price in land registry taxes, stamp duties and notary fees, Ms. Vere said.

If a lawyer is also involved, the charges are typically around 1,500 to 1,800 euros (or \$1,861 to \$2,233), Mr. Louis said.

Mortgages are available to foreign buyers, although lending criteria have become more strict in recent years, brokers said. Most banks will not lend more than 75 percent of the property value to foreign buyers, Mr. Swannie said.

Many banks have also tightened lending standards for American buyers in particular, Ms. Vere said. "I think the reason is that they had a lot of litigation with nonresident loans, and they have found it more difficult to collect unpaid debts from U.S. residents," she said.

WEBSITES

Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur tourist board: decouverte-paca.fr

Maussane les Alpilles tourism office: maussane.com

French Ministry of Foreign Affairs: diplomatie.gouv.fr

LANGUAGES AND CURRENCY

French; euro (1 euro = \$1.24)

TAXES AND FEES

The annual taxes on this property are about 2,400 euros (about \$2,978).

CONTACT

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jerry

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for that price you can get a nice chateau in France (lol) but in a different area. In Provence you pay for its international reputation....

Nestor Potkine

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