

Adopt the Languedoc lifestyle for just £151,000

Vineyards, pine forests, markets and Mediterranean blue skies – here is your chance to discover Provence's lesser-known neighbour, says **Cathy Hawker**

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THE South of France conjures thoughts of the bright lights and sky-high prices of the Côte d'Azur, but follow the gorgeous Mediterranean coastline westwards and you'll find the Languedoc, a peaceful and less pricey antidote.

The Languedoc stretches from Provence to the Spanish border, taking in Carcassonne and Montpellier, and includes bustling market towns and quiet, stone villages bookended by sprawling vineyards.

There are pine forests, rugged mountains and the tree-shaded meanderings of the Canal du Midi, all under Mediterranean skies.

"Seaside ports in Languedoc are like St Tropez used to be before Brigitte Bardot arrived," says Miguel Espada of Propriétés & Co with only a hint of exaggeration. "Look at Marseillan with its small marina and seafood restaurants. You can easily find untouched places, even on the coast."

Several upmarket hotel chains agree. Banyan Tree and Six Senses are among five-star brands said to be eyeing up locations in the Languedoc. Access is easy, too. There are five airports within an hour – Béziers, Carcassonne, Nîmes, Perpignan and Montpellier – and three more, at Toulouse, Girona and Marseille, within two hours' drive.

Espada lives in the Languedoc and has an enviable lifestyle. His family owns Seigneurie de Peyrat, a 200-hectare vineyard estate close to Pézenas, a top scorer for visitors on TripAdvisor, where Espada's wife, Cécile, runs the winery. Most weekends he takes their two teenage sons sailing and fishing, stopping off to sample the seafood from the Étang de Thau, a vast saltwater lake that produces 90 per cent of France's oysters and has some of the cleanest, most protected waters in Europe.

TRADITIONAL TOUCH

For the past 11 years Espada has been developing homes in historic buildings across southern France. He takes derelict monasteries, old distilleries and crumbling châteaux and produces apartments, houses and boutique hotels, with anything from 13 to 160 homes. Now on his 10th project, he owns units in all his completed projects and works to keep service charges low, about £725 a year at most developments.

"Our policy is to integrate into the village by using building materials such as Languedoc's pale stone and traditional ironwork," he says. "Our buyers come from France, the UK and other parts of Europe and want their home to look authentically French outside, but with light, airy interiors, en suite bathrooms and modern kitchens."

Propriétés & Co has homes for sale at three completed projects with prices from £151,580. Château des Roche Fleuries has 15 homes in and around a delightful 19th-century turreted château, just a five-minute drive from medieval Pézenas, a charming market town with a population of 10,000. The two- and three-bedroom



From £151,580: flats with communal pool, golf and tennis at Domaine de la Mandoune vineyard estate, near the pretty port of Marseillan on the Languedoc coast



From £156,560: homes at Château de la Redorte vineyard estate on the Canal du Midi, which also runs as a spa hotel



Good life: Seigneurie de Peyrat vineyard estate, where Cécile Espada runs a winery, is near the medieval town of Pézenas

homes, spread between the château and new-builds in the grounds, range from 807sq ft to 1,518sq ft, some with low-maintenance Mediterranean gardens. Prices for the final six start from



Authenticity: Miguel Espada, with wife Cécile, has developed historic homes across southern France for the past 11 years

£188,500, which local rental company Go Languedoc predicts could generate rental profits of £760 over a realistic 16-week rental period. Among the oyster beds and pink flamingos on the

Étang de Thau close to the pretty little seaside town of Marseillan, **Domaine de la Mandoune** has views over the neighbouring vineyards and across the water. The 45-hectare vineyard estate has 30 homes divided between four buildings with a tennis court, pool and pitch and putt course in the grounds.

The final units for sale start from £151,580 for a one-bedroom property. These homes let well and anyone renting for a minimum of six months each year can reclaim the 20 per cent VAT on their purchase.

Château de la Redorte, a vineyard estate on the Canal du Midi between Narbonne and Carcassonne, has eight of the total 30 units still for sale priced from £156,560 for one- to three-bedroom properties of 420sq ft to 796sq ft. Communal facilities include a pool, spa and restaurant – the château operates as a hotel – and owners will be able to get fully immersed in the two hectares of vines currently being replanted by a master winemaker.

"Restoring historic homes and getting planning permission is never easy," concludes Espada. "But it is much easier to create style, character and authenticity if you are already part of the community rather than from scratch. That is what we try to do."

CONTACTS

- Propriétés & Co: proprietes.co.uk (00 334 6711 8715)
- Seigneurie de Peyrat: depeyrat.com
- Go Languedoc: golanguedoc.com



Hidden gem: Colloure is one of the coastal villages that look like St Tropez did "before Bardot arrived"

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