

# Selling like hot cakes

Picture: DOMINIQUE ANDRE/Photoblm/Maxppp

**JANE SLADE meets a British family who have moved to and established a business in France before selling their homes in the UK. And with news of the local distillery getting a makeover, they are well placed to benefit**

**T**HE MEDIEVAL town of Pézenas in the wine-rich Languedoc region of France is one of those fairytale places with cobbled streets and old stone buildings buttressed by mountains, sea and rolling hills.

Once the home to 17th-century playwright Molière, its quiet courtyards and antique shops have lured British and Irish buyers over the years, seduced by the vine-clad hills, temperate climate and proximity to lively historic towns such as Carcassonne, Perpignan and Montpellier.

Such has been the magnetic charm of Pézenas that an entire family from Wakefield have put their UK homes on the market and set up shop, literally, on the town's main street.

Natalie Leach, her sister Gemma, her husband Lee and their two-year-old daughter have opened a tea room enticing locals with their English hotpots, toasted teacakes and buttered scones.

"None of us was happy in our jobs and ever had any money," says "master baker" Natalie, who left a sales job in Wakefield.

"My sister and I got to know the area after my parents bought a holiday home here in 2001. We used to come and stay and have just fallen in love with the place.

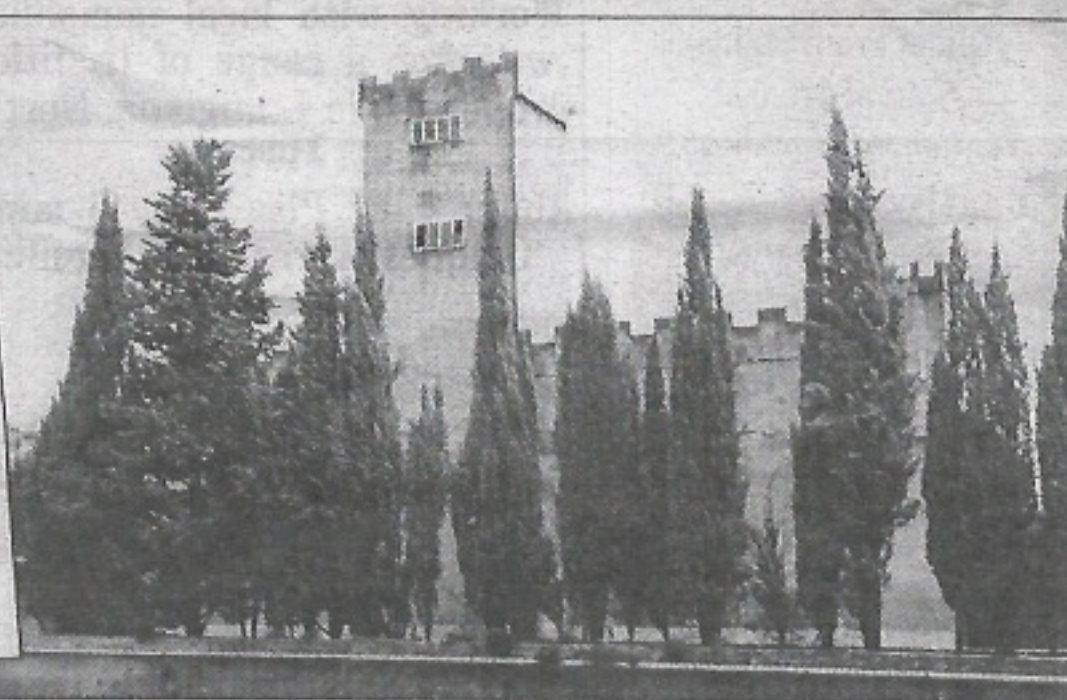
"Pézenas reminds me a lot of York, with its cobbled streets, pedestrianised areas and medieval architecture but, unlike York, it is surrounded by vineyards and just 20 minutes from the beach and hills. It also has its own microclimate with more than 300 days of sunshine a year.

"The people are lovely and friendly here too and we have found equal numbers of French and English have been visiting our shop. All the teas are from Taylors of Harrogate and as well as teacakes we sell soups, hotpots and sandwiches. We are very busy.

"There are quite a few Brits here so we do good business in the shop as we supply lots of the foods they can't get in the UK such as Marmite, baked beans, crisps, bacon and sausages. It is going very well and we are very committed to staying."

The family, who had no experience of running a shop before, are lucky to be able to stay in their parents' holiday home while they wait for their properties to sell: a three-bedroom terraced house for £150,000 and two-bedroom terraced home for £120,000. They are both in the same street in Wakefield and being sold through Richard Kendall ([www.richardkendall.co.uk](http://www.richardkendall.co.uk)).

"We are definitely keen to buy here



**TEA'S UP:** Natalie (in white) with Gemma, Lee and their daughter at their café in Pézenas. The nearby distillery, left, stopped brewing a long time ago but is about to be converted into luxury apartments

once we sell our homes," adds Natalie. "We reckon we can get more for our money here, depending on the exchange rate."

One development likely to boost the area's desirability comprises apartments being created out of the local medieval distillery, a thumping big building in a 45-acre plot that hasn't produced a drop of alcohol in more than 30 years. Thanks to Cecile and Miguel Espada, the husband-and-wife team behind Garrigae Resorts, new life is to be breathed back into the old stones.

La Distillerie des Templiers is being converted into an upmarket private enclave of 40 stylish apartments of which 30 are for sale; 12 studios, 14 one-beds and four two-beds with Mediterranean gardens, terraces and courtyards.

All the properties will be characteristic of Garrigae's projects: spacious and luxurious with the sort of facilities you would expect for the price; private spa, outdoor pool, gourmet brasserie, rooftop cocktail

terrace and piano bar. Interiors will incorporate local stone, wrought iron and wood materials and be decorated in chic, warm Mediterranean hues.

Building starts next spring and completion is aimed for the second quarter of 2011.

Garrigae is an award-winning French developer that specialises in renovating historic buildings in the

South of France. Those that bear the housebuilder's quality hallmark include a 17th-century convent that is now a boutique hotel residence and a 16th-century abbey.

It is currently reviving an 18th-century château near the Midi Pyrenees and has projects planned on the Côte d'Azur and in the Alps.

"We created Garrigae as an expression of our passion for the South of France and to ensure the beauty and heritage of the region continues to be enjoyed by future generations," says Miguel, whose family have been involved in wine-making and construction in the area for several generations.

To assure buyers of his commitment to the distillery project and its management, he is keeping 10 of the apartments himself.

● Thirty properties are currently being sold off-plan at Distillerie des Templiers. Prices, including furniture, start from €170,000 (£143,400) for a studio rising to

€490,000 (£413,300) for a two-bedroom unit with hot tub.

All properties are sold freehold through the government leaseback and tax exemption system, guaranteeing rental returns over a 20-year period of up to 4.76 per cent gross depending on usage.

Owners can also swap weeks with any of the other five Garrigae resorts, which will soon include a ski in, ski out development in Switzerland. For more information visit [www.garrigae.com](http://www.garrigae.com) or call 0871 218 2103.

There are several international airports within easy distance from Pézenas including Montpellier, Perpignan, Nîmes, Carcassonne and Ryanair's newly launched service from Luton to Béziers.

Eurotunnel crossings start from £49 one-way for a car and all passengers. Book online at [www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com) or call 08705 353535.

To get the best prices book early and travel outside of peak periods.

