

COUNTRY LIFE

INTERNATIONAL

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Buying under a southern Tuscan sun

Picture-perfect properties in Provence

Arabella Lennox-Boyd's palazzo

PLUS Which are the best international schools?

and restaurants,' recommends Mr Janssens. Price-wise, business has been slow for houses marketed above €1.5 million and from €2 million upwards, again, 'everything is negotiable,' he adds.

'The money is here, but more hidden away than in St-Rémy. Everyone likes to keep a low profile in the Lubéron'

To the south of the Lubéron, in the area around Lourmarin (known locally among anglophones as 'Peter Mayle country'), prices tend to be a little higher because you're that much closer to the action in Aix-en-Provence. They hit the headlines when Lady Hamlyn, the widow of publishing magnate Paul Hamlyn, was advised to put her 17th-century *château* near Lourmarin on the market with quite a bold price tag. 'The original asking price was close to €30 million, which—despite its excellent condition and 136 acres—was still a crazy sum. It's now on for €15 million,' says M. Honen. 'That's much closer to its true value.'

Renovating a house in Provence

Anyone thinking of tackling a project in France from a distance would be wise to first understand how the system there differs. 'We bought a house in Eygalières, Les Alpilles, which needed a full renovation job,' explains Rachel Russell, a mother of two based in Wimbledon. 'The house was built in the 1980s and had lots of character, but the rooms inside were badly configured and the garden was bland.'

Rachel and her husband, John, set about finding an architect to help them, but soon it became clear that they needed something more. 'In Britain, we're used to having a general contractor who will organise the various tradesmen on site, but, in France, it's completely different. Basically, there are lots of artisans—the painters, the carpenters, wood people, the guys who work with marble—so you can end up with between 15 and 20 independent people working on site. It's therefore critical to have someone to manage them.'

In her hunt, she came across David Price Designs (00 33 4 90 54 36 04; www.davidpricedesign.com), an Alpilles-



Painted by van Gogh when he was living in St-Rémy. This house, set in 14 acres, requires total renovation. Through Wikivoy International, €1.49 million (020-7870 7181)

and Mougins-based designer. 'He works with the interior designer, Nina Laty (00 33 6 16 79 76 12; www.ninalaty.com), and, as we were looking for someone to help with that side, too, this seemed a good solution,' explains Mrs Russell. 'He drew up the plans, got the permissions through, organised all the work on site and had everything delivered—all of which would have been impossible to manage remotely.'

She continues: 'For the interiors, I sat down with Nina, who had all the knowledge of where to find things locally. Even though everything has been done, right down to the bed linen, she's ensured that the house doesn't look like a showroom—it has real warmth.'

Provence designers and architects

Bruno Lafourcade (www.architecture-lafourcade.com) has 'been responsible for restoring a large number of the important properties in the region,' says Mrs Templeton. 'Also, in Avignon there is another highly respected architect, **Jean-Marie Renaud** (www.renaud-architecture.fr).

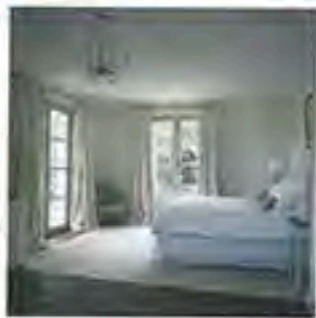
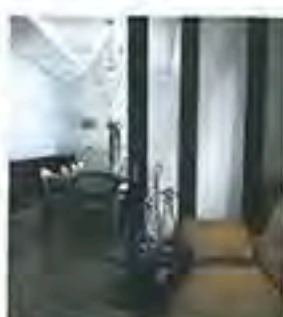
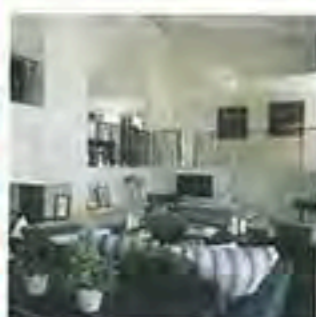
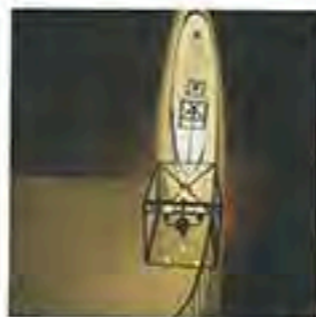
M. Honen recommends **Catherine Auffret** (who was responsible for decorating La Coquillade hotel; she's based in L'Isle sur la Sorgue; 04 90 38 38 69). 'She works with Provence Home Sitting,' continues M Honen. 'If you also need a professional property-management company in the Lubéron, they're very good,' he adds (www.provencehomesitting.com).



FOR SALE See and smell Provence
€4.95m This 19th-century manor stands in a generous garden of about five acres that harmonises with the spectacular views of Bonnieux in the Lubéron. It comes with six bedrooms, a large reception room with striking picture windows and a caretaker's house.
 €4.95 million through Knight Frank (020-7629 8171)

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