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5 Steps to choosing the style of a property

When you decide that you would like to buy a property in France there will be a number of decisions to make, for some 'where it is' is the all important question and for others 'what it is' is even more important. You may have dreamt of owning a chateau, a manor house, a mill house, a thatched cottage, or a property from a particular period of history and France can offer you the opportunity to buy any of these and more.

The choice is huge and includes former railway stations and presbyteries, railway cottages, cottages overlooking or overhanging rivers, maison de maitres which are normally substantial double fronted properties in small towns, having been the homes of the more important inhabitants of that town in years gone by. There are mas, which are plain rectangular stone properties found mainly in the South, and Bastides which are more impressive than the mas but of similar structure – thick walls and smallish windows so that they remained cool. There are thatched cottages and timbered homes (colombages) mainly found in the North and chalet style properties in the areas that have heavy snowfalls such as the Alps. Southern villas both old and new with their provençal red roof tiles often offer covered terraces and wooden window shutters. Terraced town and village properties, many with accommodation over 3 floors, are ideally situated for amenities and becoming part of the community.

As well as all these period properties there is the possibility of new or recently built properties that are built in the style of these period properties and offer all the modern technology of building procedures with lower maintenance materials and more bathrooms etc. There are lots of new and recently built properties built to the general style of the area, and last but not least there are the really contemporary super modern properties with architecture offering straight lines, lots of windows which are built to make the most of the views, the

sunshine etc. More recently some 'green' homes are being made available.

Apartments too come in different shapes and sizes, some built in converted old buildings, some are modern architecture and some are built in the general style of the area. You have the choice both with apartments and houses of buying on a development with amenities, sometime including a swimming pool, gardens, tennis courts and security or in a simple apartment block.

You may have very fixed ideas on exactly what style of property you would like or it may not bother you at all as long as the accommodation and location suit you. But, when you are searching for a home in France it might help to take the following 5 steps to ensure you are happy with your purchase as there is no point deciding on a certain style of property that may not be available in the area you want to be.

Do remember that even the plainest of properties can be made to look 'chocolate box' pretty with well situated pots oozing bright coloured flowers, window boxes, hanging baskets and depending on the area, bougainvillea encrusting the property or clematis, honeysuckle or even vines covering the property.

1. Think about the general purpose of the property you intend to buy and make sure that the accommodation that you will require can be found in properties of the style you have in mind. Certain areas offer specific architecture so don't waste your time looking in the wrong areas, for example if you would insist on a stone built property there are some areas where stone was never available and therefore there are no stone properties – Pas de Calais and Seine Maritime are two such areas where you will find brick built or colombages properties, whereas if you look further west into the Manche or into Brittany you will find that stone properties abound. The stone mas is normally found in Provence etc.

2. Many older properties in the South will have small windows as they have been built to keep the house cool rather than to let the sunshine in. Some will have a sequence of rooms leading from one to the other that does not always suit. Older properties may have small rooms or low doorways, which might not suit you if you or your family are over six foot! Terraced houses in towns and villages generally have narrow staircases and accommodation may be on 3 floors or more, possibly not ideal if you are buying something to retire to, even if you are fully fit at present and they may not be suitable for a young family with babies and toddlers to worry about as well as the fact that the

majority have no gardens and frequently the front door opens out to a narrow pavement and the road. If you don't have children and want to be able to walk to bars, restaurants and shops then these properties can be ideal and more sociable as you are likely to see your neighbours regularly. These are just a few of the reasons why you should think about the style and whether it will suit your lifestyle.

3. Consider the maintenance costs of the property, for instance a thatched roof might cost more to upkeep than a tiled or slate roof. A colombages cottage may be expensive to maintain and a stone cottage may take ages to warm up if you intend using it for short breaks from time to time rather than longer holidays, whilst if you live there it maybe easier to keep warm once it is warmed through. Some properties have been modernized to take away the original character and are completely spoilt so that although they are in good condition they may require a hefty sum to return them to their original beautiful state. As far as costs are concerned, you may find that there are not enough bathroom and toilet facilities or that the electricity is truly ancient, so that replumbing and rewiring might be a necessity if you are to make your character property into a modern working home. These points may lead you to decide on a more modern home which has good insulation, wiring, plumbing and easily maintained materials – remember there is a large choice of faux-character houses – ie those that are built in the style of the older properties – very much as we have in the UK with a selection of Tudor or Georgian style properties.

4. Whether new, recent or old, make sure the bedrooms and bathrooms will accommodate you as well as the living quarters. Do bear in mind that in the Southern half of France, that much of your time will be spent outdoors, so that possibly the size of the living area may not be as important as having a lovely covered terrace where you can enjoy your meals without having the sun beating down on you. A kitchen that is cool rather than one with the sun shining into it might be more suitable in the hotter climes but a warm cosy kitchen with eat-in facilities may suit further North. Particularly if you are buying a second or holiday home, the idea of an open plan kitchen might suit you better as you will be there on holiday and might not want to lock yourself away to prepare meals whilst everyone else is having fun, an open plan kitchen allows you to join in whilst cooking, and possibly get other members of the family to lend a hand. It is really important to consider the climate in the area you buy, as this is all-important in deciding what accommodation is important.

5. Along with the style of the property also comes the possibility of gardens, land or possibly just a balcony or terrace. Make sure that the style of property you would like does normally come with the size of outside space that you require. For instance town apartments don't

always have balconies whereas properties by the coast often have large balconies or terraces. Village or town houses may not have any outside access or perhaps a roof terrace or small garden whereas chateaux and manoirs may have acres of land that you really don't want and which would be expensive to upkeep. Sometimes the owner has sold off much of the land so that you are left with just enough but occasionally the owners have built themselves a property, which is not always pretty, in the grounds of the chateau which then becomes an eyesore for you. Be aware that gardens are a responsibility and that unless you love to garden or are at least willing to maintain the garden, this will be an extra cost and if you don't want to deal with this you should perhaps think about buying on a development where there are communal gardens which are taken care of for you.

If you would like more information on buying a property in France, please contact <mailto:sales@latitudes.co.uk>.