

Good move

After the initial move across the Channel, some expats find their needs change and they spread their wings again in their adopted country. **Gillian Harvey** finds out more from those who have relocated within France.

JOHN AND JANE GRIFFIN

Capetang (Hérault, Languedoc-Roussillon)

As the proud owners of a 70ft barge in the UK, part-time airline pilot John Griffin, 46, and his wife, former planning director Jane, 44, were able to take things slowly when they crossed the Channel in their vessel in June 2006. "We arrived in the summer, but didn't buy our first property until November 2006," explains Jane. "We lived on the boat and took a bit of time to explore before we settled down."

After travelling down from Calais slowly through France, in August they moored near Dijon. When it came to buying somewhere, their initial choice of location was an easy decision. "I'd always loved the Alps," explains Jane. "When I first visited – years ago – I had this incredible feeling of coming home. It was a real dream to purchase a property there."

Having moved in November into their fully renovated, luxury apartment in Le Bourg-d'Oisans in the Rhône-Alpes region (*pictured below*), the couple spent their first few years living an idyllic lifestyle, snowboarding and skiing whenever the mood took them.

However, the combination of the birth of daughter Sophie, now four, in 2010, coupled with John's desire for a project, saw them seeking pastures new. They'd kept the boat in the meantime, while as for their property, Jane says: "We sold the apartment easily, and returned to the boat – this time with a baby. We spent three years travelling all over France and Europe, and I loved every minute."



"However, I'm a land-lover at heart, and Sophie was nearing school age, so we knew it was time

to find a more permanent base."

Having lived in France for some time, and having travelled extensively within the country, John and Jane had very fixed ideas about what they wanted. "We needed to be near a canal for the boat," explains John, "but we also needed to be near enough to an airport so that I can commute without too many problems."

With this in mind, John and Jane settled on their current property – a 19th-century house in Capetang, in Hérault. The barge has remained a constant, and is now moored close by (*pictured right*). "It's ideal," says Jane. "We're close to the canal, it's 20 minutes to the sea and only two hours to the mountains. Plus, there are plenty of DIY jobs to keep John occupied during his time off!"

Having used an agent when they first moved to the Alps, Jane found her French had improved sufficiently for her to be able to handle the paperwork when it came to selling the apartment four years on. "For me, it was a really enjoyable challenge," she explains. "As an ex-planner, I thrive on organisation!" The couple also found that having a base on the boat made things easier. "We didn't have to link sale and purchase, which made things more straightforward," explains Jane. "And whilst we did use an agent when we purchased our current property, it was an inheritance property, so it was already empty. Although we didn't choose it for that reason, it did make the whole transaction much easier!"



"It's ideal – we're close to the canal, it's 20 minutes to the sea and only two hours to the mountains"



Peter and Jenni's new house in Le Gorvello

The family's first property

The ability to generate income was an important factor in their choice of property



PETER AND JENNI CLAYTON

Le Gorvello (Morbihan, Brittany)

Originally from Nottingham, Peter, 58, and Jenni, 42, ran a restaurant together in the UK until their son Jake was born in 2002. "We realised quickly that our lifestyle wasn't going to fit around a baby," says Jenni. "We'd always loved France, and decided on a complete change."

After viewing several properties in France, ranging in location from Bordeaux to La Rochelle, the couple eventually fell in love with Vannes, in southern Brittany, and decided to limit their search to a 15-kilometre radius of the town, eventually settling on the village of Le Gorvello.

However, even with a location secure, the move proved difficult: "We put offers in on three properties, but each time the vendor pulled out during the 'cooling off period,'" explains Peter. "So when another suitable property came on the

market, the *notaire* telephoned us and I went and signed at the next available opportunity!"

The family eventually moved in July 2004, initially renting a property to give them the opportunity to renovate their new purchase.

The ability to generate an income was an important factor in their choice of property, and their house, which consisted of two attached traditional stone properties, was ideal. "We got the second property up and running as a gîte by 2005," says Jenni, "and we get a lot of custom."

The family felt very happy in Le Gorvello, which has a thriving community: "Le Gorvello is perfect for us," explains Jenni. "And it's become a very popular location! When we first arrived, there were 800 inhabitants here; now there are about 1,400. In fact, the *maire* has now taken the decision to limit any further building work."

It is this restriction on planning that prompted the family's eventual move. With their second son, Samuel, born in 2008, and their gîte business thriving, the family required more room than they had bargained for. Initially, they looked to renovate an old forge building in their garden. "However, although we submitted lots of different ideas, they were always refused," explains Jenni.

In the end, the couple opted to run their existing property as a second gîte, and purchase another property in the village – a 1970s neo-Breton house with room for their growing family.

"The moving process was easy, as we didn't need to sell anything," explains Jenni. The financial aspect was simple: "We needed a small mortgage, but that was easy to arrange with the



DAVID AND CORRINA BLACKMORE

Moutier-Malcard (Creuse, Limousin)

When David, 34, and Corrina, 32, moved to France in 2007, they purchased a property that would be classed by many as a dream home. "We bought a completely renovated house, with a gîte, five acres of land and a large lake near Châteauponsac in Haute-Vienne," says David. "We wanted to run fishing holidays, and it was absolutely ideal."

Although the couple ran fishing holidays for one successful season, external events pulled them in another direction. "My dad became seriously ill in March 2008, shortly after we moved," explains Corrina. "Obviously, we then spent a lot of time travelling back and forth to the UK, so I spent a lot less time at the property."

Sadly, Corrina's father died in December of that year: "My parents had been the first visitors to our property, so when he died in the December, my heart just went out of the place," says Corrina.

It was the combination of this bereavement, time spent away from the business, as well as the additional impact



This page: Corrina and David (above) decided to relocate within Limousin as they had fallen in love with the region

local bank"

When it comes to advice to others contemplating making a change within France, Jenni and Peter feel that – for them, at least – the process was smoother when they used an estate agent. "We bought the first property without an agent being involved, and the second with," explains Jenni. "It was certainly easier the second time around!"

In addition, the fact that Peter and Jenni rented on their arrival in France, made things much more straightforward when it came to renovation. "With Jake still so young, it would have been too dangerous to live in the property whilst work was being done," explains Peter. "Renting turned out to have a lot of benefits: we could really concentrate on getting the renovation right before moving in." www.gorvellogite.com

MOVING MATTERS

Considering making the move across the Channel? Then cast your eye over our expert's helpful hints and tips

• DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Make sure you know where the costs lie, and select carefully what packing service you need, as this will have an impact on the total. For example, labour tends to be the greater part of the packing charge, while if you choose to pack your items yourself, this can help you de-clutter at the same time.

• GET STARTED EARLY

Don't wait until you have sold before contacting moving companies. Early discussions can help you decide what to take, or what to leave behind.

• TIMING IS KEY

This really is critical in the whole process, so it's imperative that keys are available for your new home before the mover arrives to unload. If access to the property is tricky, discuss the possibility of a shuttle service, well before the move itself.

• IT'S THE SMALL THINGS...

...that make a difference. Remember that removal crews are human, and gestures such as tea or coffee keeps them fuelled during the moving process.



Gary Burke is the managing director of Burke Bros Moving Group www.burkebros.co.uk

of the recession, that led them to think about pastures new in France.

"We really enjoyed running the holidays, and could have ridden out any financial difficulties," says Corrina. "But after my Dad, I think we really needed a fresh start. We wanted to stay in Limousin, as we had fallen in love with the area, so we began to think about what else we could do."

As David had experience both in mechanics and driving, they decided to start a business buying, selling and transporting cars.

"We needed a large property, with development potential," says Corrina. "Somewhere with plenty of space inside and out, so that David could have a fully functioning workshop with plenty of parking. So when we found our current house with its 170m² four outbuildings, 9,000m² of land, two old houses and a bungalow thrown in, we jumped at the chance!"

The property – located in the neighbouring department of Creuse – needed complete renovation, and the couple are still working on getting their living quarters up to scratch. "It's completely different from our first property, where we didn't need to do anything," says David.

As for the moving process, David and Corrina were able to make the transaction easier with a little support from their vendors. "We found out that there might be a two-week gap between completion of our sale and our purchase," says Corrina. "So we asked our vendors whether we might be able to rent the property to bridge the gap. Luckily, they were more than happy for us to camp at the property rent-free, even before the transaction went through. "Vendors can be very accommodating, and I've heard of many allowing furniture storage, etc, if a property is empty. So it's always worth asking."

"I'd also advise people to be flexible and prepared to change," continues Corrina. "I don't regret our first purchase – it was right for us at the time. But don't be afraid to sell and start afresh if circumstances demand it!"

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The family's first home in France



KAMEL AND KHADINE LITIM

Briec-de-l'Odet (Finistère, Brittany)

Their new house in Briec-de-l'Odet

When Kamel and Khadine Litim moved to France from the UK with their three children back in 2008, it was with the intention of seeking out a more tranquil family life for them and Bryn, Hadley, and Arran, now 10, eight and six years old respectively.

British Khadine and French-born Kamel also wanted to raise their children in a bilingual environment. "We felt that the best place for the children was France," says Khadine.

Having sold their house in Watford, Hertfordshire, maths teacher Kamel, 44, and Khadine, 37, who now sells handmade crafts online, fell in love with Briec-de-l'Odet, feeling that the town could offer everything their growing family needed.

"We started off renting a small property as a base from which to explore," says Khadine, "then we looked for suitable properties to move into properly. We found there weren't many available though, so we settled on a large neo-Breton house of 140m², with 3000m² of land, seven kilometres out of town."

Living with space and tranquillity, the family increased in size with the arrival of Anya (now five). However, over time Khadine and Kamel felt the needs of their growing family were changing.

"As the children grew older, we realised we needed to be more central," explains Khadine. "Bryn will be starting college next year, and I wanted him to have more independence. Living seven kilometres from town meant that I had to ferry him everywhere in the car. With my craft business growing, it was time-consuming."

Happy with their location in Briec-de-l'Odet which, as a town with around 5,000 inhabitants, has plenty of facilities for a family including a sports stadium, popular theatre and a well-stocked library, Kamel and Khadine took the decision to move to a more central location within their home town.

"As we rent, we didn't have to worry about selling, which was a real blessing," says Khadine. "But it still wasn't easy. We often found a property, only to have it snatched from us at the last moment."

Eventually, however, the couple were able to find a further suitable



"As the children grew older, we needed to be more central"

property: a well-kept, modern house of 145m² with a more manageable garden, just one kilometre from the children's school and 500 metres from the sports stadium. "It's so much better," says Khadine. "Bryn now goes to football practice on his bike, and walks to the school or the library with friends."

As for the moving process: as renters, Kamel and Khadine didn't have to struggle with difficult markets. However, there were still obstacles to overcome. "We found that agents, who don't profit much from rental income, weren't always as efficient as we'd have liked," explains Khadine.

"As for advice about choosing a property: you have to think carefully about what suits your family now, but always have an eye for the future. I think we'd have struggled if we'd had to stay so far from the centre of town." **LF**

khadine-deco.alittlemarket.com



Corrina and David's old home

Corrina and David's current house in Creuse