

How long have you worked as an estate agent in France and how did you start out in the profession?

In 1995, after having lived in the UK and worked in Belgium, I decided to come to the south of France. At that time, there weren't any international estate agents selling to overseas buyers in my area, I was really the first. I had the opportunity to be involved in TV programmes such as *A Place in the Sun* with Amanda Lamb.

Which areas of France does your business cover?

The departments of Hérault and Aude in the Languedoc region, now renamed Occitanie.

How would you describe your region in five words?

Coast, mountains, sunshine, easy-access, affordable.

What is the appeal of your area?

You can practice all sorts of sports and activities as you have rivers, lakes, mountains, coast; ideal for holidays or even better for retirement. Also, it's not a costly area once you live here.

What's your favourite corner of the region?

In Hérault, the triangle between Béziers, Pézenas and St-Chinian (it has a very good climate too).

Is the area easy to reach?

There are two motorways (A75, A9), and airports nearby at Béziers, Montpellier, Narbonne and Carcassonne.

Is the region suited to those seeking a holiday property or a permanent home?

Both really: there's sunshine all year round (in winter it's



Properties in St-Chinian are currently much sought after



Sunny south



Languedoc estate agent **Freddy Rueda** talks to **Karen Tait** about the appeal of his area and the local property market

often possible to have lunch outside, even in December/January); it's a perfect location with some great towns; there are good roads for easy access everywhere, such as the coast or the Haut-Languedoc regional park; it has great landscapes with vineyards and olive trees; and it's a very affordable area, which is surprising when you consider that there is everything that anyone could want here.

Are any locations particularly sought after?

Béziers is a nice city, so a property purchase in a village nearby is ideal if you want both

rural peace and urban living. The St-Chinian and Pézenas areas are also in demand. Places with views of vineyards and mountains are popular.

Is there a typical local architecture or style?

Old winegrowers' houses, with large garages at the front and a garden or courtyard at the back. Also, new bungalows on elevated spots in villages, with views, are really sought after.

What would people get for a budget of:

Under €100k: You can find a house in perfect condition with

no outside space, or with works to plan and perhaps a terrace.

€100,000-€250,000: At the lower end, you can get a village house with a terrace/courtyard; closer to €250,000, there are large village houses with some outside space (but not a big plot of land), or a three-bedroom bungalow on around 600m².

€250,000-€500,000: In this bracket, you find larger houses with pools, some with views and some with gîtes and outbuildings for conversion.

€500,000-€750,000: For this amount, you get businesses such as B&Bs. At the upper end, properties have larger or several

On the market



€1.275m, Béziers: This historic 11-bedroom estate, formerly a mill, is perfect for prestige events; it has nearly 1,000m² of living space, outbuildings and vineyard



€997,500, St-Chinian: Set on a 5,560m² plot overlooking an old mill, this renovated stone property has a main dwelling, a gîte, a pool and great views



€599,000, Olargues: Edged by a river, this 17th-century watermill property comprises a characterful main building, three guest rooms, private parking and parkland



€237,600, Autignac: Single-storey villa with main residence and gîte, with a total of four bedrooms, set on a plot of 599m² with a pool, in a quiet spot

outbuildings, gîtes, more land, better views and location.

€750,000-€1m: The largest properties in the area would be within budget - completely secluded with no neighbours. Also holiday businesses offering gîtes/B&B, and small domaines.

Over €1m: Domaines and châteaux from €2m.

What's the cheapest property you have on your books?

We have a small stone house to renovate offering a potential of 80m² of living space and two gardens. It's for sale at €59,000 near St-Pons-de-Thomières.

Have you sold any unusual properties recently?

Yes, an old church and an old railway station.

What would be your dream home in the region?

At the moment, I would pick one that we have for sale at €997,500. It's a superb renovated stone property on 5,560m² of land, with a main house, a gîte, a swimming pool and breathtaking views, located in the St-Chinian area.

Why do British people buy houses in your area?

They love France and the food. In our area, you have good local meat (Aubrac), cheeses, oysters from Bouzigues and wines (AOCs: Faugères, St-Chinian, Picpoul de Pinet). It is a winery area, you often have five to six winemakers in each village - and buyers want sunshine and a good quality of life.

What advice would you give to British househunters?

Use an agent who is used to dealing with international

"It's a very affordable area, which is surprising as there is everything that anyone could want here"

buyers and who has been in place for a long time - they will have all the tips you need and can help make your purchase easy. For example, we offer free translations of the preliminary contracts, signing in English on YouSign, help in English with transfer of utilities, foreign exchange, opening bank accounts and house insurance.

What tips do you have to help people settle into life in France?

Learn French (if you don't already speak it) immediately after the purchase. Your life will be much easier and you can have a mix of French friends and international ones. You will

adapt very quickly to the French lifestyle this way.

What are your predictions for your local property market in the coming year?

Good demand is expected for 2026. Last year was favourable compared to 2024 and, taking into account all the enquiries we've received at the start of this year, it looks like many UK clients are going to purchase in my area. People want to make their dream become real. ■

Freddy Rueda is the founder of Real Estate Occitanie
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AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES

How much would you expect to have to pay for:

A detached property with land in good condition?
€350,000-€450,000

A three-bedroom townhouse?
With outside space, but no garden, €150,000; with a garden, closer to €300,000, and more, depending on the size of the property and land

A renovation project? With no garden, €80,000; with a garden, €150,000-€250,000 - again depending on the size of the property and plot

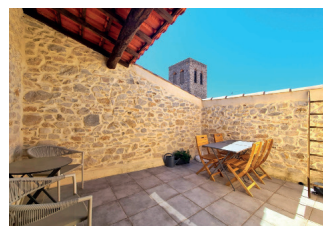


Béziers is a pleasant city with good travel links including an airport - pick a village on its outskirts for the best of all worlds

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€415,000, Cruzy: Modern three-bedroom villa, with an open-plan kitchen, a large veranda and cellars, on a landscaped plot of 1,675m² with exceptional views



€129,600, Cessenon-sur-Orb: Charming two-bedroom village house for sale fully furnished, with open kitchen, cellar and roof terrace with a view of the church



€475,200, Trèbes: Single-storey villa with three/four bedrooms (two ensuite), a garage and outbuilding/workshop, on a plot of 3,135m² with a swimming pool



€326,160, Capestang: Centrally located townhouse with four/five bedrooms including a master suite, living area, courtyard with hot tub and covered terrace