

The latest news from the Languedoc – March 2008

The average high temperature during February and up to 22nd March in Montpellier was

14°C

with 31 bright, clear days out of 51



Bienvenue !

Hello again, and welcome to our second newsletter of 2008. We had such lovely comments following our newsletter in January that we are very pleased to continue.

Do still keep your comments coming in as we are always delighted to hear from you and to take your views on board.

Election Fever



'Tis the month to be voting – that is if you registered at your local Mairie before 31st December 2007 to secure your right to vote.

If you registered, taking in proof of identity and utility bills bearing your name and the address of the property, you can choose 15 people from the different lists – and you can 'mix and match' to your hearts' content. Voting took place in two tranches on 9th and 16th of March.

If you own a property in France you can vote in the Élections Municipales for local councillors and mayors (however, unless you are resident in France and a French citizen, you cannot vote in the Presidential elections).

Having said that, one doesn't actually vote for the Mayor of one's choice. No indeed, that would be far too simple for a country that seemingly cannot survive unless there is a ton of red tape and a load of bureaucracy.

Normally each mayoral candidate will put forward a team (équipe) of 15 candidates and it is for these people that you vote. Those that have the majority of their team members voted in will assume office. So, in the end, the new Mayor could have 8 of their original team but a few from each of the other opposing teams. With me so far?

10 months ago when Nicolas Sarkozy swept to power much hope was raised with his promises to make radical change and strengthen the French economy. So far he has avoided major overhauls, instead offering mini-reforms. His popularity rating has fallen from 65% to 40% and these local elections have seen a swing to the left with the Socialist Party winning 49.5% of the overall vote, and Mr Sarkozy's centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and its allies winning 47.5%.

Turnout was high, estimated at close to 70% in the first round and 54% in the second round. Studies show that French voters focus on local issues when casting a municipal ballot.

Local elections take place every six years so, if you want your voice heard, your next opportunity is in 2014. Don't forget to register in time !

Canal du Midi

The greatest engineering project of the 17th Century

Pierre-Paul Riquet, in 1662, was able to solve the problem that had vexed the great and the good for centuries (including Leonardo da Vinci) - and that was how to create a shortcut between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, avoiding a month long sea voyage. Riquet was a salt tax collector from Béziers and knew the area intimately, allowing him to find a way to supply the summit sections with enough water. Finally, after securing the financial backing of Louis XIV in 1667, at the age of 63, he started his greatest project. Sadly, it was a project that he would not see completed before his death in 1681, just months before the Canal was opened to navigation.



The Canal du Midi has been in existence for more than 300 years and was built in the days when the waterways were the deluxe form of transport. It was constructed using only manpower, about 12,000 workers, who dug out 7,000,000 cubic metres of earth to connect Toulouse and Sète and created 240km (150miles) of canal waterways. It has 328 structures, including not only 103 locks which serve to climb and descend a total of 190 meters, but also bridges, dams and a tunnel 173 metres long.

Like all good projects, the initial budget of 3,360,000 livres eventually came in at over 15 million livres, of which nearly 2 million came from Riquet himself, leaving him, and his descendents, with huge debts. He sacrificed everything to make sure of its completion - even using his daughters' dowries for the cause. During its construction detractors became more vociferous as his project slowly advanced, plagued with technical and financial problems. When he died he was ruined and embittered by the vehemence of his opponents. Only 1.6km of canal still remained to be dug and his son took over the works. At last completed, the canal was inspected and filled with water in 1681.

Pierre-Paul Riquet's remains lie in Saint Etienne Cathedral in Toulouse.





One only has to stand on the canal's edge and be enthralled by its grace and beauty to understand Riquet's passion and engineering genius. The canal crosses rivers, tunnels through hills, and possesses many ingenious designs that were ahead of their time. The oval locks alone are a notable feat. The Canal also involved building the first artificial reservoir for feeding a canal waterway by creating a massive dam, 700 meters long, which was the largest work of civil engineering in the 17th century and only the second major dam ever to be built in Europe.

At the town of Béziers there is a staircase of 9 locks, called Les Neuf Écluses, which are spectacular. Just next to this is a bicycle hire shop which is a great way to explore the canal paths. The construction of the Canal du Midi was considered by people in the 17th century as the biggest project of the day.

It is truly a marvelous engineering accomplishment, but it is its picturesque and magical beauty that makes it the most popular pleasure waterway in Europe. Shaded by plane trees and passing through acres of vineyards and orchards, passing under little humpbacked bridges and gliding past medieval villages, it continues to cast its spell over travellers and is now almost exclusively used by pleasure boats.

The Canal du Midi was recognised by UNESCO as a world heritage site in 1996 and is the most famous canal in France.

[Beziers Tourist Office](#)



Mother Nature's Bounty

If you were under the impression the only thing that comes out of the vineyards is grapes, then you are sorely mistaken. The regimented rows of vines offer up more than next summer's chilled rosé wine. If you know what you're looking for, and depending on the season, you will find salad leaves such as wild rocket and mâche, herbs such as thyme, mint, garlic and fennel, wild asparagus (delicious in an omelette), almonds, olives, apricots, cherries and figs, mushrooms, a wonderful array of flowers, and of course, after some rain, our gastronomic little friend the escargot – cook them up with some butter and garlic. Yummy!



How to ...?

... Organise your affairs before you die.

It's an obvious statement, but the laws in France are not always the same as those in England. All real estate, such as buildings and land, money and financial investments in France fall under French civil law. All non-fixed goods, such as furniture, paintings and jewellery fall under the laws of the country of residency, such as England for example.

Notaires do not always warn you that children cannot be disinherited in France (well, not easily anyway) before you commit to a purchase agreement. It is much harder, and sometimes not always possible, to change how the house is owned after the sale has completed, so you need to make sure you set everything up how you want it before you sign on the dotted line.

Take this scenario: you and your spouse buy your retirement home in France thinking that when one or the other dies first, the remaining partner will be able to stay in the house and dispose of it on their death how they wish. Wrong. Or perhaps the surviving partner wants to sell the home and downsize so that they can pay for health care or just to improve their quality of retirement. Wrong.

Unfortunately, if you have children, whether together or from previous relationships, this is not the case in France. When one partner dies their share of the property (and remember we are talking about the house, land, money and investments in France) passes to the children in equal shares and unless you are in a position to buy these children out, you may be forced to sell the house. Not only do you have to bear the loss of your partner, but you may be forced to sell your home and start all over again on a lot less money than you had planned – just when you were hoping to put your feet up and enjoy your retirement.

Children can renounce their part of the inheritance (irrevocably) while the parents are still alive, but the child has to come to France to sign a legal document, called a RARR.

However, if you have no children, you can leave it to whoever you want.

When buying a house, you can opt for a 'tontine' clause to purchase your home that allows the surviving spouse to inherit and become the sole owner of the house, thereby being able to do as they please with it.

AB Real Estate will help you with all of this as part of our service and will put you in touch with someone who can give you professional advice.

Inheritance taxes are a whole different kettle of fish and we will cover some of these issues in our next newsletter.

A selection of Featured Properties



15th Century Presbytery in a pretty village with 3 bedrooms, 136m² living space, sunny terrace and heaps of character !
269 000€



Gorgeous village house offering 95m² living space over three floors, 3 bedrooms, sunny terrace, garage and cellar, peaceful village location
189 000€



Single storey Villa/Bungalow in new condition near Nîmes, 4 bedrooms, 800m² of garden and pool
325 000€



Domaine with beautifully restored house, 6 beds, Carcassonne area, pool, outbuildings, 4.3 ha, peaceful, stunning view
910 000€



17th century water mill in Carcassonne area, lots of character, outbuildings, stables, 1.2ha
777 000€



Character stone house, outbuildings to convert, rare location Canal du Midi in the vineyards
500 000€



Maison de maître with gîte and large stone barn in Narbonne area, 10 beds, garden, pool.
871,500€



Exceptional Villa currently under construction, 815m² lovely view
380 000€

Restaurant Review

Brasserie du Théâtre, Montpellier



The Brasserie du Théâtre is located on the corner of the Place du Comedie next to the Theatre (funnily enough). The interior is spacious and sumptuously Parisienne in style and weekdays is filled with businessmen and chic ladies that lunch. It has an à la carte menu, and dishes of the day, but its set menu (Formule Garçon) is good value for money at 19€ for 2 courses or 26€ for 3 courses. The staff are friendly and very efficient and the whole experience sends one back in time to central Paris in the 1930s. In the summer a delightful terrace with parasols and a small fountain beckon you to dine al fresco. A wonderful oasis in the midst of all that retail therapy that Montpellier has on offer.



Brasserie du Théâtre

22 Boulevard Victor Hugo

34000, Montpellier

04 67 58 88 80

Anyone for tennis ?



The climate here is ideal for tennis as it is invariably mild and dry.

There are large tennis clubs across the region but also hundreds of small ones – your village has probably got one of its own ! To find out where your nearest club is just ask at your local tourist office or at the Mairie in your village.

The International Tennis Centre at Cap d'Agde has over 40 courts and you don't have to be a member to play. It is located at 3 Avenue Vigne, Cap d'Agde - Tel: 04 67 01 03 60. There is also the Mas de Galoffre Tennis Club, Route de Générac, Nîmes - Tel: 04 66 3815 36 and the Pierre Rouge Tennis Club, 7 Avenue St lazare, Montpellier - Tel: 04 67 72 22 08 among others.

À Bientôt

Thanks again for taking the time to read our newsletter and don't forget to let us know what you think as all comments and suggestions would be gratefully received.

Please feel free to call us on

+33 (0) 4 67 36 36 80
in France

or

0871 990 2000
from UK

or by email on
ab@ab-real-estate.com

with your queries and as always we will be delighted to assist you in any way that we can.

With best wishes

Annelise Bosshard
Managing Director
AB Real Estate



www.ab-real-estate.com
www.south-france-property.net