

Trading places

Daniela Harris talks to three inspiring entrepreneurs who have switched careers for exciting new ones across the Channel



Natural juice therapist
Ross Beckley

A move to France is a change of scenery and culture, but for some it's also the start of an exciting new career. Here is the story of three women who came to France and reinvented themselves.

HI-TECH TO DETOX

Ross Beckley and her husband Neil were media technology entrepreneurs in the Middle East before setting up a boutique wellness retreat in south-west France. They left corporate lives in Dubai to run Maison de Lunel in Lot.

Why France?

My husband Neil had worked in France previously, so already liked the country. We wanted more space and to put our health first; we felt France could offer that. Also, France has a culture which values food above all else and the organic industry thrives here so sourcing ingredients is easier.

What was your ideal property?

We actually weren't looking for this property, but the agent had been so good to us that we did a cursory viewing - and it really drew us in. Our brief was a place up and running with 12 bedrooms and a large living/ yoga space. What we got was 10 stables and a cowshed!

Why this career?

I had started training as a nutritionist, specifically as a natural juice therapist in 2014. We live in an age where obesity is society's biggest problem. Many digestive problems, allergies and intolerances can be accounted for by our modern way of eating. Helping people improve their lives feels like we're achieving something.

How did you get set up?

We set aside a renovation budget and continued to work in Dubai while that was going on. We also took advice from the local *notaire* and a number of tax and business experts.

Any advice for others?

Have a clear vision of what you want to achieve and who your customer base will be. Decide if you are just going to be the venue or be actively involved. There are a lot of retreats in France, so try and work out what is going to set you apart.

Did you have experience?

Not doing this. However, we'd stayed at plenty of hotels and knew what we liked and didn't like. We also had experience setting up a business.

What challenges did you face?

Artisans! We had not anticipated the timescales involved in the renovation. We love the slow pace in France, but that can be frustrating when you are reliant on local artisans and their deadlines. However, the end result for us has been worth it.

SCHOOLS TO GARDENS

Lorraine Caulton was a teaching assistant in the UK before moving with her husband over a decade ago to Aude where she is now a landscape designer and professional gardener.



Maison de Lunel's
ginger shot and
green juice



€551,200

MONTAZEAU, DORDOGNE

This formal Girondine house comes with six bedrooms (three on the ground floor). The sitting area has a cosy double-sided log burner and lovely views out onto the terrace and gardens. Outside there's a pool, around six hectares of land and a garage.



€850,000

LAUZERTE, TARN-ET-GARONNE

A beautifully restored stone country home set in 0.7ha of gardens, with fruit trees, lawn and woodland. The main house has three bedrooms and three bathrooms. There are two further bedrooms and a bathroom in a self-contained cottage.



€1.47M

NIORT, DEUX-SÈVRES

This fairytale chateau sits in beautiful gardens that lead down to a river. It has six ensuite bedrooms and numerous outbuildings that sit around a courtyard, including converted stables. There is also a heated pool and a pétanque court.



€375,000

BRANTÔME EN PÉRIGORD, DORDOGNE

A beautifully presented four-bedroom home with panoramic views over the countryside and nearby village. It has a large enclosed garden with a heated pool. Popular Brantôme is just 12 minutes away.

Why France?

I spent time in France as an au pair when I was 18 and even then I realised it offered a better lifestyle. I always knew I would come back, so when our kids left home and I had a bad day at work, I handed in my notice and set the wheels in motion.

How did you plan?

I took my husband to the village I had lived in years ago. The locals still remembered me, which convinced him. We spent a year saving so we had enough to live on, renovate a house and enjoy ourselves for the first two years.

Did you have experience?

In the UK, I always had an allotment so I followed my passion rather than experience. Through networking, I got my first job and it went from there.

Any advice for others?

Speak to the locals. Gardening is a huge part of French culture; they follow the lunar calendar and know what does and doesn't grow. Don't be deceived by the weather. Nobody in Aude will plant anything before May 15 in case of a frost. Take time to get to know the place and its inhabitants and you will find France very welcoming.

MUSIC TO ART

Anna Camille was the lead violin at the Basel Sinfonietta in Switzerland for eight years before becoming owner and artist-in-residence at Galerie de la Cabrerisse in Aude.

Why France?

I'd been on many happy childhood holidays here. After a career as a musician, I had two very successful art exhibitions in Basel and was in a financial position to relocate.

Why this region?

While visiting an artist friend, I found this very spot in St-Laurent-de-la-Cabrerisse.

I first saw the house then, and retrospectively researched the area. With its climate, architecture and value for money, it was the area for me.

Why this property?

I'd fallen in love with it when I'd seen it a year earlier but I still viewed other properties. I was looking for a small, old, traditional French house with only minor repairs. What I got was this enormous old property with a gapping hole in the roof.

How did you plan the move?

I didn't. I moved in the middle of winter and realised that, despite the house having



€399,000

MONTRICOUX, TARN-ET-GARONNE

A very elegant four-bedroom house within walking distance of a village. It comes with seven acres of prairie and a small barn. There are several fabulous terraces and balconies that overlook the garden and the pool.



€279,000

SEYCHES, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This magnificent two-bed house is surrounded by a garden of almost 1ha, and located very close to a lively village. The house is full of original features such as 'tomette' (terracotta) floor tiles, fireplaces and exposed beams.



€214,000

CUSSAC, HAUTE-VIENNE

This stone cottage dates from 1770, and has been renovated to an exceptional standard. It is situated in a beautiful regional park and only 3km from a village. It boasts three bedrooms, and a terrace with steps leading up to a mature garden of around 600m².



€335,000

ST-VINCENT-LA-CHÂTRE, DEUX-SÈVRES

This beautifully presented five-bedroom stone-built home sits in a wonderfully tranquil position with no near neighbours. The property is set in just over 1ha of garden. Outside you can also find a heated swimming pool, a covered terrace and a large conservatory.



Anna Camille

seven fireplaces, none of them functioned, I had no lighting, no experience in renovation and a dwindling budget. I spent the next few years learning to renovate and I still travel back to Basel to teach violin to supplement my income.

Why an art gallery?

The house itself is too big to simply be a home. I didn't want to run gîtes and it immediately spoke to me of a gallery space. I had already made a sea change in my career by becoming a full-time artist and, through the people I met here, I learned

how to set my business up as a gallery to support local and international artists.

Any advice for others?

Don't worry, you will never get bored. Any challenge you come across can be overcome and it will be the most rewarding thing you ever do. ■

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