

Do you yearn to live in a property like this restored 16th-century watermill on the River Dronne (€2.6m)?

Go with the flow...

Do you dream of owning a riverside property in France? **Clare Rolt** explores the benefits of waterside living and looks at what you need to consider when hunting for the perfect place on the waterfront

○wning a riverside property is the dream for many people. There is indeed something very calming about living next to water - the soothing sound it makes as it flows by, the abundance of wildlife living in and around it, and the stunning views.

About 10 years ago, I was lucky enough to live in a house that was surrounded by a series of streams. Our cottage (which was once an old nut oil mill) was in the grounds of a château, and the streams had been created in order to supply a steady flow of water to its extensive gardens.

Living there was a wildlife enthusiast's dream. Our children once discovered duck eggs hidden in a quiet spot in rushes by the river and were delighted to watch the baby ducks develop and swim down the many waterways that traversed our garden. We accidentally found a prickle of hoglets in an old compost

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heap fiercely guarded by their mother, and quietly left them to their business. Frogs would be in abundance in the spring, we would hear their incessant mating calls and watch them leap, splay-legged, into the river as we walked by.

An avid bird-watching family, we were thrilled by the different species we would see. The kingfisher was a regular visitor and would often come swooping by for his catch of the day. My favourite - the woodpecker - visited when I was quietly enjoying a drink on my terrace one day. Two landed on the lawn in front of me. As soon as they arrived, they were gone again but I enjoyed their continual drumming sound high up in the trees above me.

We've since moved from this riverside paradise, but haven't strayed too far from the river - in fact, we're now just a five-minute walk away. In the summer, the waters come alive with kayaking, canoeing, pedalos, bathers and picnickers who sit and watch the world flow by. We've even invested in our own paddle boards so the children can quite happily soak up the sun and paddle downstream. Being by the river seems to have something to keep everyone happy.

STRESS SOLUTION

There are also health benefits of living next to the water. Biologist Dr Wallace J Nichols details his findings in a book titled *Blue Mind*. He states

that living near a lake, river or the sea can promote levels of happiness, and feelings of calm and peacefulness. Water “lowers stress and anxiety, increasing an overall sense of well-being and happiness and a lower heart and breathing rate”.

It can also make sleep easier, according to author of *The Sleep Solution*, Dr W Christopher Winter. “There is some research that says people may sleep better when they are adjacent to nature... No wonder sleep machines always feature the sounds of rain, the ocean or a flowing river.”

Living by the water certainly has its advantages, but of course there are some risks too. Most notably is that of flooding. All properties in France now are listed on the Géorisques website ([georisques.gouv.fr](https://www.georisques.gouv.fr)) and here it is possible to see the hazards a property you are thinking of buying is exposed to. This will highlight whether the risk is high, moderate or weak and give



€670,000

PLAZAC, DORDOGNE

Located on the edge of a pretty village, this old mill house has an underfloor aquarium. The garden is an oasis with streams and ponds. The property is currently run as a B&B with three guest suites from which visitors can enjoy the peaceful surroundings.



€495,000

PARISOT, TARN-ET-GARONNE

Renovated four-bedroom, two-bathroom stone property with just over an acre of gardens leading down to the river, and a pool too. Accessed by a country track, there are no neighbours in sight and yet the village is just 3km away.

CASE STUDY

Maggie and Barry's waterside retreat



Maggie and Barry bought their water mill in Haute-Vienne more than 26 years ago. For the first 16 years, they used the property as a holiday home during school holidays with their two children, who knew every inch of the woods and enjoyed having the freedom to explore the land and

surrounding area. Since selling their businesses 10 years ago and retiring, they have spent five or six months a year at the mill and have enjoyed the surrounding environment, nature and local activities. Their 12 grandchildren have also enjoyed many happy adventure-seeking holidays here, as has their cat who has a French passport and loves staying there too!

"We chose the mill for its solitude, accessibility, beauty and south-facing aspect - with all-day sunshine, a pretty stream and lots of wildlife," says Maggie. Indeed, wildlife is plentiful at the property and over the years they've seen deer, wild boar and water voles, as well as lots of beautiful birds including kingfishers, yellow wagtails, green woodpeckers, barn owls, buzzards and migrating cranes. Barry adds: "It's been a wonderful family hideaway, and we feel very lucky to have had such a beautiful, peaceful home. It's been a fabulous paradise for children and adults alike."

Although the water mill is in a peaceful, secluded location, where they can walk and cycle, they are also near civilisation and have lovely French neighbours in the village. There is easy access to Limoges airport for visitors, and supermarkets and local markets in Marval and Piégut. There is also canoeing at the local lake, St-Estèphe.

They've spent their time updating the property including repointing walls, installing terraces on three sides and a swimming pool, putting in working sluices on the leat, creating a vegetable garden (water pumped from the stream keeps it well watered) and a fruit cage, as well as discovering their lake, which they cleared trees from and refilled. This is located down a track surrounded by beautiful woodland and is completely private.

Maggie and Barry are now reluctant to sell the property as it holds many happy memories for them, but feel the time is right to let someone else enjoy the peace and tranquillity this property offers. The water mill is situated in the Marval area of Haute-Vienne and is for sale with Beaux Villages for €385,000.



€399,950

RUFFEC, CHARENTE

A charming water mill in a beautiful location just a short walk from the town. This three-bedroom, two-bathroom property has a stunning vaulted sitting room with views of the private, mature garden to one end and river views to the other.

you an educated view on the likelihood of this happening.

Your estate agent will be able to go through this with you when you're looking at a potential place to buy. It can also be useful to speak to your agent and neighbours at the property, who will have first-hand knowledge of the risk of flooding. For example, although our property was in a flood zone, our 80-year-old neighbour, who was born in our house, had never seen flooding at the property in his lifetime. It is always important to discuss your concerns with your agent when looking at a property in France and make sure you're fully aware of the risks so that

you can make an informed decision on whether or not the property is right for you.

MAINS AND DRAINS

For properties not connected to mains drainage, sanitation can be another issue to consider. Regulations for properties close to rivers and streams are more restrictive when it comes to installing a new individual drainage system as the authorities want to make sure there's no chance of the waterways being polluted. A site visit from the local sanitation board followed by a soil study will give you all the information you need in order to install the correct system. ▶

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€396,000

BEAULIEU-SUR-DORDOGNE, CORRÈZE

Enjoy outstanding views from this four-bedroom riverside cottage, with living areas and bedrooms all facing onto the river. There is a covered seating area to the front and private river access for canoes. The property is also walking distance from the village.



€172,800

VERTEUIL-SUR-CHARENTE, CHARENTE

Situated in a riverside village, this property comes with a plot of land with fruit trees that leads down to the Charente river - perfect for fishing, canoeing or swimming. It's a two-bedroom property to update, with the possibility of creating two more bedrooms.



€560,000

LALINDE, DORDOGNE

This four-bedroom, four-bathroom property is set between the river and the canal and is just a short walk from the riverside town of Lalinde. It comes with 6,500m² of land, including river frontage onto the Dordogne river, a 9x5m pool and several outbuildings.



€318,000

CUSSAC, HAUTE-VIENNE

Located in a beautiful peaceful spot on the edge of the Perigord Vert, this four-bedroom, three-bathroom former mill has 1.5 hectares of land. With the sounds of a small waterfall and surrounding streams, this property is a paradise for nature lovers.

Waterside properties are very much in demand and there are still many good-value homes to be found. For example, properties within walking distance of the river in Haute-Vienne can start at around €80,000 for a four-bedroom habitable house. If you want to be right by the river, properties in Charente range from about €170,000-€200,000 for a house that is ready to move into.

If you're looking for riverside frontage with gorgeous views, prices start at around €310,000

for a four-bedroom mill in the Haute-Vienne department to about €399,000 for a restored country house by the river in Tarn-et-Garonne. It all depends on your criteria and budget, but there is a real variety of riverside properties available. ■

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WHAT TO GROW BY THE RIVER

Some plants thrive in moist conditions, and create great habitats for wildlife. You'll have to consider the conditions and microclimate of your particular riverbank, but in general these are eight of the best plants for providing colour and/or fragrance on the waterfront:

- Reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*)
- Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)
- Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)
- Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
- Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
- Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*)