

From £388,000: Château Capitoul, a working wine estate, is becoming a boutique hotel with townhouses and villas for sale

Share in the château life

If it's all about location, these vineyard homes are hard to beat, says **Cathy Hawker**

HALF an hour from the Spanish border in the south of France and only minutes from the Med, **Château Capitoul** is a working wine estate about to have a serious facelift. On completion in 2019 it will have 46 homes priced from £388,000, fully furnished, and will operate as a boutique hotel.

It's the third project from Karl O'Hanlon of Domaine & Demeure and also he says, his last. O'Hanlon takes down-at-heel châteaux on successful wine estates in the Languedoc and renovates them, sensitively adding new buildings among the vines to create successful, acclaimed hotels.

He has shown a Midas touch for delivering precisely what buyers want. His first project, **Château Les Carrasses,** had 28 homes and despite launching in the deep recession of 2009, sold out in four months. **St Pierre Serjac,** his second, offering 36 homes, sold out in six months in 2013. "We only work on great sites, we sell at a fair price and we run the hotels to the best of our abilities,"



Simply chic: Domaine & Demeure interiors offer calming colour schemes

he says. "People want to get to their holiday homes quickly and have lovely views. When they are there they want plenty to do on their doorstep and when they are not there they want to know that their home will be looked after."

With Toulouse airport 80 minutes away and Montpelier, where BA starts flights from Heathrow this summer, 70 minutes away, Château Capitoul is easy to reach. Perpignan airport is only 25 minutes away, while Barcelona is a two-and-a-half-hour drive.

The location is arguably the best of all three projects, rural and peaceful but surrounded by places of note. Opposite the 200-acre estate is an entrance to Massif de Clappe, the Languedoc's largest natural conservation area and a hikers and bikers paradise, while an easy three-mile path leads to Gruissan, a charming seaside spot with an Old Town, a modern marina, leisure port, plenty of shops and wide, sandy beaches. Narbonne, with a delightful France-meets-Spain vibe, a daily market and a population of 50,000 is five minutes' drive away while the local area has Cathar castles, Catalan towns and remnants of Roman sites. Quiet beaches, buzzing markets, foie gras in a bistro or oysters in a waterfront restaurant: O'Hanlon's buyers love the variety.

"The buyers we appeal to plan to use their home at least two or three weeks each year as well as rent it out," he says. "People who, like me and my family, have a love affair with France."

On a sunny, south-facing site with panoramic views that take in the Étang de Bages lagoon, Narbonne and the Pyrenees, the Château Capitoul estate includes 120 acres of vines producing 250,000 bottles a year. Garden designer James Basson, a repeat Chelsea Flower Show Gold winner, has created an informal Mediterranean landscape of stone terraces and gravel paths through lavender, thyme and olive trees.

The château will have eight hotel rooms and two restaurants, a large wine bar, a gym and spa, while the properties for sale are all new build, featuring reclaimed roof tiles, chunky beams and large, industrial-style doors. Interiors colour schemes will be of soft greys, blues and sage greens. O'Hanlon furnishes each home differently, sourcing goods from Italy, Indonesia and the antique markets of France.



Beautiful south: Château Les Carasses has 28 homes in Languedoc-Roussillon

Prices range from £388,000 for a furnished 860sq ft townhouse and garden to £1,296,000 for a 2,150sq ft five-bedroom villa with a private pool. Annual maintenance charges start from £4,800 and Domaine & Demeure will manage all rentals.

Domaine & Demeure: domaine demeure.com (0845 686 8670)



Problem-free south of France

JON and Emma Todd own a three-bedroom house at **St Pierre Serjac.** The Northamptonshire couple and their daughters, Katie and Jemima, 13 and 11, holiday there for three or four weeks a year and otherwise let Domaine & Demeure rent it.

"The Languedoc is far enough south for guaranteed good weather and much better value and less congested than Provence," says Jon, 44, director of an engineering company. "The people are earthy and pleased to see you." It's the hassle-free holidays that appeal, adds Jon. "I don't want to spend the first few days rectifying problems on our property so the hotel-commune concept is key for us."