



Patrick Kidd and his daughter, Hattie, on holiday in France

Escape to the château: we search for property to buy in the Loire Valley, France

Fed up with south London, Patrick Kidd dreams of self-isolating in a French castle

[Patrick Kidd](#)

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I always miss the turning. Even though I have done this drive for seven straight summers, when I get to the final stretch of the 300 miles from Calais, heading into the setting sun on the tree-lined arrow-straight D766, I always shoot past the road to Breil and have to detour back past fields of nodding golden sunflowers and forests of maize before I reach our oasis.

I say “our”, but it is only rented. Is it possible to feel homesick about somewhere that isn’t your home? I have spent only 15

Past six days

most want to be, after almost 15 weeks stuck in my actual home in south London. Perhaps it was the draining of the final bottle of Bourgueil rosé brought home last summer that did it. There are only a couple of bottles left of the Château de Villeneuve red too, and half a case of Ladubay crémant. Situation desperate, sir, requesting permission to restock.

I can't think of a better place to self-isolate. This former farm, its buildings converted into six holiday lets some 20 years ago, is a mile from the nearest small village, which has a world-class boulangerie and nothing else, and on the edge of a vast hunting forest. On a Sunday morning you can hear the distant echo of bugles and beagles in pursuit of boar. For 364 days of the year you will barely see another soul; then, on August 15 the village's population swells a hundredfold for the Assumption Day *fête de la chasse*.



A field of sunflowers in Champigny sur Veude, in the heart of the Loire Valley
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It was hunting that brought the French aristocracy down to the Loire region. The local tourist map lists 71 châteaux open to visit within a two-hour drive, and there are many more in private hands, such as La Fourchette, an 18th-century manor built by Louis XIV's chief minister, Jean-Louis Colbert, the town's namesake.

Jagger has been passing his lockdown. The Rolling Stone bought it in 1980 for FrF2.2 million and has reportedly been entertaining the neighbours with concerts in the chapel.

Lucky Sir Mick. I don't imagine I will be allowed to escape to the Loire this summer. A man can dream, though, and I spent an afternoon surfing the internet with my nine-year-old daughter, Hattie, looking at what we could buy in the area we have come to love, if only her father had concentrated more on his music lessons as a child.

Money goes a long way here, although it is money I don't have. We found a 29-bedroom château near Richelieu, for starters, a snip at £2.2 million, though it will need a lot more spent on renovation. This model town was built by Cardinal Richelieu, who gave it his name, in the 17th-century and its buildings and grid-system street plan are protected. One of my happiest memories is of being there on a scorchingly hot day a few years ago and my daughter plunging fully clothed into the fountain. Perhaps she remembered that too because she dismissed this château with a cry of: "It doesn't have a pool."

More lovely, and well restored, was a [castle we found near Angers](#) for the same price. It has six bedrooms, but 50 acres of land, including gardens in the classical French style — put in by the head man at Versailles — as well as an orchard and an 18th-century orangery. "Perfect," Hattie declared. "Can you change jobs?"

Even better was the [17th-century castle](#) a little way north, towards Le Mans, which had a moat on three sides, 16 bedrooms and 40 acres. "Yes, yes, yes," Hattie said. And cheaper too, at £1.4 million, if still way out of my league. "You need to save up," she said.



The traditional kitchen in a six-bedroom château, in Linières-Bouton, which comes with 17 acres of land as well as a watermill and is on sale for €572,400 through Leggett

OK, well if we can't afford a castle on a journalist's salary, how about part of a castle? We found an 18th-century [château near Chinon](#) that was converted into five three-bedroom flats six years ago. Beautiful gardens, a shared swimming pool, £240,000. Now I was starting to dream: move out of London, downsize, use the money saved to buy a bit of a château to spend the summer in. Or this: a [two-bedroom ancient stone house](#) with its own rose garden in Saumur, the town I love most in this region, which has wooden beams, a winding staircase, good views of the river and is only a short walk from the wonderful crab served at Le Grand Bleu. Tempting for £260,000.

My favourite drive takes me west along the river from Saumur, stopping at Ladubay to buy fizz, visiting the church at Cunault and the remains of the amphitheatre at Gennes, then crossing the Loire for lunch in Les Rosiers before heading east, again hugging the river, towards the fishermen's church at St Clément-des-Levées. This is where I would choose to live year-round. A [six-bedroom stone and brick house](#) on the south bank, with excellent views of the river and an enchanting shaded garden that melts into the troglodyte hills, is on the market for £410,000.



A four-bedroom farmhouse in Gaillac, on sale for €599,000 through my-french-house.com

And then I saw it. A higgledy-piggledy [mini château](#) in the tiny village of Linières-Bouton (population 96), between Breil and Saumur. It comes with 17 acres, a watermill, woods, a lovely kitchen, two copper roll-top baths, all apparently in good condition and for sale at £510,000. I feel an itch. My wife, who until now had been an amused bystander, feels it too. “You’re not going to write about this one, are you?” she asks. “We shouldn’t tell anyone it’s available.”

A new life, raising the children in France? I turn to Hattie, who realises we’re not daydreaming any more. “No, no way,” she said. “I’d miss my friends. We’re not moving yet. Save it for when you’re old and mouldy. Well, older.” It seems that yet again I am going to miss my turning.

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