



# Paris calling

WHERE DO YOU START WHEN YOU WANT TO BUY AN APARTMENT IN PARIS, BUT YOU LIVE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY? **KIRSTEN SCHLYDER** FINDS OUT

*“The best thing about London is Paris.”*

**S**o claimed Diana Vreeland, the iconic French-American editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, who frequently jetted across the pond from New York to Europe.

As resplendent as she is on any given day, Paris can – like London – fall victim to poor weather. Yet there is almost unanimous agreement among regular commuters between the two capitals that Paris is less perturbed than her English counterpart by unfavorable conditions. Somehow, she is less miserable and manages to transcend the elements.

When wrapped in a cotton wool-like layer of snow, Paris can be even more sublime. Humming along beneath a low, grey sky, she remains the epitome of romance (*Midnight in Paris* in the rain, anyone?). Faithfully serving her all the while are thousands of bistros and cafés providing shelter and cheer to tourists and residents alike.

So a jaunt from London through the Chunnel on the Eurostar can remedy a climate-induced malaise and shift the mental gears.

London resident Anne McGhee has been a regular visitor to the French capital since the age of 14, and has habitually



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celebrated her birthdays in Paris with her husband, Bernard. Until recently, they would stay in a hotel during their *séjours*, often spending time with family who live just outside of Paris.

Their love of the city and the relative frequency of their visits sparked the idea of owning something. Somewhat hesitant at first, the decision to buy evolved after the couple stayed in a rented apartment, rather than a hotel, during one of their sojourns.

“It was a completely different experience,” says Anne. “We felt more comfortable having our own living space. We immediately started thinking again about buying, which we ended up deciding to do with Bernard’s sister and her husband.”

A decision was made to buy a *piéd-à-terre*, which could provide all the comforts of a home away from home. But the nagging question was how to go about the hunt for their Parisian *coup de coeur*. Cross the Channel back and forth, ad nauseam? Or put themselves at the behest of Parisian real estate agents?

**SEEKING ASSISTANCE**

Every *quartier* in Paris has its healthy share of estate agencies, but raising their attention can

be difficult, as Anne soon discovered.

“We registered with a number of agencies, but unfortunately we didn’t receive one return phone call,” she says. “So we went along to a French Property show at Earl’s Court in London to look at other options.”

It was there that they found out about professional property hunters and homed in on the services of a bilingual, Paris-based American with nearly 10 years experience in buying and selling property on behalf of international clientele.

“Our property consultant, Yolanda, was invaluable,” says Anne. “She facilitated each step of the search and purchase process, right up to the final signature and negotiations at the notary’s office. She knows a lot about Paris, the laws and taxes, and could point us in the right direction on any number of subjects.”

**BIG DECISIONS**

Yolanda’s first task was to focus Anne and her family on choosing the best location. The draw for them would be to have an address close to a metro station serviced by a line running directly from the Eurostar terminal at Gare du Nord. This would ensure they

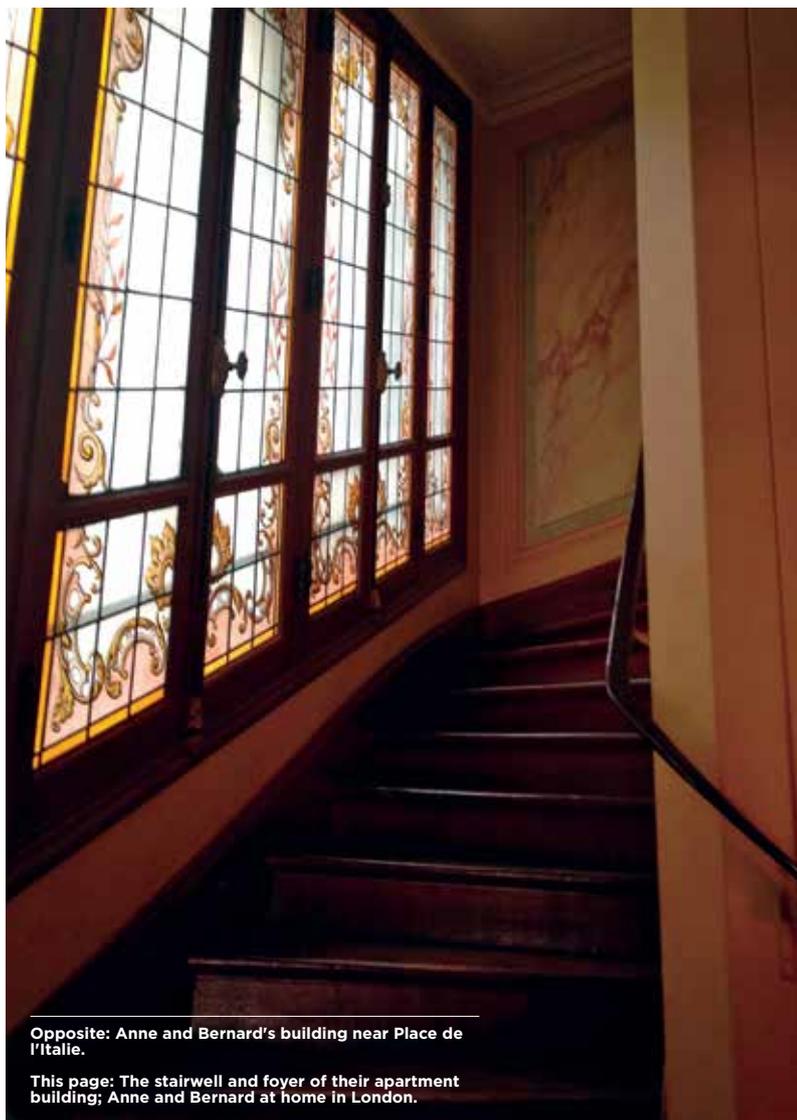
could transplant themselves as seamlessly as possible and get the most out of their escapes.

Europeans rely heavily on regional trains and their own city’s public transit systems to efficiently shuttle between locations. The majority of Parisian households don’t own a car. Within Paris itself, public transport is cheap and reliable: a €1.40 metro ticket is all it will cost you to zip from one end of Paris to the other in 30 to 40 minutes.

“We decided that we wanted to be near Chinatown (Quartier Chinois) in the 13th arrondissement, in the south east of Paris,” explains Anne. “Bernard is of Hong-Kong Chinese origin and we have become fond of this area. We wanted a two-bedroom apartment, with lots of light and preferably in the old style. It was never thought of as an investment. It is for us and our children – there are five of them over the age of 19 amongst us.”

**COUP DE COEUR**

After seeing roughly 15 properties, Yolanda’s research yielded results close to the bustling Place d’Italie in the 13th, where she found a 70msq *trois pièces* on the third



Opposite: Anne and Bernard's building near Place de l'Italie.

This page: The stairwell and foyer of their apartment building; Anne and Bernard at home in London.



floor of a Belle Époque building. Ads for apartments in Paris are routinely described using certain criteria: number of *pièces* (main rooms), *arrondissement*, the style and date/history of the building, size (in *msq*), exposition, whether the rooms face a courtyard or a street, and whether the building has an elevator and is serviced by a *gardien* (concierge).

With plenty of light, a lift and a concierge, the charming find had the bones of what they were after, but some thought was required as to redesigning the interior in order to maximise the liveable space. Yolanda referred them to an experienced, English-speaking *ouvrier* who carefully re-worked the bathroom and WC and transformed the dining room into a second bedroom, while also creating a laundry (quite a luxury by Paris standards).

The *relooking* – as the French like to call it – took three months, with the two couples to-ing and fro-ing to supervise progress and select furnishings and decor. The final product boasts a foyer, double living room, two bedrooms, an eat-in kitchen, bathroom and a powder room – the allure enhanced by ceiling moldings, fireplaces, wainscoting and hardwood floors.



### You wish: Paris

Median apartment price: €8,270 per sqm  
 How long it takes to buy: Allow 3 - 6 months  
 Rental return: 5 - 6 per cent  
 Common amenities: Concierge, lift, courtyard and garden  
 What to look out for: Very few apartments have parking, so make sure you're close to the Metro  
 Cost of living on global scale: Paris is the world's 8th most expensive city  
 Popular suburbs: The Marais, St Germain, Latin Quarter  
 Where not to buy: Are you serious? It's Paris!

### PARIS, JE T'AIME

Now with quarters on French turf, Anne and her family can trade London for Paris with very little effort. About once a month, early on a Friday evening, they arrive in their convivial neighbourhood and mosey among the local *commerçants* to gather the weekend's provisions. A little further down the street, the neon signs signal the start of Chinatown – the obligatory ducks suspended in windows and the atmosphere perfumed with Asian spices.

Friday dinner might be at a local *brasserie* or Vietnamese eatery, or another of the Southeast Asian restaurants abounding in the *quartier*. Saturday might mean a stroll through the hilly village of Butte-aux-Cailles, passing old villas with their hidden gardens, or reposing in an ambrosial square. In less agreeable weather, an art exhibition is the favoured outing.

A tour of the street markets on Sunday is customary, followed by a good dose of unwinding with a book or DVD to round out their weekend retreat. "It gives us a break from the monotony of daily life in London," says Anne. "We can leave behind the boredom that the everyday grind brings."

*Quel bonheur à Paris.* 🇫🇷