



A Zoom with a view

With digital tools such as Zoom, LiveStream and online contracts, it's now possible to find and buy your dream French home without leaving your sofa in the UK, says **Julie Savill**

What has changed most for me over the last year? How new technology has revolutionised parts of the buying process. We got into some seriously good new habits as soon as the pandemic hit and they're so helpful that there's no way we're going to let them slip now that things are starting to get back to normal.

We're all used to beginning the property search on websites and portals using our laptops, tablets or even phones, but the digital experience has been vastly extended over the past year and it's now possible to go from simply browsing to making an offer - and beyond - before leaving home. This is all good news in so many ways,

with fewer flights, less driving and less time wasted (yours and the vendors). All round a greener, cleaner way to shop for property. So, what should you expect on your digital journey?

VIRTUAL VIEWINGS

Something that is becoming more and more common is the 3D virtual viewing. With the right cutting-edge camera, an agent can take great high-resolution photos that show a property honestly and clearly, and can also produce a 'walk-through' tour that lets you pass through the property and have a 360° view of each of the rooms. You'll see where rooms lie in relation to each other and how the flow of the property feels. It's not quite like being there but it'll let you see if, for

instance, the bedrooms are big enough and it's nice and light.

RECORDED VIDEOS

A recorded video is another option you might be offered. This is where an agent has done a walk-through of a property and filmed it. You'll find links on websites but often agencies have more videos, on a platform such as Youtube or Vimeo, that are not made public (for reasons of privacy, for example) so do ask if a video is available or could be produced.

LIVESTREAM TOURS

Once you have shortlisted a few properties from the photos, descriptions, videos and 3D tours available, the next step might be to request a LiveStream tour. What that

means is that your agent will go to the property (with or without the vendors) and set up a video chat so they can walk you through the property and around the gardens or pool so you can get a real feel for the place. We've used Google Hangouts, Whatsapp and Zoom for these tours and they work really well (internet permitting).

A LiveStream tour is an opportunity to stop and ask to see more detail of a certain room or area or to have any questions answered. Want to get a panoramic look at the views? Here's your chance. Need to check out how private the grounds are or how far away the neighbours are? It's all here in real time and it really is the next best thing to being



€381,600

ST-LAURENT-DES-BÂTONS, DORDOGNE

This three-bedroom stone house has a two-bed gîte and heavenly views down onto an ancient village. It has been finished to an excellent standard, and would be ideal for intergenerational living or a source of income. (See also main image)



€189,000

CHALAIS, CHARENTE

This superb four-bedroom detached house is perfectly situated amidst rolling countryside, yet close to a bustling market town. It has a wonderful wraparound veranda and a balcony, and there's also a pretty ruin in the garden.



€662,500

PENNE-D'AGENAIS, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This magical farmhouse sits in the middle of almost 30ha of rolling hills, woods and private gardens. It has been very tastefully restored to provide a luxurious four-bedroom, three-bathroom home with plenty of character.



€500,000

FEUILLA, AUDE

On the edge of a village, surrounded by nature and only 15km from the beach, this five-bedroom house comes with numerous wisteria-covered terraces in the garden. The interiors have been renovated to a high standard.

there. If being near a village is important to you, your agent might also be willing to zip into town and give you a guided tour of the shops, bars and amenities available.

FOUND 'THE ONE'?

Despite the travel restrictions, the property market in France is moving - and at an increasing pace. Good properties are coming on to the market and being sold, in some cases in a matter of days. If you do find that property that makes your heart sing, it will pay to express

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interest and start exploring the idea of an offer sooner rather than later. An offer? Without even viewing? Well, yes. Over the past year this has become a bit of a thing in France. While travel was at best difficult and at worst impossible, it has become perfectly acceptable to

make, and have accepted, an offer on a property you haven't visited. Bear in mind that with new-build properties, a client makes an offer for a property which doesn't even exist yet!

In order to proceed, you will need to feel confident in the relationship with your

estate agent and believe that they will tell you everything that you need to know about the property, good or bad. Tell them everything that is important to you, be that the proximity of neighbours, lack of pylons in sight, distance to a *boulangerie*, position of the property within its land or even the height of ceilings and doorways if you have tall family members!

Once you have satisfied yourself that this is the right property, you make an offer in the normal way, just as if you



€957,446

BEAUVILLE, LOT-ET-GARONNE

This exceptionally beautiful property overlooks a pretty valley. It has six bedrooms, an impressive glass corridor and magnificent vaulted living spaces with underfloor heating. There are mature gardens with a pool.



€149,995

MONTMOREAU, CHARENTE

This pretty three-bedroom cottage in a hamlet has a large south-facing garden with great countryside views. It has been fully refurbished with central heating and double glazing throughout. There is also an attached barn.



€465,000

CASTELNAU-MAGNOAC, HAUTES-PYRÉNÉES

A charming four-bedroom farmhouse packed with original features near a pretty village. The mature gardens have views towards the Pyrénées, and there is also a separate space currently being used as an artist's studio.



€333,900

PAYROUX, VIENNE

Set down a private track, this stunning equestrian property sits in 11ha of land. The main house has three bedrooms and a vast newly fitted kitchen with range and Aga. Outside there are numerous outbuildings.

had done an in-person viewing. The offer will be negotiated with the vendor by the agent and, once accepted, all the usual paperwork is gathered ready to send to the *notaire*.

NEXT STEPS

During the preparation of the first contract (the *compromis de vente*) the full diagnostics reports will be commissioned and you will receive a copy of these along with the contract

so you will know the status of key elements such as electrics, any gas installation, presence of lead and presence of wood-boring insects such as termites before signing. You will also receive a report showing the status of the drainage; whether it conforms to the current regulations and if it is private (a septic tank) or the property is connected to mains drainage. If all is as you expect it to be you can sign the contract,

which is also likely to arrive in digital format for you to 'sign' and accept online.

What happens next might vary depending on the *notaire* being used. Some are happy for the process to continue right up to completion, while others will prefer you to actually visit the property before signing the final *acte de vente* contract. Whichever way things work out, you'll have secured your own little piece of France with

minimal travel and wasted time, and can get on with simply enjoying it! ■

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Turn to page 40 to read about people who have bought remotely