THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUYING PROPERTY IN FRANCE

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
TO BUY WITH CONFIDENCE

2026 edition

BEFORE YOU READ A SINGLE PAGE

Is This Book Right for You?

I'll be straight with you — this book isn't for everyone, and I'd rather you know that upfront than feel like you wasted your time.

So here's a quick gut-check. Read both columns and see which one sounds more like you.

✓ THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU IF...

- ✓ You're a foreigner wanting to buy property in France — to live there, enjoy as a holiday home, or rent it out
- ✓ You've browsed SeLoger at midnight dreaming about a stone farmhouse in Provence
- ✓ You find French administrative processes confusing, slow, and occasionally maddening
- ✓ Your French is anywhere between "un peu" and non-existent
- ✓ You want to avoid expensive mistakes and understand what you're signing
- ✓ You're a retiree planning a move, or an active buyer ready to start the search now
- ✓ You're willing to do it right, even if it takes a little longer

✕ THIS BOOK IS NOT FOR YOU IF...

- ✕ You're a French citizen who grew up with this system (you already know all this — lucky you)
- ✕ You're looking for large-scale investment strategies or property development
- ✕ You want someone to make all the decisions for you without understanding what's happening
- ✕ You expect to buy a French property in two weeks from a sofa in New York (nobody can help with that)

PRO TIP

I wrote this book because I've personally seen hundreds of foreign buyers navigate the French property market — some brilliantly, most with at least one avoidable disaster. My job is to be that trusted friend who speaks both languages (literally and figuratively). Think of this as a long conversation with me, minus the time difference and the plane ticket.

Your Field Guide to France

This book is meant to be used, not just read. Dog-ear it. Highlight it. Come back to specific chapters when you need them. It is deliberately written in the order you will actually experience the process.

THE BOOK FOLLOWS YOUR JOURNEY

Each chapter maps to a stage of the buying process — from understanding the market, to securing financing, to due diligence, to signing the final deed. You can read cover to cover, or jump directly to the chapter relevant to where you are right now. The chapter summaries at the end of each section will tell you exactly what to expect next.

WHAT THE BOXES MEAN

PRO TIP	Insider knowledge that saves time, money, or headaches — the kind of thing your French industry insider would tell you over dinner.
! WATCH OUT	Red flags, common traps, and situations where things go wrong. Based on real mistakes real buyers have made.
FR KEY TERM	A French legal or real estate term explained in plain English. No more nodding along pretending you understand.
" REAL STORY	Anecdotes from real buyers (names changed). Sometimes reassuring, sometimes cautionary — always true.
? DID YOU KNOW?	Surprising facts about France, the property market, or the legal system. Conversation fodder for your next dinner party in Paris.

A complete bilingual glossary and printable checklists are in the Appendix at the back of the book.

Why France? And Why Is It So Damn Complicated?

Let's start with the obvious question. Why do so many people from the UK, the US, Australia, and beyond dream of owning a piece of France? And if it's such a great idea, why do so many end up completely lost in the process?

The dream is easy to understand. France has everything: 3,400 kilometres of coastline, ancient villages clinging to Provençal hilltops, world-class skiing in the Alps, and some of the most beautiful countryside on earth. Add a rich food culture, a pace of life that actively resists the tyranny of the urgent, and property prices that — compared to London, New York, or Sydney — can still represent genuine value in many regions.

France is also, by a wide margin, the world's most visited country. Around 90 million tourists a year pass through — and a meaningful percentage leave thinking: *I could live here*. The UK, the US, Belgium, and the Netherlands consistently top the rankings of foreign property buyers. Many of them find this book at exactly the right moment: when the daydream is starting to feel like a plan.

So yes, the *why* is obvious. The *how* is where things get interesting.

A System Built by Lawyers, for Lawyers

Here is the honest truth: the French property system was not designed with foreign buyers in mind. It was built by, and largely for, French people who grew up understanding its logic. The paperwork is dense. The timelines are long. The vocabulary is highly specific — a world where a *promesse de vente* and a *compromis de vente* are two meaningfully different documents, even though both are preliminary contracts. Where a *mandataire* is not the same as an *agent immobilier*. Where the notaire simultaneously represents the state, manages the transaction, and theoretically serves both buyer and seller — but in practice, you need to know whose questions to ask.

> *"The French property system was not designed with foreign buyers in mind. It was designed by, and largely for, French people who grew up understanding its logic. My job — and this book's job — is to close that gap."*

The professionals you will work with — estate agents, notaires, mortgage advisors — are often excellent at their jobs. But they operate in French, think in French legal frameworks, and rarely have the bandwidth to explain everything from scratch to a buyer who does not share that cultural background. They assume a baseline of knowledge that most foreign buyers simply do not have.

REAL STORY

"I felt like everyone in the room knew what was happening except me. Even my estate agent seemed surprised I was asking questions."

— Michael R., American buyer, Bordeaux region 2024

This is the gap I have spent years helping people bridge. Not by replacing the professionals — you absolutely need a notaire, and probably a mortgage broker and a good local agent — but by ensuring that *you* understand exactly what is happening at every step. An informed buyer makes better decisions, negotiates with confidence, and is far less likely to be rushed or misled.

What This Book Will (and Won't) Do

This book walks you through the entire buying process, from understanding the market to signing the final deed at the notaire's office. It explains every major document you will encounter, every cost you need to budget for, and every decision point where things commonly go wrong.

It will not replace professional advice. Every purchase is unique. Tax situations differ. Mortgage eligibility varies. Local planning rules differ by commune. Use this book to understand the landscape — then use the right professionals to navigate your specific situation with the knowledge to ask the right questions.

PRO TIP

The single biggest advantage you can give yourself as a foreign buyer is knowledge. Not because you need to become a French legal expert — but because an informed buyer asks better questions, spots problems earlier, and is far less likely to be rushed into a bad decision by time pressure or confusion.

The Buying Journey at a Glance

Before diving into each stage, here is the full arc of a French property purchase — every step from idea to keys. The chapters of this book map exactly to this journey.

STEP	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	TYPICAL TIMING
1	**Market Research**	Understand the market, regions, pricing, costs. Define your brief.	**Ch. 1**
2	**Budget**	True cost calculation including all taxes, fees, and hidden costs.	**Ch. 2**
3	**Financing**	Mortgage eligibility, lender selection, dossier preparation.	**Ch. 3 — 6–12 wks**
4	**Property Search**	Portals, agents, off-market, viewings, regional research.	**Ch. 4 — Weeks to months**
5	**Due Diligence**	Diagnostics, survey, hazards, legal checks. Know before you commit.	**Ch. 5**
6	**Offer & Compromis**	Negotiate, sign preliminary contract, pay 10% deposit.	**Ch. 6**
7	**Between Contracts**	Mortgage approval, searches, notaire checks. The waiting game.	**Ch. 7 — 6–12 wks**
8	**Completion (Acte)**	Sign the final deed at the notaire. Funds transfer. Keys.	**Ch. 8**
9	**Life as an Owner**	French taxes, rental rules, inheritance, renovation grants.	**Ch. 9–12**

? DID YOU KNOW?

France has over 35,000 communes. Many of the most appealing villages for foreign buyers have fewer than 2,000 inhabitants — meaning a very limited number of properties ever come to market. Patience and local networks matter more than search portals in these areas.

CHAPTER

1

The French Property Market: What Nobody Tells You

Before you fall in love with a listing — and you will — it helps to understand how the French property market actually works. Spoiler: it is not quite like anything you have experienced before. The good news? Once you understand the logic, it all makes sense.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The cast of characters — who does what, and whose side they're on
- Old property vs. new build — two completely different games
- Why the same property can show two different prices
- The DPE energy rating — why it matters more than ever
- The French market in 2025 — what's happening to prices
- Seller psychology — the one thing that surprises every foreign buyer
- The 5 mistakes foreign buyers make in their first 30 days
- Julien's 3 golden rules before making any offer

The Cast of Characters — Who Does What

Step one is getting completely clear on who the people in this transaction are, what their job is, and — critically — whose interests they represent. This is where most foreign buyers make their first mistake.

The Agent Immobilier

The closest equivalent to a traditional estate agent. They work for a registered agency, hold a professional card (carte professionnelle), are bonded and insured, and operate under strict regulations. They earn a commission — typically 3–8% of the sale price — that is almost always paid by the buyer (baked into the FAI price, or added on top of the net vendeur price).

One critical thing: in France, the agent immobilier almost universally represents the **seller**. They hold a mandate from the vendor. Their job is to achieve the best price for their client. They are not your enemy, but they are absolutely not your advocate. Act accordingly.

The Mandataire Immobilier

A relatively new category that catches foreign buyers off-guard. Mandataires are independent agents who operate under the umbrella of a large national network — IAD France, Optimhome, 3G Immo, and others. They work from home, have lower overheads, and sometimes charge lower fees as a result.

Legally, they operate under a *mandat* from a registered agency — they do not hold their own carte professionnelle but must be attached to one. Quality varies widely. Some are excellent; others are newer to the business. Check how long they have been working in your target area.

The Notaire

The notaire is not an estate agent. They are a *officier ministériel* — an officer of the French state appointed to authenticate legal transactions. Their role is to ensure the deed of sale is legally valid, that title is clean, that taxes are paid, and that the transaction is properly registered with the French land registry (Service de Publicité Foncière).

Crucially: the notaire is neutral. They are not your solicitor. They do not advise you. They represent the law, not you personally. If you want someone looking out for your interests, you need a separate legal adviser — or, for property matters, a buyer's agent.

FR **KEY TERM**

Carte Professionnelle

The mandatory professional licence for estate agents in France, issued by the Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie. Any agent or agency without one is operating illegally. Always verify before signing any mandate or paying any fee.

The Chasseur Immobilier (Buyer's Agent)

A chasseur immobilier is a buyer's agent — someone who works exclusively for you, the purchaser. They search the market on your behalf, negotiate the price, coordinate due diligence, and guide you through the process. Unlike the estate agent or the notaire, their mandate is to represent your interests.

They typically charge 2–3% of the purchase price, payable on completion. For foreign buyers who are unfamiliar with the market, do not speak French fluently, or are buying remotely, a good chasseur is often the single best investment in the whole process.

" **REAL STORY**

"My biggest regret is not understanding that the estate agent worked for the seller, not for me. She was perfectly pleasant — but her job was to close the deal at the vendor's price, not to protect my interests."

— Claire M., British buyer, Normandy 2023

! **WATCH OUT**

In France, an agent can hold an *exclusif* mandate — meaning only they can sell that property for an agreed period. If you see the same property listed by two agents, one may be in breach of their mandate. Always clarify the mandate type before working with multiple agents on the same property — and never pay two agents for the same deal.

Old Property vs. New Build: Two Completely Different Games

The moment you start your search, you will encounter two fundamentally different types of property in France — and the rules, costs, timelines, and risks are significantly different for each. Confusing them is an expensive mistake.

The Marché de l'Ancien — Existing Property

Existing property — technically anything completed more than 5 years ago — represents around 85% of all French property transactions. This is what most foreign buyers are imagining: the stone farmhouse, the Haussmann apartment, the Provençal village house with wisteria and a terracotta courtyard. The charm is real. So are the costs.

For existing property, you pay the full notaire fees (droits de mutation) — typically 7–8% of the purchase price. What you get in return is a property with character, an established neighbourhood, and usually more transparent pricing. You also get the full mandatory diagnostic package (DDT) — those technical reports we cover in Chapter 5.

The Marché du Neuf — New Build (VEFA)

New-build properties are sold in one of two ways: as completed finished units, or off-plan before construction finishes under a VEFA contract (Vente en l'État Futur d'Achèvement — literally, "sale in a future state of completion"). You pay in stages as the building progresses.

The main financial advantage of a new build: notaire fees are just 2–3% instead of 7–8%. On a €300,000 property, that is a saving of up to €15,000. New builds also come with ten-year structural warranties (garantie décennale) and comply with modern energy standards — which matters enormously given the DPE rental restrictions we discuss below.

FR **KEY TERM**

VEFA — Vente en l'État Futur d'Achèvement

The legal framework for buying off-plan in France. Payments are staged (typically 35% at foundations, 70% at roof-level, 95% at completion, 5% at handover). The developer must provide a Garantie Financière d'Achèvement (GFA) — a bank guarantee protecting your payments if they go bust.

Side-by-Side Comparison

FACTOR	EXISTING PROPERTY	NEW BUILD (VEFA)
Notaire Fees	7–8% of price	2–3% of price
VAT (TVA)	Included in price	20% TVA included
Energy Performance	Varies A–G; many old builds are E/F/G	RE2020 standard — typically A/B
Warranties	None (existing condition)	10-yr structural + 2-yr equipment
Timeline to Keys	3–5 months from offer	12–36 months (build period)
Delivery Risk	None — property exists	Delays of 6–18 months common
Character / Charm	High — stone, beams, history	Low — modern box
Renovation Budget	Often needed (budget €50–200/m²+)	None initially

PRO TIP

If you are planning to rent out your property, a new build's A/B energy rating means no rental restrictions. An existing property rated F or G faces serious rental restrictions (see DPE section below) and potentially €20,000–40,000 in renovation costs to reach a rentable standard.

Why the Same Property Can Show Two Different Prices

One of the first confusions foreign buyers encounter is finding the same property listed at different prices by different agents — or seeing a price advertised that seems suspiciously low compared to similar properties. This is almost always the FAI vs. net vendeur difference.

Net Vendeur

The *net vendeur* price (literally: "vendor's net price") is the amount the seller will receive after the transaction. It does *not* include the estate agent's commission. If a property is advertised net vendeur, you must add the agency fee (typically 3–8% of the price) to understand what you will actually pay.

FAI — Frais d'Agence Inclus

The FAI price (fees included) is the total buyer's price. What you see is what you pay to the agent — before adding the notaire fees. Since 2017, French regulations require estate agents to display FAI prices in public advertising. However, you will still encounter net vendeur prices in private negotiations, mandataire listings, and PAP (private seller) platforms.

A Real-World Example

COST COMPONENT	AMOUNT
Property advertised net vendeur	**€350,000**
Agency fee (5% on top)	**+ €17,500**
FAI Price (what you actually pay)	**€367,500**
Notaire fees (~8% on €367,500)	**+ €29,400**
Total out-of-pocket (before renovation)	**€396,900**

A property that looked like €350,000 actually costs nearly €400,000 all-in. This is why so many buyers arrive at the notaire's office looking shocked. Chapter 2 is entirely dedicated to making sure this never happens to you.

PRO TIP

Always ask: "Le prix affiché est-il net vendeur ou FAI ?" — is the price shown the vendor's net price or does it include agency fees? This one question takes five seconds and can save you thousands.

The DPE Energy Rating — Why It Matters More Than You Think

If there is one piece of information that has changed the French property market more than any other in recent years, it is the DPE — the Diagnostic de Performance Énergétique. Understanding it could save you tens of thousands of euros.

The DPE rates a property's energy performance on a scale from A (excellent) to G (thermal sieve). Since 2021, the DPE is legally binding — vendors can be held liable for significant inaccuracies. Since 2023, F and G-rated properties are banned from new rental contracts in France. E-rated properties follow in 2034.

Why does this matter to you as a buyer?

- If you plan to **rent the property**: an F or G rating means you cannot legally rent it today. Renovation to achieve at least an E rating typically costs €15,000–35,000.
- If you are buying for **personal use**: G and F-rated properties have high heating costs and will need renovation if you ever wish to resell or rent. Factor this into your offer price.
- **Resale values** of F and G-rated properties are already under pressure — buyers are discounting them significantly, and this trend will accelerate as energy standards tighten.

" **REAL STORY**

"We bought a lovely stone house rated F on the DPE, thinking we'd renovate gradually. Then we found out we couldn't renew our rental contract for it — and the renovation cost to bring it to E was €28,000. We wish someone had explained this before we signed."

— Anonymous client, Languedoc-Roussillon 2024

! **WATCH OUT**

A G-rated property is not unsellable — but it carries significant renovation obligations and rental restrictions. Never buy one without a clear renovation plan, a firm cost estimate from a local contractor, and a corresponding reduction in the purchase price. A D or above is the minimum we recommend for rental investment buyers.

? **DID YOU KNOW?**

France has 5.2 million F and G-rated properties — dubbed 'passoires thermiques' (thermal sieves) by the French press. The government has committed billions in renovation grants (MaPrimeRénov') to upgrade this stock. Chapter 2 breaks down exactly what grants you can access as a foreign buyer.

The French Property Market in 2025

Before you make any financial commitment, you need a clear-eyed view of where the French market is right now — what has happened to prices, how the mortgage rate environment has evolved, and what the indicators suggest about the short-term outlook.

What Has Happened Since 2022

The French property market experienced a significant correction between 2022 and 2024, driven by the rapid rise in mortgage rates from near-zero to 3.5–4.5%. Transaction volumes fell sharply — from a record 1.17 million sales in 2021 to around 780,000 in 2024, a 33% drop. Prices followed, with average national declines of 5–10% from peak in most markets, and sharper falls in some urban areas where prices had been most inflated.

The good news for buyers: this correction has improved affordability meaningfully. Average rates have stabilised in the 3.0–3.8% range in 2025, and some lenders are beginning to compete more aggressively on non-resident borrowers. Transaction volumes are beginning to recover.

Where Are Prices Now?

MARKET	PRICE PER M² (2025 EST.)	CHANGE VS. 2022 PEAK
Paris (central arrondissements)	€10,500–16,000	-8 to -12%
Nice / Côte d'Azur	€5,000–8,500	-3 to -5%
Bordeaux (city)	€3,500–5,500	-10 to -15%
Lyon (city)	€3,800–5,500	-8 to -12%
Dordogne (rural, stone houses)	€1,200–2,800	Stable to -3%
Brittany (coastal)	€2,500–4,500	Stable
Alps (ski resorts)	€5,000–14,000	Broadly stable
Rural (Creuse, Corrèze, etc.)	€600–1,500	Broadly stable

PRO TIP

The correction has been sharpest in markets where buyers were most dependent on cheap debt — Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon. Rural and coastal markets popular with foreign cash buyers or lifestyle buyers have held up much better. For a foreign buyer with strong equity or significant cash, the current environment is genuinely attractive.

What French Sellers Really Care About

In France, there is a factor that regularly trumps price: **certainty of completion**. Understanding this gives you a genuine competitive advantage in negotiations.

French sellers — and their agents — have a cultural memory of transactions that collapsed. A deal that falls through after three months of waiting is not just frustrating; it is costly. The property has to be re-listed, the seller faces notaire fees for the failed transaction, and the market may have moved. So when a seller chooses between buyers, they are often weighing probability of completion as heavily as the offer price itself.

What does this mean for you? It means that:

- A **cash buyer** with proof of funds is extraordinarily powerful in France — far more so than in the UK or US.
- A buyer with a **mortgage pre-approval** (accord de principe) from a credible lender is significantly more attractive than an unverified buyer.
- A buyer willing to agree a **shorter délai** (time between compromis and acte — typically 3 months) can often negotiate a better price.
- Flexibility on the **date de libération** (when the seller moves out) can be more valuable to some sellers than €5,000 extra on the price.

" **REAL STORY**

"Everyone told us it would take three months. It took seven. We had booked our removal van, given notice on our London flat, enrolled our kids in a French school. The delays nearly broke us — financially and emotionally."

— Anonymous client, Provence 2023

> *"In France, a buyer who can close is often more attractive than a buyer who will pay more. Know your leverage — and use it." — Julien Loboda*

The 5 Mistakes Foreign Buyers Make in Their First 30 Days

These are the errors we see most consistently — and they happen at the very beginning, before most buyers have a clue anything is going wrong.

1. **Budgeting only the purchase price**
   They see a property at €350,000, have €380,000, and think they have plenty of room. They have not factored in notaire fees (7–8%), agency fees (3–6%), mortgage arrangement costs, and moving costs. The real number is closer to €415,000 all-in. Chapter 2 fixes this.

2. **Assuming the estate agent is on their side**
   The agent is warm, friendly, helpful, and speaks English. This does not mean they represent your interests. They represent the seller. Every piece of information they give you, every viewing they arrange, every negotiation they facilitate — all of this is in service of their client. Know this going in.

3. **Starting the property search before the financing**
   You fall in love with a property. You make an offer. The seller accepts. Now you try to get a mortgage — and discover it will take 10–12 weeks and your profile needs work. The seller gets impatient, finds another buyer. You lose the property. Get your mortgage pre-approval sorted before you make a single offer.

4. **Not visiting the area in different seasons**
   A Provençal village in July is utterly charming. In February, the restaurant is closed, the market is gone, your neighbours have left for Paris, and the mistral wind has been rattling your shutters for six days. If you are buying a holiday home or planning to retire, visit in autumn or winter before committing.

5. **Rushing the due diligence to 'lock in' the property**
   Time pressure is the enemy of good decisions. France's 10-day cooling-off period after the compromis is designed precisely to give you time to think. Use it. If something feels rushed, it is. A motivated seller who refuses to give you time to do proper due diligence is a red flag, not a compliment to your decision-making speed.

Julien's 3 Golden Rules Before Making Any Offer

After years of helping foreign buyers through this process, I have distilled my guidance down to three non-negotiable rules. Apply them and you will avoid the vast majority of the problems we see.

FR **KEY TERM**

Rule 1: Know Your True All-In Budget Before You Search

Not just the purchase price. The true budget includes notaire fees, agency fees, mortgage costs, currency exchange costs, and an emergency renovation reserve. Chapters 2 and 3 give you the exact framework. Never make an offer on a property you have not fully budgeted for.

FR **KEY TERM**

Rule 2: Understand What You Are Signing Before You Sign It

Every document in a French property transaction has legal force. The compromis de vente is a binding contract with a 10% deposit attached. The acte authentique transfers legal ownership. If you do not understand every clause, do not sign until you do. A qualified translation and legal review costs €300–600. The alternative can cost far more.

FR **KEY TERM**

Rule 3: Build Your Team Before You Need It

Identify your notaire, your mortgage broker (if needed), your currency specialist, and potentially a buyer's agent and independent surveyor before you are under time pressure. Making these choices under urgency leads to poor decisions. The best professionals are booked up. Identify them early.

CHAPTER 1 — THE FRENCH PROPERTY MARKET · KEY TAKEAWAYS

- → The estate agent represents the seller — the only person whose job is to represent you is a buyer's agent (chasseur)
- → Old and new build properties have completely different costs, timelines, warranties, and energy obligations
- → Always clarify whether a price is FAI or net vendeur — a 5% agency fee adds €17,500 to a €350,000 property
- → The DPE energy rating has real legal consequences — F and G-rated properties cannot be rented; renovation costs are real
- → France's market has corrected 5–15% from its 2022 peak — a cash or well-financed buyer has genuine pricing leverage
- → Certainty of completion matters more to French sellers than price — use this in every negotiation
- → Get your financing sorted before you search; budget every cost before you make an offer; understand every document before you sign

UP NEXT · CHAPTER 2

The True Cost of Buying — No More Surprises

You know the market. Now let's talk money — and not just the purchase price. In Chapter 2, we break down every single cost you will face, including the ones that make first-time buyers go pale when they see the final bill from the notaire. By the end, you will know your true all-in budget to the last euro.

YOU'VE REACHED THE END OF THE FREE EXTRACT

Ready to Buy Smart in France?

The full guide covers every step — from financing your purchase as a foreigner to signing the final deed. 12 chapters, 200 pages, bilingual glossary, and printable checklists.

- Chapter 2 · The Real Cost of Buying — every fee broken down
- Chapter 3 · Getting a French Mortgage as a Foreigner
- Chapter 5 · Due Diligence — reading the diagnostics like an expert
- Chapter 7 · The Compromis de Vente — your rights, your risks
- Chapter 9 · Tax & Legal Life as a Foreign Property Owner
- Chapter 11 · The 12 Mistakes Every Foreign Buyer Makes
- \+ Bilingual glossary, checklists & letter templates