

# Clients Cornered

Diane & Gordon Thom ([www.la-villamhor.com](http://www.la-villamhor.com)) have recently applied for planning permission to build two new houses in the Hérault - and they can't wait to hear whether the answer's yes or no!



Gordon and I fell in love with the Hérault three years ago during our first visit to the area. With our two children grown up, the time seemed right to look for a second home in France which we could then rent out for most of the year. Just three years later, we're now hoping to realise our dream of moving to the area permanently.

We explored the Hérault thoroughly during a six-day holiday in September 2000. To us, the region couldn't be better - scenic mountains and lakes just thirty minutes from the Mediterranean coast. We'd planned to house-hunt as much as we could during our holiday, but by Day Five - and after viewing most of the properties for sale in the region (or so it felt!) - we'd seen absolutely nothing to our liking.

Feeling a bit despondent, we were about to say goodbye to the Estate Agent when he suggested we see one final house - "La Villamhor". Situated opposite a vineyard in the charming little village of Laurens, it didn't take us long to make our decision. Two hours after seeing the particulars in the agent's office, we'd instructed him to make an offer. And four hours after that we had secured our new home!

The house had already been converted into two self-contained apartments, but it needed considerable refurbishing and redecorating before we would be ready for our first rental season in 2001. Meanwhile, each time we visited "La Villamhor", we found it harder and harder to return home to Aberdeen. And at the end of our second season, we were also beginning to realise that running gîtes when you're not on-site can be tricky - it's certainly not ideal if you want the business to run as smoothly as possible!

So, in 2002, we started searching for a plot of land large enough for two new houses - one for us to live in, the other to incorporate three gîtes. In March 2003, we found our ideal plot in the village of Cessenon in the Orb Valley - an acre of land with lovely open views of the surrounding countryside. Within 48 hours, a purchase price was agreed.

Our first port of call was the mairie to check that the land was in an approved area for house construction. Once this was confirmed, our notaire arranged an application for a *Certificat d'Urbanisme* - a vital document similar to outline planning permission. After that, we signed a *Compromis de Vente*, paid our deposit and a couple of days later returned to Scotland. The remainder of the process was conducted by email and our notaire finally signed the *Acte Authentique* on our behalf in August. Our little corner of paradise was ours at last!

By June, we'd had our first meeting with our French architect, Valerie Garnier. Apart from being an excellent local architect, she's fluent in English which has made everything much easier - especially since most of the design process has been conducted by email!

In December 2003 the plans were finally completed and lodged at the mairie. And during our New Year holiday in the Hérault, we watched some *sondages* (trial holes) being drilled to determine what we'll be building on. We also made arrangements for the land to be cleared of vines and serviced with water and drainage before our next visit in May - that's the plan, anyway!

We're hoping to hear any day now that our *permis* has been granted - the sooner we get started, the sooner we can begin our new life in France. So, in the meantime, do keep your fingers crossed for us!



[www.letsites.com](http://www.letsites.com)

If you'd like to be "cornered" in a future issue, please contact [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

## The LetSites Newsletter - May 2004

We'd like to start the May Newsletter with a huge "Thank you!" for all the photos we're using on the new-look LetSites welcome page. It's hard not to spend hours in front of the screen just gazing at all the lovely places featured!

As the 2004 holiday season gets under way, it's already time to start thinking about advertising for 2005 – see below for the advertising deadlines. We also introduce our first ever Online Poll to find out more about where you're advertising – we're keeping our fingers crossed for a 100% turnout! The results will be available to all participants in early June.

Any items you'd like to see in future Newsletters? Tell Emma: [emma@letsites.com](mailto:emma@letsites.com)

## Some dates for your diary...

The **2005 advertising deadlines** are fast approaching - here are the relevant dates available so far:

*Chez Nous* have no dates yet, but should know by June.

*Owners in France* are already sending out Advertisers' Packs. Ads booked by 1 July get a free entry on the Owners in France website. The final deadline is 1 August.

*Bonnes Vacances* offer 20% and 10% discounts for ads submitted by 30 June and 15 August respectively. Their final deadline is 30 September.

**Update your website for 2005** and you can start to fill in your 2005 bookings – just email us your prices & dates whenever you like and we'll add the new tariff & availability charts to your website.

## Tell me all about... external links



One of the main advantages of having a website for your holiday property is that it becomes a useful source of information for your clients before their holiday starts. They can find out about the many events, activities and attractions on offer in your local area, for example.

To help you tempt people back to your site again and again, we already offer free links to the local tourism and administrative websites. Now we're pleased to offer you a

further set of free links to the major travel company websites. The links will appear on the "Directions" page after the itineraries – for an example, have a look at [www.skolfski.com](http://www.skolfski.com)

Many clients have also asked us to add website links to specific attractions in their local area, such as leisure parks, a wine-tasting course, sailing schools...

[www.skolfski.com](http://www.skolfski.com) has links to two skiing websites. Because we have to set up each link individually, we make a nominal charge of 5 euros per link, but you can now have as many personalised links as you like on any page of your site.

If you would like us to add some local website links and/or the (free) standard travel links to your site, just let us know.



## Recommend-A-Friend!



The LetSites brochure has just been given a *New Look* so we thought you might like to see it!

Clients will find two copies of the new brochure enclosed with this Newsletter – one to keep and one to pass on to any of your friends, family or neighbours who also let their properties. And for your French friends, don't forget the 100% French version of LetSites: [www.locsites.com](http://www.locsites.com)

When you **Recommend-A-Friend** and they set up a LetSites website, you receive a 20% discount off your next hosting renewal - recommend five friends and your hosting is **free!**

## Online Polls - your chance to share your thoughts...

During May, we shall be launching our first Online Poll – a chance for you to share your views and experiences with other holiday property owners.

Our first poll is about advertising – how, where and when do you do it? And with the 2005 advertising deadlines on the horizon, now seems like a good time to take a look at how well you think your advertising has performed.

So, as well as asking you where you advertised in 2003 and 2004, we shall be asking for your (anonymous) advertising-related comments, advice and warnings for other LetSites clients to read.

We'll also be asking you about your plans for 2005. Then later in the year, we'll poll you again to find out about your final marketing decisions for the 2005 season... what was it that persuaded you to advertise where? Was it price, prestige or panic?

In mid-May, we'll email you to let you know that the poll is open. You'll be able to fill in your answers online via the LetSites Control Panel at any time up to the end of May. Once the poll closes, we'll summarise the results and make them available online to participants in early June.

We do hope that everyone will want to take part – the more responses we can gather, the more meaningful the results. We'd also love to hear your ideas for future polls - *serious or light-hearted!*



## STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!



LetSites clients Mike & Sue Douglas ([www.le-murier.com](http://www.le-murier.com)) were featured in the March issue of *French Property News*. They have recently moved from South Africa to the Lot Valley to run *Le Mûrier de Viels* - a delightful hotel and restaurant. You can read the article on the LetSites website - just click on "what the press say". If you have a story which you think might make a good *French Property News* article, do please let us know.