

A photograph of a living room with a white sofa, a wicker lamp, and a stone fireplace. The room has a rustic feel with dark wooden beams on the ceiling and a tiled floor. The text 'French flair' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# French flair

A chance discovery led to a new home and successful business venture for Anne Guthrie

The guest living area has been decorated very simply, allowing the natural materials to stand out. Red and yellow accents reference the Catalan heritage of the region Anne lives in



**PROPERTY  
DETAILS**

**Type of house**  
Four-bedroom  
townhouse  
**Location**  
Ille-sur-Têt  
**Purchase price**  
£45,500  
**Money spent**  
£200,000  
**What it's  
worth now**  
£275,000



Anne has added colour to the outside stairs with pot plants

*Right* The stone fireplace and tiled floors in the living room in Anne's house are both original features



**ANNE GUTHRIE, 41, lives in a townhouse in southern France, where she runs a bed and breakfast business. Anne says:**

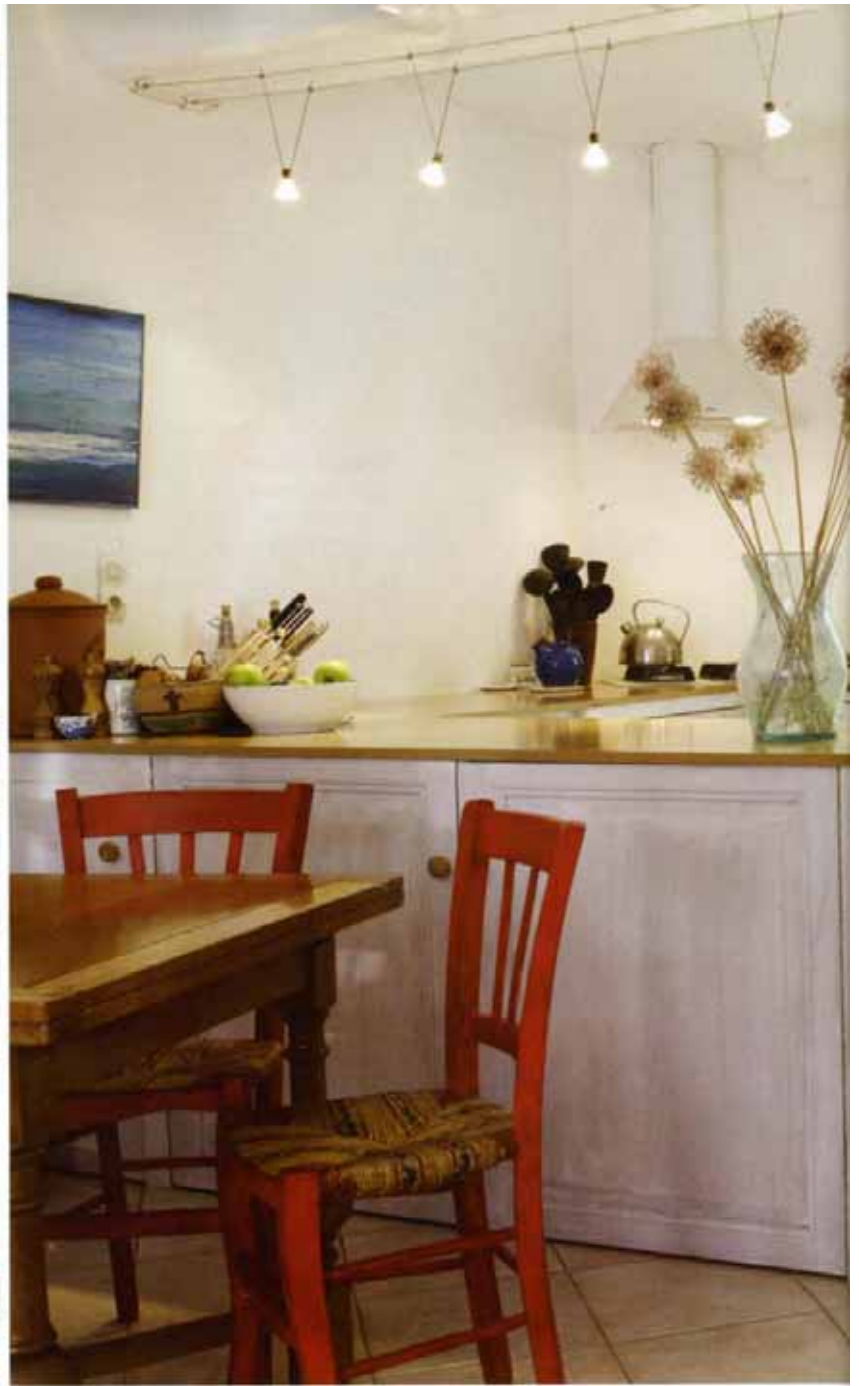
**F**or many years I led a fairly nomadic life. My family's roots are in Scotland but I grew up in Kenya, and my work in the food and wine industry involved a lot of travelling. However, eventually I settled in France and changed careers to work in the travel industry.

In 2000, I took a trip to Ille-sur-Têt in southern France, just half an hour's drive from the sea and very close to the Spanish border. While there, I wandered into a local estate agent's while I was waiting for a shop to open. Years before I'd had a dream that had left me with a very clear impression of a lovely house and in the estate agent's shop

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*Above:* A brightly coloured table runner adds a friendly feel to the large dining table, where guests gather for communal meals. Full-length windows dressed with red curtains create a dramatic look, meaning the room can be given a more formal air if needed



*Above:* Anne has chosen a simple, neutral scheme for her open-plan kitchen and dining area, creating a lovely feeling of space and light. The room leads out to a sun-drenched tiled patio area, which is filled with pots and jars of plants

I saw a place that looked exactly like the house I had dreamed of. I went to see it straight away, fell in love, and bought it the following day. The house is set out over three floors, and part of it dates back to the 1100s. I spent the next three years repairing and restoring the place to its former glory, keeping as many of the original features as possible, like the tiled floors and beautiful fireplaces, then adding my own touches with furniture and objects collected from the many countries I've visited.

I was halfway through the work on the house when my neighbour put his place on the market. At the time I was happy working as a travel guide, organising walking tours throughout Europe, but I also felt in need of a new



## ANNE'S INSIDE STORY

**A disappointing mistake and the house's true beauty revealed.**

'Due to work commitments I had to be away for three weeks while the house was being worked on. I returned to find the builders hadn't followed the plans for the hallway, had fitted the wrong woodwork and were preparing to pour concrete over electric cables and heating pipes.

'Once the partition walls had been demolished I was able to see the original staircase properly for the first time, and appreciate how truly beautiful the interior is.'

## LIVING ABROAD



*Left* In a corner of Anne's bedroom, three old wine containers create an interesting visual display

*Below* The stunning wooden staircase is an original feature of the guest house, twisting its way charmingly up through the three floors



challenge, and so I decided to buy my neighbour's house and use it to create a bed and breakfast business to supplement my work as a guide. It was a slightly daunting prospect, but at the same time very exciting.

The oldest part of the second house dates back to the 1300s. Part of it had been a butcher's shop, and it was in need of a lot of work. I wanted to preserve its character while also creating a more practical layout that offered modern comforts. It took roughly four years and a lot of hard work to turn the place around. Central heating and new bathroom suites were installed, together with an open-plan kitchen. I also had plaster removed from a

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Anne's most treasured possession

'I'm really happy with the dining table. It's large, seating 12 comfortably, and is the centrepiece of the dining room. It's a wonderful place for everyone to gather to share a meal and a glass of wine.'



## LIVING ABROAD



A small bookshelf has been cut into the wall of this guest bedroom



After Beautiful expanses of the original stone walls have been uncovered and then restored as feature

panels in the bathroom, contrasting well with the white tile-work and suite, and terracotta floor

### HOW TO GET THERE AND WHAT TO SEE

- The nearest French airport is Perpignan, which is 15 minutes drive from Ille-sur-Têt.
- Fly to Perpignan from London Stansted, Southampton and Manchester airports.
- The French-Spanish border is just half an hour's drive away, and Narbonne and Barcelona are one to two hours' drive.
- Ille-sur-Têt is between two mountain regions, making it ideal for scenic hikes or bike tours.

number of the walls, to show off the lovely natural stone. The ceiling rafters were exposed and oiled, and the roof raised, to increase the ceiling height on the second floor.

I was keen to make use of local craftsmen, materials and designs wherever possible. I asked a local blacksmith to make the metal curtain rails for the bedrooms, and I made all the cushions and bedspreads myself. The furniture is a mixture of new and old pieces.

I still love travelling but it's also great to be able to work from home. This is an extraordinarily beautiful area, blessed with a wonderful climate, and the people who live here really take the time for the little things in life, which is what makes living here so enjoyable. 🏡

• Anne's B&B is El Pinyol d'Oliva: 10 Petite Place de l'Huile, Ille-sur Têt, France. Visit [elpinyoldoliva.com](http://elpinyoldoliva.com) for more details.

FOR STORE DETAILS SEE 'WHERE TO BUY' PAGE AT BACK OF ISSUE



The wall behind the bed in this guest bedroom is made of glass with an olive tree design in a metalwork panel