

# Chateau Haut Garrigue - Part 1

**Ever wondered what 'moving to the country' (a foreign one at that) and a completely different way of life, with two young children, is really like? Follow Seán and Caroline Feely's tale of the realisation of their long-held dream to live and work on their own wine-farm in the beautiful Dordogne, South West France.**

'They're putting Jolly on the truck!' shouted Fia in anguish.

'That's right- so he can go to France. We'll see him again in a few weeks when the moving truck brings him over for us,' I said.

Moving house is a difficult enough concept for a two-year old, but moving country? We were in the process of moving all our worldly goods from our comfortable house in the city to our new wine farm in France. It was the start of a long journey where almost everything we wanted was 'in the moving truck' as Fia put it.

exactly what we were looking for – a house with ten hectares of contiguous vines within a walk of a village and school. As Ellie had no passport yet, my husband Seán went viewing on his own.

My best friend for those few months was 'Noctura', a homeopathic sleeping pill that is acceptable for breastfeeding mums. Maybe that had something to do with the fact that we were moving to a foreign country (and a property I had never physically seen) where we hardly speak the language to do something completely new with two very small children...

got onto the aeroplane a few weeks later our luggage was piled about two storeys high on the trolley. Travel cots, car seats, buggies, changing bags... Ellie (six months old) watched the chaos unfolding with calmness and wisdom beyond her months.

Seán was adamant that we drive straight to our new property although the owners were still in situ. All I wanted to do was to turn around and go home...

Within an hour we were driving into Chateau Haut Garrigue. There were no welcoming signs, no long avenue of trees, no impressive entrance... just the farmhouse and outbuildings at the end of a heavily potholed road.

We got out of the car amid a swirl of cats and dogs. The buildings and the house were more rundown than I expected but the aspect took my breath away. The classic U-shaped French farmhouse and outbuildings were located on a plateau perched above the Dordogne Valley. The entire property had magnificent views. I was momentarily stunned by the opportunity and the massive task of renovation it presented. The photos had not prepared me at all.

Within days of our arrival we had a new bank account, a new car (with aircon- in summer it reaches 30 most days) and a new life. Fia was registered for école maternelle 5 minutes from our new home. I had realised just how rusty my school French was and Seán had realised that his 'Alliance Française' French was non-existent.

Ellie got her first tooth while we were in a chambre d'hôte (Bed and Breakfast) waiting for the property transfer to complete. We had vomiting, sleepless nights, an upset tummy and a really sore bottom alongside limited access to a washing machine and no bath or baby bath. It was an 'interesting' start to our life in France. I began to wonder if it was all a huge mistake but we were too far in to change our minds...

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Ellie was a mere two months old when we first saw the property on the internet. It was

Although we tried to travel light (and didn't seem to have much of what we needed) when we

It was a glorious day when we finally moved into Chateau Haut Garrigue. Myriam, the owner of our chambre d'hôte, took Fia, Ellie and me to our new home as Seán had gone to collect our new furniture. She loaded us up with gifts – hand-me-down toys for Fia and bottles of fig jam- and called out 'Bon Courage' as she left. I felt mine fail.

I went into the dark, shuttered house... It didn't feel like home. It felt empty and run-down. I started cleaning cupboards. Some hours later when I was close to tears Seán arrived

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with the new furniture and appliances. By the end of the day we were exhasuted but we had an operational washing machine, dishwasher and fridge and one relatively functional bathroom. It was a virtual palace! A single flame on the old gas hob provided our only cooking facility. I added 'new cooker' to the already long shopping list. We had a picnic and toasted our new home with a glass of our very own 'Chateau Haut Garrigue' Red. It tasted great - thank goodness - as we bought the bottle stock as part of the purchase price.

A day later Fia started school. We somehow managed to find clothes and a suitable bag and got her there on time. Despite the new language, new place and new faces she walked courageously into the fray. Other children were crying but she didn't

even look back for a goodbye. The toys in the playroom and the new friends were more than sufficient distraction. A week later when we dropped her at l'école (school) she sobbed inconsolably and didn't want to be left. The thought that this was all a gargantuan mistake reared its head again. Perhaps the total upheaval of our lives was too much for her...

Fia stayed at school and was in good form that afternoon when I collected her. The following morning I was dreading a repeat performance. As we drove to school a little voice from the back of the car said: 'Mummy, I am not going to cry today.' That was the last we heard of it. Now she loves school so much she cries if she can't go.

**In the next instalment in the summer issue of ABC Kent follow the Feelys' progress as they confront a leaking roof and rout an infestation of mice that threatens to carry the baby away.**

## Grape Escape Gîte ...

*is a well-equipped 4-person self-catered accommodation wine-country house located on Haut Garrigue's 14 hectare vineyard and winery estate. It offers commanding views across the magnificent Dordogne valley from almost every window and is surrounded by vineyards. The property provides privacy within beautiful rural surroundings although just a 10 minute walk (through the vineyards) to the scenic village of Saussignac and a 15 minute drive to the historic town of Bergerac.*

*As our guests, you are very welcome to spend time with us to learn about our wine and winemaking, taste our wines and perhaps even take part in vineyard or winery activity, depending on the time of year and your energy!*

*Young children are very welcome, and most baby equipment can be provided if necessary.*

*Visit [www.hautgarrigue.com/gite.html](http://www.hautgarrigue.com/gite.html) for further details.*

## ABC READER OFFER ...

The Feelys are offering a selection of special edition cases (12 bottles) of vintage Chateau Haut Garrigue wine starting at £66 (including delivery to your door in the UK) for a limited period. Orders must be received by latest 31st March. To find out more please visit [www.hautgarrigue.com/ukwine.html](http://www.hautgarrigue.com/ukwine.html), e-mail [info@hautgarrigue.com](mailto:info@hautgarrigue.com), or tel. 0033 553 227271