



Your peace of mind, wherever you buy in France

## GETTING A SURVEY

*an independent point of view by Sian Lehrter of HSBC*

*It's not a necessity in France, but you're advised to carry out a survey before buying your French home to ensure value for money*

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**D**ry rot, subsidence, leaky roof. If you've ever experienced these nightmare scenarios, you'll know how important it is to obtain a proper survey before buying a new property.

British buyers might be surprised to discover it's not common practice to obtain either a valuation or a survey before buying a property in France. Except for specific cases, French lenders don't insist on this as part of their mortgage decision process. Usually, the purchase price is acceptable for their calculations.

If you want to avoid being saddled with a potential money-trap, it's a good idea to commission your own survey. You have several options. Your notaire (property official) or lender can recommend a few names, or else you find your own professional.

The ideal solution is to engage a fully qualified chartered surveyor. Unfortunately, though, they are currently few and far between. There are some 400 chartered surveyors in France, but the vast majority of these specialise in commercial property.

The good news is that more French professionals are choosing to become residential surveyors. They have to pass a rigorous training period-including a commitment to ethical standards. Their training involves a three to five year course at a university accredited by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, followed by a two-year vocational period in a firm. They are only allowed to practise after they have passed an assessment of professional competence.

The other main alternative is to find a British surveyor who specialises in French property. There are quite a few of these. Or else you can look for another professional such as an architect, who sometimes offers this service.

Good places to search are the small ads section in French property magazines (see the Property Services category of the Petites Annonces section starting on page 110). Remember, before agreeing to use a British surveyor, it's advisable to check they are bilingual, up-to-date with the latest French building practices and have experience of old properties, if appropriate. Don't forget to ask about fees, whether they are inclusive of VAT and whether out-of-pocket expenses are included.

Many people often confuse valuations and surveys-but they are substantially different. A valuation states the valuer's opinion of the current market value and the property's suitability as security for a

proposed mortgage. Although the valuer will visit the property, it is not a structural survey and must not be relied on to identify any structural defects present in the property.

A survey gives a far more detailed structural report on a property, carried out by a building surveyor rather than a valuer. This will cost you around 1,000-1,500 euros (£700-1,050), depending on the size and the type of property in question, and should reveal any hidden defects. It can even save you money, as it's possible for people who have a survey to go back and renegotiate the price of their property.

Once the survey has been carried out, you will receive a written report. On average a survey will be carried out within two weeks of your initial request. It takes a further two weeks before you receive the results.

It is possible to have conditions such as a 'subject to survey' condition included in the compromis de vente that you will be asked to sign when you decide to buy. Such a clause is known as a 'suspensive' and gives you extra power to renegotiate on price, should any defects be found.

Changes in the French law also now require sellers to provide reports covering lead, asbestos and any termite infestations found within the property. But remember, the purpose of a survey is not to put you off your proposed purchase—it's to make sure you are fully aware of what you are buying.

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