

Meet the reader...



Jane and her labradors outside their townhouse

FULL NAME: Jane Hanslip

AGE: 54

JOB: Runs her own holiday rentals agency, as well as themed holidays: riding, gastronomy and language learning.

WHERE: Le Bourdil Blanc in St-Sauveur-de-Bergerac in the Dordogne.

CONTACT: Telephone: 00 33 5 53 22 76 08

Mobile: 00 44 77 68 74 76 10

Rentals: www.dordognerental.com

Riding holidays: www.dordogneriding.com

French total immersion language holidays:

www.frenchinthedordogne.com

French gastronomy: www.dordogneweekend.com



WHY BUY THERE: BERGERAC

■ Situated in the southwest of the Dordogne *département*, Bergerac is known as the 'gateway to the Dordogne' and its own airport makes it an excellent base to explore the beautiful surrounding countryside and *châteaux*.

■ Bergerac is a busy, modern market town with an historic old town and harbour. A foodie haven, it's famous for its AOC wines, *foie gras* and truffles.

■ The average price for a house in the Bergerac area is €200,000. Prices soared between 2001 and 2004 following the introduction of budget airline flights to Bergerac, but the property market has now peaked, according to agents.

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Le Bourdil Blanc, the perfect setting for a themed holiday

Busy in Bergerac

Self-confessed Francophile Jane Hanslip bought her elegant Bergerac home on impulse while she was on holiday in the area back in 1989. Now with four business ventures, two labradors and plenty of renovation work still to be done, she talks to **Rebecca Chappell** about her busy, sociable life

In 1989, investment banker and management consultant Jane Hanslip was living a fast-paced existence in London, and had every reason to think that things could not possibly get any busier. That was before she bought an imposing 18th-century manor house, just outside Bergerac, on impulse after a holiday to the Dordogne. For a number of years, she lead a triple life as a City worker, renovator and holiday letting agent, travelling between France and London on a regular basis to keep on top of things – before the days of budget flights!

Jane eventually moved to her French home permanently in 2003, but instead of things finally quietening down, a slide in the holiday rentals market forced her to rethink her options. To stay ahead of the game, workaholic Jane decided to set up not one, but three more businesses. She now provides riding holidays, French language learning immersion courses and gastronomy weekends alongside her holiday rentals agency.

Busier than ever, Jane maintains a hands-on approach to all her ventures, and is particularly proud of the immersion courses, which she believes are the best and most enjoyable way to learn the language.

FRENCH MAGAZINE: What attracted you to life in France?

JANE HANSLIP: I have always been a Francophile. My father, who was a fluent French speaker, introduced me to the pleasures of France when I was young and I spent a month in France every summer from the age of 13, learning the language by spending time with host families. I studied French and German at university and also used the language during my work in London. Apparently I had told a close friend at the age of 25 that my life plan included buying a lovely manor house in France, which I had totally forgotten about until several years after I had bought my house, Le Bourdil Blanc. It must have been a subliminal wish that I managed to make come true.

FM: What preparations did you make before you went out?

JH: None! It was 1989 when the first wave of buying in France was happening. I went on holiday to the South of France due to the good weather, but I found the Côte d'Azur too built-up and too full of international people; not French enough for me. Visiting a friend in the Dordogne shortly afterwards – with no

intention of buying a house – I ended up buying the first house I saw, Le Bourdil Blanc! I could tell that it was a very special place, but I guess I can be described either as impulsive or foolhardy!

FM: Describe your property.

JT: Le Bourdil Blanc is an 18th-century *gentilhomme* (manor house) and is just ten minutes outside Bergerac. It has eight bedrooms with eight en-suite bathrooms plus a heated pool, a tennis court and a lake stocked with fish. Within the grounds, there's a restored *pigeonnier* with another two bedrooms and a bathroom where I live. Le Bourdil Blanc is ideal for large family holidays or, since it has separate parts, it can be rented separately to smaller groups of 2-4 or 6-8 people off season.

FM: Did you have to do much work to your property?

JH: Yes, and I do it every year as the money comes in. I have had the property for 17 years and I still have projects to do for another five years. It's continual unless you do it all upfront with an enormous amount of money. One of the mistakes I made was to underestimate the amount of maintenance work this property required just to run: the electricity, heating, garden, cleaning and so on. And the amount of bureaucracy involved in hiring staff and doing annual tax returns.

FM: How did you get started with your businesses?

JH: The rental business has developed over time through meeting a lot of French people in the area and by their seeing how well I rent the Bourdil for myself. People understood that I am here for the long term and can understand their concerns about renting their cherished family properties; and that I know how to market their properties to UK and American clients. In short, by word of mouth and recommendation. Now more and more English people are asking me to rent for them to take advantage of my website position.

Over the years, the rental market changed and I could see that it would be harder to attract holiday-makers. I pre-empted this by going into riding holidays and French language holidays and now gastronomy to fill up the off-season months, where there is so much competition for not much demand. This has taken a great deal of effort and paperwork.

The riding holidays are now a big success as it is great riding country. I have extremely good staff running it, am very close to the airport and the food and drink are superb. My language holidays are probably second to none, as I have



À table! Guests on the language learning holiday enjoy an immersion into French food and conversation

“I went on holiday to the Dordogne with no intention of buying a house and ended up buying the first property I saw. I guess I can be described either as impulsive or foolhardy!”

a wonderful teacher and as I speak French fluently, we do total immersion courses together, so people make enormous progress and it is great fun. We take people around to visit the Dordogne and since I have written a local guide book, I know where to go and what to see in this wonderful region. Gastronomy classes now follow within the French course or separately for a long weekend or a week. I have teamed up with a local French *cordons bleus* teacher and we will visit *foie gras* and truffle farms and do wine tasting.

FM: What have been your main challenges?

JH: At the beginning, the only challenge was to have enough energy and the finances to do a really demanding job in London and to be able to then come to Bergerac via Bordeaux (the low cost airlines were not running then) every three weekends. I supervised the restoration work and then managed the rentals from afar, making sure that my clients were being looked after in my absence. But every time I arrived something went wrong and had to be fixed! Then the accounts had to be done at the end of the year.

The change in the rental market was also a challenge. Initially, I rented Le Bourdil Blanc for around 24-26 weeks a year, then it dropped to about 12 weeks over a two-year period. This was due to the low cost airlines bringing more

Brits over, who changed from being clients to competitors. They first of all invited their friends for free and then rented properties out to the British, so it was a double whammy effect on both supply and demand.

Since I moved here permanently, the challenge has been to continue to restore the house and juggle builders with holiday-makers, and of course there's the continual battle with bureaucracy. It has been hard to recruit staff to help me in the office who can speak French and English and who want to work, so I have just too much work to do to enjoy my idyllic surroundings. Lastly, rural life in France as a single person can be lonely. I need to find someone to share my life with, aside from my two lovely black labradors.

FM: How have you benefited from the move?

JH: Financially I have managed to replace my City earnings with a French-based business which has paid the loan off, given me an income and allowed me to restore the house, but it has been a long hard slog. In three years I will have paid off the mortgage and be able to benefit properly from all this work.

I plan to travel three months of the year, as this part of the Dordogne gets pretty dead from November through to the end of April so it is good to get away. »

“My ideal life would be to spend two months maximum a year in London, as I do love city life, six months where I am in the Dordogne and the rest of the year travelling around the world”



The riding school take a break to enjoy a glass of wine; Jane talks shop with her language teaching partner, Alexandre



FM: Have you found it easy to integrate into French life?

JH: Yes, but that's because I speak French and I am enormously appreciated in this part of France, as I rent the local people's houses and finance their lifestyle. I also try to not have too many English friends!

FM: What advice would you give someone considering setting up a business in France?

JH: How you treat people is very important. You need to shake hands and smile and say *Bonjour Monsieur et Madame* before you start any conversation. You need to take your time to build up relationships with them and understand their point of view. You also need to speak French or at least try to – they really do appreciate it – and you need to try and understand what their values are and what makes them tick. Ask for professional advice before doing anything, as once you have it, it makes life so much easier and there's no corner cutting. If renting property, use your intuition with clients and if suspicious, say no. Also, make sure there is a large deposit in place to cover extra costs and keep your sense of humour! You also need to operate legally; the French are really beginning to start cracking down on tax evaders.

FM: Do you go back to the UK regularly?

JH: I go back to see my family and friends and, until recently, my website designer. Now I have a new designer who lives in France.

FM: What do you miss about the UK?

JH: I miss London, the cinema, films in English (I must persuade the Bergerac cinema to run films in *version originale*), cappuccinos, the theatre and being able to find good staff as and when.

FM: When is your favourite time of year?

JH: Spring or autumn. In the summer there are too many people here, whereas in winter, this area becomes extremely quiet.

FM: Can you describe a typical day?

JH: There is no typical day. When the riders and language learners are here, I am with them for breakfast. I go to the office after they have settled in to their activities, and then meet them again for lunch and then tea and dinner. It is a lot of social interaction and laughs. During the day, I deal with emails galore from and to clients and suppliers for all my businesses.

Off-season, my time is taken up by dealing with builders for the ongoing renovation work, and I spend my evenings either alone with the dogs or having dinner with friends. I love to travel, and try to get away at this time of year while it is quieter; my last trip was to India.

FM: What have been the reactions of your friends and family to your move?

JH: Fine, they have all been very positive because they know how much I love France. My mother has even recently decided to follow me out here to live.

FM: What are your plans for the future?

JH: My mother is coming to live here in France with me, which is proving tricky with all the paperwork involved, but she will be much happier here as the medical system and long term care is second to none. My ideal life would be to spend two months a year maximum in London as I do love city life, six months in the Dordogne and four months travelling around the world.

FM: Do you plan to stay in France permanently?

JH: Yes, it is permanent. I find that values in the UK have changed; now there's too much inequality, the infrastructure is poor for health, transport and education. There's a lack of security, high crime rates and the weather is not that great either. [fm](#)



Jane's horses graze lakeside in the grounds of Le Bourdil Blanc