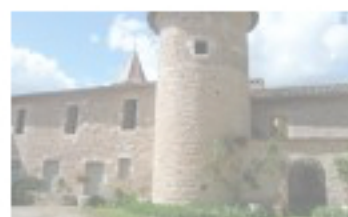


## Great escapes in faded French wineries

Creating luxury holiday retreats in crumbling French wine châteaux may be old hat to one Irishman – now the idea is catching on



Château St Pierre de Serjac



Frank McDonald

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Karl O'Hanlon is at it again. The Dublin-born developer's French company, Domaine & Demeure, has acquired another chateau in Hérault to transform into something special – an elegant combination of hotel, holiday homes and vineyards producing Languedoc wine.

He's done it already with Château les Carasses, a late 19th century conical-turreted fantasy near Capestang, on the Canal du Midi. Now his focus is on Château St Pierre de Serjac, near Espondeilhan, where his father Redmond once part-owned a holiday home with the late Terry Keane.

Attractions in the area include Narbonne, with its wonderful covered market; Béziers, which has a 13th-century cathedral and a highly regarded Musée des Beaux Arts; and the fortified town of Carcassonne, which is served by Ryanair. Aer Lingus flies directly to Toulouse.

O'Hanlon's thinks his latest project will appeal to well-heeled retirees who haven't lost their money on bank shares or highly-leveraged buy-to-let investments. "I sold the first duplex to an English couple and the second to Americans. Eleven are gone now," he says.

Other developers who looked at Château St Pierre de Serjac two years ago wanted to build 400 houses on the 85-hectare estate, but the local mayor wouldn't hear of it.