

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

Topics: Karl O Hanlon

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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.