

French real estate investment in London: current trends

THE CHANGING PROFILE AND BUDGETS OF THE FRENCH IN LONDON IS DRIVING A TREND TOWARDS BUYING PROPERTY FOR LIVING AS WELL AS LONG-TERM INVESTMENT ACCORDING TO **SÉGOLÈNE CHAMBON**, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF **FRENCH TOUCH PROPERTIES**

London has always been a favourite destination for the French, not only for tourism but increasingly for work and living. The evolution of French tax legislation, and London Mayor Boris Johnson's promise to roll out the red carpet for 'talented French people' have made London an even more attractive proposition, while many of the French who came to London years ago as expatriates, workers or students have no intention of ever moving back to France.

More than 200,000 French people are registered with the French embassy as residents in London but as this procedure is not compulsory and many don't make the effort, the actual number of French residents is estimated to be up to 1 million in London alone. This invasion generates a parallel market for estate agents. The main drivers are understandable; families tend to stay close to French schools, hence look to live in areas such as South Kensington, Brook Green, Notting Hill, Hampstead, Fulham, Ealing and Clapham. Single people or young couples seek trendy locations such as East London, Islington, Angels, Barbican Centre or Chiswick.

A recent trend is the reduction in the number of French people on expatriate contracts. Those who have switched to local contracts often end up moving to smaller residences, but try to stay within the same neighbourhood, as areas such as Notting Hill or Chiswick have a village and community feel. Before long, many become concerned about the vast amounts of money they lose each month in rent and start thinking about the alternative – buying!

French buyers are now looking not only for the right family house, but also the right investment. And as far as lucrative investments are concerned, London is a very big deal. Property prices have been climbing for the last 20 years, even during the crisis, and nothing would indicate that this trend is about to change. London is



West London kerb appeal

the capital of the world and there are always wealthy foreigners who want to buy in London, keeping the market dynamic.

So is it still all about location? Not necessarily. London is an ever-moving and developing city, with newly emerging 'trendy' areas that are still undervalued. Is it worth going a bit further away from the centre? What about buying a house in a bad state to renovate and extend?

Thanks to long-term regeneration, areas such as Earl's Court, West Brompton, Battersea, Nine Elms and White City are well positioned for investment. They are family friendly, popular and only a stone's throw from central London. Other opportunities are arising from massive investments in the public transport network. For example, a French family who decided to buy in Ealing because it is a nice place with a French school, now realise they made a great investment as the new Crossrail will link Ealing to Canary Wharf in 26 minutes by 2019.

London is a city where it is still possible to find a bargain or an opportunity next door. Just ask our consultant who bought a house in Hammersmith eight months ago for £680,000, fully refurbished it for £180,000 and has just had it valued at £1,050,000! ■