

Courting desire

Sarah Francis reports on a moated château set in beautiful countryside yet within striking distance of Paris

Some 80km from Paris, in the heart of the countryside, you might be pleasantly surprised to come across this utterly charming historic moated château, tucked away on the edge of a small village between Rambouillet and Chartres. It's peaceful and secluded and yet within easy striking distance of the capital – only an hour's drive away. Even more compelling, however, is its romantic history. If only its ancient walls could talk, what a tale they would tell of the days when it was, once upon a time, the love nest of the King of France and his mistress.

The origins of this delightful 'sleeping beauty' date back to the 15th century, when it was



built on the site of an older property, possibly dating as far back as the 11th century. Originally the seat of the Barons d'Ecrosnes, the château was

acquired in 1674 by Louis XIV as a gift to his then mistress, Madame de Maintenon, who subsequently became his second wife. Widowed very young at the



age of only 25, Françoise Scarron was appointed to act as governess to the, then illegitimate, children born to the Sun King by Madame de

Montespan. Her diligence in this role brought her to the attention of the King and, when the Queen died, he took her as his second wife. She retained a considerable influence over Louis for many years to come, especially in matters of religion and piety. When she acquired the château, she is reputed to have written to her brother: 'It is beautiful, a noble edifice.'

At the time of the Revolution, the estate was subsequently confiscated and sold to a local farming family, in whose possession it remained for almost 200 years. While they tended the estate, the château was abandoned and fell into a dilapidated state. It was only rescued in 1989, when its present owners bought the property and began the slow and painstaking task of meticulously restoring it to its original glory, taking care to retain its authenticity and yet managing to combine this with the installation of modern day comforts.

Gates lead into a driveway lined with trees. To the left is a large open barn, perfect for parking cars or to store sit-on lawnmowers. To the right is the

pretty little stone chapel, probably the oldest building on the estate. While structurally sound, it is in need of interior restoration. Opposite the château, two long barns, dating from the 19th century, are at right angles to one another forming an 'L'. These offer an ideal opportunity to create a caretaker's lodge or guest house, or would be equally suitable for seminars, offices or some other form of commercial use. The larger of the two barns has recently been re-roofed. The gravelled driveway leads to a stone bridge which spans the moat and to a splendid arched oak doorway in the tower.

The moat is fed by a river which crosses the property to the rear. To one side is a boules pitch, beyond which is another smaller stone building. The grounds have been entirely landscaped with lawns, orchards, lavender bushes and attractive beech hedging.

On entering the château, to the left is the salon, a bright room with double aspect and mullioned windows, exposed-beamed ceiling and a pretty stone fireplace. The floor is of original polished tomette tiles.



Beyond this is the dining room, also with tomette-tiled floor, exposed-beamed ceiling and an impressive stone fireplace. Steps lead down to the fitted kitchen beyond. To the right of the hall is one of the four en-suite bedrooms, with a further small room used as an office with internet connection and so on. A small spiral stone staircase leads down to the vaulted wine cellar, which runs under the entire area of that bedroom.

On the upper floor are three more en-suite double bedrooms, all spacious and beautifully appointed. There is also a laundry /linen room with

The château dates back to the 15th century and is accessed by a stone bridge spanning the moat. The dining room, shown above, boasts a tomette-tiled floor, a ceiling of exposed beams and impressive stone fireplace

storage space.

Additional accommodation could be provided in the attic. Electricity and pipework are in place, but at present it is just an open space with the chimney breast going through to the tiled roof. The bedrooms and bathrooms are all carpeted. □

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