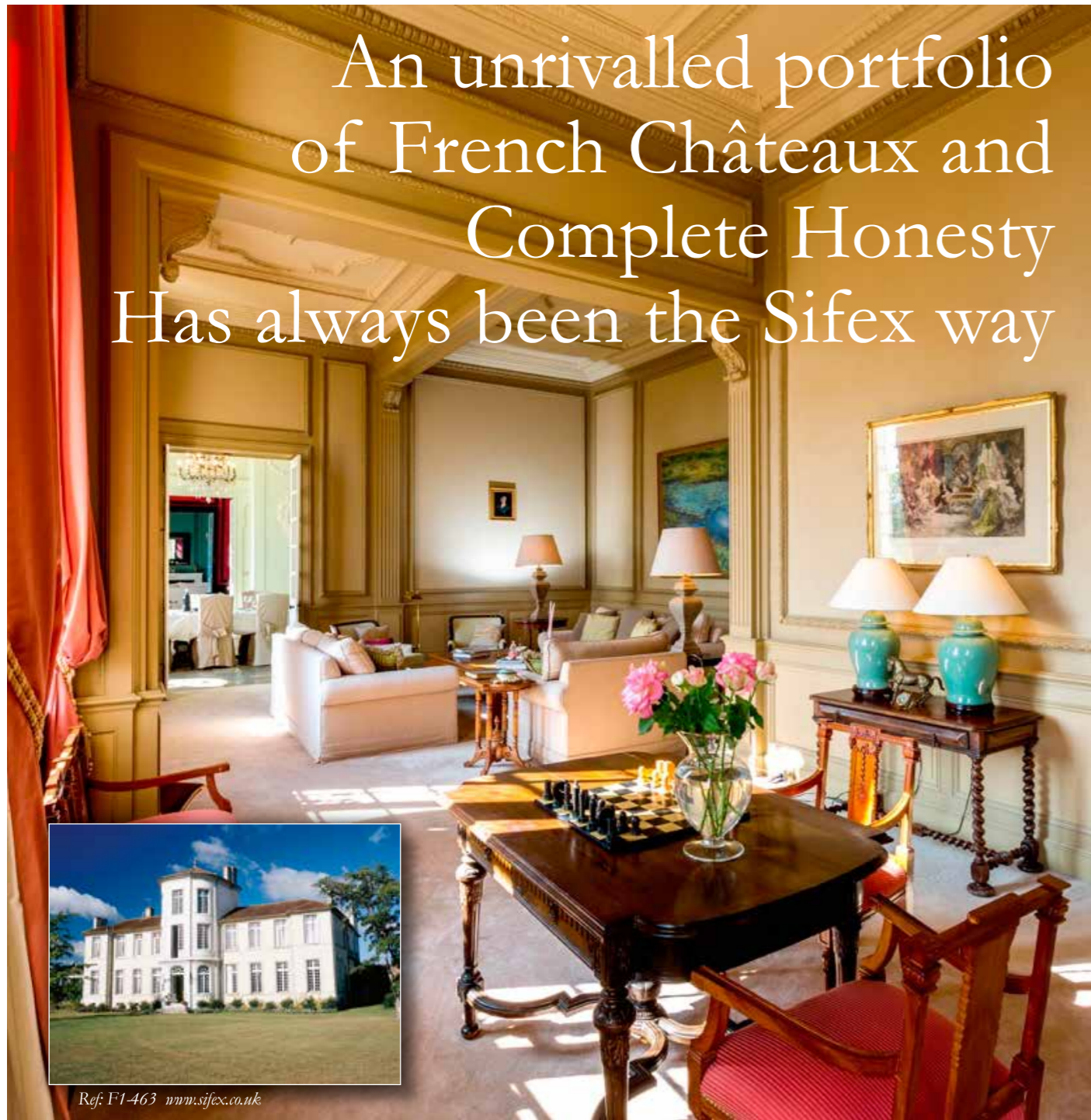


An unrivalled portfolio of French Châteaux and Complete Honesty Has always been the Sifex way



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“Our colleagues in France know how much we care about the experiences of our applicants when searching for a property. They also know we endeavour not to waste the time of buyers, agents or vendors.”

Sarah Francis – Director of Sifex

When the parents of 10-year-old Sarah Francis introduced her to the joys of Southern France it was the beginning of a glorious journey into the world of the historical Châteaux. Before the war her father cycled across this great nation. Now, he and his wife were ready to introduce her to the finer aspects of all things French, including staying in Relais & Châteaux hotels en route for the ‘South of France

Back in 1988 bemoaning the fact she wouldn’t be returning to France for a year, a girlfriend revealed they had just snapped up a house near Bourges St Maurice. There appeared to be a ‘buying boom’ in French property; everyone who could was climbing on the bandwagon of bargain buys to be found over the ‘Manche’.

Sarah told The Good Property Guide: “My career in French property started off covering Brittany and Normandy and expanded into Picardy and the Pas De Calais when I joined forces with another agency.

This resulted in the creation of ‘Sifex’ as it is known nowadays (Société Immobilière Française Extraordinaire - which tended to make the French smile). Becoming UK appointed representative for the FNAIM (Fédération Nationale de l’Immobilier) in Normandy was the next step along the way.

Intrigued by a sheaf of Châteaux details she was handed ‘to sell’ by a Toulouse agent at a London property exhibition, Sarah decided to investigate. She was whisked around the Gers by a charming young English agent, continually making expansive gestures towards the horizon.

“Owning a Gascon house with stunning views of the mountains, I now know exactly what he meant, but in the heat haze of that first summer’s day in Gascony the much sought after ‘views of the Pyrenees’ were not on view.

Despite the torment of visiting endless elegant properties with fine pools, on a day so hot I could only dream of ice cold Perrier, my introduction to the beautiful and reasonably priced properties in the South West had a marked effect. Shortly afterward Sifex moved its focus to the southern half of France.”

The arrival of the internet revolutionised the property business, flinging open a worldwide window on the French Château market for English speaking buyers. Sifex was amongst the first to have a website, and eventually that same Toulouse agent persuaded Sarah to expand her portfolio to cover properties throughout France.

Over the years Sarah has dealt with various celebrities, high-flyers and extremely high earners and had some interesting encounters along the way. One would lead to her professional involvement with two big A-listers as she explains: “One Monday morning while sorting out the garden rubbish for the dustmen, a very British sounding banker from overseas rang wanting to pop round for a meeting and look through our files (pre-internet). He had decided to buy a Château in France. I had just time to do a bit of ‘power dressing’ before opening the door to a fresh faced smartly suited man, seemingly far too young to be CEO of securities for one of the best known banks in India.”

Fast forward and the young lady from Texas who he subsequently married also came to see the Châteaux he had selected. Their itinerary was arranged and of the many properties they visited, they selected a most unusual and striking Château, bordering the Landes and the Gers with a classical XVIII Century façade on one side and a Hispanic façade on the other.

Their globe-trotting lifestyle eventually forced them to sell the property, but not before building up a successful rental business letting it to various Hollywood stars, understood to include Hugh Grant and Penelope Cruz. Within striking distance of the coast, the mountains and Eugénie-les-Bains, with that rarity - a Michelin three starred restaurant in its 39th year, the Château has just come back on the market again.

In the beautiful Auxois countryside, Sifex lists a splendid late 18th Century listed Chateau, tastefully and comfortably restored with three magnificent reception rooms and fourteen bedrooms. It also offers period outbuildings for hosting weddings or other commercial ventures, and enjoys easy access to Paris, the South of France and the great Vineyards of Burgundy.

Would-be Château owners embarking on a quest to realise their dream, need stamina and



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determination. They also need the wherewithal not only to buy, but also to maintain their unique piece of French history.

Sarah added: “Caution needs to be exercised against pouring money into endowing a Château with state of the art mod cons, an investment which may not necessarily be recouped. One of the most desirable yet most difficult things to find nowadays is a Château, well maintained yet untouched, complete with period features.”

Sifex has the advantage of autonomy, offering an unbiased overview of what is available. They go to great lengths to try and uncover any potential blights or ‘nuisances’ as the French call them. It is vital not to disappoint clients who have travelled far with great expectations.

A visionary serial entrepreneur commented ‘By the way - love dealing with you. Your style is great, direct and open’. Investing in a property

overseas requires great belief and trust in the broker. Honesty is a non-negotiable essential in the Sifex ethos.

For those seeking the vineyard life-style, Sifex are fortunate to work with extremely successful and competent vineyard experts covering the appellations around Bordeaux and the Languedoc, Provence and Rhône Valley.

Sarah says: “We have a reputation for sending serious clients to look at beautiful properties. We take great pleasure in trying to find that elusive irresistible property that may appeal. We believe that we do make a big difference.”

The simple truth is for the purchasing of any French Château, Sifex are the global leaders.

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