



Fate led Chris Jubb to this lovely property in Limousin



Full stream ahead

Looking for inspiration to add impetus to your search for a French home? **Glynis Shaw** catches up with a Yorkshire woman in Limousin and hears her heartwarming story

A riverside watermill in an area of outstanding natural beauty. Sounds like a dream French property, doesn't it? Well, Moulin d'Arnac in the Limousin department of Corrèze, close to Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, is the dream made real and the story of owner Chris Jubb is very much a tale of real life, with all its twists and turns of fate.

Chris used to work for a French hotel chain, so visited France a lot and loved the country. About 14 years ago, she and her husband Ken thought they would be settling in Yorkshire to take care of Chris's mother, but when her mother passed away, they realised they were free to follow their idea of moving to France. However, finding the right property wasn't easy and they spent a year viewing houses in Dordogne and Lot, none of which quite matched up to their vision.

Then, on yet another visit to the office of a local agent, they were looking through her files and came across Moulin d'Arnac. It had literally just gone on the market and the owner couldn't be contacted, so Chris and Ken jumped in the car to see if they could find the property. After driving through and around the village of Nonards without success, they spotted a man coming out of the *mairie* and stopped to ask if he knew of the mill house.

"Actually, Moulin d'Arnac is my house," he smiled. "Follow me."

Mill tales

"As soon as we went over the bridge to the mill, we knew," remembers Chris. "There was this beautiful house in a secluded paradise, complete with lovely grounds, a mill pond and

pigeonnier, all set right beside the River Menoire. At last our search was over – if we could do a deal with the owner."

A tour of the property left the Jubbs even more certain that the mill was for them. Immediately, they drove to the house of a friend right up in Chalons, Champagne, to ask him to use his fluent French to call and negotiate on their behalf.

"Within 10 minutes, we had a deal and Ken went down to sign the *compromis de vente*," Chris says. "Six weeks later we were back to sign the contract and the property was ours."

The Jubbs soon discovered that Moulin d'Arnac had quite a history. The mill's two acres of parkland adjoins the grounds of the 15th-century Château d'Arnac, which in the early 20th century was owned by a French lady married to a Scotsman. The story goes that the couple had the Duke and Duchess of Windsor to stay several times prior to World War II.

There has been a mill on the site since the 14th century and it was always at the heart of village life, being used to grind local staples, such as chestnuts and walnuts as well as corn.

"One day a lady in the village told me that when she was a little girl, she used to go with her father in his cart to the mill and she would do the family's washing in the river while he took his corn for grinding," says Chris.

"We heard some amusing tales too – like the miller's pig that lived in the *pigeonnier*, along with the chickens and ducks. Apparently, he was a handsome specimen and from far and wide people would bring their female pigs to be served by him, some even walking up to 15km. So he was one busy pig, but the story

This page: Set beside the River Menoire, Moulin d'Arnac is surrounded by two acres of parkland which adjoins the grounds of the 15th-century Château d'Arnac

Facing page clockwise from top: The beautiful gardens to the front of the property; the mill pond creates a feeling of peace and tranquillity; the *pigeonnier* is full of character and the story goes that it was once the home of the miller's pig as well as chickens and ducks

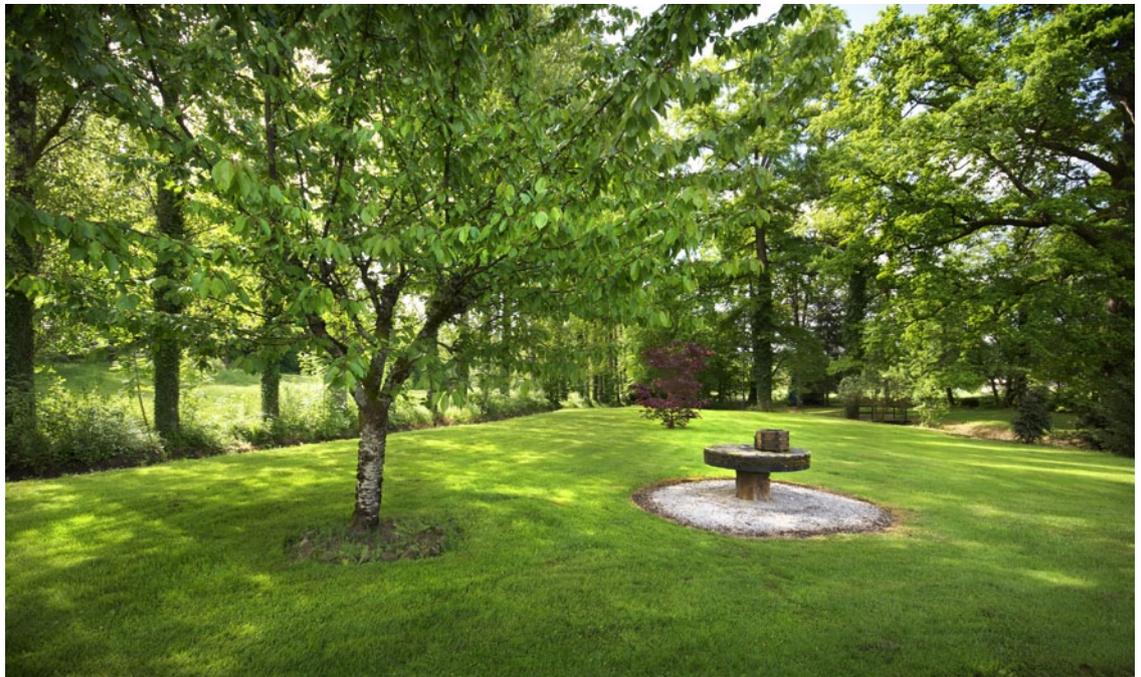
goes that he was allowed a rest on Sundays."

It soon became clear how pivotal Moulin d'Arnac had been to many peoples' lives, and the villagers were very welcoming and open to Chris and Ken. Perhaps part of the reason was that, with new owners, the mill had been saved from ruin. It had last been used in the 1970s and then fallen derelict for two decades.

"The previous owner had carried out a massive restoration and I think he had planned to hold events there, because he turned almost the whole of the mill's ground floor into a massive *salle de fête*," explains Chris. "This was too big for us, so we divided the space. We now have a lounge with a wood-burning stove and French windows to the garden, a panelled entrance hall with storage cupboards and a dining room with a glass floor over the mill race, which is floodlit at night. You can see the fish in the water, and we've even seen an otter."

Hosting holidays

The Jubbs had decided that they would like to run gîtes and host visitors for holidays at the mill, so they created a two-bedroom apartment in the separate *grenier* or grain store, a three-bedroom self-contained apartment in the main 'Miller's House' and a studio sleeping ►



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Top to bottom: Chris and Ken divided the large downstairs space to create a lounge with a wood-burning stove and French doors leading out to the garden; the kitchen has plenty of room for cooking and eating; exposed beams are an attractive feature in the master bedroom; the panelled entrance hall offers useful built-in storage

two people in the pretty *pigeonnier*. Visitors can appreciate the character, quality furnishings and peaceful setting of the mill as well as take advantage of the outdoor space and the chance to play badminton and *pétanque*, use the shared pool or fish in the river.

The mill is also easily accessible, at around 45 minutes' drive from the airport at Brive-la-Gaillarde, and there is plenty to see and do in the area. The medieval town of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne is a five-minute drive and offers bars, restaurants, shops and a weekly market.

"Every Monday night in summer, the town has a farmer's market where you can buy local produce and then queue up to barbecue your meat," explains Chris. "Everyone sits down to eat together, there's live music and it's just a great atmosphere."

Village support

Three years after the Jubbs moved in, tragedy struck as Ken's heart condition meant that, after experiencing his fifth heart attack, he sadly died quite suddenly.

"Everybody expected me to go back to England," remembers Chris. "But this is my home and I was determined to stay. Almost immediately, my neighbours and people in the village came forward with help and support. I appreciate so much how welcoming and embracing this community has been. There's a gentle pace of life and everybody is so relaxed.

"Now I'm an active member of the *French-English Rencontre* group, where we meet and discuss a topic. The British speak in French and the French members, most of whom are retired professionals, practice their English conversation. I even hold an English tea party at the mill once a year and invitations are snapped up with relish."

Chris has continued to run the gîtes and to host both holidaymakers and househunters who want to stay for a month or two and sample life in the area while looking for their own dream property. But now she feels it's time to retire and move into a smaller house, so she has placed her beloved mill property on the market – although she doesn't plan to go far, so devoted is she to the area.

"Moulin d'Arnac is quite a flexible property and I personally feel that it would make a beautiful family home for the next phase of its life, either as a permanent home or for holidays," says Chris. "The summer kitchen and lounge would be an excellent space for children and the separate apartment could either be incorporated back into the house or kept as accommodation for guests.

"The *pigeonnier* would make a lovely studio or work space – or that could be guest accommodation too. One thing is for sure: I know that whoever does move in will come to love the mill as much as I have." ■

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 (Moulin d'Arnac is ID 160222 and is on the market for £700,000)