



A picture is worth a thousand words, but this view of Paris's Eighth Arrondissement is worth \$30 million.

# How to Buy a Paris Apartment

*A new wave of companies catering to Americans and a vibrant real estate market are turning the City of Light into a turnkey experience.* **BY CHRISTINE MUHLKE**

**R**eal estate: the ultimate souvenir. Who during a vacation doesn't dream of owning a Tuscan villa, a Greek island, a French Quarter townhouse? (Well, that was several years ago.) During a business trip to Paris in 2004, my eye was lured to the window of a real estate agent's office. A one-bedroom apartment for \$350,000? The wheels began to turn.

Within a year, as the dollar continued to tank and the Paris market was enjoying a *bulle* (bubble), I was able to get serious—although apartments under \$375,000 were not very common. I fell in love with Montmartre for its villagelike character and excellent shopping, as well as the Ninth Arrondissement for its stately residential calm and the gourmet food on Rue des Martyrs. I soon began searching the addictive classified sites Explorimmo.com and

COURTESY EMILE GARCIN

Seloger.com, which a Parisian friend told me is the best way to see everything on the market. I also looked in the trendy Marais quarter but realized that 17th-century beams—and hordes of tourists—weren't my thing. The prices in Montmartre were gentler compared with the in-demand arrondissements, like the tony Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth, and the hip Third and Fourth, where prices for a 500-square-foot one-bedroom start at around \$700,000\* and can go up to, say, \$140 million for a *hôtel particulier* on Rue de l'Université.

Although I'd majored in French literature and spent my "year as a

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broad," as my father dubbed it, in Paris, I soon found that real estate French was a whole new game. By the time I was ready to schedule viewings, my stock phrase was "*Parquet, moulures, cheminée*" (wood floors, moldings, fireplace): all part of my Haussmannian vision. I quickly learned to ask how recently the building had been reroofed and *ravalé* (cleaned and repointed), if there were plans to install an elevator—all charges that are divided among the occupants—and if the bedroom was on the street or courtyard side.

Between broker appointments, during which I learned that places that look great on the Web could be rather triste in person, I stopped into an agency on Rue Caulaincourt to ask about some of its offerings. Soon I was on the fifth-floor balcony of the most charming (little) apartment, looking out over all of the city on a rare clear day and wondering how my boyfriend and I could make this happen.

In the end it was both simpler and more difficult than I expected. Buying in Paris is fairly easy for Americans since there's no such thing as board approval, and the standard down payment is only 5 percent

\* At presstime, one euro equaled \$1.41.

## Très Chic

### EMILE GARCIN

33-1/42-61-73-38;  
33-1/40-73-84-48;  
emilegarcin.com

#### PLACE DES ETATS-UNIS

**LOCATION:** Eighth Arrondissement, near the Avenue Montaigne

**KEY FEATURES:** A 6,450-square-foot top-floor apartment with an expansive view

**OTHER:** Parking included

**PRICE:** \$30 million

#### RUE VIEILLE DU TEMPLE

**LOCATION:** Fourth Arrondissement, near the



Picasso Museum and the Place des Vosges

**KEY FEATURES:** 4,370-square-foot apartment in an 18th-century *hôtel particulier*

**OTHER:** The apartment has a 1,000-square-foot garden and comes with parking.

**PRICE:** \$13.8 million

#### RUE DU PERE GUERIN

**LOCATION:** 13th Arrondissement, in the charming Butte aux Cailles quarter

**KEY FEATURES:** A 1,500-square-foot, three-floor private house in perfect condition. Stairwell area has multistory windows and a glass roof for a solarium effect.

**OTHER:** Laundry in basement and parking available for rent

**PRICE:** \$1.48 million

### DANIEL FEAU

33-1/53-23-81-81; feau-immobilier.fr

#### AVENUE DE FRIEDLAND

**LOCATION:** Eighth Arrondissement, near the Arc de Triomphe

**KEY FEATURES:** A four-bedroom apartment, built around 1900, completely renovated and modernized, with a Boffi kitchen

**OTHER:** Views onto treelined streets

**PRICE:** \$3.4 million

#### VILLA MOLITOR

**LOCATION:** 16th Arrondissement

**KEY FEATURES:** A 10,700-square-foot free-standing house from the early 20th century, with nearly an acre of landscaped grounds

**OTHER:** Terraces, outbuildings (including a caretaker's cottage), and garages

**PRICE:** Upon request

### PLACE DES VOSGES

**LOCATION:** Fourth Arrondissement, in the Marais, on one of the oldest squares in the city



**KEY FEATURES:** 1,765-square-foot duplex apartment in an old private mansion.

**OTHER:** Cobblestoned courtyard, exposed wood beams, fireplaces.

**OTHER:** The building has an elevator and the apartment comes with two basement storage spaces.

**PRICE:** \$3 million

#### PARC MONCEAU

**LOCATION:** 17th Arrondissement

**KEY FEATURES:** A three-floor, five-bedroom private house from the late 19th century, with an elevator

**OTHER:** An 860-square-foot garden and two parking spaces

**PRICE:** \$7.4 million

### SOTHEBY'S

33-1/42-44-24-00 or 33-1/44-94-99-80;  
sothebysrealty.com

#### RUE DE VERNEUIL

**LOCATION:** Seventh Arrondissement, in the heart of St.-Germain-des-Prés

**KEY FEATURES:** 800-square-foot apart-



ment with a living room, dining room, study, and fully equipped kitchen

**OTHER:** A private, treelined terrace

**PRICE:** \$1.3 million

#### QUAI DES JEMMAPES

**LOCATION:** Tenth Arrondissement, in the hip Canal St.-Martin neighborhood

**KEY FEATURES:** 1,500-square-foot four-floor apartment with three bedrooms, on the corner of a 19th-century building

**OTHER:** The living room has a working fireplace. Master suite has walk-in closet.

**PRICE:** \$1.75 million

#### RUE DU FAUBOURG ST.-HONORE

**LOCATION:** Eighth Arrondissement, near the Champs Élysées

**KEY FEATURES:** A 9,000-square-foot three-floor townhouse with a private garden and terrace

**OTHER:** Five-car garage

**PRICE:** \$24 million

to 10 percent. If you deposit 20 percent in an investment account, certain banks will provide 100 percent financing and renovation loans. Mortgages from French banks have become easier to get in recent years, because of increased competition from international banks (rates are generally between 4 percent and 5 percent). With prices, annual taxes, and fees that seem tiny compared to those in Manhattan and London, “Paris is the last affordable big destination city there is,” says Carol Polakoff, who sells fully loaded *pieds-à-terre* through her company, DPF Holding. “There’s still an overwhelming number of Americans who want to buy here, even with the weak dollar.” And with an average yearly appreciation of 10 percent, things look better still. (Note: Don’t buy to flip. If the apartment is sold within five years, the capital gains tax is 33.3 percent. It decreases annually for the next ten years.)

Securing the apartment can be a relative cinch, and it doesn’t require your being there. But before you buy, consider renting in the neighborhood during tourist season—what seems quiet in November could be hell in July. Once you’re set, you can have the initial sale contract notarized at a French consulate in the United States. But then there’s the process of navigating

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the system—the closing is handled by a *notaire*, a state-registered real estate lawyer who, between his fee and transfer taxes, collects around 6 percent of the selling price and can represent both the buyer and the seller. You’ll also have to deal with contracts in 18th-century *legalese* as well as try to wrap your head around French inheritance law, which is state-mandated: Every child, even from previous marriages, is ensured an equal share and American wills are not honored. Also, upon the death of a spouse, the survivor is required to pay a 20 percent inheritance tax based on the property’s value. Forming a *société civile immobilière*,

equivalent to incorporating, can alleviate this. In other words, hiring an English-speaking lawyer is key.

I had help from a great fixer, Annaliese Ellidge, who translated contracts and set

up my electricity and insurance accounts. She also found me a painter, plumber, and locksmith. When hiring workers on your own, remember that it’s almost impossible to fire people in France. Also, emergency services (say, plumbing) are practically nonexistent, so unless you get a property manager, your vacation time could be spent doing repairs. “It’s essential to have someone you trust to go through the process with you,” says Kathleen Murphy, who had assistance from Parisian friends when buying her 17th-century carriage house in St.-Germain, which she rents out when she’s not there. And it’s natural to want to rent out your place, but be advised that any profit earned through this is taxable, even if you’re a nonresident. More critical, however, do not get French tenants—depending on the type of lease, they may have the right to indefinite occupation.

Top-tier buyers are increasingly using companies such as Just France Sales or high-end real estate agents like Emile Garcin and Daniel Féau, which find the apartment, hold your hand through the closing, and do everything from setting up cable to decorating, a popular option among investors who just want to show up and find their favorite Diptyque candle burning. Expect to pay these fixers handsomely, with apartments starting at about \$850,000 for 500 square feet near the Luxembourg Gardens. Agencies like Garcin specialize in desirable properties such as a 4,500-square-foot residence on the Place Victor Hugo.

Those who choose to renovate from afar have their own issues, from managing contractors to meddlesome neighbors. “If I hadn’t had a French architect, I don’t know what I would have done,” says Barbara Howard. After gutting her 17th-century *piéd-à-terre* in the Fifth Arrondissement, she was hassled by her next-door neighbor, who believed her renovation wasn’t historically accurate enough. Neighbor vanquished, Howard now finds bliss on her terrace three times a year. Her only regret? “I would have bought a smaller couch,” she says.

For me, the hardest thing was waiting the standard 60 days to close. Or maybe it was hoping the dollar would rally before I wired the money. But when I’m sitting on the balcony, I can’t imagine a better lifetime investment. As Howard says, “Once you’ve lived in Paris, part of your heart is there.” ■

## Americans in Paris

**C**ompanies that specifically cater to U.S. buyers, such as the following, are often well worth the expense. They provide a variety of services, among them helping buyers navigate Paris’s large for-sale-by-owner market, serving as proxies at closings, and offering properties that have been gutted and fully renovated.

### NAMES TO KNOW

**A + B Kasha**  
33-1/45-44-08-10; [abkasha.com](http://abkasha.com)

**Abodes Abroad & Associates**  
718-599-8805; [abodesabroad.net](http://abodesabroad.net)

**Demeures Parisiennes**  
[demeures-parisiennes.com](http://demeures-parisiennes.com)

**DPF Holding**  
33-1/40-26-10-87; [yourplaceinparis.com](http://yourplaceinparis.com)

**Just France Sales**  
610-407-9633; [justfrancesales.com](http://justfrancesales.com)

**My Home in Paris**  
33-1/49-96-60-80; [myhomeinparis.com](http://myhomeinparis.com)

**Paris Real Estate Finders**  
33-1/53-21-98-44;  
[parisrealestatefinders.com](http://parisrealestatefinders.com)

### ENGLISH-SPEAKING LAWYERS

French real estate laws are complicated and can vary greatly from those in America. An attorney who can explain things clearly to a buyer is vital.

**Alexis Agoquet**  
33-1/53-23-94-22; [aagoquet@agoquet-avocats.fr](mailto:aagoquet@agoquet-avocats.fr); [agoquet-avocats.fr](http://agoquet-avocats.fr)

**Jonathan Eastwood**  
33-1/47-23-37-08;  
[jonathan.eastwood@wanadoo.fr](mailto:jonathan.eastwood@wanadoo.fr)

### ENGLISH-SPEAKING FIXER

A veteran of the Paris real estate world can help where your broker or lawyer can’t, assisting you in navigating everything from contracts to contractors.

**Annaliese Ellidge**  
33-6/61-72-99-16;  
[ellidge.annaliese@neuf.fr](mailto:ellidge.annaliese@neuf.fr)

### NOTAIRE

No deal is done until the *notaire* gives it the stamp of approval. *Notaires* generally represent both the seller and the buyer.

**Jérôme Le Breton, Le Breton & Associés**  
33-1/44-11-12-13; [jerome.lebreton@paris.notaires.fr](mailto:jerome.lebreton@paris.notaires.fr); [jeromelebreton.com](http://jeromelebreton.com)