

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE

A philosophical approach to life in France

by Karen Barnes

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a woman in possession of her own mind must be in want of a quiet life. Picture this tranquil lifestyle in the French countryside. Awake to prancing dust particles illuminated by dazzling rays of early sunlight streaming through slats in precariously hanging shutters. Take a leisurely stroll along the arguably miscalculated 2km lane to the nearest town, shaded by towering plane trees, their planting reputedly ordered by Napoleon to protect his troops from the midday heat as they marched into battle.

First linguistic challenge: the boulangerie. Salivate in anticipatory delight at the scent of freshly baked pastries and baguettes. Next, the local épicerie. Fresh fruit, vegetables, and a plethora of produce intimidating to the untrained eye. Finally, the boucherie for a faux filet, or the poissonnier for a filet de saumon. Stop at the tabac for a café au lait and a chat with the proprietor. He loves to practice his English, or so he says when he hears his beloved French being massacred.

Afterwards, home to the 19th Century detached stone house with a large garden for Max, the

ageing labrador cross. Adopted a week after moving in because the previous owners left him behind in the barn, from where he barked relentlessly until his rightful place was restored in front of the open fire. Surrounded by beautiful countryside, the house overlooks a lake in which Max loves to swim. He loves also to flop down in front of the fireplace to dry his fur on the expensive Bokhara hand-knotted rug, hastily purchased to hide charred floorboards; despite what the agent said, they are not an original feature.

Choking on hazardous down-draught from the now-condemned chimney, follow sensible Max to the garden, where ivy hugs the house like a spurned lover refusing to leave. Gloves on and tug. Oops! Google specialist stonemasons in France. On the upside, the view from the bathroom window has improved.

A romanticised reminiscence of a first Christmas feasting on oysters and champagne is reduced to a gruesome flashback of oil-fired heating clanging its way into solidarity with striking farmers. Fair enough. There being no suitable firewood available for delivery this side of New Year tests resilience

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE

Anyone who could oblige with a few tide-over logs has flown to Spain for the winter, and French neighbours have a suspicious glint in their eyes whenever paths cross, which is often thanks to the right of way clause. Max turns frantic circles, sniffing the rug for a dry spot, gives up and gazes wistfully at cold grey ashes in the fireplace. Solution: a ferry crossing to spend Christmas with family in a warm house in England. Max gets seasick.

A fortnight later, tired of the told-you-so lectures and arguing that comparing France with England is like comparing courgettes with apples, a bittersweet longing to return kicks in. Force-feed Max an anti-seasick tablet and race back to a stomach-lurching smell and the local cat population asleep on the bed. Stuff happens. New Year, new hope. Will not be defeated. Max rolls his eyes. Indifferent cats shrug and move on.

Spring blooms with fresh optimism. Although Max has denied digging up the lawn, there are little mounds dotted all over it. At least the house has dried out. At the sound of La Poste van, beat Max to the front door in time to see Marianne's image on A4 envelopes being forced through the letterbox. A sudden chill creeps up the spine. Even Max looks concerned. Pour a glass of wine. Make a start on the burgeoning to-do list instead. Request recommendations for trades through the local Facebook group. The best ones are all busy. Quelle surprise. Seeming to want to get it off their chest, someone private-messages their own sob-story-turned-life history regarding a plumber who qualified on the ferry from England. Got the picture. No need to be so graphic.

Pour another glass of wine, and with trepidation, open the post. Two speeding fines. Max raises a reproachful brow. Take the bottle of wine and Max

outside to watch the deepening blue sky explode in brilliant hues of orange, pink, and purple, shimmering light on the glossy surface of the lake. Nirvana.

The awe-inspiring vista is soon interrupted by a group of French neighbours exercising their right of way, pulling a mini trailer draped in le tricolour. Google how to say, no fly-tipping in the lake please, in French. They leave the track and head towards the house, cursing as the trailer rattles over uneven, weed-strewn ground. If only they knew a landscaper who replied to emails. Something portentous in the way Max sniffs the air makes the skin tingle. What if the flag is a message? They don't want une étrangère living here. Even Max holds his breath.

Then, in a grand unveiling, they remove le tricolour and lift out: a portable gas heater, a bottle of gas, a tray of intimidating produce from the épicerie, a homemade chocolate gateau, a case of wine. They've even brought their own corkscrew, glasses, and – wait! Is that a rotavator?

'Bienvenue en France,' they merrily chime.

...and breathe.



YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE



YOGA B

Move well, Feel well, Age well

HOW MIND, BODY, AND MOVEMENT SHAPE OUR WELLBEING

As humans, we evolved to move, walk, lift, stretch, and adapt to our environment for survival. Yet modern life presents new challenges. Busy social lives, aging, chronic illness, long cold or rainy seasons, and extended periods of sitting can all reduce our physical activity.



Over time, this can lead to stiffness, lethargy, back pain, and reduced mobility. The good news? For most of us, it's never too late to change course.

Understanding the mind-body connection and the importance of movement can help us restore vitality and long-term wellbeing.

SMART GOALS	
S	SPECIFIC State exactly what you want to accomplish.
M	MEASURABLE Use smaller, mini-goals to measure progress.
A	ACHIEVABLE Make your goal reasonable.
R	REALISTIC Set a goal that is relevant to your life.
T	TIMELY Give yourself time, but set a deadline.

Our mindset plays a crucial role in how we care for ourselves. The mind is powerful; it can motivate us or hold us back. If we believe that change is too hard or that it's "too late," we're far less likely to take action.

When we approach movement with curiosity, self-compassion, and possibility, motivation becomes much easier to access. Your mental attitude is your greatest asset.

Changing habits doesn't require drastic action. In fact, small steps are often the most effective.

- Set realistic, meaningful goals that are specific and achievable.
- Start small, ten minutes of movement a day is far better than none at all.
- Celebrate progress, however minor it feels, and reset goals as you go.
- Most importantly, notice the messages and thoughts you are having with yourself. Replace "I can't" with "I'm improving." Even on cold winter mornings, when motivation is low, the sense of wellbeing after moving is almost always worth the effort.

Movement looks different for everyone, so finding what you genuinely enjoy is key. Walking is one of the most underrated forms of exercise, it is low impact, accessible, and mentally restorative, especially in nature. Group exercise or sports, can add social connection and accountability, while one-on-one training allows you to work at your own pace with support.

Even a short morning stretch routine can set a positive tone for the day.

As we age, strength and flexibility become essential. Maintaining muscle supports posture, balance, and independence, while stretching helps to keep joints mobile and counters the effects of prolonged sitting. Practices such as yoga, Pilates, or simple bodyweight exercises can make a significant difference.

We only get one body, and while it's easy to take it for granted, small daily actions can add up. Standing on one leg while brushing your teeth, stretching while watching TV, or improving posture during phone calls all count. Caring for your body today is a physical, mental, and emotional investment in your future wellbeing.

If you would like some support getting started or guidance on what to do, contact Beryl Evans, yogabfrance@gmail.com.

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE



Is AI Making Us Lazy?

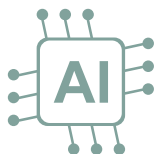


We all love a helpful shortcut. Today, artificial intelligence, or AI, can write emails, answer questions, and organize our thoughts in seconds. It's a fantastic tool that feels like magic. But there's a hidden risk if we lean on it too much: it can quietly make our minds lazy.

This isn't about being physically tired. It's about what happens when we stop using our own brains for certain tasks. Think of your mind as a muscle. If you always use a machine to lift weights for you, your own muscles grow weak. In the same way, if we constantly let AI do our thinking, our own mental strength can fade. We might start to lose our personal touch in communication, letting our own voice become generic. We might stop feeling the need to learn deeply, settling for quick answers instead of true understanding. Over time, we could even forget how to patiently work through tricky problems on our own.

The goal isn't to avoid this amazing technology—that would be silly. The goal is to use it wisely, as a helper instead of a replacement. Try to begin your tasks yourself; write that first sentence or brainstorm those initial ideas before asking AI to polish them. Make a conscious effort to keep learning in the old-fashioned ways, through reading and conversation. Most importantly, just pause and ask yourself if you can do part of the thinking on your own before you ask for help.

AI is here to stay, and that's a good thing. But our own ability to think, create, and solve problems is our most valuable skill. Let's be sure to use this powerful tool to support our amazing minds, not to let them fall asleep. After all, you don't want your brain to get so comfortable that it starts asking AI to come up with its own funny article endings... wait..... did it?



Wil Schmitz



The Connexion

FRENCH NEWS IN ENGLISH SINCE 2002

NEW CIVIC TEST FOR FRENCH RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

From 2026, most applicants under 65 must pass a new French civic test when applying for a first multi-year residence card, a 10-year carte de résident, or French nationality. The only exemption is for people whose medical condition makes taking the test impossible.

The computer-based test lasts around 45 minutes and includes 40 multiple-choice questions on French values, institutions, rights and responsibilities, history, culture and everyday life. There are three different levels, depending on the type of application. Candidates must book and pay for the test themselves (around €70–€100).

Applicants following the Contrat d'intégration républicaine will receive civic training through Office français de l'immigration et de l'intégration.

Intensive French courses to help support your residency and citizenship

As you have read in the above news from the connection carte de séjour applicants will need to prove their French (A2 minimum) and pass a short civic test covering French society, culture, and services.

Annabelle's workshops help you build real, usable French and confidence in everyday situations.

Why learners love it:

- Small groups (max 4 people)
- 5 days of practical, focused learning
- Lunchtime conversation practice
- Amazing value: €499 for the week

Email info@assistvirtuallanguagesolutions.com for more information.

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE



Beaux Villages
IMMOBILIER

PROPOSED CHANGES TO SEPTIC TANK COMPLIANCE RULES

SPANC is considering changes to existing legislation to tighten enforcement around non-conforming septic systems during property sales.

Under current practice, buyers are typically granted a 12-month period, written into the sale contract, to bring a septic system into compliance. However, SPANC aims to ensure that these works are completed strictly within the legal timeframe.

One proposed measure could involve the notaire retaining funds at the point of sale to cover the cost of a devis for required septic works. In some rare cases, notaires have already refused to complete property sales where the previous buyer failed to carry out the agreed works within the timeframe set out in the contract. After all, the acte de vente is a legally binding document, signed and enforceable by all parties.

What can you do to protect yourself?

- Obtain a fosse inspection report early. Ensure you or your agent commissions a SPANC (fosse) report as soon as the property goes to market – ideally before listing – so there are no surprises later.
- Get accurate costings. Obtain a devis for remedial works or a replacement system. This cost may need to be reflected in your valuation and asking price.
- Soil test. Most areas now require a soil test to be done first before a Septic tank can be replaced to identify the type of tank and system the ground allows

- Check whether an upgrade is sufficient. In many cases, an existing system can be brought up to standard without full replacement, significantly reducing costs.
- Consider mains drainage. If a mains sewer connection is available in the road or nearby, connection is now a legal requirement for properties currently on a fosse or replacing their system.

Being proactive not only avoids delays and legal complications but can also make your property more attractive to buyers by providing clarity and certainty from the outset.

Feel free to get in touch with us if you need further advice

Nicola Summers

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LOCAL NEWS REWIND BELLAC

How did Rewind Bellac begin?

On a trip to Tasmania, we fell in love with a small cinema showing classic films on the big screen. When we came back to Bellac, we thought: why not here? So here we are... bringing classic movies, in original version with subtitles, to our home town

Films shown so far include:

Love Actually
The Fifth Element
Dirty Dancing

And showings coming up:

The Terminator

Follow Bellac Cinema to follow all films showing locally : [HERE](#) and Rewind Bellac : [HERE](#)

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE

MARGARET WIGHTMAN BUSINESS COACH



It's now nearly three years since I arrived in Bellac with my husband and two cats, and the first priority for me was to set myself up as an auto-entrepreneur so I could

continue to meet the needs of my existing clients.

Margaret

I'd been a freelance consultant since 2008, after having worked in and around the voluntary sector and social enterprise in the UK for all my adult life. Over the years I had worked with a fair number of consultants, some of whom had been impressive and earned their fees, but others had added little or no value, and I had always thought I could do better than them! So, in September 2008 I took the best decision of my working life, and went freelance myself, specialising in business and financial planning and reporting.

I had been planning this for some time, so had a number of potential clients who'd said they'd like me to work with them, but it was still nerve-racking waiting for the phone to ring, and a relief when it did!

During Covid I worked throughout the lockdowns, establishing a new pattern of remote working online, and although it's not quite the same as meeting someone face to face, it certainly beats sitting in traffic on the M62.

It was this change to remote working that made our decision to move to France possible. Without this, we would have stayed in the UK until retirement, instead of moving to beautiful Bellac and beginning our French adventure.

So some further insights

The new year brings a fresh opportunity to reflect on what went well in your business, what didn't, and what you can do better. I think it is worth using both a qualitative approach and a quantitative one to achieve this.

You can think in a qualitative way by reliving the highs and lows, working out what's worth doing again and what mistakes you can vow never to repeat. It's worth doing this with others, bouncing good memories off each other, and sharing cringes. This might be easier to face over a cup of coffee and some pastries, or a glass of wine or two... Either way, take notes so you can refer back later when you're planning your next innovation.

You can also do it in a quantitative way, by using the data at your disposal and analysing it in different ways. For example you could start by looking at when you get the booking / commitment from customers. What was the pattern? Were you booked up for the full year by the end of January, or did most people book a day or two in advance, or walk in on the day? If you work with the same clients over longer periods, how did your diary fill? Were people committing to a week's worth of work or three months' worth?

Look at the patterns of when you are busiest or not. Is it seasonal? Are you busier on weekends and public holidays? Compare sales quantities as well as income. Are you selling higher value products/services at certain times of year or is it the same every week?

But, don't just look at last year, go back further, analyse your data over 3-4 years if you can, to understand the longer-term trends. Are people booking for shorter periods or longer? Are people booking further in advance or leaving it later? Are your costs for the same service going up or down? Do you need to find a new supplier or renegotiate your contract?

You don't need to try to analyse everything at once, focus on one area – enquiries and bookings, sales, costs, staffing, and try to see the patterns over time. Once you understand the trends, you are in a position to really understand whether you're doing better or worse than last year, and what actions to take to help your business flourish.

Contact me to arrange a free introductory session
Margaret@margaretwightman.co.uk

Margaret's LinkedIn Page : [Margaret Wightman EI](#)

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE

5 EASY-CARE ORNAMENTAL GRASSES FOR CLAY SOIL



If you garden on heavy clay soil, you know the struggle: sticky and waterlogged in spring, then rock-hard in summer. The good news is that ornamental grasses love these conditions! Their deep root systems help drain the clay in winter and search for moisture deep down during dry spells. They offer maximum impact with minimal effort.

- 1. Giant Feather Grass (*Stipa gigantea*) – The Star**
Low-growing foliage, then from June onwards, huge, golden panicles that dance in the breeze (height: up to 2m). It laughs off both wet clay and summer drought. The seed heads look stunning right through winter.
- 2. Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*) – The Architectural One**
Forms a neat clump of blue-green leaves. In autumn, it puts on a fiery show as it turns golden-yellow, with stiff, dark stems holding delicate flower spikes. It actually enjoys heavy, moist soils, making it ideal for damper spots.

- 3. Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) – The Softie**
Elegant, arching foliage and fabulous, fluffy, bottlebrush-like flower heads in late summer and autumn. It dislikes winter waterlogging, but once established, it's very drought-tolerant. A good mulch for the first two winters will see it right.

- 4. Blue Fescue (*Festuca glauca*) – A Splash of Colour**
Forms neat little punnets of intense, steely blue foliage. It's incredibly tough and loves poor, dry soils. To keep its vibrant blue colour in clay, plant it in the hottest, best-drained spot you have, like a rock garden or slope.



- 5. Leatherleaf Sedge (*Carex comans* 'Bronze Form') – The Reliable One**

Not a true grass, but used just like one. Its soft, bronze, weeping foliage looks fantastic all year long and really warms up a border. It's perfectly happy with the damp, fresh conditions of spring.

A Planting Tip (Especially for Clay)

Don't just dig a hole in clay soil – it can turn into a watery pit that drowns the roots. Instead, plant on a slight mound or at ground level.

Mix plenty of sharp sand or horticultural grit into the planting area to improve drainage.

Water well only for the first year to help the roots establish deep roots. After that, they'll fend for themselves!

With these five, your garden will have movement and interest through every season, without needing constant watering or fussing. Perfect for enjoying the garden, come rain or shine!



LOCAL INFORMATION FOR THE SPORTY AMONG YOU!

In and around Bellac there is a wide range of sporting activities available to join through local clubs and facilities. Team sports include football, rugby, basketball, hockey, netball, volleyball and badminton, alongside tennis, table tennis and pétanque.

Martial arts such as judo, ninjutsu and Viet Vo Dao are available, as well as boxing and gymnastics.

Outdoor pursuits are especially popular, with cycling, mountain biking, running, trail, walking and Nordic walking organised locally.

There is also dance, roller sports and a public gym. Nearby areas provide horse riding, pony clubs and scenic hiking opportunities in the Monts de Blond.

How lucky are we to have all this on our doorstep!

www.Bellac.fr

YOUR NEW LIFE IN FRANCE

MEET THE TEAM



Natalie



Claudia



Wil



Geraldine



Natasha



Katey



Tom & French Plans Team



Lindsey



Annabelle

We can deal with any aspect of French administration and are part of a broader team of specialists who are ready to Assist.

info@assistvirtualsupportsolutions.com