

After three years of home ownership in the Dordogne our house was finally reaching the point where we had time to relax and enjoy our time versus working on home improvement projects. We were delighted with the homeownership experience and loved our time in Excideuil except for one downside, our dog was not in France with us. In early 2019 we went to work to resolve that issue. After a great deal of research, we overcame the logistical hurdles to bring our West Highland Terrier, Tavis, to France.

Our love of Europe was born when my husband was stationed in Germany in 1980-1984. We had our Scottish Terrier with us during that tour so knew how the Europeans loved dogs. We were young and adventurous and took every opportunity to soak up the European culture every chance we got. Over the next thirty years we traveled almost every year to some part of Europe always in the back of our mind that someday, just maybe, we would be able to find a small little abode that we could call our own. In August 2014 we decided it was time as our sons were grown, my husband had retired from two careers and time was ticking. Although we already spoke some German, which would be helpful living there, we decided that Germany was too cold. France was at the top of our list too, but we only knew about Paris and Normandy. Paris was too expensive, and Normandy was not as warm as we wanted. So, we started searching the internet for homes in various parts of southern France and only by accident came across the Dordogne. Where? We had never heard of the Dordogne, but the houses were reasonably priced, the climate mild and from the pictures we fell in love. We corresponded extensively with agents, used Google Maps to view the properties but finally narrowed down our search. In August 2014 we had a list of potential properties and we were off to find our dream home. We quickly found out that pictures do not show the entire story and although we were unsuccessful in our search, our visit gave us a great deal of information about home construction, values and the potential pitfalls to avoid.

Our second trip was in April 2015 and we had another list of potential properties. Although we still focused on rural properties on this visit, we found out information that proved to be decisive in our future hunt. We found some lovely cottages in the countryside but decided to start focusing on village properties due to new French regulations regarding septic tanks, “Fosse Septique”. This worried us as we were not sure what buying in the countryside would entail with inspections and potential costs.

We came back to Knoxville and continued our search via the internet. This time we focused on village properties that met of criteria for budget, size (about 100 square meters), access to services and within an easy drive to larger cities.

By September of 2015 we had narrowed down our list to five houses. We focused on the Périgord Vert region of the Dordogne. The first four houses were disappointing as either the villages were too small or there was too much renovations to be done. With us being in Tennessee and the language barrier we were not sure how we could take on major renovations. Feeling a little defeated we looked at our final house in a quaint village, Excideuil. Although it was over budget, I still wanted to see it and as soon as we walked in the door I gasped with excitement. The sunlight was shining bright on the golden stone walls, the ceiling had original wood beams, the upstairs had three bedrooms with ten-foot ceilings and there was a lovely walled garden. The house had been renovated except for the kitchen and a ½ bath downstairs. I wanted this house! I was going to get this house! Tavis would love this house! My husband David just smiled and said, "I think we are buying this house"!

Our timing was perfect as the dollar was very strong, which gave us more buying power, and the current British owners were anxious to sell. We had received some advice on how to proceed while visiting a local coffee shop filled with British and American ex-pats. So, before we set off to Saint-Émilion and Bordeaux for our trip home, we made an offer and hoped it would be accepted. We soon found out that the owners, who now lived back in England, agreed to our offer and made all the furniture available for a very nominal amount. To say the least, we were thrilled but also a little overwhelmed about what would come next. We are going to own a house in France!

When we returned home, we would begin a journey that would last six months. During that time we had to figure out the much-regimented French procedures for purchasing a home. No simple real estate contract or a closing in 30 days. We were fortunate that the seller was British and that the estate agent was in the United Kingdom. Additionally, they had employed a local English family to look after the house so they were very helpful during and after the transition.

During the next few months we established a bank account with a local bank in Excideuil, communicated with the utility company and the internet supplier. We purchased homeowner's insurance and stayed in almost daily contact with the owner's agent in England. Our contacts in Excideuil who spoke English were very helpful. We learned much about exchange rates and the ins and outs of how to wire money from the US to France.

In March of 2016 we returned to Excideuil, closing on March 12th at the local Notaire's Office who legally executes the sales contract. After about an hour going over fifty plus pages all in French, that we could not understand, we owned the house and the keys were given to us!

During the next two weeks we got to know our new home and the charming village of Excideuil. We cleaned, removed unwanted items, painted and made many visits to larger stores 30 minutes away using translator apps on our phones to communicate. We found a kitchen store that we contracted to renovate the 1950's kitchen to a lovely country French design.

We would end each day sitting in our garden listening to the church bells just around the corner. We laughed about the day's activities, the faux paus we made trying to speak French, while opening a bottle

of local wine and planning our next day's adventures. Our dream had come true, we were grateful. However, we still were missing someone that was part of our family, Tavis our Westie.

Finally in April of 2019 Tavis stepped on board our American Airlines flight from Philadelphia to Paris. He was a perfect gentleman enjoying the flight and in fact was far better behaved than the children on the flight. After getting our rental car we were on our way for the five-hour drive. Tavis finally arrived at his home away from home in Excideuil.

Tavis was happy to end his long journey and explore his new home. Tavis immediately fell in love with our garden. Our home was fortunate enough to come with a walled garden which was a deciding factor for us in making our purchase. Tavis quickly endorsed our decision by exploring and sniffing every square meter of the garden. By this time, like us, he was ready to settle down for a short nap until heading down the street for dinner. Tavis took in every turn and smell, you could see the excitement on his face, Viva la France!

During our three week visit to France Tavis joined us almost all the time. He only stayed at home when we visited grocery stores and museums since dogs are not allowed. When we returned home we would find him perched up on our new sofa as if to say, bonjour.

Tavis adapted well to the French way of life. He loved the two-hour French lunches and usually got a special treat before lunch concluded. He embraced every activity no matter if a walk in the village or a car ride heading to a new adventure. During our April 2019 visit Tavis got to visit Sarlat, Beynac, Domme and La Roque-Gageac, a small and beautiful village on the Dordogne River. We had never taken a boat ride on the Dordogne so Tavis joined us for a water adventure. He sat at the edge of the boat basking in the bright sunshine and taking in all the beautiful river views on this warm spring day. A post boat ride lunch was his big reward at a lovely restaurant by the river.

On Tavis's second trip to France in September 2019, he embraced Paris when we took the TGV from Bordeaux to Paris. Dressed in his finest France attire Tavis walked from Notre Dame to the Eiffel Tower receiving constant requests for photos. At one red light, the Hop-On Hop-Off bus was stopped at a red light and all the tourist on the top deck stood up to take photos. He was at ease with his adoring fans who had to have that perfect photo. At times, he had 5-10 tourist surrounding him shooting photos. He knew he was the hit of Paris and turned to pose for each tourist. Patient as always, Tavis knew we wanted one of him at the Eiffel Tower so with his red French beret perfectly positioned he waited for the sign that we were ready to take a photo. We then had a long walk back to the hotel in the Latin Quarter but Tavis being the trooper, kept up with us. By the end of the day Tavis returned to our small Paris hotel room exhausted from his twelve-kilometer walk. He laid on the bed and looked out the window just waiting for his next adventure.

As 2019 ends Tavis has logged approximately 16,000 air miles, 2,000 car miles, visited beautiful villages, savored many French markets, had bites of wonderful baguettes, enjoyed a boat ride on the beautiful Dordogne River, rode a French train and toured Paris. He has met many of our new friends that live in Excideuil. Several have their own dogs and Tavis gleefully enjoyed getting to know them. Tavis is learning French slowly, as we are. His adventures by themselves are amazing but more importantly having our beloved companion with us to share our French adventures has been priceless. After three years our home in the Dordogne is now complete. The final and best addition, Tavis the Westie is now at home with us in France. **La Vie est Belle!**