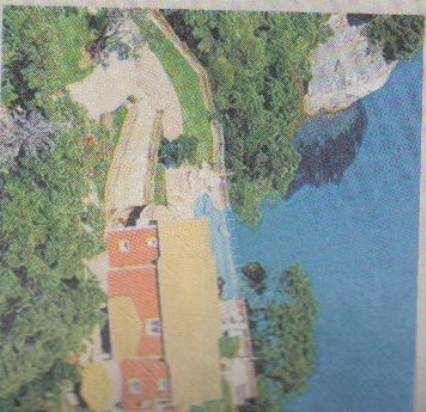


STRIKE OIL
Three more sun-kissed properties with olive groves in



Cortfu £2.4m
St Nicholas Beach house, in St Spiridon island, has 150 metres of sea frontage with anchorage point. A pathway winds from five-bathroom villa down the olive grove, 10 years old. Built last year, the property has reception, a gym/games room and a heated pool. www.dylesfor.com
020 7351 2383



STONE ME
For more mouthwatering properties in olive country, go to timesonline.co.uk/overseasproperty

of restoring. Prices range from £135,000 to £235,000. Each property has blue window frames, valley views — and olive trees in the garden (see panel, right).

"We all help each other in the village, which includes getting together for the olive harvest," says Conway, 72, who left London nine years ago and also grows figs, pomegranates, chestnuts, prickly pears, melons and passion fruit. "We lay down the nets, beat the trees, then combine the results to take to the press."

For olive aficionados, the choice of where to buy a home may even be dictated by the taste of the oil, whether it is the almondy manaki from Greece, which has the highest number of grove-owning experts; the peppery picual from Andalusia; the fruity calletter, from the Alpes-Maritimes, France; northern Portugal's earthy arbequina variety; or any of Italy's vast range of artisan oils, from robust Ligurian strains to delicate Sicilian flavours.

Yet the process can be tough, warns Michael North, who runs the website oliveoilclubs.com and advises people who have bought properties with olive groves and want to know where to start. "It's hard, especially if you're learning the ropes in local co-operatives," he says. "Your oil is only as good as another person's worst olives."

North insists that the quality of oil depends more on how much love and care you put into it than on the region from which it comes. And one tree will produce up to seven litres of oil — more than the average person's annual consumption — so you don't need a vast grove to become an amateur oil baron.

Kirsty Robson, 39, and her husband, Shaun, 40, from Stamford, Lincolnshire, have just eight trees in the grounds of their home in Afrata, western Crete, but harvest 350kg of olives each year. The couple bought the

The groves of Crete are popular with expats



Martred Mehlig/PhotoLibrary, Johanna Huber/Sima/Corbis Images

"Having an olive grove is part of the Provençal dream, along with the vines, lavender and boules pitch," Humphreys says. "And it needn't be a hassle if you delegate the running of it."

Those looking for the Mediterranean climate and a picturesque farmhouse on a tighter budget should try Portugal. Even on the Algarve, if you don't mind undertaking a building project as well as tending the groves, you can buy a ruin for less than £150,000. Algarve Property Group is selling a tumble-down pile near Tavira, with five hectares including carob and olive trees, for £135,000.

Or head inland, to the centre of the country. Two hours' drive from Lisbon is Salgueiro da Lomba, a mountain village with a permanent population of five. One of them is Robert Conway, a retired interior designer, who is selling nine houses that he is in the process

of restoring. Prices range from £135,000 to £235,000. Each property has blue window frames, valley views — and olive trees in the garden (see panel, right).

"We all help each other in the village, which includes getting together for the olive harvest," says Conway, 72, who left London nine years ago and also grows figs, pomegranates, chestnuts, prickly pears, melons and passion fruit. "We lay down the nets, beat the trees, then combine the results to take to the press."

For olive aficionados, the choice of where to buy a home may even be dictated by the taste of the oil, whether it is the almondy manaki from Greece, which has the highest number of grove-owning experts; the peppery picual from Andalusia; the fruity calletter, from the Alpes-Maritimes, France; northern Portugal's earthy arbequina variety; or any of Italy's vast range of artisan oils, from robust Ligurian strains to delicate Sicilian flavours.

Yet the process can be tough, warns Michael North, who runs the website oliveoilclubs.com and advises people who have bought properties with olive groves and want to know where to start. "It's hard, especially if you're learning the ropes in local co-operatives," he says. "Your oil is only as good as another person's worst olives."

North insists that the quality of oil depends more on how much love and care you put into it than on the region from which it comes. And one tree will produce up to seven litres of oil — more than the average person's annual consumption — so you don't need a vast grove to become an amateur oil baron.

Kirsty Robson, 39, and her husband, Shaun, 40, from Stamford, Lincolnshire, have just eight trees in the grounds of their home in Afrata, western Crete, but harvest 350kg of olives each year. The couple bought the

three-bedroom house, which was built by Snobby Homes, for £215,000 three years ago, and now live there permanently with their children, Hannah, 15, and Saul, 7.

While their Greek neighbours use strimmers to flail their olive trees during the harvest, the Robsons doggedly stick to the traditional method. "We lay nets on the ground, then use plastic tridents to beat the living daylight's out of the tree, bringing the olives down in a hailstorm," Kirsty says. "Shaun does the top, I do the lower branches and the kids sit on the ground, picking out twigs and leaves before scooping up the olives into a sack."

"Picking our olives is fun for the first hour. Then the kids moan about being pelted by a perpetual barrage of olives, backache sets in and by the end of the day the whole family is grumpy."

They soon cheer up, though. The harvest is taken to a press in nearby Kollimbari to make about 50 litres of fresh, peppery extra-virgin olive oil. The factory takes 10% of the yield or pays £2.60 per litre.

"We are left with more than enough oil for two years, until the next good harvest," Kirsty says. "It's a wonderful experience, being completely accepted in this community. It brings home the important things in life."

✚ Rachel Dobson's flat is available to let through ourpactrentals.com. Knight Frank, 020 7861 5120, knightfrank.com. Algarve Property Group, 00 351 289 792785, algarvepropertygroup.com. Snobby Homes, snobbyhomes.co.uk