

Elaine interviews: Michelle

Elaine: Michelle, thank you very much for taking time out on this not very pleasant morning if it's not freezing fog it's throwing it down.

Michelle: It certainly is, typical Brittany weather

Elaine: Sitting here like little drowned rats

Michelle: Good morning.

Elaine: We'll dry off by the time we've finished. So, to start with, when did you move to Brittany, was there any particular reason?

Michelle: Yes, my husband and I came looking for a holiday home in 2015 because he'd retired from the police in London, um and then we decided to just turn our lives around completely and make our home in the UK the holiday home and move over here full-time. Um so that's what we decide to do in 2015 so the criteria for the house we were looking for changed all of a sudden mid-visit and we ended up sort of a little small holding outside of Laniscat and that was in 2016 we moved here full-time.

Elaine: So actually well you're 9th anniversary this year.

Michelle: Yes, yes it's flown.

Elaine: Were you glad to make the move?

Michelle: Yes, I've never regretted it.

Elaine: Brilliant. That's the word I always love to hear, never regretted it. That's brilliant. So you're obviously now, not ready to retire so how did you become involved with Leggett's Estate Agency?

Michelle: Well I saw an ad I think it might have been in the CBJ I can't remember quite now, but I saw an ad for recruitment for Leggett and I thought that sounds quite interesting. So I thought what a great idea to help other people realise their French dream as mine had been so successful for me. So I enquired about it, spoke to the recruitment department down in the Dordogne. They sent me off to have a chat with one of the regional agents here and we we sort of got on very well and she told me the ropes and it seemed like a really exciting thing to do, so I went for my training, so we do 2 days online training, 28 hours of training all together, online 14 and then you do 2 days down at head office and then you're set off into the world.

Elaine: So you had to go down to head office in the Dordogne?

Michelle: That's correct for 2 days, so my husband made a holiday out of it, a little road trip

Elaine: I'm sure he did.

Michelle: And then once we'd done that you get lots of support, they don't just kick you out into the world of property real estate after that. We got lots of support from head office in terms of both the marketing, even materials they supply you with and they give you leads, um and then you have sort of a team around you that you can ask any question any time of the day or night if you want to. So, yeah, it's been really good so far.

Elaine: So had you had any previous experience in real estate as they call it in America?

Michelle: A little bit yes when I came first in fact the lady who sold us our house took me on to take on houses for her, so I wasn't really involved in the sales process as such, just in the taking on of the houses so that she could sell them. Um so I had a tiny bit of experience in that regard but it's been a bit, it's still been a bit of a baptism of fire in terms of the actual market over here, French market so difficult to the uk one.

Elaine: Well absolutely

Michelle: Different

Elaine: Different. Well it's a whole different process, the whole buying and selling because you just the one notaire who deals with both parties.

Michelle: You can, it's not necessarily the case. A lot of people would prefer to have their own notaire, particularly we'll see people coming from a market like America where it would be unheard of to share a notaire because they don't I think understand that the purpose of the notaire is more like a civil servant rather than a lawyer who's acting on behalf of a client, um so in that regard I tend to find my American clients prefer to use their own notaire which is no problem. Everyone works quite well together over here and all used to working with different notaires and different clients.

Elaine: I just find I mean I have been through the process a couple of times here, buying a house and selling one and buying another and whatever and I find it easy just to have the one dealing with all the bits because sometimes I can remember back in England the communication between the 2 acting for both of you was virtually nil sometimes.

Michelle: Yes I do recommend it to clients, we do recommend they use the same notaire and we try to explain the process to them how it's actually facilitating the process for all parties and most of the time that does happen but there generally aren't any huge problems if that isn't the case.

Elaine: So you are passed on contacts are you? Or do you have to find them?

Michelle: It's a bit of both. We use um our network or our sort of contacts so for instance I would say a lady will hear of someone who wants to sell their house let me know or if someone wants to buy a house, let me know for around this area and other times

then obviously because Leggett do such a lot of marketing the um the clients come to us via head office so if it's someone near me geographically I will get that contact from head office, um because there are quite a few of us on the ground. We are always looking for more people but there are quite a few of us on the ground.

Elaine: You mean here in Brittany there are quite a few around are there?

Michelle: There are there are lots around France. we have quite a big network. Um yes certainly in Central Brittany I work with quite a few colleagues.

Elaine: Do you get to meet up?

Michelle: Yes, we get to meet up for training we get to meet up for fabulous days where we have lunch and we all get together and chat about everything that's going on. We have Christmas dos. You know, It's very much, we're all independent agents but it is very much like a team, so you don't ever feel like you're on your own.

Elaine: No that's good because sometimes you could feel a little bit isolated.

Michelle: Exactly

Elaine: How is it, how do you come to value a house when you go to, you know, how does that work?

Michelle: Well we have a couple of apps that we use that Leggett furnish us with and we use them to get a median price in between one and another but also then because were on the ground looking we can use our own personal expertise and our knowledge of the local area to give you a better idea of the price. What I like to say to my clients is you can't price your house too high and you can't price it too low because too low people wonder what's wrong with your house and too high people will think they're priced out of the market, so if you want to put it at the correct price if that's ideal for selling the house then you sell quickly. There's sort of a myth that it takes a long time to sell a house in France, that's only the case if your expectations are unrealistic.

Elaine: I think sometimes that's coming if you're coming from somewhere else like from England, people because of the different value of property here it's obviously very much more reasonable

Michelle: Yes

Elaine: I think people sometimes expect when they are selling to put it at what I would call an English price,

Michelle: That can be the case and sometimes they're right, sometimes it is worth that much more when they've done a lot of work to it and what have you. But other times yes absolutely you have to be very careful not to be unrealistic if you want to sell the house.

Elaine: So do you show people round or do because I know it's a slightly different situation isn't it? I know here it tends to be an agent that will take you and the owners are not there or does it work

Michelle: That also depends

Elaine: Right.

Michelle: Sometimes the owners will prefer to be there and sometimes that helps because they can answer questions that you're given on the spot, other times it's best to allow the clients and the agent to go there on their own together so they can be honest about what they feel about the house. Instead of sort of saying it's marvellous, it's wonderful and then the owner thinks they've got a sale and they leave thinking well I didn't want to say it was awful, so you know it can depend.

Elaine: Tell us about what sort of properties have you covered that have left a particular mark on your mind.

Michelle: Almost every sale is different, and interesting for different reasons. I have a beautiful little chalet I sold down by the lake in Caurel that was absolutely beautiful, sold very quickly to an American couple actually from Texas who had emailed saying they want to offer the full asking price and of course anyone can do that, so I said maybe come and see the house first and she was there I think the following Friday so it was like 3 days later she turned up to see it and to make the firm offer and then I sold a petit manoir in Laniscat which was fantastic. It was in the middle of nowhere, farmland and then all of a sudden you come across this great big turret and this gated property and it was fantastic with a little river running at the bottom of it. So you get all sorts, absolutely all sorts of homes here and they're absolutely fabulous all of them I think.

Elaine: I think that's the attraction in a way isn't it? The variety of property that is available, I mean you don't come across these housing estates where every house is exactly the same, even they're all individual even on the lotissements.

Michelle: On the lotissements, yes they absolutely are and they're also sort of staggered so you don't generally have anyone over-looking you on the lotissements and also quiet.

Elaine: Yes.

Michelle: The neighbourhoods are really lovely and quiet, so I mean yes it's a completely different experience to buying a home in the uk and probably in the us and we're seeing a lot more us clients or I'm certainly seeing a lot more enquiries from the us now.

Elaine: Why do you think that is?

Michelle: Well I don't like to say in case it sounds political. But since November particularly.

Elaine: They're all beating a retreat, heading for the woods.

Michelle: Well they've just discovered France, that's probably what it is.

Elaine: I think that's the thing isn't it with America being such a vast place you get the travellers, the people who do travel and whose eyes are wide open to adopting a different way of life very enthusiastic and then there are others that don't even have a passport

Michelle: America's so huge though. I mean I understand completely when you sort of see people in America don't know an awful lot about the international market or the international stage and it's because America is so enormous they don't even have time to even look abroad, I think.

Elaine: So you're obviously kept very busy and on your toes. And you enjoy that?

Michelle: I love it. I have to say I've enjoyed even when you have ups and downs I've even enjoyed the downs as much as the ups, it's just such a varied job and it's really interesting

Elaine: So what about let's say, let's pick out difficult houses to sell, maybe its because the roof needs replacing as we've heard or .

Michelle: Difficult houses.

Elaine: Or septic fosse .

Michelle: The fosse septic they rarely conform, so that's never really an issue any more. If anyone is looking for more than a month they know that the septic tank is possibly going to be a problem. But I think there isn't really a difficult house to sell as such because if the owner listens and you work together and you get the price correct they will sell their house. So as I said I don't consider any houses difficult to sell. I wouldn't say that I think that the owners are difficult, but just that the process can be in terms of explaining how you need to get from you know wanting to sell it to having it sold and to get that done efficiently.

Elaine: Do you need to have a particular knowledge of French, spoken French?

Michelle: Yes, I think it's helpful to be bilingual, you can learn a lot on the job, you get support from head office

Elaine: So what would you say if you were recommending it to someone to maybe become an agent for Leggett, or what would you say is the best thing about it?



Michelle: I think it's meeting very interesting people and also if you're interested in how people decorate their homes or how they live it always helps to be a little bit nosy, because you're going to be shown around a lot of houses and I think just an ability to get on with people a sales background is helpful but you do get a lot of support from Leggett's in terms of that, so that's not necessarily a barrier either and I think, yeah I think just being a friendly out-going person who's willing to negotiate, willing to help people to realise their French dream or draw it to a close, then this is the kind of thing you should ring up Leggett and have a little chat with the recruitment guys if it's of interest to you.

Elaine: And then ask to speak to Michelle

Michelle: Absolutely, especially if you've got a house to sell

Elaine: Well, thank you very much Michelle and it's been great because I'm really interested in houses. I'm one of these people when you're sitting on a train in England sitting on a train looking into peoples

Michelle: In their back gardens.

Elaine: In their back gardens and their houses

Michelle: Thank you very much Elaine, it's been great.