

Localité heroes

An unloved French hamlet is rescued by have-a-go heroes Yip (left) and Paul

REALITY

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HELP! WE BOUGHT A VILLAGE

20 episodes

If you love shows like *Escape To The Chateau* and *A New Life In The Sun*, then you'll enjoy this new series, following couples who have bought entire villages across Europe and are slowly regenerating them. In the first episode, we meet Paul Mappley and David Ward ('Yip'), landscape gardeners from Kent who fell in love with the forgotten and decaying hamlet of La Buslière, nestled in rural Normandy.

'I'd been looking online at property in France and was amazed at how ridiculously cheap some of these places were,' says Paul, 47. 'A friend told us about a cottage for sale in La Buslière for £10,000. The minute we drove over the hill on to the lane, we knew it was a no-brainer, and that we wanted it. So we spent a week there in May 2019, and got our first cottage, plus the

tin-roofed one next to it, and a tiny building opposite.'

That was just the start of the couple's journey into becoming village owners, as they decided to rescue more of the neglected and overgrown properties that neighbour their own.

After striking a deal with the owner, they began hacking away at 25 years' worth of tree growth and other vegetation to reveal the rest of their investment, and negotiating its purchase for a bargain price.

'Suddenly, we were custodians of a potential village, and we'd got all this for €24,000!' says Yip, also 47.

'Unlike all the other gays in the world who have loads of money, us two don't! So it was still a huge amount for us, but it gave us the chance to become homeowners for the first

time – we'd been renting in the UK.'

'We really enjoyed clearing up the row of cottages, taking the ivy off and finding some beautiful stonework underneath,' adds Paul. 'We felt blessed to be the



ones discovering these gorgeous buildings.'

So how have they got on in the year since they moved there?

'We're definitely not builders, and we'd never done anything like this before,' says Yip. 'Paul's very capable, and he'll always have a go at everything,

apart from the dangerous stuff, like electrics. For the most part, we've been very successful. It's lovely finding out you are good at something new, and we wouldn't have been able to pay anyone to do it, anyway!

'Some people might say

we were nuts to take on all this with very little money or experience of doing up property, but it was worth it, and we're absolutely going to try our hardest to do something with each and every one of them.'

After a winter spent making sure their purchases don't suffer any further damage, the boys intend to rent out a vintage horsebox to paying holidaymakers this summer, to help fund their next step.

'It's on the paddock out the back, in beautiful scenery, and the plan is to rent that out and get some income coming in. As soon as we make some cash from it, we can start on the other work,' explains Paul.

'We want to get the apple cider press running to produce apple juice, and the bread oven working so people who come to stay can use it for pizzas,' adds Yip. 'We've got lots of plans, but just need to get the finances in to make it happen!'

Cecile Metcalf

