



Château an Noz – Lady Mond's Castle

At the time, my wife and I wanted to leave the Paris area and we had two ideas: either the Dordogne or Brittany. My wife who loves the sea, said 'But darling, you know I love the sea', so we moved to Brittany. And we spent an age searching in Brittany and, then one Saturday morning, leafing through the Ouest-France we came across an article: 'Save Lady Mond's castle'.

It wasn't what we had in mind but 'Darling we haven't seen that castle so let's go and see it'. So we went and it was on the market. Mrs Williams the owner was selling it. However, another English person had already, very quickly made an offer.

And then eight months or so later someone I knew called me late one evening about 11 o'clock, and asked if I was still interested in the castle. I was starting to get tired and growled 'D'you realise how late it is?!'. And he said 'Brian Harrison is looking to sell the castle.' That was in November, and we met in April and then agreed on a sale, but the deal wasn't finished; there was still paperwork to deal with and we didn't sign the bill of sale until 11 July 2011.

At that time it was a ruin. Just the four walls remained standing. The floors had already fallen through. The ceiling supports were on the point of crumbling. Two or three years more and it would have completely collapsed.

We started by clearing the site, which was an epic undertaking. There were tons and tons of rubble to clear, and we completely cleared the site so we could build a scaffold, floor by floor, until the last floor so we could preserve the ceiling supports and roof. Then we worked down the towers one by one, retaining each one with a scaffold.

Our main aim was to make sure that the building was stable and there was no longer at risk of it falling down. I didn't want to work a miracle: just to stabilise the building. After three years we'd managed this; the last roof tile had fallen.

It was wonderful to save the building, because it was a ruin, but also it was important to try and make it live again. It's located in deep forest so it's not easy to make it live again as a Chambre d'Hôte but, seeing how society and trends are changing, we thought it would work better as a retirement home. A Chambre d'Hôte, a Bed and Breakfast in this location would be odd. Now, in the Parisian area older people who are faced on a daily basis with a stressful and often aggressive environment, are looking for a tranquil location to retire to. Our idea is to offer a retirement space for some 30 residents, where they can live in total independence and comfort.

