



# A billionaire's pied-à-terre

Tucked away in the heart of Paris, the home of the late Sir James Goldsmith is up for grabs. **Paul Shearer** takes a look inside

**T**he 18th-century Parisian residence of one of the most charismatic and controversial tycoons of recent times has been placed on the market, 13 years after his death. Standing in 5,920 sq ft of grounds, the former home of Sir James Goldsmith, the Anglo-French billionaire, is concealed from prying eyes on the Rue Monsieur, an historic street in the upscale Faubourg Saint-Germain on the city's Left Bank.

"I have been selling luxury houses for 20 years and I have never known a house that was so hidden from view," Nicolas Hug, of Immobilier de Collection, the estate agency handling the deal, says. The Goldsmith house was converted from the stable block of the Comte de Provence, who, as the brother of King Louis XVI, used the honorific "Monsieur", giving the street its name. The house was owned by Cole Porter in the 1920s, and now neighbours include Mick Jagger and the Queen of Bahrain. The home is a U-shaped cluster of buildings, which are timber-framed in the Normandy style. Immobilier de Collection's particulars state that the "entire property is in immaculate condition", an apt summary of the state of the three reception rooms, large master suite and nine further bedrooms.

The opulence of the 8,245 sq ft property is striking. Behind a set of large double doors opening on to the Rue Monsieur lies a small cobbled courtyard. To the left is the entrance to a small apartment block, but in front and to the right are the two separate entrances to the lair of Sir James, who spent more than £20 million founding the Referendum Party and even stood for Parliament in Putney in his fight against further European integration.

Entering the principal apartment up a wide marble staircase, you are led through reception rooms filled with a collection of

artworks. There are paintings, and some brightly coloured naive crewel work panels from Mexico, where Sir James had an 18,000-acre estate. The only reason given for the decision to sell the property now is that it is being used less and less. Most recently, it seems to have been used by Alix Marcaccini, a daughter from Sir James's second marriage. The ownership structure (the house is held in a company; see box, right, on French property law) means that it is unclear whether the proceeds of the sale — the asking price is €42 million (£33.8 million) — will be distributed among Sir James's eight children, who include Zac Goldsmith, Jemima Khan and Ben Goldsmith, who is engaged in a rather public marriage break-up which the partners themselves have commented about on Twitter.

A famed empire builder who was often accused of being an asset-stripper, Sir James was the inspiration for the corporate raider Sir Larry Wildman in *Wall Street*. He established the base of his colossal business empire in Paris, and when his leveraged buyout bid for British American Tobacco failed in 1989 the house increasingly became his refuge.

Episodes in his tangled love-life were played out there; at one time Ginette Lery, his ex-wife, and Laure Boulay de la Meurthe, his mistress, both resided in separate parts of the building, while on the other side of the Channel he lived with his wife, Lady Annabel, the inspiration for the eponymous Mayfair nightclub.

Sir James was fond of quoting that "if you marry your mistress you create a job vacancy". For those seeking a pied-à-terre fit for a billionaire, this chance to follow in the footsteps of one of the world's richest men is a vacancy not to be missed.

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The exterior of the Paris home, above, and one of the ten bedrooms, top

## Property law and legacies

Under the *Code Napoléon*, children have rights over their parents' property on death. For an individual non-domiciled in France this is limited to realty — the houses, not the furniture, nor the French bank accounts. Upon death, a share of the property will normally pass to the children even if there has been more than one marriage. "If you are buying in France, it's very important to make sure you seek advice on the ways the inheritance rules are applied under different types of property ownership before you purchase," Dawn Alderson, a French Law specialist at Russell-Cooke solicitors, says. "We have had instances of disputes arising between the children of an individual's first marriage and his second wife, when appropriate advice might have mitigated the situation."

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If the price tag for the Goldsmith house is too steep, you might prefer a similarly private place: a three-bedroom house, with a spa, swimming pool, large garden and guest cottage. In the Hameau Boileau, a small gated community in the 16th arrondissement, it's for sale through Philip Hawkes for €10.5 million (£8.45m). [philiphawkes.com](http://philiphawkes.com)