



Illustration: Tom Jellott

■ THE dream of buying a house in France persists for many of us, just as **Peter Mayle's** annoyingly smug 1980s memoir *A Year in Provence* won't go away (I have the tea-towel and am waiting for the mouse mat). The recent **Russell Crowe** movie *A Good Year*, inspired by Mayle's tale of the same name, was panned but even critics who thought Russ should have been

smothered with a boomerang pillow seemed to agree the French provincial mansion — with vineyards, terraces with idyllic views and room for a pony, as **Hyacinth (Bouquet) Bucket** would famously have it — was a star.

**Sharon and David Stratford** purchased a property last year in an historic village in southwest France and now this Australian

couple is sharing their vision (and hard-won advice) with other potential life-changers.

“Thousands of properties for sale in France for under \$100,000 can be purchased by Australians, assisted if needed by loans from French banks at fixed interest rates of 4 per cent,” the Stratfords claim. I am not convinced it can be quite that easy — witness the dramas of such Euro-change television shows as *No Going Back* and *Build a New Life* — but the couple will be talking about their experiences, and no doubt offering valuable tips, on April 26 and 28 at Sydney's Hyde Park Forum. More: [www.frenchdesire.com](http://www.frenchdesire.com).

■ **MILES Hilton-Barber** is a pilot, and he is blind. If this sounds like a Monty Python sketch, then Hilton-Barber would probably be the first to laugh along. The amazing British adventurer arrives this weekend in Darwin in his microlight, a small hang-glider-like aircraft. With the assistance of his sighted co-pilots **Brian Milton** and **Richard Hardey**, he'll have flown over 18 countries and rather a lot of ocean since leaving London 55 days ago.

He's continuing to Townsville and Brisbane, then Sydney on April 28. Hilton-Barber will become the first blind pilot to fly halfway across the world and, under the **Seeing is Believing** program, is aiming to raise millions towards the prevention of blindness in developing countries. And for every \$US donated, **Standard Chartered Bank** is matching the donation.

Hilton-Barber relies on a speech-output program from his navigation instruments to steer his course. A wireless keyboard, into which he types flight plan co-ordinates and notes, is strapped to his leg while flying. Hilton-Barber has completed the Siberian Ice Marathon — touted as the coldest on earth — and has climbed Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Blanc, Africa and Europe's highest mountains. He has set the Malaysian Grand Prix lap record for a blind driver (there are other blind Formula One drivers?), whirling around at 200km/h in a customised Lotus.

What an inspirational adventurer. I bet he has not once complained about the sorry lack of herb-filled pillows or petal baths on his travels. More: [www.seeingisbelieving.org.uk/microlightadventure](http://www.seeingisbelieving.org.uk/microlightadventure).

#### TRAVEL EDITOR'S PICKS

■ British Airways has cut its World Traveller (economy cabin) and World Traveller Plus (premium economy: sort of business lite) fares from Sydney and Melbourne to London. Book and pay by April 30 (travel from May 1 to 27) for deals from \$2095, inclusive of surcharges, fees and taxes. More: Travel agents or [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com).

■ Travel Indochina has slashed up to \$650 a couple from its 10-day Highlights of Vietnam tour (for departures June 9, 23 and 30) and discounts are on offer for some other packages. These are small group journeys packed with inclusions. More: [www.travelindochina.com.au](http://www.travelindochina.com.au).