

Going with the flow

By Eric Frey

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The north-western suburbs of Vienna are the only spot in Europe where the Alps meet the Danube. The narrow slice of land between the hills and the river, with the historic town of Klosterneuburg in the centre and the woods around it, is one of the most coveted places to live in the vicinity of the Austrian capital.

But as house prices rise young families are gradually moving west into the smaller towns that dot the flat southern bank of the Danube. "The area between Klosterneuburg and Tulln is where people are heading next; this is the future," says Christine Weber, a real estate broker in Klosterneuburg. "The land is not as attractive as the Vienna woods but, thanks to the river, new arrivals have great opportunities for leisure and transportation links are excellent."

Tulln, a quickly growing town of 14,000 people with a lovely old historical area and lots of flower markets, is the centre of the Tullnerfeld plains. Thanks to good highway connections, it takes only 40 minutes to reach downtown Vienna and some trains make the journey in less than half an hour. But it is the area in between, mostly in the borough of Sankt Andrä-Wördern, where real estate agents expect to see the strongest growth in the coming years, even more than in the so-called "fat belt" south of Vienna where most suburban expansion took place in recent years.

The sister towns Sankt Andrä and Wördern, once separated but now linked, and adjacent villages such as Königstetten and Muckendorf-Wipfling, are visually unremarkable. But all are attractive places to live, with Vienna workplaces and Klosterneuburg attractions just a short drive away, few concerns about safety, good schools and an extremely popular cycle path along the Danube. Perhaps most importantly, average property prices are €150-€250 per sq metre, making homes much more affordable than in better-known communities in the area.

A single-family house with 128 sq metres of living space and a garden recently sold for €260,000, while a larger renovated house with a swimming pool is on the market for €335,000. And, thanks to widely available housing subsidies, rental properties are even more affordable, with an 80 sq metre apartment in a new complex costing about €450 a month.

"This town has an unbelievably high quality of life," says Marianne Stanek, who moved here 25 years ago. "You've got forests, hills and the flat land and we are still so close to the city." Her only concern is the arrival of new residents and second homeowners from Vienna who prefer anonymity to neighbourly contacts. "Vienna is changing the place a bit," she acknowledges.

Aldred Stachelberger, the mayor of Sankt Andrä, also works in Vienna so he knows the challenges of a commuter town. "We don't want to be a bedroom community where people arrive Friday night, leave Monday morning and conduct cocooning in between," he says. But a strong community spirit remains. The main meeting place in the town is the Kulturcafé, which organises popular cultural and social events, but there are also more than 60 local civic organisations and clubs to join.

Outside the towns, many househunters head to the wooded hills, most likely in the hamlets of Hadersfeld, Hintersdorf, Oberkirchbach or Unterkirchbach, where properties are relatively small and public transport can be patchy but one can find a pleasant rural atmosphere still on the outskirts of a big city. This is also where the vineyards, one of the region's biggest attractions, begin.

The most beautiful spot in Sankt Andrä-Wördern is arguably Altenberg, which is best known for Burg Greifenstein, a striking medieval castle overlooking the Danube valley, and a large and idyllic bathing area behind a major hydroelectric dam. The northern river bank is covered by a large wetland area that can only be reached by foot or by bicycle across the dam.

The next village downstream, Höflein, is part of the Klosterneuburg borough, where housing prices are on average 30-40 per cent higher than further out. It is the place where the Danube curves south towards Vienna and, in the river bend, is Kritzendorf, a destination for hundreds of Viennese who own small weekend cottages as well as strikingly luxurious homes with great river views.

Another place to settle is the village of Maria Gugging, in the midst of the Vienna woods. It was previously best known as the site of a large psychiatric hospital but the facility was recently moved to make way for the newly founded Institute of Science and Technology Austria, which is designed to attract scientists from all over the world and create a fertile environment for cutting-edge research. Once the institute is fully staffed, most of the full-time professors and visiting scholars are expected to seek housing in the area, though Weber claims "the name Gugging is still tainted [so] it will take a while to change its image".

For now, the biggest magnet remains Klosterneuburg itself, a town with a 1,000-year history that is dominated by the two-domed Stift Klosterneuburg, one of central Europe's greatest monasteries, founded in the 12th century. There is also the Museum Essl, an excellent private collection of modern Austrian art, and, in and around the town, dozens of *heurigen*, or traditional wine houses, serving hearty food and drink.

"After a hard day of work, I can't wait to come home out here," says Chaya Molcho, a resident of 30 years who operates a trendy restaurant in downtown Vienna. Her ivycovered house, located on a leafy street in Klosterneuburg with a brook flowing in the middle, looks like an enchanted castle from a Brothers Grimm tale yet it takes her only 15 minutes to get to the city centre by car.

"Objectively, it is oriented towards Vienna but it still does not feel like a suburb. It is truly a separate town," says Irmgard Schnür, a local real estate agent. "The first choice of new residents is to have southern exposure with lots of light and sun. But they also want to be close to the monastery and the vineyards."

House prices in Klosterneuburg are rising - about 10 per cent over the past three years - but they are still about 20-40 per cent lower than in the most expensive Vienna neighbourhoods, says Eugen Otto, one of the capital's leading residential estate agents. "For the same money, people find here more space and higher quality," he says.

A 130 sq metre home, for example, might sell for €400,000-€450,000, while the number of properties listed at more than €1m - typically perched up on the hills overlooking the Danube - are relatively few. The town is building some new multi-apartment developments in central locations in an effort to provide more lower-cost housing and quite a few plots are owned by either the town or the monastery, which gives them to residents on long-term leases. Otto says the most expensive home sold in recent years was an extravagant mansion that went to an opera singer for about €3m.

For the most part, the town, its borough and those that surround it remain conservative places, originally home to civil servants and small businessmen but now attracting family-oriented newcomers from Vienna. Less than 10 per cent of Klosterneuburg residents are foreign-born, so it is also very Austrian. "It has a real small-town feeling to it; everybody knows each other and also cares for each other," Otto says. "What people like about the place is that it is not like Vienna."

Eric Frey is an FT correspondent based in Vienna

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Robert Going with the flow

Next Neighbourhood: Sankt Andrä-Wördern, Vienna. By Eric Frey

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history that is dominated by the two-domed Stift Klosterneuburg, one of central Europe's

On Show

The fabric of C

A new interiors fair, desi key home textile manufa launches on Wednesday. Under the umbrella of the International Furniture F home-related events' will. Guangzhou, the capital o province. Intertextile Gua Hometextile China will ha major manufacturing hub province, an area which, nearly 27 per cent of Chi textile exports. Intertextile Guangzhou H from Wednesday until M Import and Export Fair P Guangzhou, China, tel: +8 www.messefrankfurt.com.

Dynamic cerami

A notable collection of Cl colourful porcelains will g Bonhams in London on V. The English artist came i in the 1920s and 1930s w innovative art deco desig past two decades Cliff er Sevi Guatelli has amasse collection of her pieces, v originally sold for pocket are now predicted to fet £12,000 each. Clarice Cliff Sevi Guatelli March 18, Bonhams, Lond (0)20-7447 7447, www.bo

International In

Also in London, The Desig Chelsea Harbour will thi showcase new collections 300 international brands fabrics, wall coverings, fur kitchens, tiles and carpet be an opportunity to atten masterclasses by leading decorators such as David William Yeoward. London Design Week, from until March 20, Design Ce Harbour, London, tel: +44 www.designcentrechelseah

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Was there ever a better e

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Convenient Sankt Andrä, top, is within easy reach of Klosterneuburg and its monastery, above, as well as Vienna Jakob Polacek; Corbis

Details

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www.otto.at

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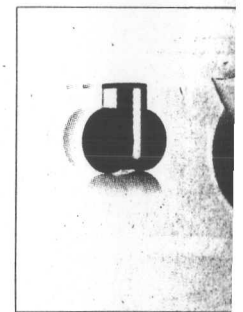
Eric Frey is an FT correspondent based in Vienna

Was there ever a better design that can raise a s when people seem to be braced for the next econ the market for items with or wit must surely be im Even something as sim wheels where they might expected can give a brief respite.

Take for example the seasoning set (below). A aluminium drums with ar these salt and pepper sh large synthetic wheels – black for pepper – that the expression "pass the They are the work of Be team Merken Hansen an from www.menu.as.

Meanwhile, on the Clo www.coolhunting.com, th little bit more) have bee humble alarm clock. Onc wake-up call has been q snooze button, it rolls of table, on to the floor an that the next time it sou get out of bed and find silence it.

Nic



Contacts

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