

My psychic path to paradise



Psychic Heidi Sawyer's idyllic French villa is a happy home for her family, but she also opens its arched doors to those in search of spiritual inspiration. Emily Anderson finds out what makes the retreat so special

Overlooking the green hills of Lodève



As we drive from Montpellier airport to the medieval town of Lodève, I'm struck by the intensely green and stunning landscape surrounding us. Heidi Sawyer's husband, Laurence, who's at the wheel, confirms what I've already felt - there's something very special about this part of southern France.

'It's one of the least polluted spots on earth, with clear, pure air, mountainous terrain and 300 days of sun every year,' he explains. 'There's also a real community feel to the area. And it's virtually crime-free, as the French police special forces training base is at the bottom of the hill. It's also a very spiritual place, but I'll let Heidi tell you about that when we get to the house.'

Set halfway up a hill overlooking the town is the Sawyer family home, Les Tours Carrées, meaning 'the square towers'. It's a beautiful 10-bedroom villa with a veranda and two towers, true to its name.

'We didn't even look for the villa,' Heidi says. 'It found us. It appeared one day on my

computer screen and we just had to go and see it. We said, "Yep, that's it," before we'd even gone inside.'

Not only is Heidi a psychic and author, she and Laurence have been running retreats at their home since March last year. They moved here in July 2008 with their son Charles, now seven. They still have a home in Farnham, Surrey, for when Heidi pops across the Channel for work - including mind, body, spirit shows, lectures and workshops - but the family are very much locals now. Heidi's parents Jennifer and Clive also live in the Sawyer home, looking

after Charles and helping to run the retreats.

'In the short time we've been running retreats here, they've been instantly booked up,' says Heidi. 'Each is for about 10 women. They're different every time but are mainly about psychic development, the mind-body connection, and a method I've devised called Life Codes. It uses a combination of numerology, Kabbalah and the Tree of Life archetypes tarot cards to learn about personality, life path and spiritual development. It's highly popular with women who are ready to open up to



A Tree of Life chart, used in Heidi's work



Much of the artwork in the living room was designed by Heidi's father, Clive



Heidi is fascinated by Chinese warriors. This one stands guard outside her bedroom

their intuition. Most go home transformed because they get an insight into life patterns or situations that may have been bothering them for years.'

The guests stay in five beautiful rooms, which were once one huge upstairs ballroom. Each has its own style and colour scheme, lovingly created by Heidi from curtains, fabric, furniture and treasures she's found over the years.

'Some rooms are over the top,' says Heidi. 'Others are more

simple but still luxurious. I've found the furniture and decorations locally or online. Some pieces came from India, or from England via eBay, including French furniture that you can't get in France but can in the UK.'

'There was one lady who I put in my favourite room, called the Boudoir, which is full of elaborate decadence, including a four-poster bed. She burst into tears of joy and said she felt like a princess.'

'I also love the Indian Room,

with its orange colours and elephant sculpture. It's one of a pair of handcrafted, fair trade elephants, made in India by the female elders of families. They position each tiny mirror and bead by hand. The statues themselves are stunning, and elephants are very spiritual creatures. I find their energy very calming.'

'As soon as we decided we could create a retreat centre here, we knew we wanted it



Vibrant oranges glow in the Indian Room



The Sea Scapes Room has a marine theme

to be luxurious and relaxing, as well as a spiritual experience.'

There are spiritual statues all over the villa, and Heidi's particular favourite is the Buddha that stands serenely in the living room.

'I really love it because it's hand-carved out of a single piece

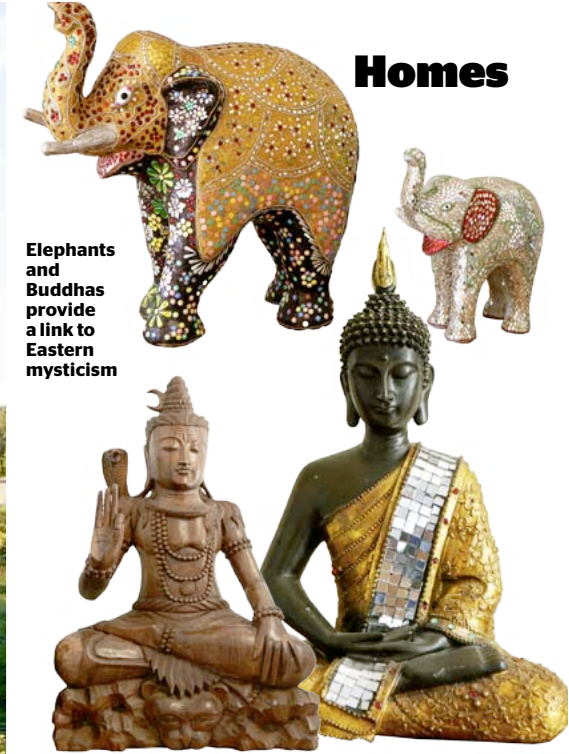
of wood and the workmanship that's gone into it is incredible. The detail is fascinating.'

Standing guard outside Heidi's bedroom door is an impressive Chinese warrior she bought in France.

'I've always been fascinated by these warriors, ever since



The Sawyer family home, bookended by its two towers



Elephants and Buddhas provide a link to Eastern mysticism



Heidi's Oriental cat, Claude, in the Rose Room



Framed photos of Heidi's family



Bronze statues of gods including Artemis (left) and Cupid and Psyche

I was young and saw a picture of the lost Terracotta Army, which was found in the 1970s. Collecting bronze statues of Greek and Roman mythological characters has also been a passion of mine for years.'

These striking bronze figures, of Cupid, Psyche and Artemis (above) sit downstairs on a table in the main hallway, next to special family photographs and other treasures.

It's not just the Sawyers who have been attracted to the area's spirituality. They had only been in Lodève for two weeks when Laurence came home saying he'd heard that the Dalai Lama was in town.

'He was staying at the Buddhist temple above us on top of the hill,' Heidi says. 'At the bottom of the hill, a giant TV screen was set up for all the local townspeople to gather and watch his address. He just sat there laughing for about two hours and everybody else did the same, and then went home. It was incredible. It certainly added to our great feeling about our new hometown.'

In the large, welcoming family living room are more statues and paintings - mostly the handiwork of Clive, a talented artist. He's also responsible for the beautiful oil painting of the Archangel Michael, all swirling purples and sparkles, hanging in Heidi's office. This is where she plans retreats and workshops, writes books, and films courses

PHOTOS: SYRIOL JONES



Heidi in her study, with a painting of Archangel Michael by her father



A glass sea horse was a gift from grateful students



A tantalising view of the front terrace



Arthur Rackham's pictures are an inspiration



A green man door knocker symbolises protection



The colourful kitchen is warm and welcoming

for Psychic Circle, her web-based psychic development school.

'I told Dad one day about the vision of an angel I saw in my mind once, and he produced it exactly,' says Heidi.

Staring out from the opposite wall is another creation by Clive, a gold om, a sacred Sanskrit syllable meaning peace. 'I had another of those with even more amazing colours, but he painted over it because he wasn't happy with it. I'll keep this study door locked so he can't get to this one!'

The shelves in Heidi's office are laden with personal treasures. Particularly precious is a black and white photo of her grandmother, Gwen, who changed Heidi's life.

'She was a huge influence at the start of my journey into higher awareness,' explains Heidi. 'I was psychic as a child. I'd say things about people, and assume they'd told me, but they hadn't. I found it confusing, and didn't say much about it. In my



Heidi's grandmother, Gwen; Heidi's husband and father were chocolatiers



Henry takes in the sun on the front terrace

late teens, though, I became fascinated by anything spiritual.

'My grandmother died when I was in my early twenties, but I knew she was still around me as I could smell cigarette smoke and no one else in the family smoked. Then one day I was reversing out of the driveway when I saw this figure, a black outline, inside the house. I stopped the car, thinking it was a burglar. But this figure, which had been looking out of the front door at me, was suddenly outside the door. I saw really clearly that it was Grandma, waving at me.

'From then on, there was a lot of psychic activity around me,

including a loud knocking all the time, which I knew was Grandma trying to get in touch. Mum didn't quite see it like that, and told me not to be silly. But she changed her tune when she heard loud knocking, too!'

This clear sign from her grandmother made Heidi desperate to embrace her spiritual side. So when she spotted an advert in her local paper for a psychic development course in Kingston, Surrey, she saw it as fate and signed up.

While Heidi was delighted to learn how to use her intuition and psychic skills, her nearest and dearest were far from

thrilled. Her mum thought she'd joined a cult, and Heidi had no contact with her family for two years - hard to believe when you look at how close-knit she and her parents are today, happily living under one beautiful roof.

'They eventually saw what I could do and how it helps people, and they are hugely supportive now,' says Heidi.

Back when she was first embarking on her spiritual path, Heidi found plenty of reassurance from kindred spirits on her course. After it finished, she taught psychic development and meditation classes for two years, which gave her a solid grounding for doing readings professionally. And she's never looked back.

'From day one of doing readings, it's been easy to find work. Business grew by word of mouth and I carried on teaching classes. Then in 2007, I wrote *Why My Mother Didn't Want Me To Be Psychic*, which I self-published, sharing my experiences and observations about being psychic but without being too 'way out'. It only took me two weeks to write the book, always working between 2am and 4am. That's when I can't hear people's thoughts because everyone's asleep. I still write best at that time.

'I don't sense my grandma around me any more. She was clearly urging me on at that time in my life, and mediumship isn't my main thing anyway. I do it if it's necessary to help someone, but I prefer to use my skills to work with people to help them understand something about their lives, or change something, and empower them to move forward.'

Heidi's work clearly has the desired effect, helping many people unlock their intuition or work out their life path. And there are 'thank you' gifts from satisfied retreaters all over the house, including a stained glass sea horse hanging in a window.

Before becoming a professional psychic, Heidi did an English Literature degree at Brunel University in London, and her love of books is obvious. She collects first editions by spiritual

masters such as mystical author Dion Fortune.

'Another favourite is a rare first edition collection of Arthur Rackham drawings, which I found online. He's probably the most famous illustrator of fairies, elves and nature spirits. Not everyone likes them - they're quite creepy, odd images, but I like that about them.'

And when her Oriental cats saunter into the study, it's clear that Heidi likes unusual-looking pets, too.

'The grey one is Pablo and the white one is Claude. I've had them for four years, from when they were kittens with great big heads and looked very odd. I've always had Oriental cats because they're deeply intuitive. They look a bit unusual, but I love them. Claude is totally in love with me and follows me everywhere.'

The other furry resident is Henry, a lovely, lively Jack Russell belonging to Heidi's mother. But step outside, and the list of wildlife is endless.

'We've seen glow-worms, wild boar, red squirrels, and in the summer you hear nightingales, cicadas and frogs calling out. You get the most incredible insects, including butterflies in every colour imaginable, iridescent turquoise dragonflies and giant black bees. You get so many different birds, too. Once I even saw a giraffe eating leaves in the car park in town. But that was part of a travelling zoo!'

Surrounded by such natural beauty, Heidi has made the most of the local scenery by turning it into a very effective outdoor gym.

'A while back, I started walking as a way to lose weight by listening to my body and doing some exercise. I lost three stone walking in the hills, and it's become a wonderful meditation that I do most days.'

Inside and out, Heidi's little piece of paradise is definitely nourishment for the mind, body and soul. It's easy to see why she fell in love with Lodève and her spiritual home. **SPIRITS DESTINY**

• To find out more about Heidi's work, visit www.heidisawyer.com

JOIN A WORKSHOP WITH HEIDI
Heidi Sawyer will appear at a one-day workshop called *Intuitive Messengers* with astrologer and psychic David Wells and medium Gordon Smith on 15 October 2011 at The Shaw Theatre, 100-110 Euston Road, London. Tickets cost from £79.99. Call 020-8962 1230 or visit www.hayhouse.co.uk