

The drawbridge is still in perfect working order. It is drawn up in the evenings, and the castle is closed. Completely closed. Would-be burglars have no way of penetrating the premises. And even through the day, the castle is not able to be invaded—it's impossible. Only a financier can conquer it: Gorgier Castle in the canton of Neuchâtel is for sale.

Which leads us to the following questions: How does one sell a castle in Switzerland? Who are the potential buyers? Why is it for sale? How much does it cost?

But slow down: first, a few details about the property. In the thirteenth century, the men of Estavayer built their castle in Gorgier. A round tower from this time still stands; the remaining walls originate from the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The castle has been privately owned since 1813, and it currently belongs to successful U.S. venture capital entrepreneur Laura Dlutowski. She and her husband, a no-less-successful American attorney, bought it ten years ago—including its drawbridge, dungeon, enormous fireplace, Moorish-style arbor, gardens, dovecote, fountain from the eighteenth century, orangery, chapel, a cedar that is at least one thousand years old, a breathtaking view, and 1,400 square meters of the finest living space. "World class," says Robert Ferfecki, a proven expert in the country's most expensive properties in the country.

Caught in the net. As somewhat of an agent of luxury, Robert Ferfecki runs the company FSP Fine Swiss Properties. He sells Swiss properties to the world's richest people—Gorgier Castle, for example. Upon request, Ferfecki will also arrange residence permits, relocation, furnishings, and schools for children. "The opportunity to sell a property such as Gorgier," he says, "probably only comes along once in a lifetime." And in the private chapel, with its stained-glass windows from the seventeenth century, he almost goes into raptures: "This would make even an atheist believe."

Laura Dlutowski and her husband were looking for a European base for their family. England was out of the question because of the taxes. They sought a country with legal certainty, good schools for their children, and an advantageous tax structure. The couple soon came



CHATELAINE

With much attention to detail, the castle, once home to the men of Estavayer, is renovated: Laura Dlutowski.



WAITING...

...and exercising patience: Robert Ferfecki and Laura Dlutowski expect the sale to take seven years.

"We have always understood the Château Gorgier as guests, as caretakers for a while."

Neuchâtel, and about the community of Gorgier: "Here," she says, "even the police officers are friendly and intelligent."

But life has its curveballs: her marriage ended, and Laura Dlutowski does not wish to stay in the castle alone. This is why it is now for sale. It will cost approximately 20 million Swiss Francs.

A decelerated lifestyle. The most important thing when it comes to a sale such as this one, according to professional Robert Ferfecki is "lots of patience." One expects it to take seven years. What are needed are unconventional advertising methods and personal contacts. He cannot reveal much about the clientele, says Ferfecki (keyword: discretion), but one must approach potential buyers on equal footing. He has certain ideas about which clientele would appreciate Gorgier Castle: private enthusiasts of a decelerated lifestyle, companies, or foundations.

Among Robert Ferfecki's clients, for example, are a multi-billion-dollar businessman who lived in Libya and sought a safer place of residence. Ferfecki procured for him a gigantic villa with the best lakeside location in Central Switzerland—including residence permits for him, his family, and his household employees; the best schools for the children; as well as a Ferrari and other luxury vehicles.

Today, Ferfecki makes no secret of the fact that business has become more sluggish. The economic situation and the discontinuation of the lump sum taxation in some Swiss cantons do not make it easy to conduct business. He says one must find new positive aspects to promote, such as the excellent schools in Switzerland or the low-tax communities. And basically, he says, there's just one thing: consulting, consulting, consulting.

Laura Dlutowski sat in an armchair in Gorgier Castle in front of an enormous fireplace that was built in 1620. The age of the armchair cannot be determined exactly; along with all the other upholstered furniture in the castle, it was newly covered. To avoid the cold, a heated floor has been installed in some parts of the castle, whereby every step was planned by a specialized architect and agreed upon with the authorities regulating the preservation of sites of historic interest. There were never any problems with the officials, raves Dlutowski, nor were there any unpleasant surprises during the construction, even though some rooms had looked like ruins.

The chatelaine only has one regret now that she is parting with the old walls: "I wish I had renovated the kitchen." It didn't work out to do so in the beginning because they needed to use it. And then they ran out of time. "Now the new owners will get to do it," says Dlutowski, "meaning they will likely enjoy the kitchen twice as much." ■

across Gorgier Castle on the internet; the impressive building had been vacant for eight years.

This was the beginning of a happy time for Laura Dlutowski—with much adoration for the old walls, as she says. Little by little, she invested ten million Swiss Francs into the renovation of the castle, 95 percent of which went to local professionals. For the businesswoman from the USA, the renovation became a passion that did not allow for a single compromise. For example, she searched for a long time for the right tapestry for the red bedroom. "When we couldn't find anything that was truly suitable, we just had one made," she says. It was, she explains, a question of respect with regard to the history of the property: "We always saw ourselves as guests, as caretakers for a while."

And outside of the castle, everything was optimal for the chatelaine; she only has good things to say about Switzerland, about the canton of

Change of Scenery

Enjoying the view over the countryside from the round tower, taking a stroll in the park, and then enjoying the evening around the fireplace. Go ahead: Gorgier Castle, once home to the men of Estavayer, is available for sale.

BY PIERRE-ANDRÉ SCHMITT TEXT // ALBAN KAKUYLA PHOTOGRAPHY