

SO YOU WANT TO BUY AN ISLAND? FARHAD VLADI HAS THE DEAL FOR YOU

Half a mile off the windswept Brittany coast, there lies a pink granite island called Costa Eres. Its four acres include grassy fields, a pine forest, two white sandy beaches and a 19th-century Gothic Revival castle. The first screech of the seabirds wakes you in the morning, and the boom of the Atlantic lulls you to sleep at night. Sometimes, when the wind is still, the skirl of a Breton bagpipe can be heard, floating across the water from Ploumanac'h, a mainland fishing village.

If that sounds like the perfect escape from a frantic, overcrowded

world, the man to see is Farhad Vladi, 43, an international island broker who has Costa Eres listed for sale at \$1.5 million. But if Brittany isn't exactly the neighborhood you had in mind, don't fret. His real estate firm of Vladi Private Islands offers them in sizes and shapes to suit every taste, at prices ranging from \$9,000 to \$20 million.

There is, for instance, Marvin Island, a bird sanctuary in San Francisco Bay with a nice view of Alcatraz (\$4.5 million). Then there is Sampire, an island at the mouth of the River Blackwater in Essex, England, which goes for a mere \$140,000 and comes with an impressive title for the new proprietor: Lord of the Manor of Great Wigboroughcum-Salcott. Something a little more tropical, perhaps? Too bad. VPI recently had on its books, for around \$4 million, 135-acre Spanish Cay in the Bahamas, which was just sold to a New Yorker. In all, VPI's computer lists 400 islands currently on the market in 30 countries and maintains up-to-date in-



Vladi asks locals for tips on property such as Brittany's Costa Eres, below, where author Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote *Quo Vadis*?

formation on 10,000 that may someday be available.

Vladi has been island-shopping for more than 20 years. The Hamburg-born son of a German housewife and an Iranian businessman, he saw his first island—Capri—when he was 5. "Father traveled a lot and always took at least one of his four children with him," Vladi says. In 1967, soon after he got a master's in economics from Hamburg University, Vladi read a report (false, as it turned out) that an island in the Indian Ocean had just been sold for a piddling \$5,000. Intrigued nonetheless, he shipped out for the Seychelles, determined to buy an island for himself. Alas, the one he wanted turned out to be too expensive, so instead, he found a buyer and took his commission. That transaction began his career.

Even though he viewed—and still views— island selling as "a crazy thing to do," it quickly proved more lucrative than he had imagined. Soon

he was flying all over the world inspecting property and compiling computer listings. In 1976, after selling 50 islands—mostly in Nova Scotia and the Caribbean—he set up a North American office. Divorced and the father of an 11-year-old daughter, Natalie, Vladi now lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. VPI grosses about \$3 million from the 30 or so islands Vladi sells each year.

Right now, he says, the East Coast of North America is one of the hot spots for island sales. Another is Hawaii where "the Japanese are buying everything loose." Vladi still gets phone calls from people searching for islands on which to plant a flagpole and declare unilateral independence. "But every rock which appears out of the sea has already been claimed by one country or another," he warns.

"You can't create a new country anymore." Occasionally, the motives of island seekers can even be sinister. "A guy with a chemical company called looking for an island to dump waste on," Vladi says angrily. "I was very insulted."

While few of his customers would like to maroon themselves à la Robinson Crusoe, "the desire to have an island still ranks high in the imagination," says Vladi. Owners become so attached to them that it usually takes death, bankruptcy or divorce to bring one on the market. Often, Vladi admits, they are bought as status symbols. Still, a private island provides a sense of romance that no town house in Spain or Florida condo could ever hope to match. "Every island has a name because each has a soul, a heart," Vladi says. "Other properties don't have that. An island has no street number, nothing. It's different, it's magic."

—By Michael Neill,
with Laura Sanderson Healy in Brittany

Photographs by Terry Smith

