

STYLE

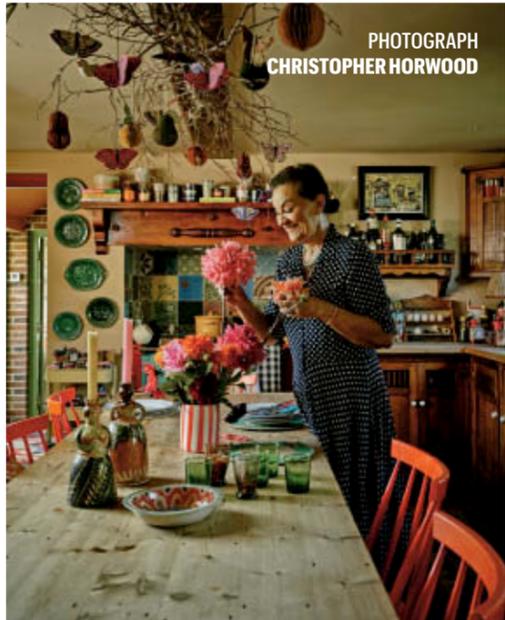
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BEST DRESSED BRITSOF 2025



HOME comforts



PHOTOGRAPH
CHRISTOPHER HORWOOD

Got guests coming? Don't panic — *India Knight* knows how to make that spare room feel special

There is nothing more demoralising than being shoved in a guest room that is only a guest room because it happens to have a bed in it. You feel like an afterthought, like the hosts thought, "This'll do," rather than anticipating your arrival with any real pleasure. Having said that, guest rooms are a luxury — it's likely that the room multitasks the rest of the year as an office, a TV room, a Zoom room, the place where the exercise bike lives or, frankly, the room where all the crap goes until you find the strength to go through it (which may be never).

This is understandable — we've all been there — but it's really not acceptable at this time of year. Whether your guests haven't had to travel far or have crossed the country for the pleasure of spending time with you, the fact is that leaving their own cosy nest to go and spend Christmas in somebody else's is a sacrifice. You, the host, really need to make things as lovely and welcoming for them as possible. Here are a few ideas.



This page from top India Knight in her kitchen. Pile up plenty of pillows and cushions, duvets and quilts to make the bed look more inviting. **Opposite from top** These guest bedrooms make the most of lighting with table lamps and separate reading lights

HUBERT ZANDBERG INTERIORS

1 Don't try to turn it into a hotel room. It's slightly naff and if people wanted a hotel room they would stay in a hotel. The whole point of guest rooms is that they have charm, are individual and reflect you, the host — and that you are in a private home. They should be cosy and homely. So don't get in a panic about thread counts or excessive housekeeping. You want a clean (obviously) and neatish room, but there's no need to freak out because the children's old drawings are framed on the wall or there are family photos on surfaces. That's exactly the sort of thing that makes rooms feel warm and human, and thus nice to stay in.

2 Having said that, get rid of the crap. Things that have lived in the room for years waiting to find their purpose can perhaps finally go to the charity shop. If that's too much effort, hide them somewhere else. You need a clean canvas.

3 Impeccable bedding makes up for a multitude of imperfections. In the same way that a clean kitchen sink makes the whole kitchen look neat and any mess look intentional rather than sordid, so a pristine bed makes a guest bedroom appetising. In an ideal world you would have the sheets professionally laundered and pressed, so they're slightly crisp — heaven to slide into.



NICOL AHARDING & CO

4 Make the bed fat. Thin beds are depressing. Have bouncy, chubby duvets. Pile on quilts, eiderdowns, throws and/or blankets until the whole thing looks plump and appealing. Two pillows per side plus, maybe, a big square one behind them for reading. You will have your own views about decorative throw pillows.

5 Lighting is everything, always, in any room. Make sure the bulbs don't cast that creepy mortuary glow, because nothing kills the vibe faster. Go for low, comforting light from table lamps, perhaps with a couple of separate reading lights. (Ikea does an unobtrusive one called Sambord. You can tuck it more or less behind the bed and it's £17. I have them in every bedroom.)

6 You'll need a radio in there. Radios are the mark of civilised bedrooms.

7 And some reading matter. Make an effort and try to match the books to the guests. If not, my general formula is one cosy crime, one local interest, one funny but not inane rom-com, one recently published, well-reviewed work of fiction, one PG Wodehouse, one Jilly Cooper. Apart from the contemporary one, you can get all the others at charity shops, or of course from your own bookshelves. Any editions of John Julius Norwich's *A Christmas Cracker* (there's also a compilation of the best of them) is a huge bonus. >



STUDIO HOLLOND



MARTA DELLA RICA

A guest room should reflect you, the host, rather than looking like a hotel room. **Below** Twin beds can be a more versatile option than a double

8 If your heating is temperamental, or your boiler sulk in winter, add a heater.

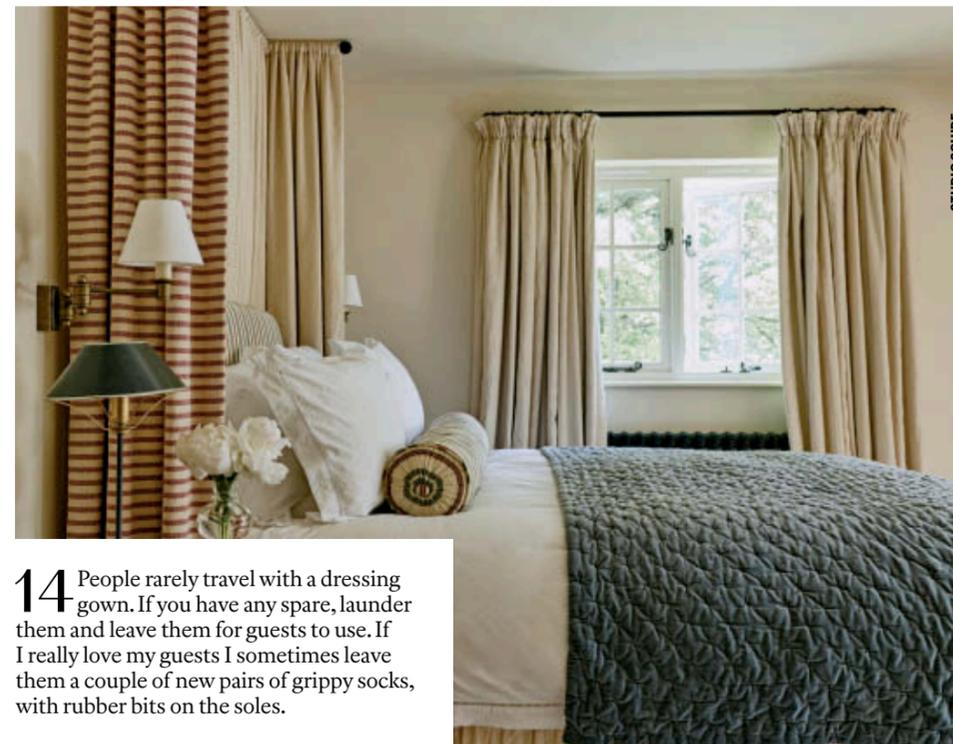
9 Have tea and ideally coffee-making facilities in there. No matter how nice it is staying with people you love, it is even nicer to be able to retreat to your room and have a cup of tea in peace whenever you like. Leave out a milk jug for guests to refresh as they need. Good biscuits. Mince pies. A bar of chocolate. Maybe a cake.

10 Speaking of which: make it really clear what guests can and can't help themselves to from the kitchen fridge. Provide snacks for them to access if they're hungry at 2am, but spell out that they should ideally not scarf down the ingredients for the next day's meals. I've been known to use Post-its.

11 If the guests are thirsty, a basic drinks — as in alcohol and mixers — tray doesn't go amiss either. Avoid if the guests are really thirsty, though. Nobody wants overly refreshed persons roaring down the stairs at 6pm.

12 Having said that, thirsty guests might like a little basket with a sleep mask, some electrolytes and some headache pills in it.

13 I always do a basket of really nice (unused) toiletries, it makes such a difference. I have a head start here because I get sent so many, but just a new bottle of foresty Radox is a nice thing to come across on a cold night. Go as elaborate as you like here — a tub of cleanser, a freshly laundered flannel, eye make-up remover, a basic moisturiser, body lotion, shampoo, conditioner etc. If you have a spare hairdryer and/or straighteners/tongs/heated brush, now is its time to shine.



STUDIO SQUIRE

14 People rarely travel with a dressing gown. If you have any spare, launder them and leave them for guests to use. If I really love my guests I sometimes leave them a couple of new pairs of grippy socks, with rubber bits on the soles.

15 Impeccable towels, fluffy and fragrant, large enough and plenty of them. Like the pristine bedding, these add instant "this room is so nice" factor.

16 Thick curtains, though this matters less in winter. If your curtains are really thin and knackered, Dunelm does very acceptable ready-made ones, including blackout ones.

17 If your guests are bringing a dog, provide a basket, a water bowl and one delicious chewy. Don't forget to give them spare keys/the alarm code so the dog can go to the loo at the crack of dawn.

18 Unromantic, but one of those tower chargers with loads of different sockets and hubs is always a good idea.

19 This is entirely subjective, but I like a little light Christmas decorating in bedrooms at this time of year. You don't have to go mad — even a few sprigs of holly in a jam jar is festive. But if you feel like your guests would appreciate a huge vase of greenery (real, please) strung through with battery lights — well, I wouldn't complain.

20 All of the above also applies to a guest sofa. One of the great joys of life is expecting to be shown to a sofa with an old spare duvet and instead finding that your every need has been anticipated and your sofa is basically Claridge's in disguise. ■

Home by India Knight (Penguin £22). To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Free UK standard P&P on online orders over £25. Special discount available for Times+ members

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STUDIO HOLLOND



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Provide tea and coffee-making facilities and tasty snacks so that guests can retreat to their room. **Top** Thick curtains that block out light are essential, especially in the summer