



The guest bedroom offers a chance to be more adventurous. The interior designer Jo Berryman calls this one, in Gary Lineker's London home, the Explorer's Room

Michael Hall; Maxine Paul

Is yours a dumping ground for dusty Swiss balls and ski kit, or a scented boudoir for event sex? Perhaps it's a design lab where you test out your decorative ideas, or the place where you commune with your Hornby 00 gauge. Designers say a client's true nature is revealed in the guest bedroom. As an interior that's not in everyday use, it offers an opportunity for indulgence, which can take the form of a museum-style curation of wedding photos or a bracing animal-print wallpaper. Every homeowner must decide how heavily to stamp their personality on theirs, while still making guests feel welcome. So, as you spruce up for the season, it's time to ask: what are the rules of guest-room decor?

First, let us note the phenomenon of the sexy spare. It is a seductive option, especially if you feel you've had to downplay frivolity in the rest of the house — a confection of silk and lace to counterbalance the industrial-look kitchen. Sera Hersham-Loftus, an interior designer whose clients include Kate Moss, Courtney Love, Sadie Frost and Barbara Hulanicki, specialises in the look. "I often get asked to do guest boudoirs," she says. "I call them 'house jewels'. In them, I will create a most romantic haven that guests never want to leave."

Her boho-style interiors combine supreme comfort with honeymoon-suite styling. "The bedding is the softest linen trimmed with lace, and I make tons of cushions, stuffed with lavender, out of vintage satins and velvets."

Soon, we can all try this at home. Last month, Hersham-Loftus launched her Les Folies interiors collection, featuring cushions called Aroused Rose and Shell (from £480, gulp). "The room should be heavily perfumed with heady incenses," she says. "The lighting is from low-level table lights, with lampshades made of lingerie lace, and I make shutters for the windows out of vintage Indian screens. I hear that owners sleep in the 'house jewels' on their 'special nights'."

The concept of the sexy spare is almost irresistible — until one reflects that there



Fashion-loving guests will adore the way this understated room has been jazzed up with pillows and a blanket by Missoni. The interior is by Maurizio Pellizzoni

isn't a friend, family member or acquaintance who won't find it awkward. Teenage daughter's best friend? Granny? Parents-in-law? No, no, no. If we are compiling the rulebook for guest bedrooms, regulation number one must be: soft-pedal the sexy. Keep that for the third bedroom. Or the next house.

The designer Jo Berryman, whose clients are mainly film, music and media types, has another perspective on the guest bedroom. She emphasises the importance of soundproofing. Not through fear that her clients' "special nights" might disturb the neighbours, but because the spare often serves as what she calls "snorer's exile". "The way sound travels through a house with timber floors and open-plan living, you can

Always wanted a valet stand, but no space in the master bedroom? Stick it in the spare. This one is by Jonah Takagi. £1,750; anothercountry.com

Sera Hersham-Loftus is the queen of the 'sexy spare'. The cushions are from her Les Folies collection. seraoflondon.com



Visitor attractions

Spare bedrooms are a space where you can let your imagination run riot. Just don't make your guests too comfortable — they may never leave. By Katrina Burroughs

► 'Add a little bravado,' Anna Burles says. Mary wallpaper, from Blackpop's Elizabethan range, should fit the bill. £175 a roll; blackpop.co.uk

"Crank up the playful and show off a little. The spare room is where you can be a bit bolder"

hear everything that's going on. You need to think about the acoustics of any bedroom space, and include carpet or layered rugs on the floor, or even fabric as cladding on the walls." She sums up the reason she pays such close attention to guest-room acoustics: "Maybe you'll want to send your husband there because he is snoring like a warthog."

Among Berryman's favourite spares was one she designed for Gary Lineker's home in Barnes, southwest London. She created a guest suite for the England footballer turned presenter at the top of the house, inspired by Pacific Ocean voyages of discovery. The Explorer's Room has tropical colours, vintage-look textiles and a telescope. "If Captain James Cook ever took respite during his discovery of the Hawaiian islands, this bedroom would be a fanciful port of call," she says.

Her general advice for the guest room is: "Crank up the playful and show off a little. The spare room is where you can be a bit bolder. Often, it's an opportunity to try out your craziest wallpaper." In Lineker's home, she contrasted a



Wow factor on a roll: House of Hackney's Pampas wallpaper, in tangerine/azalea, is not for shrinking violets. £128 a roll; houseofhackney.com



Never skimp on spare-room linen. Maurizio Pellizzoni has injected the glamour of the silver screen into this guest bedroom. The finishing touch is luxurious bedding from Ralph Lauren Home



Simply the guest

DO

- Use the spare room to unleash your creativity. This is the place for the Moroccan riad-themed decor that your other half banned from the master bedroom.
- Make your guests feel spoilt with hotel-style goodies — break out the scented candles and luxury soaps you got for Christmas.
- Invest in bed linen that's as good as your own. The same goes for towels. Some sleepers need extra warmth, so lay on a store of throws.
- Clear some storage space for clothes... but not too much.

DON'T

- Make your guest sleep in a single bed, unless space is really tight. Buy the biggest bed you can fit.
- Force visitors to dwell on your, er, "special nights". Boudoir-style decor is acceptable, up to a point, but don't overdo it.
- Expunge all evidence of the room's everyday life. It probably has a day job as a library/home office/hobby room. A stack of books is always welcome, and visitors will find a small desk useful. Some guests will also enjoy your train set.
- Impose niche hobbies. You might have developed an all-consuming passion for roadkill taxidermy, but your sister-in-law may have a phobia of badgers.

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sunshine-yellow headboard with Farrow & Ball Stiffkey Blue wall paint, and added a knockout wall covering with a sharkskin print, La Peau de Chagrin, by Shagreen Art.

"It's a room the clients don't live with every day, and which really packs a punch on occasions when the door is opened to welcome guests," says Anna Burles, who has designed interiors for celebrities including the singer-songwriter Ellie Goulding. She describes her spare bedrooms as "a bit wilder" than the rest of the house. "Adding a little bravado gives a hint about the clients' creative alter ego."

Burles advises creating drama with dark, stormy colours such as Tempest, by Fired Earth. "Not just on walls, but keeping the skirtings and mouldings — and sometimes the ceilings — dark, too. We've used neon light installations to 'rock'n'roll' a subterranean guest room."

That rocking basement sounds rather fabulous, but what if your guests are more Classic FM? If your main concern is for the comfort of visitors, doesn't the spare bedroom need to be designed with the aim of being "taste-neutral"? The decorators are unanimous in saying no. It seems there's no need to expunge your character from the room to make visitors feel welcome. Your hospitality can show itself through the thoughtful provision of all the comforts.

"I think one of the most important elements of designing a guest bedroom is not to scripp on anything," says Francis Sultana, whose first client was the singer Annie Lennox. He works with art collectors and philanthropists, including Yana Peel, of Intelligence Squared. "You want your guests to feel that they are being loved and cherished when they stay with you."

According to Sultana, the key area on which to lavish your budget is the bed: "You want to get a good-sized one — the biggest and best you can afford — with the same quality of sheets that you would expect on your own. Also, be sure to offer a selection of pillows — firm and soft — and throws, in case your guests are sensitive to temperature."

He goes on to address the hot-button issue of storage. "It's important not to underestimate this. When people come to stay, they often overcompensate on their packing. So don't give them just a couple of drawers and a cupboard half filled with your own stored-away clothes." That said, in many households, finding even an empty drawer is striking gold. Realistically, it's not practical for "plentiful empty storage" to feature in our guest-room rulebook.

In any case, there are benefits to keeping storage provision sketchy, according to Mark Riese, the owner and creative director of Urban Living Interiors. His studio is on Great Portland Street, in central London, adjacent to Broadcasting House, and he recalls how one of his BBC clients made him rethink his approach to guest rooms. "She was fed up with her partner's visiting relatives," he says. "As a busy career woman with a demanding programme and celebrity events, she wanted to return home to the peace and quiet of her own space, and not find that another overseas guest had landed — or not yet departed."

Riese told the harassed woman to use storage as a subtle signal that visitors should keep their stay to one night only. "A guest bedroom should be an opportunity for some exuberance, fun and exotica — but not so comfortable that guests stay for ever."