



STAY AWHILE
Natascha Folen's country home in Virginia and the writer's apartment on Croatia's Dalmatian coast are filled with the owners' personal touches but intended to be welcoming for travellers.
PHOTOS BY GORDON BEALL (LEFT) AND JOSKO HERCEG (RIGHT).

MAKING SOMEONE ELSE AT HOME

The growth of the sharing economy is changing the way many homeowners decorate. **Maryam Siddiqi** breaks down everything you need to help a temporary renter feel welcome in your space

What do you do with all of your stuff?" This is often the first question I'm asked when people find out I'm an Airbnb host. A minimalist by nature who quickly took to Marie Kondo's KonMari method of decluttering, my initial answer is "I don't have a lot of stuff."

But I do spend time in the one-bedroom apartment in Trogir, Croatia that I rent out to tourists for part of the year, and so it is filled with my books and plants, clothes and postcards turned wall art. When renting it out, I tuck the truly personal stuff (clothes, toiletries) away in storage spaces under the pull-out couch, but leave books, art and decor pieces out for the touching (though hopefully not taking). My thinking is that prospective travellers from Airbnb, VRBO and the myriad other peer-to-peer home-stay services are looking for more than just a bed and bathroom when they check into my space; instead of a nondescript hotel room, they're looking for lodging with personality, some place that is truly a home away from home.

Without any sort of interior design education, I am, however, making things up as I go, as are many of the short-term rental hosts around the world. And there are a lot of us. Airbnb has 60,000 accommodation listings in Canada, and saw more than 2.4 million inbound guests to the country in the past year. VRBO claims it can accommodate 3.1 million people across all of the properties listed on its site, which boasts more than 1.18 million bedrooms available for stays around the world. But striking the balance between personality and too personal in

these spaces can be tricky.

Airbnb and the like do a good job of guiding hosts towards stocking the supplies their guests need and staging a home for travellers. In an Airbnb blog post, home stager and interior designer Meridith Baer writes: "Everyone loves a clean, crisp looking bathroom. Make sure your counter is free of products except a couple that have pretty packaging. Provide other necessities you would expect in your own home, but they can be tucked away in drawers or baskets. Place rolled up white towels in a basket and add a potted plant to brighten the room."

But it's difficult for owners to find advice about what to do with their belongings when hosting guests. Two years ago, Natascha Folen launched a new service as part of her eponymous interior design firm, NF Interiors, targeting clients who want design help with Airbnb rentals and vacation homes. Based in northern Virginia, she has five properties on the rental website herself, including one in Ibiza, Spain, and spends time in two of them during vacations. Her weekend home in Virginia is often rented by guests. A stately country property, it sleeps up to eight, and is filled with rustic wood accents – including handsome ceiling beams in the kitchen – and luxe textured fabric pieces, like throws and cushions, throughout.

She has seen an increase in interest for her service. "I deal mainly with people who have a second home and want to rent it out when they're not there," Folen says. But she advises that prepping a home for short-term vacation rentals requires work. "Most people are thinking, 'I'm going to put in all my leftover

furniture,' and it doesn't matter how it looks as long as there's a bed, table and chairs. I think the competition is getting so large that it needs to be more than just that. A space needs to look finished, it shouldn't be a mishmash."

To adapt a space for rentals, she recommends buying durable furniture that can be treated if there's a spill or damage – a sofa with a slip cover, for example – and to steer clear of things that are fragile or that will stain or scratch easily. "I have really nice art work and chandeliers, but [guests] are not going to take that, I hope," says Folen. "If they ruin your upholstered chair because they spill red wine on it, well..."

Orlando Soria, an interior designer and creative director for Home Polish, a U.S.-based hourly interior design service, hosted guests via Airbnb in his former West Hollywood apartment when he wasn't there. The bright, one-bedroom apartment was filled with colourful accents and textiles, but the overarching design had a clean, minimalist aesthetic. "People were interested in my place because it was very accessorized, it looked homey," he says. "I had lots of throws and well-styled shelves. There were indoor houseplants, too. It looked alive and welcoming."

Soria says keeping his space decorated for guests was a good thing when it came to how his temporary visitors maintained his home, because it was a sign that somebody actually lived there. "It didn't feel like an abandoned space," he says. But he did use a different set of throws and bedding for guests, using only textiles that were

machine washable. This allowed him to quickly remake the space as his own upon his return. "I'm very particular about pillows and style and put everything back the way I wanted it. And it's good to do a clean sweep to make it feel like it's your's again," Soria says. "There are some weird elements. Sometimes there's food in your refrigerator – and this is somebody else's stuff."

Lastly, storage is key. Although Ikea Canada doesn't have specific research about customers looking for design solutions for short-term rentals, Kathy Davey, the company's head of interior design, says, "we do know that, with urbanization in major cities, we're seeing more and more rental units and there is definitely a need from our customers to be able to furnish rental properties. There is a need to optimize storage using both open and closed shelving units." As part of its 2,300-product strong storage and shelving offerings, Ikea offers beds, couches, footstools and desks that all have hidden storage capacity.

Soria and Folen both recommend putting some locks on closets to store personal belongings. "I put things I value in them so I didn't have to worry about them," Soria says. But Folen says homeowners should make sure there are some empty closets and empty nightstand drawers to make guests feel welcome and settled. "It's not nice for you when they go through your stuff," she says. "And it's actually not nice for the guests when they have to go through other people's stuff either."

STRANGER THINGS

Fit out your pad with furniture and accessories that create personality, add storage and create a fresh feeling for your guests



DOUBLE DUTY

This lockable steel cabinet is ideal for storing personal belongings and other items visitors shouldn't have access to, but acts as a shelving space for guests to use. Best of all, it can be cleaned easily with a wet cloth.

Ikea PS cabinet, \$129 at Ikea (www.ikea.ca).



BEDDED BLISS

Separate sheet sets are a quick way to transition your home to a guest accommodation. This durable 100-per-cent linen bedding from H&M Home gets softer the more it's washed and it can be tumble dried.

Washed linen duvet cover set in dark petrol, \$149 at H&M (www.hm.com).



ART START

Instead of personal photos, consider more functional wall accents like this calendar. Filled with original illustrations of wanderlust-inspiring destinations including Amsterdam, Paris and London, it will help keep your visitor's vacation plans on schedule.

Bon Voyage 2017 Rifle Paper Co. oversized wall calendar, \$29.95 at Indigo (www.chapters.indigo.ca).



NICE STASH

Whether you're looking to add storage space for your own items or shelving for guests' belongings, this minimalist, industrial-inspired tower is versatile enough to look good in every room of the house.

Grid tower, \$299 at CB2 (www.cb2.com).



SCENT HIT

Turn on this diffuser to set the atmosphere for guests. It also houses a light, which is useful when they're trying to find the bathroom in the middle of the night, or to help reclaim your space after they depart.

Ultrasonic aroma diffuser, \$89 at Muji (www.muji.us).