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'Setting the table makes even bland meals taste better'

Annie Dunne's background in event planning inspired her to start a business aimed at helping us entertain at home. She shares some of her secrets with **Eve Kelliher**

DRESSED FOR DINNER: Annie Dunne who has set up AD Event Design which designs dinner parties and small events.



Where is your happy space at home?

>> My bedroom. Whilst I love working and I really miss doing large-scale events, one little luxury that has come from Covid is a lazy Sunday afternoon, especially in winter.

I love to get back into bed or sit by the fire with a cup of tea and devour the weekend paper.

What is your favourite room?

>> My favourite room is definitely the kitchen, there is something so comforting and homely about it. It is always alive with a hustle and bustle of people coming and going.

When I was living in London one of the things I looked forward to the most about a weekend at home was being on the receiving end of a friendly welcome into the kitchen by our over-excited golden retriever, Molly.

How would you describe your home/interiors?

>> Whimsical I love lots of colour, clutter, texture and pattern. I am a complete magpie, always collecting trinkets along the way. I like a room to evolve organically over time, so much of what makes a room are the things in it.

What was your best-ever bargain?

>> Love a good bargain and one of the best places I've recently come across is the Fabric Outlet in Newbridge. They stock hundreds of fabrics, all of which are priced at €4.99 per metre.

Be prepared to roll up your sleeves — and I recommend going when they have just restocked — but you are guaranteed to find a great deal.

Another fantastic place for a bargain online is Haines Collection. Their goal is to help reduce waste by selling leftover designer fabrics, wallpaper and accessories at discounted prices.

Biggest extravagance in your home?

>> Fresh flowers! They bring so much joy and make a house feel lived in. I think it's a lovely touch to add a little bud vase or plant to a guest bedroom when someone is visiting — it makes the room feel extra special.

What's your favourite household chore?

>> Setting the table; it makes even the blandest of meals taste better.

During the first lockdown, we made such an effort cooking and baking for dinner and I always set the table using fresh flowers.

During these challenging times, it's so important to add some cheery touches to your day.



PICTURE PERFECT: Setting the table is Annie Dunne's favourite household chore.



Former US First Lady Michelle Obama would be on Annie's ideal dinner-party guest list.



Annie Dunne would invite Graham Norton, above, to her dream dinner party.



There is something so special about a beautifully dressed dining table. I see a demand now for smaller events that are beautifully styled at home, presented to ignite excitement and impact. The concept of "rent, dine and return" is perfect for our times where unique moments are created at home and shared on social media, to entertain our friends and transport us to another place.

And what's your least favourite task?
>> Drying glassware. Even when you use a lint-free tea towel it still manages to leave a trail of infuriating fluff!

Are you a DIY whizz?
>> I wish I'm the person who likes to come up with the ideas and then delegate the installation to someone else — it's all about knowing

your strengths!

What's your fridge or kitchen cupboard must-have?
>> Red wine, cheeses, such as Comté and Camembert, and bacon (I could never be vegan).

Tea is also an essential; I have taken to making myself a full pot in the morning and another in the afternoon, because one mug is just not enough.

Your signature dish?
>> I am such a messy cook — "leave no utensil behind" is my guiding principle — but I do love cooking, especially when I have friends coming over.

My signature dish is chicken satay with peanut sauce — it's such a crowd-pleaser, lends itself to every season, and the mango chutney added to the sauce is a real game-changer.

I am such a messy cook. Leave no utensil behind is my motto, but I love cooking — especially when I have friends over

Ideal dinner-party guests?

>> This is a tough one! There are so many to choose from but I would say Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Michelle Obama, Alain de Botton, Kiek Kennedy (JFK's younger sister), Rod Stewart, Graham Norton and Mona Lisa (to find out once and for all about the smile).

What is the best advice you got at home growing up?

>> Count the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.

What household/interiors advice would you like to give others?

>> Don't be afraid of colour. Lots of people shy away from colour but you don't have to paint your entire room yellow or green. You can introduce colour in lots of ways that aren't intimidating or expensive.

How do you feel home is more important than ever in these strange times?

>> Covid has given us the chance to reconsider what's important in life and appreciate what we have. Our homes are now required to serve lots of different purposes: a place to eat, sleep, work and work out and as a result, we have had to set boundaries between work and downtime.

The desire to revamp the rooms in our home has been amplified so there is a clear-cut division between the spaces where we spend the most time.

Annie Dunne has a strong background in event management and design. Following stints at leading London event production agencies, Annie returned to Ireland in February and founded AD Event Design, a new business designing dinner parties and small events in time for Christmas.

entertaining; adeventdesign.com and Instagram: @ad_event_design