



THE DREAM SPACES

The Costa del Sol Holiday Rental Design Guide

*What separates the properties that
book out from the ones that sit empty.*

THE DREAM
SPACES

WHY I WROTE THIS

I designed and launched a holiday rental on the Costa del Sol last year. We had a budget, a deadline and a competitive market full of properties that all looked the same.

Six months after launch, the villa was running at 95% occupancy, Superhost status, every review five stars.

That outcome wasn't luck. It came from designing the property as a product, not as a home.



95% occupancy. Superhost in six months. Every review five stars.

THE HARD TRUTH

Most owners design their rentals like they would design a home they live in. That is the single biggest mistake. A holiday rental is a product. Its job is to convert browsers into bookings, justify a higher nightly rate and generate five-star reviews that bring the next guests in.

None of that has anything to do with whether you personally like the colour of the sofa. Three principles run through everything in this guide. They sound obvious. Almost no one actually applies them.

1

IT'S PHOTOGRAPHED BEFORE IT'S LIVED IN

Guests see your property as twelve photos on a phone screen, not as four walls. If those photos don't compete with the next listing in the search results, the design has failed before anyone walks through the door.

2

GUESTS DECIDE IN 8 SECONDS

That's roughly how long someone spends on a listing before scrolling past or clicking in. Your hero image, your title, and your first three photos do almost all the work. Everything else is confirmation.

3

MEMORABLE BEATS TASTEFUL

The properties that get booked, reviewed and shared are the ones with one or two design choices a guest can describe to a friend. Tastefully neutral disappears. Memorable converts.

THE 8-SECOND RULE

What the algorithm actually rewards

Every booking platform ranks listings on engagement. Photos drive engagement. The hero image drives photos.

A high-converting hero image has four things: clear light, depth, a strong focal point, and an emotional pull that says "I want to be there".

The second and third photos matter almost as much. They confirm the promise the hero made.

If your cover shows a beautiful pool and your second image is a tired-looking sofa, you've already lost the booking.

Pick one shot. Make it unmistakable.



FIVE ROOMS THAT MOVE BOOKINGS

Spend disproportionately, in this order

THE VIEW OR HERO SPACE

Terrace, pool, sea view. What guests are paying the premium for.

THE BEDROOM

Specifically the bed. Every bad review mentions it.

THE BATHROOM

Hotel-quality finishes matter more than tile area.

KITCHEN & LIVING AREA

Generous and clean beats high-spec.

THE "MOMENT"

One Instagrammable detail per property. A reading nook, a hanging chair, a wall of art, an arched window framing a view.



DESIGNING FOR GUESTS, NOT YOURSELF

Personal taste is the enemy of bookings. You're not designing a home. You're designing a stage that has to appeal to a specific guest, photograph well, and generate revenue.

Four questions to answer before any decision.

WHO IS YOUR GUEST?

Couples, families, friend groups, retirees. Each wants a different property. Trying to please all is how rentals end up generic.

WHAT'S THEIR BUDGET?

€120 a night and €400 a night are different products. Design and styling must match the tier of guest you actually want.

WHO IS THE COMPETITION?

Look at the top ten listings in your area at your price point. What do they all do? What does none of them do? Your opening sits in the gap.

WHAT MEMORY REMAINS

Guests don't remember rooms. They remember moments. Morning coffee. Sunset from the egg chair. Design backwards from there.

Answer these before you choose a single colour.

MEDITERRANEAN STYLE WITHOUT THE CLICHÉ

The Costa del Sol has its own visual language. Done well, it feels timeless. Done badly, it feels like a souvenir shop.

WHAT WORKS

Warm whites with cream undertones.

Terracotta floors.

Natural wood, rattan, jute.

Olive, rust, sand, ochre, faded blue.

Linen and cotton textures.

Original arches, beams, brickwork. Visible. Celebrated.

WHAT DATES BADLY

White-and-blue beach-house kitsch.

Anchors and starfish.

Faux-distressed signs with quotes about the sea.

Cool-toned greys that fight the warmth of Spanish light.

Anything lifted from a 2018 Pinterest board.

THE APPROACH

One statement per space.

A bold wallpaper in the children's room.

A hanging chair in an arched alcove.

A gallery wall of original watercolours.

A floor lamp like sculpture.

Calm, then one moment. Never the other way round.

FIVE MISTAKES THAT KILL BOOKINGS

Walk through any underperforming rental, you'll find at least three of these:

FURNISHING IT LIKE A HOME, NOT A STAGE

Personal photos, family knick-knacks, the sofa from your old flat. Style it like a small boutique hotel.

CHEAPING OUT ON THE BED AND BATHROOM

The two things every review mentions. A €600 mattress is the single highest-return purchase in a rental.

TRYING TO DO TOO MUCH IN TOO SMALL A SPACE

Sleeps-eight in a sleeps-four space looks desperate in photos and feels worse in person.

BAD LIGHTING

One overhead light, cool white bulb, no warmth. Lighting is the fastest, cheapest way to lift a property. Three sources per room.

TREATING PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT

A €30,000 renovation photographed badly looks like a €5,000 refurb. Hire a professional. Before listing, not after.

Most owners make at least three.
Walk through your property and count.

VILLA CASE STUDY

THE BRIEF

Not a renovation rescue. A genuinely nice villa - part-renovated, arched windows, porcelain floors, a pool with a view.

The brief was to keep what made it special, strip what made it personal and make it perform as a short-term rental in a competitive market.



THE CONSTRAINTS

A fixed budget and limited time to get the villa running before the holiday season started. It had to feel warm and lived-in, but without the pull of strong personal taste or the flatness of cheap decor.

The warmth needed to come from good choices, not personal taste. And the budget had to land where guests would notice.

THE DECISIONS AND THE RESULT



WHERE THE BUDGET WENT

The budget followed the guest. Beds, mattresses and bedding came first - bad sleep is one of the quickest routes to a lower rating.

The living and dining rooms, where guests spend most of their time, got high-quality furniture. The wardrobes were kept and reworked - cleaned, repainted, new handles - saving a significant amount.

The kitchen kept simple, but fully equipped to make guests feel at home. The bathrooms, hotel-grade.

KEY DECISIONS

The hanging chair under the arch. The most-photographed corner of the property. Every guest takes the same shot and enjoys the moment.

Children's rooms are usually an afterthought. The bunk bed with a great decor with plenty of games and books - this often became a reason to book.

Three bedrooms, three distinctive moods and decor. Different guest fantasies under one roof. The property became more versatile and memorable.

THE RESULT

Six months after launch: fully booked and now outperforming competitors in the same area.

BEFORE YOU BRIEF ANY DESIGNER

Ten questions to answer first.

01 Who is your target guest? Be specific. It's not "everyone."

02 What's your target nightly rate, during high and low season?

03 What's your annual revenue goal and the target occupancy rate?

04 What's your realistic budget for furniture and finishes? My advice is to add 15%.

05 What's the one thing guests should remember about it?

06 Who manages it day-to-day - you, a co-host, an agency?

07 What are the costs of running a rental? Electricity bills, cleaners, refills, gardening, etc. - this all adds up quickly.

08 What style do top competitors lean into? How can you make your property more unique?

09 What is your timeline to start your listing? And what is your ultimate deadline you can't cross?

10

What would it take for a guest to leave a genuine 5-star review?

Answer these ten, and the brief writes itself.



You don't need to figure it out alone. Get in touch.

Every property and every owner starts somewhere different. The most useful thing is a conversation about where you are and what you want the property to do.

I can help you with that, so you have the confidence to move forward and turn your property into one that performs.

First step is a conversation. No pitch, no obligation. Just an honest conversation about how I can help.

CONTACT



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