A café curtain can be a quick and effective way to dress your bed

# Finishing touches for your bed

When looking to furnish your bed appropriately, you must first establish the age of the bed. As a rule, iron beds were made from 1840 to 1880, iron and brass from 1880 to 1900 and iron, brass, porcelain and mother-of-pearl from 1900 to1920. If you are still unsure, another method of dating is by the distinctive lugs on the side rails, which were used to hold the hoop irons in place.

Next you should consider the style of your home and the period of your other furnishings. Modern homes and bedrooms are generally not built to display an iron four-poster bed completely dressed to its original state. These beds ideally need a twelve-foot high (3.66m) plus ceiling and a spacious bedroom to fit them. The canopies, which came in various styles and could be fully dressed with a calico canopy, valances and bed curtains made these beds very dominating pieces of furniture.

When choosing the fabrics for your bed, keep in mind that heavier fabrics, such as tapestry and velvets were favoured in earlier periods. These helped to reduce draughts. Later the trend moved towards lighter fabrics such as chintz. Remember that heavier fabrics and valances require higher maintenance and cleaning than the lighter versions and may become dust collectors.

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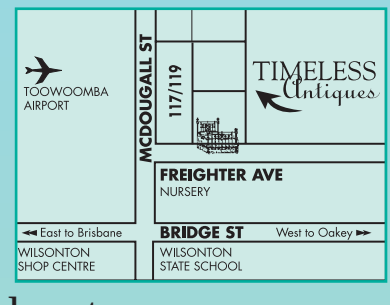


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A straight-edged damask valance with an old style 'wedding ring' design patchwork quilt

Top: A bed furnished with a traditional scalloped damask valance with lace backdrop and lace side drapes tied to the side posts

Above: The modern cottage craft look uses modern co-ordinating fabrics for the valance and quilt

Luckily today there are ranges of heavier, durable materials to chose from, which offer easy maintenance, as well as a huge choice of patterns and textures. Decorative trims can also be used while drapes may be tied to side posts with braided cord or ribbon to avoid catching the dust.

Beds with swinging arms known as 'Italian bedsteads' can be simply dressed with side drapes, which may be swung to the side. By far the most popular styles of beds had round or square testers.

A quick way of furnishing your bed is by simply threading café curtains on the lace rail. However, you can just as easily create an elegant looking bed by fitting a mosquito net or calico canopy with lace drapes. Personal choice allows for a great variation in style.

Laces are available with straight edges, scalloped edges or with a curved finish and all give a very successful effect. Full-length lace can be draped behind the back post or tied to the side posts. Ready-made curtains are a great time-saver and can create some excellent effects in the various styles available.

Low four-poster beds rely on the right quilt to create their image. Patchwork, crocheted and Marseilles quilts have always been favoured.

To find the correct dressing, make use of the books in your local library, which may include facsimiles of old mail order catalogues or even turn of the century ladies' journals which include hints. *The Workwoman's Guide* recommends 'beds for common use are hung with linen or cotton check, or stripe or print, but for better purposes, with dimity, fine stuff, moreen, damask, chintz, turkey twill and lined with glazed calico or muslin of various colours and for staterooms fine silk, satin or velvet is employed.'

Our thanks to the readers of *Antiques & Art in Queensland*, for their phone calls, personal visits and expressions of interest and support. As a small business in a specialised and unique field it is encouraging and rewarding to hear your comments. Should you require further information on dressing your bed we are only a phone call away ■

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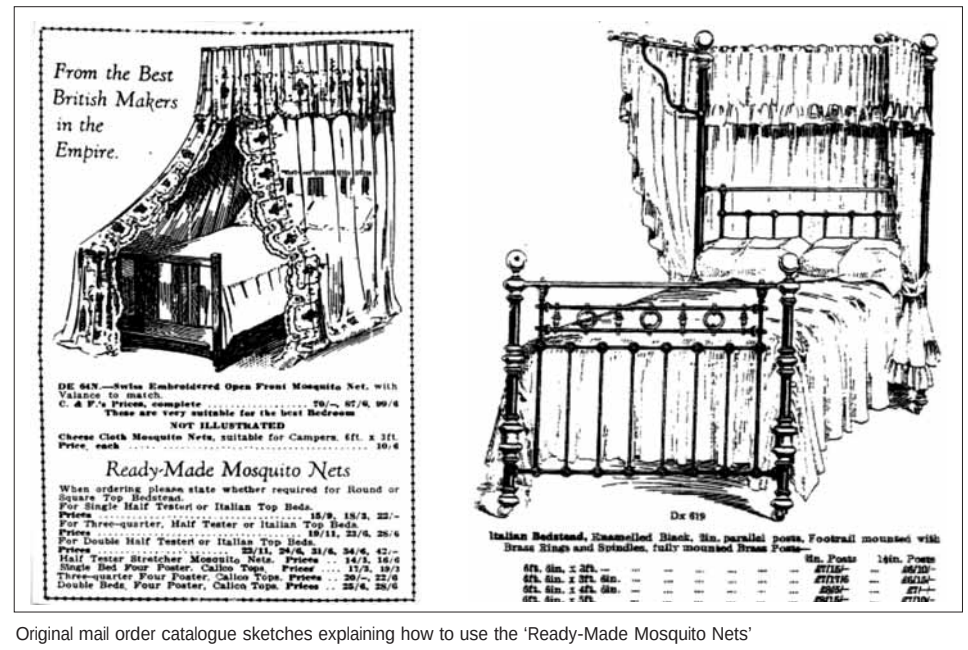


Original mail order catalogue sketches explaining how to use the 'Ready-Made Mosquito Nets'