NEWS LESSON

When Did Inviting Friends Over Become So Much Work?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you invite friends over if your home was untidy?
2. What makes an evening with friends feel effortless?
3. Would you rather bring food or help clear up?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**aesthetic**	☐	A	make something from the past seem better than it was
2	**postponed**	☐	B	a set of ideas about what looks beautiful
3	**competence**	☐	C	hard work, especially physical or household work
4	**romanticise**	☐	D	delayed until a later time
5	**hospitality**	☐	E	the ability to do something well
6	**modest**	☐	F	give something to help a shared effort
7	**contribute**	☐	G	not large or showy
8	**labour**	☐	H	friendly and generous treatment of guests

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Domestic perfection has turned an ordinary act of friendship into a test many people would rather avoid.

1 The invitation is almost sent. Then the host notices the laundry, the crowded kitchen and the absence of anything impressive to serve. A casual evening is postponed until the home looks better and everyone's diary aligns. What ought to be an ordinary expression of friendship has acquired the demands of a minor production. Wanting the evening to be perfect can become the reason it never happens.

2 Much of the anxiety is about presentation. Social media has helped establish an aesthetic of domestic perfection in which homes look permanently ready for a magazine photograph. Against that background, the ordinary evidence of living can begin to feel like failure. A pile of washing, an ageing sofa or a crowded kitchen becomes something to apologise for, although friends rarely visit in the hope of inspecting the furniture. Hosting is no longer simply about welcoming people; it can feel like a test of competence and taste.

3 Practical obstacles are real, too. Dietary requirements call for thought, working patterns leave limited free time, and friendships are increasingly spread across cities. The spontaneous visit has given way to a chain of messages comparing schedules several weeks into the future. Meanwhile, entertainment is available without leaving the sofa. A streaming subscription offers relaxation on demand, without the trouble of shopping, washing-up or waiting for someone who is running late. Convenience, in other words, has quietly raised the relative cost of company, and the easier option is rarely the more sociable one.

4 The change sits within a broader retreat from face-to-face socialising. Analysis of the American Time Use Survey has suggested a long-term decline in time spent with friends, including the once-busy Friday evening. Such figures do not prove that hosting has disappeared, and cultural habits vary considerably between countries. They do, however, capture a familiar shift: opportunities for casual companionship are being crowded out by routines that are easier to manage but often less sociable.

5 It would be unfair to romanticise the past. Invitations were never equally convenient for everyone, and the labour of cooking and cleaning has often fallen disproportionately on women. Restaurants can offer genuinely neutral ground, especially for people whose homes are small or shared. Yet the answer to an unequal division of domestic work need not be the abandonment of hospitality. Guests can contribute food, help clear away the plates or accept that a visit involves sharing the household's ordinary imperfections.

6 What may need reviving is not the elaborate dinner party but the modest invitation. A pot of tea, a shop-bought dessert or a simple supper can create room for conversations that rarely develop through hurried messages. Friendship does not require polished surroundings. It requires repeated opportunities to spend unhurried time together. The real loss would be to mistake hospitality for performance and, in doing so, forget how easy it can be to make someone feel welcome.

Sources: Socius. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The article calls for a return to the elaborate dinner party. T F NG
2. Restaurants can be a fair choice of meeting place, especially for people with small homes. T F NG
3. British people host friends at home less often than Americans do. T F NG
4. The writer suggests that easy home entertainment makes company seem more costly by comparison. T F NG
5. The writer believes the survey proves that hosting has disappeared. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

ageing	aligns	disproportionately	neutral	polished	retreat	spontaneous	unequal

1. Hosting is easiest on the rare weekend when everyone's availability _____ .
2. Household chores have fallen _____ on one partner in many families.
3. The _____ drink after work, unplanned and unrehearsed, often leads to the best conversation.
4. Some commentators describe the decline in socialising as a _____ from public life into the private sphere.
5. The café was chosen because it was _____ ground, belonging to neither of the two rivals.
6. The host's _____ manners and flawless table setting suited a formal dinner.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of the invitation made everyone feel at ease. (SIMPLE)
2. It would be _____ to blame guests for a crowded flat. (FAIR)
3. There is a widespread _____ about how a home appears to others. (ANXIOUS)
4. The _____ of takeaway apps has made cooking for guests seem optional. (AVAILABLE)
5. Guests often leave feeling _____ by an evening of real conversation. (REFRESH)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. These are fixed C1 pairings of adjective, noun or phrase plus preposition. Learn each one as a single chunk.

at for in of on to with

1. Turning down every invitation is tantamount _____ admitting that you prefer to be alone.
2. Hosting can be fraught _____ small anxieties about food and furniture.
3. The success of a dinner is rarely contingent _____ the quality of the menu.
4. The cult of convenience has flourished at the expense _____ real company.
5. Hosts are not answerable _____ every guest's mood.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What one rule would make hosting feel easier?
2. Have online images raised expectations for an ordinary evening at home?
3. Which would you choose: a perfect dinner next month or a simple one tonight?

9 Role-play: come round on Friday?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the host

You want to invite a friend to your flat on Friday. It's a bit untidy and you have no special food. Persuade your friend to come anyway.

Student B · the friend

You'd prefer to meet in a café. You're tired and you don't want to see a messy flat. Ask questions and say what would change your mind.

Useful phrases

Why don't you come round on Friday?

I'm afraid the flat's a mess.

I wouldn't mind that at all.

Let's meet at a café instead.

I'll bring dessert if that helps.

That's a fair point, so let's do that.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did you decide to meet, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 D · 3 E · 4 A · 5 H · 6 G · 7 F · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 aligns · 2 disproportionately · 3 spontaneous · 4 retreat · 5 neutral · 6 polished

6 Word forms

1 simplicity · 2 unfair · 3 anxiety · 4 availability · 5 refreshed

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 with · 3 on · 4 of · 5 for

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