

Finishing touches



When looking to dress your bed correctly and appropriately, it is important to first date the bed era. As a general rule, iron beds were made from approx. 1840 to 1860's, iron with brass 1860's to 1900 and iron, brass, porcelain, mother of pearl from 1900 to end of production years.

If you are still unsure, another method of dating is by the distinctive hoop iron lugs on the side rails, which were used to hold the hoop irons in place, if they are matching on all four sides, they will be most likely from the earlier 1840 to 1880's era. However, you need to be aware many side rails have over the years been lost, swapped when stored over the years. Each cast iron rail is unique and not a "one size fits all", if there is resistance or the rail does not sit neatly into the jigsaw, they are not correct and when used over time in this condition often result in the casting breaking.



When dressing brass beds you should consider the style of your home and the period of your other furnishings. The Queenslander style home, is distinctive sitting high above the ground, to allow air to circulate freely under the house assisting cooling the house, its high ceilings, door breeze frames and verandahs just some of its features. With high ceilings it easily accommodates four poster and tester bed which need a twelve-foot high (3.66m) plus ceiling and a spacious

bedroom to fit them allowing additional finishing touches options and along with Australian federation timber furniture, will create a perfect atmosphere. Modern homes and bedrooms are generally not built to display an iron four-poster bed completely dressed to its original era, the room will appear crowded, half tester and low four poster beds are more suitable.

When choosing the fabrics for your bed, keep in mind that the heavier fabrics, such as tapestry and velvets were favoured in early centuries, predominantly on the heavier timber four poster beds of that time, to help reduce draughts in cold English castles and climates. Remember, that dense fabrics and valances require higher maintenance and frequent cleaning, to remove built up dust which is a health concern for many people with breathing ailments.

Later the fashion trend moved towards lighter fabrics and valances such as lace or sheer fabrics. Battenburg lace is often used for bed sheets, pillowcases, quilts and window curtains, but rarely used as bed canopy as minimised air flow and easily collects dust. For easier maintenance and to minimise health risk, lighter lace and sheer fabrics, they also have a soft flowing fall which suits brass beds well.

Luckily today there are ranges of heavier durable materials to choose from, which offer easy maintenance, as well as a large 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 help 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 has been round and square testers, which have a front long supporting rod. **Be mindful, square testers and swing arms are two different styles and are dressed differently.** Italian Swing Arms the lace falls at the back and from rails in a long continuous sweep to back side posts and have no front rod. Square testers will have a front support rod, allowing for a half canopy with a short fall of lace, if a double lace rail originally allowed for the long mosquito net to drape over bed and during the day was tucked behind the head end of the bed, only being pulled out when going to bed.

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 alicó canopy with lace drapes. Personal choice allows for a great variation of 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 an excellent choice, available from a wider range of curtaining retailers and create a variety of finishing looks.



Low four poster beds rely on the right quilt to create their image. Patchwork, crocheted and marsellies quilts have always been favoured. To find the correct dressing, make use of the books in local libraries or searching online, 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 "bed for common use are hung with linen or cotton check, or stripe or pint, 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".

Ultimately, how you finish your bed is up to you, we can only guide you how beds have been dressed through the centuries.

