

# Home, sweet home

Johanna Griggs' house was her private sanctuary until her family outgrew their need to be shielded from the media, writes **SHANNON MOLLOY**

FOR the longest time, Johanna Griggs knocked back repeated requests to open her home to TV cameras – even ones from her own show – in a bid to shelter her two young sons from the limelight.

The agreement with Jesse and Joe was always that the family house was a sanctuary away from their mum's high-profile world, and whatever went on inside those walls was their business.

"When kids are growing up, they're trying to work out who they are and it can be hard when everyone knows every little thing about you," Griggs says.

"It was a clear decision that when the front door was closed, that's home and no one needed to know anything about it."

Now that they're all grown up – Jesse is 20 and Joe, currently gallivanting around Europe, is 19 – they're much more comfortable with the media circus and don't mind if it comes home with Griggs once in a while.

And so it did recently, when the *Better Homes and Gardens* host invited her fellow presenters around for a lavish Christmas lunch, with several cameras and a crew of about 80 in tow to capture the day for a festive episode of the long-running lifestyle show.

Even her husband Todd Huggins makes an appearance in the special, which airs on Friday.

"I wasn't nervous," Griggs says. "We were pretty comfortable with the idea.

"I figure *BH&G* viewers



welcome us into their homes every week, so it's nice for us to give them a window into our home."

Griggs and Huggins built their place together, on Sydney's northern beaches. Huggins runs a construction company and Griggs was hands-on with the design and decorating elements.

Griggs says what they created was the ultimate party pad boasting big outdoor spaces, a dream kitchen and a pool with a

view of the TV, perfect for long summer days of live-televvised sport.

"We love to entertain and the whole back of the house reflects that," she says. "It's designed to have mass numbers of people. For Todd's birthday last year, we fit 150 people in there and turned the lounge room into a dance floor."

It's also perfect for Christmas, which is by far Griggs' favourite time of year. Planning for festivities,

**COME ON IN:** Johanna Griggs opened her doors to the cameras when she invited her fellow *Better Homes and Gardens* presenters around for an early Christmas lunch.

which she hosts each year, start in June. She recruits a horde of nieces or nephews, who pick the colour scheme, help with decorations and take part in craft and baking days in the lead-up.

"Christmas morning is an intimate affair with family ... and then it's a mad scramble to get everything ready," Griggs says. "People start arriving about 5pm and it just kicks on."

The past year has been one of the most frantic of Griggs' career. As well as *BH&G*, she filmed two seasons of Seven's renovation reality series *House Rules*, on top of her semi-regular sport coverage duties.

"It was exciting and fun, I've got to say, but it was full-on," she says. "I've had lots of

## HOST WITH THE MOST

JOHANNA Griggs knows the pressure of hosting a large-scale party. And over the years, she has learnt a few keys to pulling off the perfect event.

### BE ORGANISED:

Embrace list-writing – and write many. It's the only way to keep track.

### GET HELP:

Enlist family members – particularly if you've got kids who are bored at home during school holidays – for the fiddly, small jobs.

### SHOP ON A BUDGET:

You'll find plenty of quality decorations and other bits and pieces in discount shops. You don't need to spend a small fortune.

### TIMING IS EVERYTHING:

When you're cooking for a lot of people, keep the timing of various dishes in mind. Having everything ready at the same time takes pretty careful planning.

busy periods but nothing as intense as that."

In September, she took two weeks off and went to the family farm in the Hunter Valley for some much-needed rest. The 40ha slice of country paradise has about 30 cows grazing on the rolling green pastures. There, Griggs and Huggins switch off their phones and relax.

"Todd and I went out there to regroup and I think we sat in silence for the first week. We both needed a rest," she says.

That fortnight will seem like just a distant memory come Christmas Day.

**BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS CHRISTMAS SPECIAL**  
FRIDAY, 7PM, SEVEN