

# Opening up

A Guide for Open Houses



[aoh.org.uk](http://aoh.org.uk)

Artists Open Houses Ltd is a not for profit company.  
Registration no. 5420675 (England and Wales)

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# Artists Open Houses Mission Statement

Artist Open Houses (AOH) helps artists connect with audiences in self-curated, non-traditional art spaces; which means usually (but not exclusively) artists' own homes.

To this end we co-ordinate and promote open house festivals, during May alongside the Brighton and Fringe Festivals, and in December.

Our ethos is inclusive rather than selective. We offer the service to all within the 01273 telephone code area, encouraging participation from both artists and makers of all ages, at all stages of their careers, and from all parts of the community including school and college students and marginalised artists.

With a focus on quality and value for money, we work to bring this dynamic mix of arts and crafts to the widest possible audience, providing visitors and viewers with engaging and inspiring experiences.

We are the oldest and largest Open House movement, proud of our roots within the diverse and vibrant artists' community of Brighton and Hove.

We continue to innovate and evolve, reflecting the experience and professionalism as well as the youth and freshness of the city's artists.



**[There is] a feeling of being part of a consolidated organisation, open to the community which adds a lot of value to the festival. AOH is an organisation to be proud of**



*AOH artist 2012*

# 2

## Am I eligible to take part?

The AOH festivals cover the 01273 telephone code area and are open to any practising artists and craft makers in this area. Third party intermediaries are welcome to host open house venues exhibiting artists' work, but may not promote their business as part of their AOH listing. They can take an advertisement in the AOH brochure to promote their business, in addition to their listing, if they wish.

Many open houses invite 'guest artists' to show work alongside them in their houses and to share the costs involved in taking part. Guest artists coming from any geographic area are welcome to exhibit in the Artists Open Houses festival. If you would like to invite artists to exhibit in your house but don't know of any, you could try Houses Seeking Artists on the AOH website: <http://www.aoh.org.uk/artists-seeking-houses>

Unlike some Open Studio events in other parts of the country, payment for a listing is by venue rather than by artist. This means that the costs can be divided up amongst all the artists exhibiting in one venue, keeping costs affordable to all.

Printed brochure and online listings can take the form of a single listing, i.e. a quarter-page, containing a single image; a double listing, i.e. a half-page containing two images; or a full page listing, containing up to four images. (N.B. Venues with 2-3 studios, or occupancies, **must** take out a minimum of a double brochure listing. Venues with more than three studios, or occupancies, **must** take a full-page brochure listing).

For a small additional cost, individual Artists Listings can be added to venues online listings, allowing an image of each artist's work, a link to the artist's websites and their contact details. Artists Listings will also feature in the Artist and Media online search.

If you would like more information on getting involved in AOH, you can contact: [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk)

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## Artists Open Houses Who we are and what we do

Artists Open Houses Ltd is a not for profit company which coordinates and promotes the AOH festivals through its brochures, leaflets, website ([www.aoh.org.uk](http://www.aoh.org.uk)), social media, PR and marketing, throughout the year.

We organize two annual festivals: one in May to coincide with the city's Brighton and Fringe Festivals and a smaller festival at Christmas. The May festival runs over the first four weekends of May; the Christmas festival generally covers the last two weekends in November and first two in December.

AOH Ltd is run by a small, but dedicated organisational team, each with a responsibility for a specific area, e.g. admin, client support, sales, sponsorship and fundraising, social media and marketing, finance, etc. Some team members devote a part or all of their time voluntarily. Anyone is welcome to offer their services on a voluntary basis if their skills and experience match a need.

Where necessary, we outsource work to professional suppliers to undertake jobs such as PR, web development, distribution and design. In doing so, we always source the most cost effective route, whilst never losing sight of the importance of quality.

We keep our costs and the listings fees for houses as low as possible by not having an office and by working hard to attract advertisers, sponsors and other private bodies. Without this financial support, we would not be able to provide the services we currently do. The Artists Open Houses festival at present receives no public grant funding of any kind.

Photo: James Pike



# 4

## What do I get from taking part?

**Artists Open Houses (AOH) is an open-to-all, inclusive festival, welcoming artists of all ages at all stages of their careers, working in all media. As a not for profit company, Artist Open Houses works to support and encourage artists to realize their creative potential.**

By registering as an AOH venue you will benefit from the following:

- Your venue listed in the AOH printed brochure (print run 50,000), distributed throughout Brighton Sussex, SE region and London
- Your venue listed in the AOH printed leaflet map (print run 50,000), distributed throughout Brighton Sussex, SE region and London
- Your venue listed in the AOH website: AOH May 14 festival saw over 100,000 unique visitors in the run up to and during the festival period
- Website listings options include: individual Artists Listings, allowing an image of each artist's work, a link to the artist's websites and their contact details.
- Artists Listings featured in the Artist and Media online search.
- Dedicated trail maps and travel information
- Year round social media campaign, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, blog
- Professional PR campaign, offering extensive local and national media, press, TV and radio coverage
- Cover and 8-page editorial in Latest Homes magazine
- Reciprocal marketing with partners e.g Brighton Festival, Brighton Fringe, Brighton Art Fair
- Personal support and advice offered to all venues
- Online Guide to Opening your House: [www.aoh.org.uk/AOH-guide-2016](http://www.aoh.org.uk/AOH-guide-2016)
- Regular newsletters sent to artists and visitors
- Reciprocal advertising in publications such as Pallant House Gallery Magazine, Selvedge, Aesthetica
- Best Open House Award
- Brochure Cover Artist Award
- AOH launch party
- Invitations to attend discussion groups and take part in online feedback surveys
- The opportunity to join a local art trail

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## **Artists Open Houses a brief history**

Brighton's open house phenomenon began in 1982, when Fiveways artist, Ned Hoskins, opened his front door to the public, inviting visitors into his home to view his own work and that of a group of friends. Other artists in the area followed suit, to form the Fiveways Artists Group. Soon other trails sprang up around the city and the open houses were born. Initially appearing as a brief listings section within the early Brighton Festival brochures, open houses were subsequently moved to the Brighton Fringe. However, as this brochure contained neither images nor maps for open houses and the listings were buried within its many performance arts pages, trails were ultimately reliant on producing and distributing their own leaflets to market and promote them. Visitors to the open houses had to collect up to around 13 different trail leaflets from around the city in order to cover all the disparate trails.

Hence Artists Open Houses (AOH) Ltd was set up in 2004 by a group of open house artists, acting on the necessity of producing a brochure uniting all the individual trails. The initial idea was simple, but soon expanded to include a website, PR, marketing, distribution and had grown into co-ordinating a full-blown festival in its own right. The clear, single brand identity for all the open houses made it much easier for visitors to have a strong image of who we are and how to find the open house venues, resulting in audience figures greatly expanding over time accordingly.

Although the Artists Open Houses festival now stands as an important festival in its own right, it does not forget its roots, ensuring that procedural decision making is inclusive, by consulting extensively with participating artists via regular discussion groups, trail and venue feedback and online surveys carried out with open houses throughout the year.

# 6

## Taking part

### 6.1 Should I join a trail?

Open House trails cover most areas of the city, plus some surrounding areas. Trails operate autonomously, setting their own membership criteria and joining fees (which are used to promote the trail and are not paid to AOH). Although the AOH ethos of inclusivity is strongly encouraged, it is each trail's ultimate decision as to who may and may not join their trail, when they close membership to new members, and if and how much they charge as an annual membership fee. One or two trails may ask to inspect your house or ask you to undertake a probationary year before joining their trail. Some trails charge no fee and the majority have no membership conditions.

Each trail nominates one or two Trail Contacts, who are the initial point of contact for new members wanting to join a trail - their contact details can be found at the end of this guide, as well as on the Contacts page of the AOH website:

<http://www.aoh.org.uk/contact>

Once you have registered your venue to take part in the Artists Open Houses festival, you will be sent contact details for your local Trail Contact so that you will be able to join a local trail, should you choose. The Trail Contact will be able to let you know their trail's joining criteria and keep you updated of any trail meetings. Trail Contacts will also inform you of the collection point where you can collect your allocation of AOH brochures and leaflets in the weeks before the festival starts.

Many people like to join a trail as it can be helpful and stimulating to share information and ideas with other trail members. If you are opening your house for the first time, it can be useful to receive some advice from veterans. Trail meetings provide an opportunity for trail members to discuss issues and prompt one another as deadlines approach. Each trail has a different way of working, but most provide a good degree of support for new members.

You are also likely to receive more visitors if you are a part of a trail. Many visitors like to follow a designated trail route and enjoy the identity and presence of a trail. Although AOH provides a full marketing and promotional service for all open houses taking part in the festival, some trails like to add a little bit more by, for example, producing a trail flyer or creating a trail website. By being a member of a trail you may benefit from this extra joint

**NB**  
**Trails operate for the**  
**May festival only –**  
**all Christmas festival**  
**venues are independent.**

trail publicity and the trail identity created, as well as from the fact that other trail members will often direct visitors to your door.

However, joining a trail is by no means obligatory and, although many people enjoy the sociable aspects provided by the majority of trails, joining groups, attending meetings and taking on responsibilities is not everyone's cup of tea. If you prefer not to get involved in a trail, if there is no trail in your area, or your local trail is not taking new members, you can always register your open house as an Independent venue (contact [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk) if you need more information on this).

## 6.2 How do I register?

Registration for the AOH May festival opens in December and closes in early February. Registration for the AOH Christmas festival opens in mid August and closes in mid September.

Open houses register individually, by filling in the online registration form and paying online.

If you are registering as an independent venue, you can just go to the login and then go straight ahead and upload your listing.

There are three listing sizes:

A **full page listing**, allowing you four images and a 2,200 character description of your venue.

A **half page**, or double listing, allowing you two images and a 1,100 character description of your venue.

A **quarter page**, or single listing, allowing you one image and a 550 character description of your venue.

Early bird payment rates, running from early to end December, offer a discount.

Normal payment rates run from 1st January to 24th January.

Late payment rates run from 25th January until registration closes, on 1st February, at a slightly higher price.

### **6.3 What will it cost me?**

Early Bird Rates – paid for between 1 - 31 December

Single listing (quarter page) **£279.00**

Double listing (half page) **£459.00**

Full page listing **£599.00**

Normal Rates – paid for between 1 January - 24 January

Single listing (quarter page) **£309.00**

Double listing (half page) **£499.00**

Full page listing **£649.00**

Late Rates - paid for between 25 January - 1 February

Single listing (quarter page) **£339.00**

Double listing (half page) **£539.00**

Full page listing **£699.00**

Sharing the cost of your listing with all your venue's participating artists makes taking part in the AOH festival affordable for all. (Christmas festival rates are considerably cheaper)

Your listing will also appear in the online listings on our website.

As part of the registration process you can upload your own and your guest artists names and media, so that you, your venue and all your artists will be searchable via the AOH online artists, media and venue search facility: <http://www.aoh.org.uk/may-2014-festival-artists>. You and your guest artists can also take individual Artists Listings (see Individual Artists Listings below). Doing this will provide you and your artists with an image, website, description and greatly increased presence on the artists' and media search.

During the online registration process you can also order a banner, bearing the AOH logo, to display on your house front during the festival. Or if you miss this, at <http://www.aoh.org.uk> in the artists' 'retail' section until mid March. Banners cost £50 and are reusable indefinitely!

Payment for all facilities is processed using Sagepay.

There are clear instructions throughout the online registration process, but if you run into problems while uploading your listing, you can email AOH for support at: [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk)

# 6

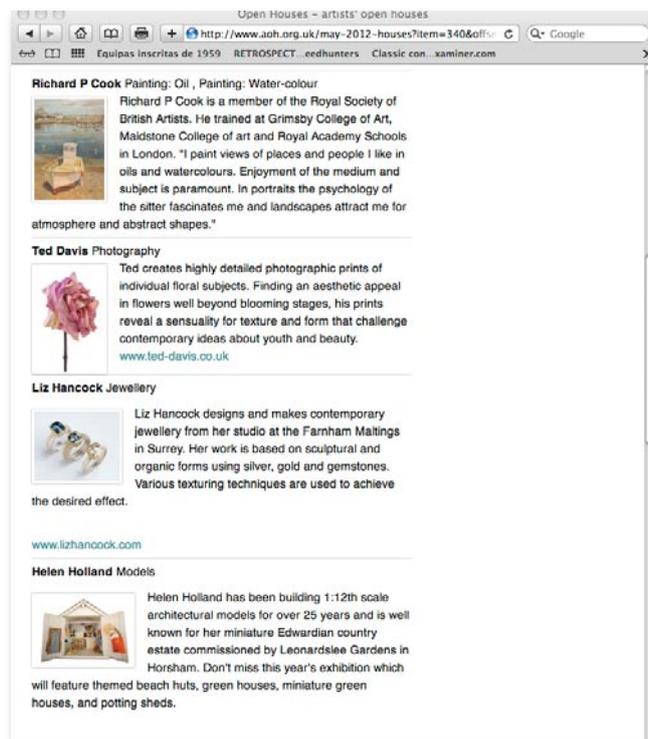
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## 6.4 Individual Artists listings

Many open houses would like to be able to let visitors know about all the artists exhibiting in their house, which may be more than can be given coverage through images in the house's printed brochure listing. And you and your artists can do this online. For just £10 per artist, you and your artists can take out individual Artists Listings, enhancing your own and each of your guest artists' presence, in your online listing. This allows you and your guest artists to add an image of their work, their contact details and a link to their website, which will appear in your venue's online listing page. It will also promote each artist in the website's 'Artists' section and in the online Artist and Media search.

Take a look at a venue where all artists have added their details:

<http://www.aoh.org.uk/may-2014-festival-artists>



## 6.5 Selecting a brochure image

A question frequently asked during registration is how to choose the best image for your brochure entry. Here are a few tips:

In order to look good when printed in the brochure, images should be strong and have good contrast: i.e. a good range of dark and light tones. Generally, rectangular (landscape or portrait) images work better in the design space than square images or extreme landscape images. They need to be of a high enough resolution not to appear pixilated when reproduced.

## 6 *continued*

To test that your image fulfills the above criteria, you could try printing out the image at the size it will reproduce in the brochure and see if it looks good. Also recommended is taking a look at last year's brochure to see what worked really well.

Generally clear, simple and well-defined images work best. Muddy and over complex images, including groups of several artists work, look less good: composite images (a combination of several separate images as a single image file) not only don't work well when reproduced small, but are not accepted in the brochure for this very reason!

### **6.6 AOH leaflet and brochure distribution**

The AOH leaflet map (print run 50,000) contains a detailed map showing the location of all AOH venues, plus an image and an address listing for each venue. The leaflet map comes out earlier than the AOH brochure, giving the festival a presence in the city in early April. You will be given a supply of leaflet maps to distribute around the city and wherever else you choose. You may like to distribute to shops, cafes, bars, galleries, hairdressers and dentists for example in your neighbourhood and beyond, as well as to your friends and buyers.

The bulk of the leaflet maps are distributed via a professional distribution service to London and throughout the South East. Visitors will use the leaflet map to direct them to the AOH website for further information, or direct them to open house venues where they may pick up an AOH brochure.

The AOH brochure (print run 50,000) comes out in early April and is distributed throughout the city and region by a professional distribution service, using a targeted distribution strategy, ensuring there is very little wastage of expensive brochures. You will be given a supply of brochures, but these are for you to keep in your house rather than distribute, so that visitors to your house will know that they will be able to pick up a brochure from your venue throughout the festival.

# 7

## Opening my house

**NB**  
All open houses must take out public liability insurance!

### 7.1 Do I need insurance?

It is a part of the Terms and Conditions, which must be agreed to when registering to take part in the Artists Open Houses festival, that all open houses take out public liability insurance. If someone has a serious accident in your house, you could be sued for a great deal of money. It is essential that you are insured with public liability insurance when you have members of the public visiting your home or studio.

This type of insurance will generally cover public liability only, i.e. injury to people visiting your house and not value of the work displayed. It is also possible for individual artists to take out their own insurance to cover possible loss or damage to their own work if they choose to.

We recommend taking out public liability insurance with the Artists Newsletter (AN) AIR. <https://www.a-n.co.uk/>

AN AIR operates the only policy dedicated to artists and costs around £36 per year. If you are an artist, the policy will provide around £5m cover. There are a variety of options, so it's worth taking a good look to check the details of what is covered.

Don't try to add this insurance to your household insurance as it may invalidate it or raise your premiums astronomically!

### 7.2 Are there any other costs?

Open house hosts generally share all costs of taking part in the Artists Open Houses festival with their guest artists (see section below). How many guest artists you choose to invite to exhibit with you is entirely up to you. The more artists, the lower the costs all round, but the less space you will be able to allocate per artist. Most visitors enjoy looking round houses with a good variety of artists and makers, rather than venues with just one or two artists – but there is a limit, beyond which the house may feel like an overcrowded shop!

Costs of taking part will include your AOH festival listing (plus a trail joining fee if you chose to join a trail and the trail has a membership fee). You must also take out public liability insurance as part of the Terms and Conditions of registering with AOH in case any accidents occur in your open house. We

## 7 *continued*

recommend AN AIR (see insurance above), which is extremely reasonable.

All other costs are optional, but could include:

- An AOH banner
- A private view, i.e. wine, soft drinks (invites can be mailed out electronically).
- A house publicity flyer and postage to mail-out (an e-flyer saves considerable costs here too)
- A website dedicated to your open house
- Wrapping and sales materials
- Cash box



Photo: Albert News Studios

### **7.3 Should I share costs with artists showing in my house?**

If it's the first time you've held an open house, you may feel slightly tentative about charging your guest artists. But, quite apart from the costs you will be incurring, you will also be undertaking the bulk of the work before, during and after the festival.

Before the festival starts this may include going to trail meetings, if you join a trail, designing or organizing the design of house flyers and/or private view invites, plus arranging for and hosting the private view if you have one.

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**“  
Go for it!  
Find someone to  
do it with, to share  
the costs and the  
organisation.  
It is more fun  
that way.  
”**

*Open House participant, 2012*

During the festival your house will experience a certain amount of wear and tear, even possibly necessitating the repainting of rooms, filling in nail holes etc. after the festival is over, as well as regular vacuuming and dusting throughout the festival period!

Throughout the festival you will have the responsibility for overseeing visitor payments for artwork, arranging collection of artwork and for paying your artists after the event. In addition, you are effectively providing a gallery space and acting as agent for your guest artists, providing visitors with information about their work and helping to sell it.

Most houses charge around £50 per artist, depending on the number of guest artists and the cost outlay. The fairest solution is to work out all your costs, e.g. listing fees, banner, private view, insurance, packaging, trail membership etc. and then divide this up between the number of artists taking part.

Most open houses also request a commission on sales of guest artists' work. This is generally around 10- 15% on works sold. Guest artists are expected to help out with invigilation, so some houses operate a system whereby those who can't, or don't want to invigilate, pay an additional commission, e.g. 20 – 25% on sales.

It is a really good idea to make these charges, as feedback suggests that gaining these, possibly small, amounts of profit from your artists' sales, will work wonders in preventing any feelings of resentment occurring in very busy or stressful moments. And, remind yourself that you deserve some reward for your hard work and the opportunities you have provided for the other artists.

If you would like to invite artists to exhibit in your house but don't know of any working in the media you would like to exhibit, you could try Houses Seeking Artists on the AOH website:

<http://www.aoh.org.uk/artists-seeking-houses>

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## **7.4 Do I need any extra publicity?**

### **7.4.1 AOH banners**

Investing in an Artists Open Houses banner, bearing the AOH logo is definitely worthwhile. Displaying a banner on the front of your house or in your garden is an excellent way of making your venue visible and clearly a part of the official AOH festival. Keeping your banner in position throughout the festival draws attention to your house during the week, providing publicity even when your house is shut. You can buy an AOH banner online, when registering your venue as part of the online registration process, or at any time up until mid March on the online artists 'retail' page: [Click here](#) – but you must first be registered with AOH. Once bought, you can reuse your banner year after year.



### **7.4.2 Social media and PR**

AOH carries out a full social media and digital marketing campaign throughout the year – this includes Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Tumblr as well as an AOH blog. AOH currently has 7,500 followers on Twitter and nearly 2,000 Facebook friends.

It's a great idea to set up your own Facebook and Twitter accounts and also to follow AOH on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/artistshouses](https://www.twitter.com/artistshouses)) and "like" the AOH Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/artistshouses?ref=ts&fref=ts>). This way information about the festival will increase exponentially throughout the city and beyond.

The AOH social media team is happy to include any interesting news angles on open house artists in their regular Tweets and festival blogs. If you have any open house artists' news, contact: Fiona at: [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk) or [marketingaoh@gmail.com](mailto:marketingaoh@gmail.com)

“  
**The brochure is  
 widely distributed  
 so you get good  
 coverage and  
 publicity.**  
 ”

*Open House participant, 2012*

And if there is anything really newsworthy happening in your house, let us know and we can forward the information to Bullet PR, our PR agency, who may be able to provide coverage via local and national media outlets of print, digital, radio and TV, as part of their regular excellent and high profile AOH PR campaign.

#### **7.4.3 House flyers and e-flyers**

Although by no means essential, some open houses like to design a publicity flyer for their venue to complement the AOH brochure, leaflet, website and other marketing and e-marketing carried out for them by AOH.

You will be able to find a number of local companies producing flyers at reasonable prices, which you will need to order a month or so before the start of the festival. Brainstorming with other trail members may provide ideas for good places to target with your flyers: e.g. shops, cafes, other open houses on your trail... putting them through neighbours' doors has been a tried and tested method. It can also be a good idea to put your house flyers inside the AOH leaflets and distribute the two together.

You may however prefer to just design and mail-out an e-flyer, this will save enormously on costs, though it has the downside of going only to people who you already know.

#### **7.4.4 Email lists**

Gathering an email list from visitors to your house is a good idea. Leaving a visitors' book by the door, or asking visitors who buy your own and your artists work if they wouldn't mind leaving their email contact details can be effective. The former is more suitable for creating a general emailing list, whilst the latter, being more targeted, is suitable for a more personal private view invitation list, if you choose to hold one.

#### **7.4.5 Individual open house websites**

Some open houses like to create their own dedicated open house website. While this may well be a bit too much to undertake in your first year of opening, longer term it can give your open house extra publicity beyond the festival period, especially via its links to the AOH website, which will direct visitors to your site throughout the year. It's a good way of providing information for any interested enquiries during the year, and gives you and the artists showing in your house an extra showcase for your work.

# 8

## What else do I need to know?

### 8.1 Opening times

Opening times are really up to the individual venue, but most open houses tend to keep to the opening times of 11:00 – 17:00 or 12:00 – 18:00. Longer hours than this can sometimes make the day feel just a bit too long.

Each trail, as an autonomous organisation, makes some decisions separately from AOH. Quite a few trails encourage, or stipulate, that all trail members keep the same opening hours. This does seem to work well as it is clearer and easier for visitors, causing less confusion and irritation. Visitors will often assume a trail's opening hours to be the same anyway.

Opening days for the festival are Saturdays and Sundays during the first four weekends of May. However, one trail asks its members to also open on the two bank holiday Mondays and some studios, workshops etc are open on weekdays as well. Allowances are made for these anomalies in the online registration process and brochure design.

### 8.2 Getting the house prepared

It's a good idea to put away all valuables and any easily movable objects in an upstairs room, or any room you won't be opening, and mark this area as private. De-cluttering, touching up the paintwork and generally cleaning up the areas you will be opening to the public makes the house more welcoming. It is also strongly recommended that you check out any dodgy floorboards, staircases etc to prevent possible accidents to visitors.



Photo: Pete Jones

## 8

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Some open houses use sheets of boarding to cover up their shelves and alcoves, allowing extra wall space for hanging work. This provides obvious advantages, but at the same time can make your house look more like a gallery and part of the joy of open houses to many visitors, is that they look like someone's home!

You may also want to produce signs to indicate which rooms are open – including the toilet if you are permitting visitors to use it!

### **8.3 Should I provide refreshments?**

Of course it's an entirely personal decision whether or not you choose to provide refreshments for visitors - a decision that may depend on the size of your kitchen, garden or living area and supply of crockery. But many open houses enjoy providing homemade tea and cake, which can give a house a welcoming feel, encouraging people to stay longer and chat to the artists while perusing the work. Some visitors carefully select houses for their quality of cake! However other houses very definitely prefer to keep the focus entirely on the art... and this is up to you.

From a legal point of view, anything beyond tea and cakes – lunches for example – effectively makes you into a cafe and opens you up to the possibility of health and safety inspections. Charging for alcohol is illegal.

### **8.4 Laying out the show**

How you choose to layout your show is really a decision of personal imagination and preference; one of the pleasures of opening your house is that you are the curator of your own house. You may have definite ideas about how you would like to display the work – taking advantage of the 'domestic' nature of your house, and the ways it differs from a 'white cube' gallery space. You may decide to 'theme' your show and select your artists or their work accordingly. Others in your trail may be able to offer the benefit of their experience, if you want it, and these subjects may be useful to discuss at trail meetings.

Deciding on a 'house style' is a good way to unite all the different work exhibited in your show. This can be done, for example, by brief information panels about each artist and maker, printed in a house style, being attached to the area where the artist's work is displayed. Some houses ask their artists to send price lists of the work they will be exhibiting in advance, so that they can design

## 8 *continued*



Photo of The Print House: Jerry Webb

uniform and co-ordinated labels for each piece of work on show.

Some houses ask their artists to hang their own work, others ask them to drop it off, in good time (perhaps a week before) and prefer to decide where all the work should go themselves. This can be advisable, helping to avoid clashes of style or disagreements around fairness of space allocation and gives you

### **8.5 Pricing and framing**

When thinking about pricing and framing your work, it's generally a good idea to visit other open houses exhibiting work similar to yours and noting what you feel works well in terms of the presentation and pricing of the work. A frequently used rule of thumb, is asking yourself whether you would feel cheated if you sold a piece of work below a certain price – and then asking yourself how much you want and need to sell the work. You should also consider the hours spent creating the work, the cost of framing, or other costs as applicable.

### **8.6 Invigilation**

First time open houses often rightly predict the fun elements of hosting an open house – the sociability, the pleasure of visitors engaging with the work – but are frequently unprepared for how exhausting being on public display, non-stop, for a whole weekend can be. Very occasionally a member of the public may

## 8 *continued*

make you feel uneasy. Having friends and guest artists to help out with invigilation is invaluable. Most people prefer to have at least one invigilator in every room that you have open to the public, as a precaution against mishap and theft (which, by the way, is a seemingly uncommon occurrence). However, some think this can be a bit intimidating for visitors. Certainly, if you're exhibiting small, expensive and easily re-moveable items, it's a very good idea to make sure someone is nearby at all times.

The best way to carry out invigilation is to divide the weekends up into time slots – two per day – and then work out how many slots each of your artists will need to undertake. It is a good idea to suggest to your artists that, once the invigilation rota is agreed and fixed, if they have to change their slot at the last minute, they will need to contact another of your artists and arrange a swap with them. It's a good idea for all your artists to have a copy of the invigilation rota and each other's contact details, so that they can do this without involving you!



### **8.7 Private view**

A private view is not obligatory and some people may feel it is a waste of time and money. But many open houses find that the advantages of holding a private view or opening party for friends, colleagues and previous buyers can be great. It opens the festival on a high note and a well run private view really does promote sales, even those invitees who can't make it, or who don't buy anything on the night, are very likely to come back at another

## 8 *continued*



time. It can also feel like a reward for your own hard work and can provide a thank-you for the participants in your house.

One suggestion, gained from experience, is to free yourself up from serving drinks yourself, so that you can play the host. It is a good idea to draw up a rota giving your artists tasks, such as serving drinks, clearing glasses, red-dotting any sold work and taking payment for and recording artists' sales throughout the private view.

**“ I’ve met so many good people. People who are genuinely interested in your work, who show this by sometimes buying it, but also love noticing the references in it. People who have become friends. ”**

*Open houses guest artist, 2012*

### **8.8 Meeting and greeting visitors**

Something requested by many first time open houses, is advice on how to treat visitors. We’d suggest it’s always good to welcome visitors on arrival. It can be quite daunting to walk into a stranger’s house, even if you’re clearly clutching an AOH brochure, and it is very off-putting to be ignored. After an initial greeting, it’s pretty much a matter of playing things by ear and by judging visitors’ reactions. Some people want space and peace to look at the work uninterrupted and in their own time. But most really enjoy a chat with the artists – within reason.

Visitors are far more likely to engage with the work and artists, resulting in possible sales, if they are made to feel welcome. But don’t be offended if visitors are keener to talk about the colour of your walls than the work hung on them! And hopefully they will be looking at both.

### 8.9 Paying for work

Easy to overlook the first time you open your house, but presenting itself as a necessity, often within the first few hours of opening, is a cash box. This can be improvised with an empty plastic container, but a proper cash box with lock and key is generally a good investment. You will also need to get some small change from the bank in advance - £5 notes are particularly useful as people often pay with £10 notes for small items.

You will also need a sales book, listing all your artists' names and carefully writing down all sales for each artist. If possible, it is also good to write down the name and contact details of visitors making the purchases - especially if they are large purchases. How you do this is up to you; some people allow separate pages for each artist and others just write down sales and artists' names as they occur. Some artists, though, will ask for their payment pages at the end of the festival, both so that they have a list of their buyers details and also of their sales, to check for themselves that they have received the right payment from you and also so that they have the right information for their own accounts.

### 8.10 Methods of payment

When paying for purchases in your Open House more and more people want to make payment by card and you may miss out on a sale if visitors are not able to make an instant payment. Now cheque guarantee cards have been withdrawn it's important to be able to accept card payments.

We suggest using the **SumUp** system, which will allow you to accept card payments using your smart phone. SumUp is an App that runs on your smartphone or tablet and charges a flat fee of 1.95% per transaction. No additional hardware is needed.

To use SumUp you simply need to follow 3 simple steps:

- 1 Download the app from Google Play or Apple iTunes Store
- 2 Sign up in 2 minutes  
[https://sumup.co.uk/?utm\\_source=artistopenhouses&utm\\_medium=referafriend](https://sumup.co.uk/?utm_source=artistopenhouses&utm_medium=referafriend)
- 3 Start taking card payments anywhere, anytime within only 2 hours after signing up.

A chip&pin reader device is also available, where the customer's card is inserted into your smartphone or tablet and the customer

## 8

*continued*

verifies their details via pin. This costs £50 and will process: Visa, MasterCard, AmEx, Vpay and Maestro (Credit and Debit Cards).

The percentage fee of 1.95% per transaction applies the same to all and the service runs on all Apple and most Android devices.

SumUp holds a licence as payment provider by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and is absolutely secure.

If you have any questions you can call SumUp's customer support on **0203 5100 610**, or send an email to [support@sumup.com](mailto:support@sumup.com).

If you don't have a smart phone but you live near a cash machine, you can always point visitors in that direction, so that they can make their payment to you in cash. Otherwise visitors, who don't have sufficient cash on them, will need to pay for larger pieces of work by cheque.

Whatever the method of payment, anyone buying a largish piece of work, will generally be asked to leave a small deposit of around 10% to secure the work. They will then need to return at the end of the festival to make the remainder of the payment and collect the work. Most open houses don't allow large pieces of work to be collected before the end of the festival, as this will leave large gaps in the show, plus it always looks good to have a sprinkling of red dots around the walls, which can help encourage other sales. However exceptions can occasionally be made if the visitor comes from far away and won't be returning to Brighton – and can pay cash! But you may prefer to arrange delivery of the work to them at the end of the festival. It is advisable not to let any work be taken away until cheque payments have been cleared by the bank. Do make sure to always write down and keep, all cheque payment details and numbers.

You may feel it is safest to handle all payment details yourself rather than hand responsibility to your guest artists – unless you have some artists exhibiting in your house who have expertise in handling large numbers of payments, sometimes under pressure if you are very busy. Jewellers and ceramicists frequently have more experience of this than fine artists! If any thing goes wrong with the final sums, you will be the one who needs to work out where and ensure that in the end everyone is happy!

## 8 *continued*

### 8.11 Suppliers

A few suggestions for things that you might need to buy when opening your house:

- Clarkes Stationers in Bond Street can supply: cash box, red dot stickers, sticky-backed price labels, card for labeling, backing card for packaging prints, files, note and visitors' books
- Viking Direct supplies stationery and bubble wrap
- Adam Adams of Shoreham is a florist's supplier which can provide bags for e.g. packaging prints (tissue one side, clear film the other) and bubble wrap
- 1st For Fittings (just off Seven Dials on Prestonville Road), sells brown paper bags in all sizes and tissue paper.

**“  
We both thoroughly  
enjoyed the whole  
experience, even  
though it was  
exhausting! We  
enjoyed being able  
to meet some great  
people, and we had  
a really positive  
response to our  
work, and made a  
good few sales.  
”**

*Open House participant, 2012*



If you have any queries on any of the subjects covered in this guide, or anything else relating to opening your house, please contact us at: [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk)

We hope you enjoy the experience of hosting your open house and wish you a successful festival.



## 2016 Open House Trail Contacts

### **Beyond The Level**

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### **Ditchling**

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### **Hanover**

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### **Hove**

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### **Kemp Town**

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### **Newhaven**

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### **Ouse Valley**

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### **Rottingdean and Downs**

AOH: [info@aoh.org.uk](mailto:info@aoh.org.uk)

### **Seven Dials**

Francesca Twinn: [magiclampaoh@gmail.com](mailto:magiclampaoh@gmail.com)



# AOH Timeline to May 2015

## Date Event

### December

- 1 Early Bird registration opens
- 31 Early Bird registration closes

### January

- 1 Normal rate registration opens
- 24 Normal rate registration closes
- 25 Late rate registration opens

### February

- 1 Registration closes @ 18.00
- 22 Discussion group 1 **for new venues** (TBC)

### March

- 7 Discussion group 2 (TBC)
- 4 Leaflet proofs available @ [www.aoh.org.uk](http://www.aoh.org.uk)
- 9 **DEADLINE** Leaflet proofing closes
- 11 Brochure proofs available @ [www.aoh.org.uk](http://www.aoh.org.uk)
- 16 Discussion group 3 (TBC)
- 17 **DEADLINE** 1st brochure proofing closes
- 24 Leaflet delivered to trail collection point
- 25 Leaflet distribution start
- 27 **DEADLINE** Banner orders close

### April

- 7 Brochures, posters, banners delivered TBC
- 7 Brochure distribution starts
- 8 Website live
- 13 Launch party TBC
- 30 First day of AOH festival

### May

- 30 Last day of AOH festival (Bank Holiday Monday)