



# THE TIMES

## Can't get the staff? What your waxer, nanny and cleaner really think of you

Diva demands and questionable habits. It doesn't go unnoticed, say the people who see you up close and personal

Interviews by **Lucy Holden**



"Clients let you into their home then totally ignore you; you are invisible to them" KINTZING

### **'She stood there naked, waiting to be dressed'**

*Mary, 35, head housekeeper based between London and New York, earns £60,000*

If you are in a household staff, the employer is always referred to as the principal. As a housekeeper, you have to be on call all the time to keep the principal happy. You average four to six hours' sleep a night. A principal I worked for in London had a morning routine that started at 6am. I had to take ice cubes and cold flannels to her bedside so she could apply them to her face; I had to follow that with hot water and flannels, and a series of fresh juices. While I ran around bringing things to her, she'd sit in bed listening to classical music wearing sunglasses.

In another job, “wardrobe management” was part of the role. My first meeting with the principal was in her dressing area. She came through from the shower in a towel, dropped it, and stood there, naked, waiting to be dressed. I had another principal in New York who hit me once when she couldn’t fit into an outfit. I quit and booked the next plane back to London. She tried to buy me back for £50,000, saying I could use it for a deposit on a house. When that didn’t work, she sent me expensive jewellery, but I returned it all.

One family asked me to arrange a five-year-old’s birthday party. They wanted a famous TV star to come and do party games so I had to call their agent and try to negotiate a price. I couldn’t afford them on the budget I had been given, so I booked a lookalike instead. They had no idea.

### **‘A six-year-old told me she was on a carb-free diet’**

*Michael, 37, private chef in London, earns £55,000*

The experience you need to be hired as a private chef amazes me — it’s more than you need to work at one of London’s best restaurants. I saw a position on a yacht advertised, which I didn’t get. When I asked why, I was told the family had hired a former *MasterChef* contestant.

The irony is that you spend thousands of pounds training at Leiths [School of Food and Wine] or Le Cordon Bleu, but then often all you do when you’re in your job is work the blender. Employers I have worked for barely eat unless they are hosting a dinner party.

Japanese food used to be the big trend — now it’s Middle Eastern.

One of my jobs was for a woman who lived in Belgravia, who was obsessed with fad diets and “wonder ingredients”. She’d leave magazine cuttings next to the cooker, to show me what she wanted to try. They usually would involve in-vogue stuff like purple mangosteen, spirulina, kelp . . . She liked me to juice everything. Men can be just as picky. I had one client who said he suffered from irritable bowel syndrome so did not eat spicy food, but he still ate at Nobu three times a week.

You see the effect of the parents’ faddy food attitudes developing in their children, stick-thin teenage girls, mostly. I’ve heard mothers telling their thin children to “watch it”. A six-year-old once told me she was “carbs-free”.

### **‘You know when parents have been in the pub’**

*Amanda, 31, nanny to two children, aged 5 and 7, in London, earns £42,000*

The thing that annoys me most are those employers who take advantage of your hours because they know you’re stuck at home with their children and can’t leave until they get back. Nannying is not like any other job where you’d leave at 6pm or 7pm regardless. Often my employers get home three or four hours late. They’re profusely apologetic, but you know they’ve been in the pub.

Most children are lovely during the day and then play up awfully when the parents appear because they crave attention.

Being landed with other people's kids is irritating too. Being asked to look after more children is like being given twice the paperwork in a normal job.

Most of my employers feel guilty about not spending enough time with their children. But they still hire an army of staff so they don't have to do it themselves. One of the families I worked for had three nannies — a full-time, live-in nanny; a weekend nanny and a babysitter for the evenings. Neither of the parents worked. Even those parents who work feel so guilty about it that when they do spend time with their children they won't discipline them and so the children turn into nightmares.

I am asked to do a multitude of other tasks: fix the wifi, pressure-wash the summer house, sand garden chairs, train a puppy. I've even had to learn how to play the trumpet via YouTube videos so I could teach a child the instrument.

### **'People ask me to do their shopping and drop off their dry cleaning'**

*Martin, 45, private chauffeur in London, earns £200 a day*

I am freelance, which means I'm hired for a few days at a time, mainly by wealthy families who don't want to take public transport, or businessmen who need to get from meeting to meeting in a hurry. Most are terrible backseat drivers. Bearing in mind I'm using sat-nav, which tells me which roads have the least traffic, it's infuriating when passengers still think they know which routes will be quickest. Then they fume when the car isn't moving quick enough. Someone once informed me I'd lost him £1 billion because he was going to miss a business meeting.

If they think the journey is taking too long, my clients jump out at a Tube station halfway to their meeting, saying they'll see me there, then ask me to do the shopping. My wealthy clients' favourite places to buy food are Whole Foods and the Harrods and Selfridges food halls. They also get me to book restaurant tables and take their clothes to the dry cleaner.

I do a lot of sitting outside clubs and bars while businessmen or footballers who have hired me get really drunk inside. Sometimes they then get into the car with a woman they've picked up from the club. They ask me to drop her off first, kissing her on the back seat all the way. Once she has been dropped off I drive my client back to his family.

### **'Everyone wants the Hollywood strip wax'**

*Deborah, 28, bikini waxer in Cheltenham, earns £25,000*

I am sure many of my clients worry about what I am thinking when I am inches from the most personal part of their body. But I'm just obsessing about making them look neat. These days most people who come in regularly are not super hairy. You do get a few bushes, which you look at and think: "Where the hell do I start?"

Requests, such as for a full Hollywood, in which everything comes off, once seemed extreme, but they are everyday now. Some blame porn for this, but I think it's as much to do with fashion. Swimsuits, especially high-legged styles require you to take a lot off. What has also changed is how much younger girls are coming in now. It does feel weird ripping the hair off a 15-year-old. I see more middle-aged and older women too now. They are often divorcées who are getting back into dating and don't want to look old-fashioned down there.

**‘I found a sex toy on the bed, I threw it away’**

*Daphne, 46, cleaner in a six-bedroom Surrey home, earns £28,000*

The strange thing about being a cleaner is that even though you see the most intimate side of your clients’ lives, you are invisible to them. They let you into their home then totally ignore you.

Cleaning the bathroom is the worst part of the job, and you’d be surprised by the state of some people’s loos. It’s amazing how often people don’t bother to flush the toilet.

Once I found a sex toy on a bed. I threw it away, thinking the couple would be mortified I’d found it. But then my male employer texted me to ask if I’d “found anything” on the bedside table when I’d been at the house. He was really annoyed that I’d chucked it out, because it was “very expensive” apparently. I guess this is why many clients now ask you to sign non-disclosure agreements. Cleaners end up knowing more than you can imagine.

**‘People give out vegetables pretending they grew them, not me’**

*Malcolm, 35, gardener on a family estate in Hampshire, earns £38,000*

I’ve been asked to do some pretty pretentious things in people’s gardens, such as grow mazes and cut hedges into swans. Once I was asked to move 2,000 strawberry plants 100m to the left so the first thing you saw when you walked into the garden was a bed of flowers. After the Chelsea Flower Show one year, a client told me they liked the “representation” of the trout pool that won a gold medal.

The one thing almost all clients do is show off their gardens as if the work was all their own. If they have guests coming and they know they’ll be taking people around the garden, they will come and ask me how everything’s doing the day before, so they can repeat it to whichever guest they want to impress. I overhear them saying they planted the hydrangeas and taking credit for planting that I’ve slaved over for weeks.

One employer loved to take guests into “her” kitchen garden, which was overflowing with my carefully planted vegetables. She’d hand out artichokes, tomatoes and asparagus as gifts, pretending she had grown them all herself.

*All names have been changed*

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