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Designer behind Bill Clinton's office is right at home with Harlem style

Sunday, November 4th 2007, 4:00 AM

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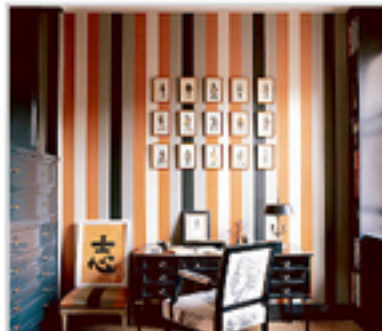
There are so many things to obsess over in Sheila Bridges' apartment. There's the size: deluxe, complete with three bedrooms, formal living and dining rooms, and maid's quarters. There's the location: the top floor of a landmark 1901 Clinton & Russell building in central Harlem, just a few blocks north of Central Park. There's the symphony of rich colors. And there are the scores of lighthearted, yet elegant, objects and furnishings. But perhaps the most seductive bit of the interior designer's handiwork is one appreciated not through your eyes but via the soles of your feet.



Interior designer Sheila Bridges, at home in Harlem. Photo by William Waldron.

Bridges starts her magic carpet ride at the front door, where she offers you a pair of Moroccan slippers. "It's not so much about the idea that the city is filthy, or ruining anything precious," she says. "I just want people to feel at ease. I am always in bare feet." Going shoeless is, of course, a surefire way to feel at ease. But the apartment, which has been totally redone in the past few years, is as globetrotting as it is down-home.

The romp begins immediately, in the tangerine blast of an entry, where the focal point is a borne d'hotel reminiscent of fin de siecle Paris. Off this a smorgasbord of doorways open. There is the blue-toned living room, anchored by the playful round shapes of a Swedish grandfather clock and an antique convex mirror.



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shapes of a Swedish grandfather clock and an antique convex mirror.

The bold orange, black and gray stripes and exotic furnishings of the home office-cum-guest room conjure a Victorian explorer's London flat or a 1970s Pop interior, depending on how you look at it. As for the apple-green dining room, it boasts an assortment of curious chairs, back-to-back demilune tables and a Venetian-glass chandelier.

"I don't like things to be matchy-matchy," says Bridges. "Real life is having different experiences and relationships, with furniture as well as people." Which explains why her apartment combines elements of 19th-century Paris, the Harlem Renaissance and 1950s New York, three eras that have captured her heart. This scope is illustrated nowhere more concretely than in the library.

Through a painstaking process that involved both a signmaker and a decorative painter, Bridges applied passages and quotations from her favorite writers to the walls, among them Langston Hughes, Emily Dickinson and Dr. Seuss. One, by Zora Neale Hurston, seems particularly apt: "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes!" And here, too, so much of it meshes.

"So Chic: Glamorous Lives, Stylish Spaces" by Margaret Russell and the editors of Elle Decor (Filipacchi Publishing. Photography by William Waldron, produced by Anita Sarsidi, styled by Carlos Mota, original text by David Colman.



Bridges mixed contrasting orange and black stripes with foreign furnishings to energize an otherwise ho-hum office or spare room. Photo by William Waldron.



Apple green hues paired with carefully mismatched chairs are right at home in this elegant dining room, while the Venetian chandelier adds finesse. Photo by William Waldron.



Quotes and passages from scribes like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and Dr. Seuss provide comfort and inspiration on these painstakingly painted walls. Photo by William Waldron.

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