

# 'Designer Living' intersects with all budgets

By Rick Bird

Post staff reporter

Sheila Bridges will show you how to hang art, use sheets to decorate a bedroom or go shopping at the flea market, again demonstrating how one person's junk is another's treasure.

Interior designer Sheila Bridges' "Designer Living" is the latest in a spate of TV shows offering design and home improvement tips. It recently debuted (8 p.m. Tuesdays) on the Fine Living cable channel (available in the tri-state to Time Warner digital subscribers).

Bridges' approach is more "Design 101," breaking from the recent trend of reality-style competition shows like "Trading Spaces."

"Unfortunately, design over the years has been kind of inaccessible to a lot of people. (This show) is about practical, usable information no matter what the size of your budget," Bridges said.



Sheila Bridges was named by Time magazine "America's Best Interior Designer" for 2001.

The 38-year-old has the credentials. Time magazine named her "America's Best Interior Designer" in 2001. Last year she

released her first design book, "Furnishing Forward."

Her star projects include designing Bill Clinton's 8,300 square foot Harlem offices and home for software guru Peter Norton. Bridges said her Fine Living show is not design lifestyles of the rich and famous, but a nuts-and-bolts approach.

While much has been made about the fad of reality TV, home advice and improvement shows may actually be the truly potent trend on television the last couple years. It runs deeper than the entertaining "Trading Spaces" — one of the highest rated prime-time cable shows. Ratings for a myriad of home improvement shows are strong. In fact, Scripps Networks, which feature a stable of cable channels with various degrees of around-the-house programming (HGTV, DIY, Food Network, Fine Living) reported revenues increased 37 percent for the four outlets last month, compared to January of 2002.

Scripps says Fine Living, which just came on the air last March, is one of the fastest growing cable channels, now in 13 million homes.

There has been a flurry of swat-team approach design shows picking up on the "Trading Spaces" success, including HGTV's "Design on a Dime," TLC's "While You Were Out," and Discovery's "Surprise By Design." Even VH1 has gotten into the act with "Rock the House."

"There has been a shift in American culture that can be called the art of nesting," says Bridges about the trend. "After Sept. 11, in particular, I've seen more people become interested in their homes and make them sort of sanctuaries reflective of how they are. I think, now, everyone's gotten the bug and interested in renovating. Instead of taking that trip abroad, people might think about redoing their family room."

Bridges' back-to-basics show

uses none of the game-show-like "Trading Spaces" tricks. But neither is it a staid interior design lecture. She brings a breezy, unforced style to her show that is different from many that seemed staged. In Bridges' case, it perhaps helps that she has little television experience, except for occasional appearances on shows like "Oprah Winfrey" and "Today." She seems at ease with a practical approach with real people and real houses. The 13-week series covers a spectrum of designer tips, from buying lamps and the moods bold colors can create, to shopping at a flea market, where Bridges comes away pleased with a mundane buy like salt and pepper shakers.

Bridges' mantra is her "Furnishing Forward" concept, which encourages people to mix a couple of major furniture purchases while still treasuring their "junk," believing it's important to develop spaces to display what people collect over

the years. "When you buy bigger pieces of furniture, you should think about the longevity and how long you will own and have it. It's surrounding yourself with well-made things that will move forward with you, no matter how your life changes. The dining table in your studio apartment might become your desk in your three-bedroom apartment."

While Bridges acknowledges she's hardly reinventing interior design with her "practical" approach, she feels it's a message that bears repeating.

"Most people can't afford to hire an interior designer or architect. I did write the book to demystify the world of design," she said. "It's practical information, but it's also fun. You have to enjoy the process of design, and the more you do that the better the outcome."

Bridges is already in production on a second season of 13 episodes of "Designer Living," which will air this fall.