

CAN BUSH SAVE THE ECONOMY? ■ VENUS RULES!

TIME

IS THIS MAN
THE NEXT
BILLY GRAHAM?

In Part 3 of our
America's Best
series, we look at
the galvanizing
preacher T.D. Jakes
and others who are
changing the way
we see the world

\$3.95 US



10090

0 925679 8

perate to impress the James Beard Foundation at a dinner the next night. It's e-fete food with testosterone subtext.

Keller impresses without trying too damn hard, like some other chefs. He doesn't try to shock with weird juxtapositions, as in Tabasco ice cream. You never think, "Great sauce," at the French Laundry. You think, "Man, that sauce tastes more like ginger-carrot than eating a pound of ginger and carrots." The epiphanies come from finally figuring out exactly what certain foods are supposed to taste like. He refuses to fool you into thinking what's in front of you is more than just food. "I remember my first experience at a three-star restaurant in France, and it didn't meet my expectations. I read about these guys like they were gods, and it's only food," he says. "It wasn't until eight months later I realized it had been a perfect meal."

Unlike TV chefs, which he says he will never become (there's not even a clear shot of his face in his best-selling cookbook), Keller is in the kitchen every day, cooking. His kitchen is calm and silent now, uber-professional; he's dispensed with the angry outbursts he was once known for. But in 2003, when Keller, 45, plans to open a restaurant in Manhattan, he's going to segue into an overseeing role. He feels bittersweet about that. Keller, whose knees are going out on him after years in the kitchen, tapes them up each morning before going to work. "Standing on your legs every day for 16 hours a day for 17 years, it's like Michael Jordan running up and down the basketball court. I don't want to just stay at the French Laundry and not be able to play the game. I'm afraid if I just stay here, I'm going to lose some of the ability to do what I do."

So he says he'll make the transition to coach, hoping to create two restaurants that last beyond his lifetime. "If it becomes unsuccessful after I leave, I've only achieved individual success, and I want success in a broader scope." Referring to the famous hotelier, he continues, "César Ritz set a certain set of standards 100 years ago, and they still strive to meet those standards. He's truly a successful man because he created a set of standards to help [the staff] strive to be better, and not just at work, either." Pretty ambitious stuff for a cook. Especially when it would be a lot easier to just yell a lot and get your own sitcom. ■

Nest

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Maker



So deep is the talent of **Sheila Bridges**, she can refine the lives of hip-hop entrepreneurs and former Presidents

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE

Interior design is not considered the most noble of professions: it's shopping with other people's money. It is seen as the vocation of bored wives with not quite enough to do. These attitudes stem in part from society's depreciation of tasks traditionally handled by women, like making a home. They also betray a misunderstanding of what interior designers do.

Not only must Sheila Bridges inhabit the lifestyle and taste of each of her clients, she must also translate them into chairs, tables and rooms, often while educating her clients along the way. This can mean telling people who are paying her money that some of their stuff is hideous. And it means pulling off some alchemy that joins materials, colors, furniture, walls into a unified whole called home. A place where people she barely knows will feel perfectly comfortable and justifiably proud.

Bridges doesn't stand out among her peers only because she's young and black; she also stands out because of the range of people for whom she can make such homes. When she started her business in 1994, most of her customers were wealthy African Americans. Since then,

her clientele has diversified. Her work on the several homes of hip-hop entrepreneur Andre Harrell is masculine, bold and warm. She uses classic pieces but freshens them with brazen upholstery or colors. The home she made for Eileen and Peter Norton, of Norton Utilities fame, is more eclectic, incorporating the Nortons' vast and pluralistic art collection, but it's not jumbled. She knew their home could withstand the iconic force of Frank Gehry and Marcel Wanders chairs. This year she decorated President Bill Clinton's new offices in Harlem with surprisingly modern furniture and light colors. "Very soothing," she says.

None of the interiors she has designed look capital-D decorated. Also not for her are the empty recesses of stark minimalism. She

understands that people collect stuff, and finds a way to let them, without causing clutter. This balancing act lends her interiors a certain timelessness. Her own home, which she decorated seven years ago, mixing custom-made pieces with a chair found in the trash, is still being photographed for decorating magazines.

It takes an enormous amount of confidence to ask people to hire you for your interpretation of their taste. Bridges has that, but without hubris. "People have such a glamorous image of interior designing," she says. "There are days that I play delivery person, attorney, psychiatrist, tech-support staff and bill collector." Decoration isn't social justice. It does take a lot of shopping. But to do it well is to improve people's lives in a way they couldn't do themselves.

» ESSENTIALS «

■ **Born:** July 7, 1964, Philadelphia

■ **Escape:** Riding her horse or snowboard at her home in upstate New York

■ **Next Projects:** A boutique hotel in New Orleans and her book *Furnishing Forward* (due out spring 2002)

■ **Manifesto:** "Be willing to take risks, but know where to take them. Do it with that \$30 candlestick, not the \$2,000 club chair"

Bridges works out of her Harlem home. Who wouldn't, when it looks like this?

Photograph for TIME by BRIAN DOBEN