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Sheila Bridges {Design Diva}

Raised amidst the richly diverse architecture and cobblestone sidewalks of her native Philadelphia and trained surrounded by the Michelangelo and Botticelli of Italy's Florence as well as New York's Parsons School of Design, interior designer Sheila Bridges chose Harlem as the place to be her artistic muse. "A significant reason why I moved here was because of the way the neighborhood inspires my work," says Bridges, who settled here 11 years ago. "I was always inspired by Harlem's architecture, whether it's a wonderful facade of a brownstone or the beautiful green patina of a copper roof on a beautiful Harlem church. It was important for me as an artist, as a creative person, to live in a place where so many important and talented African American had made significant artistic contributions."

More than just calling on Harlem to fuel her work, Bridges, named "America's Best Interior Designer" by CNN and Time Magazine in 2001, has taken a pivotal role in its emerging renaissance. From private homes to former President Bill Clinton's 125th Street offices, her classical-meets-comfort signature interiors have come uptown. "I've loved the chance to work with such a diversity of clients and to merge their style in ways that reflect that particular individual," says Bridges, who also moonlights as the host of "Sheila Bridges: Designer Living." The *Fine Living Channel* show, now in its fourth season, follows Bridges as she takes viewers on tours of some of her favorite interiors — from designer Tracy Reese's Manhattan apartment to the inside of a Lear jet—all the while dispensing helpful hints for beautifying your own. "With both the show and my book, *Furnishing Forward: A Practical Guide to Furnishing for a Lifetime*, I want to convince people that it's not about having pieces that cost a million dollars. Our spaces say a lot about who we are and who we aspire to be. So what's important is to come to a home or office where we can feel grounded and centered." Which is why at the end of the day, it is Harlem where Bridges comes to rejuvenate and relax.

Ayana Byrd