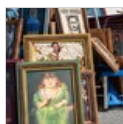


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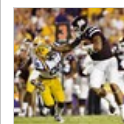
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DESIGN

# Point-and-Click Decorating

Interior designer Sheila Bridges took on the challenge of furnishing a Martha's Vineyard beach home almost entirely with online buys. Here, her top seven tips

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By RUMAAN ALAM

Sept. 17, 2014 12:04 p.m. ET



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WEB FEAT | The dining room in a Martha's Vineyard house designed with Internet purchases. *Sheila Bridges*

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**THESE DAYS**, anyone with a high-speed connection to the wilds of online shopping and a Pinterest habit can claim to be an interior designer. Of course, traditional designers still ply their trade—which at its highest levels has little to do with pointing-and-clicking, calling instead for visits to showrooms and consultations with contractors and architects. Though that's the world where designer Sheila Bridges is most at ease, she willingly stepped outside her comfort zone on a recent gig.

She agreed to take on furnishing and lightly renovating a Victorian beach home in Martha's Vineyard, Mass., working against a tight deadline to have the place ready for the summer season, a challenge Ms. Bridges only accepted because the client is an old friend.

"Most of the projects I work on, we have at least a year," she said. "Some take longer, depending on the scope and degree of customization." Given this project's timetable and modest budget, Ms. Bridges couldn't contemplate the custom route. So she did what design civilians do: She went online and started shopping.

Though she's not averse to shopping retail in her personal life, it tested her professionally. "So much of the pleasure I get out of design is in the thrill of the chase," she said. "It's about finding quality, or being able to have something made and know it's quality." She said she'll continue to work the way she always has but noted, "this was a good exercise for me as a designer." Here's some of what she learned.

### 1. PLAN, THEN PROCEED

"When you're shopping online, you're overwhelmed by the number of choices," Ms. Bridges said. Impulse buying is fine for fashion—but unloved armchairs can't be stored in the back of the closet. Choose pieces suited to the way you actually live. Ms. Bridges knew her client needed a sideboard for storage and serving in the dining room (pictured at right), but she knew, too, that in a beach house, it could be casual, with open shelving showing off plates and napkins. She found the perfect piece on Joss and Main. "Establish a color scheme, and stay within that," Ms. Bridges added. Aware that orange was a favorite hue of the client's, she zeroed in on bistro chairs (also from Joss & Main) and Foo dog lamps (from One Kings Lane) in that shade.

### 2. DOCUMENT YOUR BUYS

"A big part of an interior designer's job is crisis management," said Ms. Bridges. Custom work commands a premium price but comes with a commensurate level of service. When shopping retail—even if you've spent a significant sum—your only recourse is a general customer-service phone number or email address. She advises unpacking and examining every purchase immediately, and photographing any damage. The dining table, found on One Kings Lane, arrived with a broken leg. After alerting the company, Ms. Bridges secured a replacement at no cost.

### 3. MEASURE OBSESSIVELY

Scale is a key factor in a successful room—and it's important to anticipate both the relationship between a piece and the space itself, and its distance from other pieces. It's sometimes hard to gauge the scale of an item online, so Ms. Bridges recommends reading the fine print to find its exact dimensions, and keeping a measuring tape handy to help you

visualize them more concretely.

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Foo dog lamps from One Kings Lane *Sheila Bridges*

Ms. Bridges' approach to design relies on touch—something shopping online makes impossible. Many retailers, however, understand the importance of being able to feel a sofa or drapery textile, and make swatches available, sometimes for a nominal fee. Order samples of fabrics, wood finishes and anything else a web store offers, said Ms. Bridges: "It's worth the \$2 to make sure you're getting something you want." Alternately, she added, if the store has a real-world presence reasonably near you, check out the product in person, even if you ultimately buy online.

#### 5. DON'T EXPECT INSTANT GRATIFICATION

"Even if the website says 10 of something are available, there's no guarantee," Ms. Bridges said she discovered. Many retailers simply can't hold large quantities in stock, and inventory can be affected by long transit times. There's no way to counter this other than patience. In her words, "Design takes time."

#### 6. DON'T FALL FOR FLASH

Flash-sale sites thrive by cultivating a sense of urgency. But most of what such sites sell isn't one-of-a-kind, nor does it exist in limited quantities. Ms. Bridges spotted the beaded chandelier she used

in the dining room on One Kings Lane, which allows users to keep items in their cart for only 10 minutes. Although she was on a tight deadline, and doesn't regret the purchase, she advises letting your own timeline, not a retailer's, drive your decisions. (Note: The same chandelier turned up on One Kings Lane months later.)

#### 7. JUICE UP THE GENERIC

Ms. Bridges chose eight identical bistro chairs for the dining room, six in the orange color she'd designated as a key hue, and two in gunmetal. "It's all about layering," she said of the quasi-custom move. "That mix gives you interest, and to me that's a successful space: different textures, different colors, different patterns." You can also personalize something you bought retail. Though the Foo dog lamps arrived with white shades, Ms. Bridges made them her own

by substituting black ones.



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The room's sideboard from Joss and Main *Sheila Bridges*

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