

Discussions / Live Q&A's

SEPTEMBER 26, 2013, 11:00 A.M.

Sheila Bridges on interior design and her new memoir | Home Front

Sheila Bridges is a New York City-based interior designer and founder of Sheila Bridges Design, Inc. Bridges has been named "America's Best Interior Designer" by CNN and Time Magazine, having created spaces for prominent entertainers, entrepreneurs and business professionals. She is also an author of several books, including her new memoir, "The Bald Mermaid: A Memoir."

Every week, Jura Koncious helps you in your quest to achieve domestic bliss. Got a question about decorating? She's happy to whip out her paint chips and suggest the perfect hue, call a retailer to help track down a hard-to-find accent piece or offer some do-it-yourself. Built on years of reporting experience, Home Front is an online conversation about the best way to feather the nest. We invite you to submit questions and share your own great tips, ideas and, yes, the occasional complaint.

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The Discussion

Sep 26, 2013

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JURA KONCIUS :

Sheila Bridges is a New York based interior designer who has just written a memoir called The Bald Mermaid (Pointed Leaf Press). Sheila has designed offices for Bill Clinton in Harlem and has completed projects at Columbia and Princeton universities, besides designing many interesting homes all over the

country. Her work appears in major shelter magazines and she is regularly featured in House Beautiful and Elle Decor's lists of the best designers in the country. She creates many home furnishings products, one of the best known being her Harlem Toile de Jouy wallpaper. Let's welcome Sheila and send her some questions.

– September 26, 2013 10:40 AM

TELEVISION STAND

I love Sheila's book 'Furnishing Forward'! Are there guidelines for how high to place your television screen? I've found a 34" high sideboard for my small living room. To save space, I'd like to put my 20" tall TV on top, but I'm thinking that may be too high. The center of the screen would be about 45" from the ground. Thanks for your help. .

– September 24, 2013 8:45 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Not sure that there is one specific guideline .It's really the height that seems most comfortable to you. I personally have the two TVs in my home (one in my bedroom and one in my study) and both of them sit on tables/sidboards that are around 30-31" high (table height). It really depends on what other furniture you have in your living room but you might want to go a bit lower.Hope this helps!

– September 26, 2013 10:59 AM

DESIGNING FOR THE CLINTONS

Can you tell us anything about your work for Bill Clinton's Harlem offices? It must have been a really great assignment.

– September 26, 2013 10:47 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

It was an honor to be chosen to work with the former president. He was very decisive about what he liked and didn't like so he actually turned out to be one of the easiest clients I've ever worked with! He seemed to like neutral colors, clean lines and contemporary furniture.

– September 26, 2013 10:59 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES

Loved your book. Nearly ten years after these experiences, are they still raw? How long did you think about writing a book before you wrote one?

– September 24, 2013 10:07 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I had been journaling for a long time and had many friends suggest that I write a book about many of my experiences. I thought about it for several years but was very apprehensive about sharing them with the world because many of the things I wrote about were so real and so raw. In the end I thought that by sharing I would also inspire some people, particularly those that have faced personal challenges in their lives.

– September 26, 2013 11:02 AM

BALD MERMAID

What is a bald mermaid, and what would you wish us to know learn from a bald mermaid?

– September 26, 2013 9:32 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

If you look at Mermaids throughout the history of folklore, they are usually described as beautiful, mysterious, sexy, sirens of the sea who lure mariners and men to safety or peril. They are often portrayed as complicated and are always shown with long flowing hair. Having always had a fascination with the ocean and all things aquatic for me it begged the question: is it still possible to still be all of those things as a woman even without hair. I believe that it is.

– September 26, 2013 11:04 AM

GRAY PAINT FOR A 1950'S KITCHEN

Jura, I have a 1950's galley kitchen that I'm stuck with for a while. It has white appliances and a black and white checkerboard floor. The previous owner painted the walls, metal cabinets and ceiling a mustard yellow. The room definitely needs a new paint job and I was thinking gray might be nice. By the way the kitchen does not have any windows. Can you recommend a Benjamin Moore gray for this room? Thanks.

– September 26, 2013 10:18 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

Hi - Not sure you are talking cabinets or walls here. I might go for a bluish gray. Benjamin Moore Iceberg or Sweet Dreams would be nice.

– September 26, 2013 11:06 AM

SELF-EXPRESSION

Is that what interior design is now all about when it comes to working with clients? Or are there still aesthetic principles that serve as guidelines to help keep whims and idiosyncratic likes and dislikes in check?

– September 25, 2013 9:18 PM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I don't think interior design is really about self expression. If it were, why would anyone need to hire us? Nowadays everyone is a *designer*. Our job as professional designers is to help educate and guide clients when they are looking to solve problems with respect to design. It might be about the arrangement of a space, the color choices for a room or the optimal height to hang a chandelier. I believe that the clients' aesthetic preferences are reflected in the choices that they ultimately make.

– September 26, 2013 11:06 AM

PAINT COLOR!

Can you suggest a nice, soft blue/gray/green for a bathroom that has no windows?

– September 26, 2013 10:47 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

It's always hard to choose a paint color without seeing the space. So much of the choice has to do with the light in the room. I would stick to the historical chart if you are going with Ben Moore paint. I also like Farrow & Ball's Green Blue #84.

– September 26, 2013 11:07 AM

SHEILA

I love your Harlem Toile de Jouy wallpaper. Tell us how you came to design it and have you used the patterns on other products?

– September 26, 2013 10:46 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I have always loved to use French toile when decorating for my clients but when it came time to find one for my own kitchen I couldn't find one I really liked so I designed it!! It started as a wallpaper and now we sell bedding, fabrics, dinner plates and glassware inspired by the original designs.

– September 26, 2013 11:10 AM

LIVELY COLORS

Ms. Bridges, I read the NY Times item on you, your design, and use of color. Lovely! We are updating the kitchen of our weekend home in the Blue Ridge. It has a wall of windows facing West and has an open floor design. It has ample light. To get away from the oak, oak, oak everywhere, the solid oak cabinets will be painted a light gray. The opposite wall has a large counter/bar area. I intend to add a splash of Canyon Sun paint under the counter. My question: Counter tops. To keep it lively. . . . help. The area is large. Perhaps I could do the sink side counter one color or style and the bar area another. Or both the same. Thank you.

– September 26, 2013 10:49 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Sorry but I'm totally confused by your question. I don't know what Canyon Sun paint is! Maybe you can rephrase? If you are asking about countertops I would suggest using the same throughout the entire space.

– September 26, 2013 11:12 AM

LIGHTING FOR LOFT

Hi! I live in a modern condo loft with concrete ceilings and exposed ductwork painted white. I'm needing some more light in my living room area. Although I have a table lamp beside of the couch it is not enough light. The space on the other side of the couch does not have a lot of room though might fit a slim floor lamp. Would you recommend track lighting? If so, can you suggest a type or place to buy? Thank you!

– September 26, 2013 10:52 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Sounds like you definitely need more lighting and a track system would be a good solution. I don't have a specific brand to suggest but there are many attractive options available nowadays. Definitely go to a reputable lighting store and ask to see catalogues for manufacturers of track lighting. I would go with something small and very flexible so that you can adjust the lighting later.

– September 26, 2013 11:15 AM

HOME DESIGN

I am currently renovating my home. It is filled with antiques that represent cherished family memories. I can't get rid of them, nor would I want to. I am, however trying to let them shine and prevent them from making the space feel weighty by incorporating modern finishes and light background colors for the rooms. What advice could you give me for successfully mixing traditional and modern designs?

– September 26, 2013 11:09 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

While I think it's great to incorporate family heirlooms into your decor its sometimes easy to not let your own personality and style shine through. Make it a mix and try to use more contemporary and updated fabrics or art on the walls. Also limit the number of pieces you use. I wouldn't suggest more than 2 pieces per room incorporated along with your own, newer furnishings. If you have to use an antique chair, make sure you reupholster in a lighter and brighter textile to make it feel fresh.

– September 26, 2013 11:20 AM

THE BALD MERMAID

I went through treatment for breast cancer last year and lost all my hair. For me, it was easily the worst part of the whole experience, so I know something of what you've experienced. Good luck and keep moving forward. :)

– September 26, 2013 11:11 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Thank you. I think many women who have suffered the same would agree with you. Our attachment to hair is mind blowing. Part of the reason why I continue to wear my head shaved is about destigmatization. The more people see women (like myself) without hair the less of a stigma it will always be.

– September 26, 2013 11:23 AM

LOVE SHEILA!

No question - just a comment. Sheila, it's so good to have you on "our" chat! I've been a fan for years - mostly because you seem to always be able to find solutions for people that fit exactly what they need, but often are solutions I NEVER would have thought of. Your imagination and creativity are really unique.

– September 26, 2013 11:14 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

thank you!!!

– September 26, 2013 11:23 AM

FURNITURE REPAIR

Jura, I am looking for someone who can restore some antique furniture that was damaged in a recent move. I can't find many recommendations from my neighbors. I was wondering if there is anyone you've worked with that you would recommend.

– September 26, 2013 11:17 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

I'm actually doing a story right now on repair places. One place that has been highly recommended and that I have used is American Hardwoods in Silver Spring Md. 301 588-0363. What others do you all have to suggest?

– September 26, 2013 11:24 AM

TABLE PAD

I'm looking for a product that I'm not sure exists. I like to use tablecloths, but the pads I put underneath (usually a plastic top with a felted bottom) them make the cloth slide around which drives us crazy. Are there any table pads that are rubberized so that things stay put?

– September 26, 2013 11:15 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I grew up using table pads on our dining table but they were never plastic and quite heavy duty. I was always the one sent downstairs to search for them in the basement! I'm sure they still exist and I would imagine that searching on the internet you could find one to meet your needs. Maybe Ebay?

– September 26, 2013 11:26 AM

DESIGNER EVENT

Jura, Could you remind us of when the event occurs that allows people to purchase 1 hour consultations with designers? Thanks!

– September 26, 2013 11:21 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

Yes. This is called Spring Spruce-Up. It is sponsored by the local chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). Last year it was in March and it cost \$100 an hour to get a designer to come for one or two hours to consult about your home or business. Applications are taken online. [Click here](#) for info on last year's Spring Spruce Up.

– September 26, 2013 11:27 AM

MORE TYPOS

Hi, me again with more typos (I'm a professional editor, so I tend to notice these things). The first sentence of the Cady's Alley article has a couple of typos: "The most stylish back street in Georgetown is Cadyâ€™s Alley , a hidden byway paved with granite Belgian blocks and lined with hi gh-end design shops." 1. The

comma after Alley needs to be closed up. 2. The extra space in "hi gh-end" should be deleted. I'll sit on my hands now.

– September 26, 2013 11:02 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

Thanks for pointing this out. There were a few technical glitches in there. We have fixed them! You are a good editor.

– September 26, 2013 11:29 AM

COLLECTABLES

My Mom is coming to live with me in a 1500 sq ft townhouse. She has boxes and boxes of things she has collected over the years, many associated with my father who passed away a year ago. How do I incorporate some of these things in our, soon to be shared, living spaces? She collects hummels, and things like that and I also have one small case of cat related items. What is the best way to showcase items such as these without overwhelming the house and still make my Mom feel welcome? Thank you.

– September 26, 2013 11:22 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I understand having just lost my own father nearly a year ago. I think it is more about incorporating a few of the things that are really meaningful than a ton of items. Maybe you could put a cabinet with open shelves on top and drawers below in your mom's bedroom and she could put some of the things on the shelves that remind her of your dad? I incorporated a couple of my father's lamps and his favorite chair into some of the other spaces of my home but that was it. I think anything more than that would have been too much to live with. They are reminders of him that I love living with without going overboard and turning my own home into a shrine to him.

– September 26, 2013 11:34 AM

YOU ARE A GOOD EDITOR.

Aww--thanks! Just a small return for all the good advice you've given us. I've got your back. :)

– September 26, 2013 11:33 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

I need that! Thanks!

– September 26, 2013 11:36 AM

BRICK REPAIR

I have an old painted brick house, and both the paint and brick are looking terrible. I think I probably need a serious repair job (repainting?) but I don't really know where to start. Any ideas? Even though it's in pretty bad shape, I don't want to stucco over it. I just want the brick to be in good enough shape to repaint. And separately, once i'm ready to paint the exterior, do you have any suggestions for a blue that's not quite dark as navy?

– September 26, 2013 11:02 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

you should speak with a stone mason about repointing or a general contractor to get advice before thinking about color! I love dark blues or dark grays for exteriors. Ben Moore makes a color called **soot** that I think looks great although it is quite dark.

– September 26, 2013 11:36 AM

RETHINKING A SPACE

Very basic question here: I'm not happy about my kitchen layout and want to get an opinion of how it could be redesigned to function more efficiently (ie, which counters to relocate, whether the appliances should be moved, etc.). Should I call an architect, a designer, the kitchen department at Lowe's, or someone else? I live in a small town in the Midwest, so my access to professionals is limited -- I would have to bring someone from a larger area about 25 miles away (unless we go with the Lowe's option). Thanks for your help!

– September 26, 2013 11:32 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Many designers specialize just in kitchens. If you can't find one in your area I would check with your local Home Depot or Lowe's, particularly if you are on a budget. I did my own kitchen with many items from Home Depot.

– September 26, 2013 11:38 AM

1950'S KITCHEN...

I want a gray paint for the walls, ceiling and cabinets. Thanks.

– September 26, 2013 11:26 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

I also like Benjamin Moore's Harbor Gray, Woodlawn Blue or Gray Cloud.

– September 26, 2013 11:38 AM

LACQUER/SPRAY PAINTING?

Is there someplace that will apply paint to things like cabinetry and shutters off-site? Our interior shutters and the shelves on our built-ins need some new paint, and I have my doubts about how well we can do this with a brush, or even a DIY sprayer. Advice? Tips?

– September 26, 2013 10:57 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Yes- most of the time outdoor shutters, doors and big items are taken off-site for stripping and spraying. Speak with a general contractor or a cabinet maker about doing this for you.

– September 26, 2013 11:40 AM

FOR LIGHTING FOR LOFT

If you don't want a track system, you might think about a couple of halogen floor lamps (the ones with the cone-shaped top). We have a couple of them, they are adjustable, and they give out an immense amount of light.

– September 26, 2013 11:21 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

Most well lit rooms are a combination of several different types of lights. Use table lamps, floor lamps, something overhead and maybe even some wall sconces if you don't want a track system.

– September 26, 2013 11:42 AM

WASHINGTON

Sheila: have you ever designed any homes in Washington?

– September 26, 2013 11:39 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I haven't but would love to! Perhaps you could introduce me to the President and the first lady?

– September 26, 2013 11:43 AM

DING IN HARDWOOD

Hi there! I have brand-new Bruce maple hardwoods in Sumatra. When we chose the wood, we knew it was a softer wood, so we were prepared for dings and scratches here and there. One of our cats recently knocked something off of the counter (they shouldn't even be up there! grr) and left a ding about 0.5 or 1 centimeter large. The natural wood color is showing through. How can I fix this? I haven't yet found a touchup pen that matches the color.

– September 26, 2013 11:28 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

Believe it or now, I have found Old English Scratch Cover to work in many situations.

– September 26, 2013 11:43 AM

FOR SHEILA

What is your favorite basic white paint for walls and white paint for trim?

– September 26, 2013 11:41 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

My go to white is Ben Moore White Dove. I use it for trims and cabinetry EVERYWHERE. Religiously.

– September 26, 2013 11:44 AM

ELECTRIC FIREPLACE

I live in a condo that is all electric. I would like to get a very modern rectangular fire place built in, flush

with the wall. Do you know a good brand? I've seen them on design shows and in some decorator magazines and they look great.

– September 26, 2013 11:05 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I agree. There are lots of great fireplace options available nowadays but unfortunately I don't know the names of manufacturers/brands. I have found them before on the internet and have clients who use them. Maybe Jura can answer this one!

– September 26, 2013 11:47 AM

PAINT COLORS

People ask all the time "what shade of x color should I get", but they should realize the kind of lighting you have in a room can greatly affect how the color actually looks in your home. For example, energy efficient bulbs can make a HUGE difference of how a color looks vs. traditional bulbs vs. natural daylight. We have a yellow in our living room that almost looks alien green if you use an energy efficient bulb that is all white with no yellow wavelength to it. Also, when you go to the store to look at paint colors, keep in mind that you're seeing what it looks like in the store's lighting (usually bright fluorescent), which may not be anything like how it will look in your room. We almost ruled out a color for our bathroom b/c it looked too blue in the store, but at home it looked more on the greenish side. The only way to pick the right color is to hang up samples in your space, or even ask for a sample from the store, and paint a piece of poster board and hang it up if you want to see a bigger area with that color. Just keep in mind that to get the beautiful shade of green you saw in your friends house, you may actually need a different shade to get the same effect.

– September 26, 2013 11:44 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I agree!!

– September 26, 2013 11:48 AM

PINTEREST

Are you on Pinterest Sheila?

– September 26, 2013 11:48 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I am on Pinterest but very infrequently to be honest. I would use the link from my website www.sheilabridges.com because I think on Pinterest I'm listed under Sheila Bridges Fan. I guess I tweet more nowadays which probably seems odd since I am so visual!

– September 26, 2013 11:50 AM

ONLINE SHOPPING

What are your favorite online places for home decor?

– September 26, 2013 11:49 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

People might find this surprising but for my own homes I like to shop at Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie and Pottery Barn. I also like Serena & Lily and One Kings Lane. I just bought a few great alarm clocks last week online at LLBean.

– September 26, 2013 11:53 AM

DECORATING STYLES

Sheila, Have you noticed a difference in decorating styles from people in New York vs other parts of the country? Also, I am moving to Florida. Is there a particular style there that is popular?

– September 26, 2013 11:47 AM

SHEILA BRIDGES :

I think most parts of the country are usually a lot more casual in style than NYC. It depends what part of Florida you are moving to. If you are moving to Miami, obviously the style is quite contemporary but further north, etc are much more traditional.

– September 26, 2013 11:55 AM

JURA KONCIUS :

It was wonderful to have you on the chat again. We all wish you great success with your new book and we'll check in with you again soon. Next week's chat guest: Washington designer David Mitchell.

– September 26, 2013 11:54 AM