

## MAKING IT

# Timeless designs for modern tastes

*Interior designer Sheila Bridges' signature is culturally classic and ageless*

It was a fascination with Roman architecture and history that first piqued Sheila Bridges' interest in decorative arts. Today, the 33-year-old designer is the owner of Sheila Bridges Design Inc., a four-year-old, New York-based interior design firm that generated \$1.5 million in revenues in 1997.

After graduating from Brown University in 1986, Bridges moved to the Big Apple to explore opportunities in the fashion industry as a retail buyer. A year later, she went to work in men's designer clothing at Bloomingdale's department store. That job landed her a gig with world-renowned Italian couturier Giorgio Armani. But by 1989, she tired of the fashion business and went to work as an interior design assistant for a New York architectural firm that did both commercial and residential design work.

Bridges, who studied part time at New York's Parsons School of Design, quit her job in 1992 to study decorative arts in Italy at Polimoda, a design school in Florence. By 1994, she was ready to go it alone. She acquired a business license, incorporated and converted one of the bedrooms in her Harlem apartment into an office.

Initially, her clients were people who didn't want to spend the kind of money

top full-service design firms commanded. But soon the firm was garnering upscale clients such as Andre Harrell, the former Motown chairman. Bridges has gained fame among bankers, entrepreneurs and other entertainment personalities, including Bad Boy Entertainment CEO Sean "Puffy" Combs and MTV host and comedian Bill Bellamy. Her portfolio also boasts such projects as designing an apartment in the Trump Towers building in New York City.

Bridges Design handles six major jobs and several smaller projects per year. Any given job may take months or years to complete, ranging from \$100,000 to over \$1 million in design costs.

"I have positioned myself as a high-end residential interior designer. If you were to use the fashion industry as an analogy, I would describe what I do as creating a couture line," says Bridges. "But as my business grows, I hope to assume a more mass market appeal."

Bridges' design team comprises a staff of four plus an ongoing pool of freelancers. There's also a network of independent contractors that she uses to staff up for larger projects.

Bridges' vision for growing the business entails writing a series of books on design/lifestyle and creating a line of



JULIANA THOMAS

### Bridges turns space into class

furniture and rugs. She's already put her mark on various home furnishings from dining chairs to bookcases.

"Because I do a lot of custom work for my clients, it seems only natural to do a collection or line of furniture," she explains. "A lot of interior designers eventually create their own collections or license their designs. Most people recognize my work. I like things that are timeless and classic."

—Carolyn M. Brown

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