

DESIGN BY THE BOOK

Designer's book shares her colorful style

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Sheila Bridges believes that with a little planning, a few flea

market finds and several gallons of carefully chosen paint, you can turn any house into a place of calm and comfort. And you can achieve that goal even if you don't think you have the money to decorate.

Her book, "Furnishing Forward: A Practical Guide to Furnishing for a Lifetime" (Bulfinch Press, \$40), distills her considerable wisdom. Her ideas are sought by celebrity clients who

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range from novelist Tom Clancy to hip-hop music producer Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. When Bill Clinton became her Harlem neighbor, asking for her decorating help was *de rigueur*.

Bridges is one of the most talented decorators in the business, but she wears her laurels lightly. Meeting her, you'd never know Time magazine once named her "America's best designer." But you might hear about her childhood aspiration to be a veterinarian or marine biologist.

If talk turns to color — Bridges uses hues that can make you swoon — you might discover that she grew up with a "color inferiority complex." When she was a teenager, Bridges let her opinionated parents pick out her plum bedroom scheme. She participated by cutting out a quarter-sized circle of wallpaper to decorate the insert on her phone.

Talented as she turned out to be, Bridges doesn't think she's so different from the veterinarians and marine biologists of the world. Creating beautiful rooms, she says, is "a very personal, intuitive and enjoyable process" that is accessible to everyone.

Bridges reminds us that artists living in garrets typically have more style than moguls. Though a fat budget is nice, the secret to decorating success is learning to identify what you love.

Flip through magazines, Bridges advises, and mark rooms you don't like. Identifying the bad and the ugly is easier than singling out the beautiful and the good. Start expressing your opinions, and you'll jump-start your confidence and launch your journey to personal style. Bridges



SHEILA BRIDGES DESIGN

Decorator Sheila Bridges is known for her striking use of color, evident in her book, "Furnishing Forward."

Bookmarks

- Banish the boring bathroom mirror. Replace your medicine cabinet door with a framed vintage mirror, attached via a piano hinge.
- Cut the sweetness of a pastel color scheme with dark accents — chairs with mahogany or ebony legs, dark picture frames, a dark chest or side table.
- If you can't afford a great carpet, go for sisal or sea grass. You can dress them up with colorful borders or throw rug accents.

herself has shaped an amazing, color-saturated style, which is toured at length in "Furnishing Forward." All the projects are her own and all are stunning. The one to study: her high-ceilinged Harlem apartment.

Open the front door and you'll find a sunflower yellow hall. Wander along and you'll come to an apple green dining room. Opposite is a creamy white living room. Beyond is a cafe au lait office and a bedroom painted a wonderfully dusky blue. The white-tiled bathroom has black walls and a midnight blue ceiling.

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dence, but she's never showy. Indeed, her look is the epitome of unfussy. For window treatments she likes crisp roman shades or simple striped draperies that enhance the verticality of a window. She eschews throw pillows and favors sofas and chairs with solid backs.

She is big on comfort — her living rooms are anchored with a sofa and a pair of club chairs — but she's adamant about breathing space. Bridges never packs a room with seating, but guests can literally pull up a chair. A devotee of unusual side chairs, many of which she found on the curb, she likes to flank fireplaces with a pair of funny old Victorian chairs. She'll position another set by the windows, an extra in the hall.

"Furnishing Forward" is well worth the price. If you're looking for ways to be traditional without froufrou, if you want to be modern without sacrificing comfort, Bridges is the designer to watch. Analyze her rooms and you'll discover ways to make your home a place of "self-contemplation, reflection and healing," a place where you can "comfortably shed the armor that is necessary for the daily battle called life."