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A BOLD COTTAGE MAKEOVER

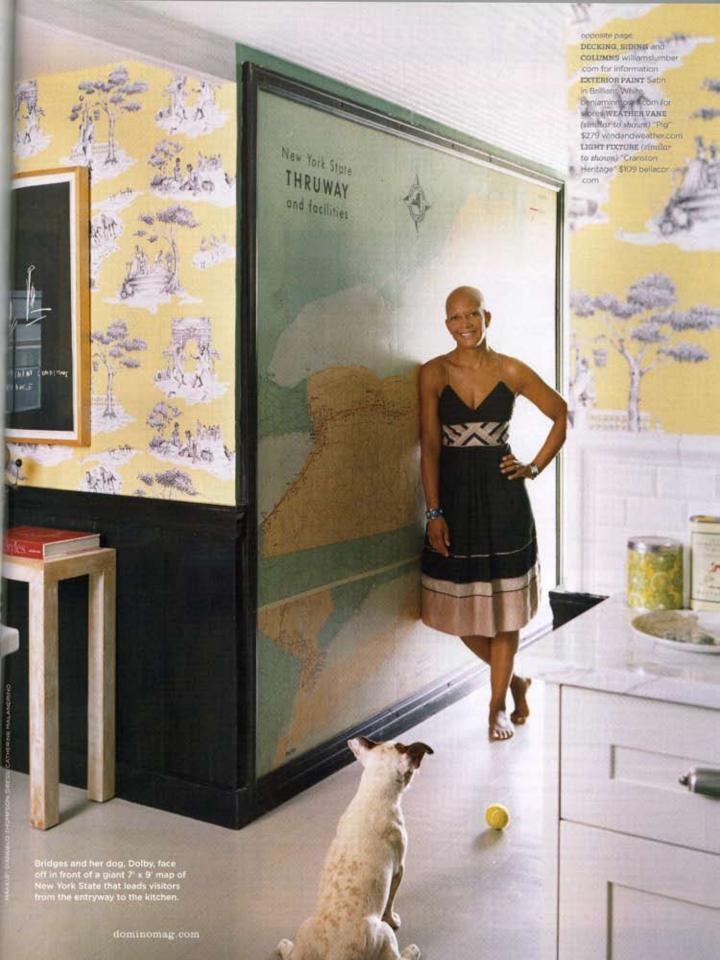
With a few small renovations and plenty of paint, interior designer Sheila Bridges turned an eyesore in her backyard into a guesthouse so inviting that her friends call it the "boutique hotel."

photographs by LAURA RESEN text by KATE BOLICK





the Hudson River in upstate New York, she was more interested in the spectacular view off the front porch than the dilapidated shack behind the house. But last year, feeling a need for more space to accommodate her many weekend guests, she gave the outbuilding a good hard look. Perhaps best known for designing Bill Clinton's New York office, the prolific Harlem-based decorator has also written a book, Furnishing Forward, and hosted a home-decor television show, so she was hardly at a loss for ideas. (Indeed, her newly launched design newsletter, thenestmaker.com, is full of them.) The trick, she realized, to transforming the sad structure into an alluring retreat was a slight restructuring of the interior, enlivened by an imaginative color scheme. She broke down some walls, carved out a few more windows and constructed a portico out front to give the exterior a welcoming feel. Then came the fun part: choosing a palette that's cozy but not too country.



"I went with bright, contemporary colors to give my living room more of an urban country look."



living room

The center of the house—a wide area with the kitchen opening onto the living room—is a comfortable mix of traditional touches and vivid colors that sets the tone for the rest of the decor. To keep the two rooms distinct but harmonious, Bridges selected one note from the kitchen palette—butter yellow—and brought it into the sitting area. "I don't use yellow often, but it seemed to me a cheery element for guests to spend time around," she says. But mostly, she thought pink. A classic love seat and club chairs (her own design) in a near-matching hue create a lively salon atmosphere, while old-fashioned details, like the silhouette of Bridges at age 9 (painted by an artist friend onto a raw silk-covered ottoman), add a little gravitas. These pieces, plus jolts of white, break up the dark background. While black trim (she opted for Farrow & Ball paint for its "depth and pigmentation") and wainscoting might seem counterintuitive in a small space, they lend the low, featureless room the illusion of architecture.

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bedroom

In her main house, Bridges prefers soft, muted colors, but the cottage offered her the chance to dream up surprising, often potent, combinations and inject more humor than she would normally. Still, she finds ways to temper these romps. The all-green bedroom—literally inspired by the bright summer lawn—could have easily been too much, but white and black accents cut the saturation and make the room feel vibrant, crisp and grounded. A George Smith chair provides an accent note while referencing the strain of yellow elsewhere in the house. Linen shades with green, black and yellow stripes pull the room together. "It's important for one thing to serve as a template for a room's overall palette, to make sense of everything," she says.



"A guest room allows you to experiment with different sides of yourself."

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kitchen and dining area

Bridges' talent for updating tradition is nowhere more evident than in her own "Harlem Toile de Jouy"-a cheeky modernization of the classic motif featuring stereotypical African-American themes like jumping double Dutch and playing basketball. The line of wallpapers and fabrics comes in six color options, but she picked sunny yellow for the kitchen to riff off the map and the turquoise walls in the entryway. She designed the floorcloth to unite the palette (its "Florentine Floral" pattern will be part of her new home collection, launching this fall). White cabinets and marble counters, along with gray painted-wood floors and a white ceiling, instill a sense of spaciousness and keep the focus on the shots of color. Likewise, an enclosed porch emphasizes only the simple pleasures of outdoor dining and the verdant view.

