

# GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

SHEILA BRIDGES USES HER MASTERY  
OF COLOR TO INFUSE A FADED  
VICTORIAN TOWNHOUSE WITH A RADIANT PALETTE  
AND PLAYFUL CHARM

"People hire designers to bring together all the seemingly disparate parts of their lives," says Sheila Bridges. "And to bring them together in a way that makes sense." The Harlem-based interior designer was faced with just such a challenge a few years ago, when a New York couple with two young children hired her to decorate their Victorian townhouse near Gramercy Park. The husband and wife, who both come from New England, own Early American pieces but find themselves drawn to Art Deco and modern styles. They are in possession of a stunning art collection that includes works by Jasper Johns, Richard Diebenkorn, and Le Corbusier. "Like so many people," says Bridges, "who these clients are is a combination of what they grew up with and what they discovered on their own."

Not only did she need to integrate the couple's collections into a seamless whole; she had to make the stately townhouse family friendly. The clients had fallen in love with the building's marble fireplaces, high ceilings, and French doors that invite sunlight into the living and dining rooms. Still, the house's innate grandeur didn't entirely suit their lifestyle as young parents; it was built in 1857 for a state supreme court judge, who no doubt entertained with a formality that the stiff, boxy room divisions encouraged. Architect David Hottenroth reconfigured





In the living room of a young family's Manhattan townhouse designed by Sheila Bridges, the crown molding and marble mantel are original, the curtains are of a Clarence House linen, and the armchairs and mahogany bar cabinet are Art Deco. The 1940s French sofa and chairs are upholstered in a Florence Broadhurst fabric, and the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Yellow Ground. See Resources.

A 19th-century Spanish chandelier hangs above a custom-made wine-tasting table, chairs by BDDW, and a custom-painted floor cloth in the dining area; 19th-century French cabinets flank the original marble mantel, the armchairs are a Bridges design, and the bench was built by a family member. **FACING PAGE:** In the kitchen, the countertops are of teak and Calacatta marble, the range is by Viking, and the sink and fittings are by Waterworks; the light fixture is antique, and the felt rug is by Liora Manne. See Resources.







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In the library, a circa-1840 Irish writing table stands on a rug the couple purchased in Budapest; the George III mahogany side chair between the windows is from Cove Landing. **FACING PAGE:** The mahogany paneling and shelves and the sofa, which is covered in a Holland & Sherry wool, were designed by Bridges; the leather club chairs are French, and the rug is by Odegard. See Resources.





the first-floor layout, taking down walls between the living and dining rooms and opening up the dining room to the kitchen. The result was a spacious canvas upon which Bridges could work. “For me the goal was to make it beautiful but also livable and comfortable,” she says. “These are the kind of parents who want their home to be accessible to their kids. They want them to enjoy all the spaces.”

Bridges is known for merging tradition—she’s never met a stripe she didn’t like—with a contemporary sensibility and a carefully measured edginess. (A good example of that unorthodox sensibility: her joyful and wittily titled wallpaper pattern *Harlem Toile de Jouy*.) She had the living room painted a bold, cheery yellow. “It’s fresh and young and unanticipated,” she says. “Not what you typically see on walking into someone’s townhouse.” A Belgian mahogany bar cabinet and Austrian armchairs nod to the couple’s love of Deco; even a contemporary zebrawood cocktail table suggests a Faubourg Saint-Germain salon from the 1930s. At the same time, Bridges covered a matching sofa and chairs that she found on 1stdibs with a sprightly pattern of circles and squares. “When the set arrived it was covered in a brown velvet that felt weighty and heavy. I like the way the geometrics play around with the Deco theme.”

The dining room is comparatively subdued, with muted touches of color and pattern: silk curtains striped yellow and blue, a hand-painted floor cloth of abstract clover leaves, matching chairs of Bridges’s own design in a pale-blue botanical print. Still, it’s cozy enough that the children can play or do homework at the dining table while their parents cook—and those



**FROM TOP:** The children’s bath is paved in tiles by Nemo Tile, the walls are custom painted, and the window shade is of a Beacon Hill silk. The bed and bookcase in the daughter’s bedroom are by Pottery Barn Kids, the armchair is by Bridges, and the rug is by Roubini Rugs; the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball’s Breakfast Room Green. **FACING PAGE:** The table in the son’s room was a school project, a BDDW chair is paired with a desk by Ducduc, and the rug is by Stark; the walls are Farrow & Ball’s Cook’s Blue, and the artwork includes, from left, prints by Selma Bortner and Roy Lichtenstein, a painting by a friend, and a Jackson Pollock–inspired painting by a family member. See Resources.



**FROM TOP:** Hand-painted wallpaper depicting Central Park, and a Tibetan rug in the dressing room. In the master bedroom, mercury-glass lamps from Sentimento Antiques flank a Bridges-designed sofa upholstered in a Donghia wool; the slipper chair and ottoman are by George Smith, the oushak rug is by Odegard, and the art-works include a painting from John Derian Co., a photograph of Versailles by Robert Polidori, and a collage by Le Corbusier.

**FACING PAGE:** An antique chest of drawers and crystal lamps by Visual Comfort & Co. sit beside the antique bed, which is dressed in bedding by John Robshaw Textiles and Pratesi; the walls are painted in Citron by Farrow & Ball. See Resources.

patterns hide kid-induced spills. “We Scotchgarded all of it,” says Bridges with a laugh.

Bridges embraces eclecticism but understands that it’s important to keep diverse elements from clashing. For this home, she reined in potential chaos by using a consistent color palette and by subtly repeating textures and details from one floor to the next. Shimmering mercury glass appears in an arrangement of antique bottles on the dining room’s 19th-century cabinets and again in a pair of lamps she chose for the master bedroom’s sitting area.

Consistency doesn’t preclude surprises, though. Bridges wanted to introduce some vitality to the dressing room and convinced the owners to let her cover the walls with a hand-painted mural of Central Park, complete with recognizable buildings, against a brilliant blue sky. “It adds a lot of fun,” she says.

Another unexpected touch is the second-floor library, which has the feel of a classic men’s club, with polished mahogany paneling and antique leather club chairs. Here the palette shifts to gray, brown, and red. The husband works at an Irish writing table, circa 1840. Bridges designed a sofa upholstered in rust-color wool, and the floor-to-ceiling curtains are a bold Regency stripe. “The idea was to create a little bit of formality,” she says. “There’s something about that stripe that’s masculine without being over the top. These are not the kind of people who want things to look overly decorated. I don’t think people who want that hire me.” ■



