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HARLEM RENAISSANCE

DESIGNER SHEILA BRIDGES
GOES ALL OUT AT HER UPPER MANHATTAN
HOME, INFUSING IT WITH INFLUENCES
AS DIVERSE AS FIN DE SIÈCLE PARIS AND 1970s POP

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There are many things in Sheila Bridges's apartment to obsess over. There's the size: deluxe, complete with three bedrooms, formal living and dining rooms, and maid's quarters. There's the location: the top floor of a landmark 1901 Clinton & Russell building in central Harlem, a few blocks north of Central Park, with breathtaking views of the surrounding turn-of-the-century architecture. There's the symphony of colors—soft, rich hues and subtle contrasts—it boasts. And there are the scores of objects and furnishings, nearly all of which possess the lighthearted elegance for which Bridges is known.

This sensory overload is heady enough to make a visitor call a real-estate agent, begin memorizing the street names (Adam Clayton Powell Jr. is Seventh Avenue, Malcolm X is Sixth), and book the designer for the redo. But perhaps the most seductive bit of her handiwork is one appreciated not through your eyes but via the soles of your feet.

A firm believer in the notion that even a home without wheels can be a vehicle for taking you somewhere else, Bridges starts the magic carpet the moment you cross the threshold, when she offers you a pair of Moroccan slippers. "It's not so much about the idea that the city is filthy, or ruining anything precious," she says. "I just want people to feel at ease. I am always

in bare feet. My friends joke that my TV show should be called *Sheila Bridges: Barefoot Living* instead of *Designer Living*." (Bridges, who was recently diagnosed with an autoimmune disease that caused her to lose her hair, can't bear to wear a wig, so you can hardly expect her to wear shoes.)

Going shoeless is, of course, a surefire, almost primal way to feel at ease. But the apartment, which has been totally redone in the past two years, isn't just about hominess. Far from it. With a style that mixes disparate influences, patterns, and colors, the place is in some ways more disorienting than comforting. That reality warp begins immediately, in the tangerine blast of an entry, where the focal point is a *borne d'hôtel* reminiscent of fin de siècle Paris.

And that's just the entry; off this a smorgasbord of doorways opens. There is the blue-toned living room to the left, anchored by the playful round shapes of a Swedish grandfather clock in one corner and an antique convex mirror on the opposite wall. To the right of the entry is the office/guest room, whose bold orange, black, and gray stripes and exotic furnishings conjure up a host of associations, from a Victorian explorer's London flat to a 1970s Pop interior. And straight ahead is the apple-green dining room, outfitted with two back-to-back demilune ta-

In the living room of interior designer Sheila Bridges's apartment, located in a landmark Harlem building, a chair upholstered in a Beacon Hill stripe pulls up to an antique French desk; the convex mirror is from Sentimento Antiques, and the Empire marble-top mahogany side table was purchased in Hudson, New York. See Resources.





Facing page, from top: Bridges, wearing a dress by Tracy Reese, in the living room; the grandfather clock is from Evergreen Antiques. In a hallway, a side chair bought at auction is covered in Jim Thompson's Similan silk. This page: An alabaster ceiling light from Eileen Lane Antiques and a vintage T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings cocktail table; the curtains are of Nancy Corzine's Orlean fabric, and the rug is by Odegard. *North Parterre, Versailles*, a 1997 photograph, is by Kelly Grider. See Resources.



Two demilunes form the dining room table; the chairs are from Alain Piéton Antiques, and the 1950s seashell-base table lamp is from Robert Altman. Facing page, from top: Some of Bridges's favorite quotations, hand-painted by Pintura Studio, cover the walls of the library; the bust is from Sutter Antiques; the sofa is upholstered in a Rogers & Goffigon linen velvet, and the drawings are from Vietnam. A deau-page plate by John Derian Co. See Resources.





The damask-pattern walls in Bridges's bedroom were hand-painted by Pintura Studio; the bedding is by Frette. Facing page, from top: The curtains are of a Brunswick & Fils fabric; the mirror was a Paris flea-market find. A Gustavian chest from Lief and an antique musician's chair. See Resources.





with as an ideal. "Real life is having different experiences and relationships, with furniture as well as people." Her new decor, with its surprising variations on classical elegance, hints at many things: 19th-century Paris, the Harlem Renaissance, 1950s New York, all of which Bridges has a soft spot for.

This scope is illustrated nowhere more concretely than in the library, which, ironically, is the only room in the place without any books. Through a painstaking process that involved both a signmaker and a decorative painter, Bridges culled passages and quotations from her favorite writers, everyone from Langston Hughes to Emily Dickinson to Dr. Seuss. One, from Zora Neale Hurston, seems particularly appropriate: "Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes!"

And here, too, so much of it meshes. ■