



INTERIOR DESIGNER

Sheila Bridges, 40

SALARY RANGE: \$25,000–\$200,000

When I was growing up in Philadelphia, art was always my passion—even though I got a bachelor's degree in sociology from Brown University in Rhode Island. After graduating I moved to New York. I did a short stint in fashion and retailing, then in 1993 earned a degree in interior design at Parsons School of Design.

"I worked as an interior-design assistant in architectural and design firms for several years before starting my own company. In 1994 I quit my job, set up an office in my Harlem apartment, and created Sheila Bridges Design, Inc. I downsized my expenses and had a small amount in savings. And what started with an acquaintance needing a designer became the freelance work I needed to jump-start my business.

"To this day I do my own marketing. Early on I contacted magazine editors and sent photos of my design work in my own home. As I was featured in magazines I got exposure and more projects. And press begets more press. *Time* magazine did an article about me, and CNN ran a five-minute segment when they both named me America's Best Interior Designer in 2001. I also got a call from Oprah's office, and then the people from the cable-TV network *Fine Living* asked me to do a show. I'm now in my fourth season of *Sheila Bridges Designer Living* and do regular segments on NBC's *Today*.

"A big plus for me is that I'm pretty well versed in multiple design styles. During my career I've done many different types of projects. I've never been afraid to experiment with a wide range of styles or colors. And I have many interests. That's why I love that each day is different. One day I'll be on a job or construction site with a client. The next I'm antiques in upstate New York or Connecticut. Next day I'm in production for my television show, followed by a day of writing for the paperback version of my book *Furnishing Forward* (to be released in January 2005). The common thread is always design. The exciting part is that I get to do a lot of things while charting my own way."

—MARSHA KELLY

WORK&WEALTH

SO you want to design spaces

Here's how to lay out a plan

ATTEND A DESIGN SCHOOL Organizations like the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) provide internship information and resources for becoming an interior designer. For a list of schools throughout the country, call ASID at (202) 546-3480 or log on to asid.org. The Organization of Black Designers (OBD) is dedicated to greater visibility of African-American design professionals ((202) 659-3918; core77.com/OBD).

MAKE LEARNING FUN Bridges spent time on weekends attending auctions to learn about various furniture styles, types of woods and costs. There are numerous research tools and resources, including television shows, that provide information on interior design.

FIND YOUR NICHE You can work with publications or with furniture manufacturers, interior designers, decorators, architects and contractors, or at auction houses, fabric showrooms and offices of retail reps that sell to designers. Think outside the box—that's where many opportunities are.

HONE YOUR CRAFT Experiment with a variety of styles to get more practice and get better at what you want to do.

BE FLEXIBLE Interior design can be challenging, but you'll get better results if you roll with the punches while thinking creatively.

ALWAYS CHARGE FOR SERVICES When starting out, avoid letting friends and family persuade you to work for free. Let people know you must charge for your services—even if it's a small fee per room, a percentage above costs or a flat fee.

CHOOSE CONTRACTORS WISELY Always get personal referrals when hiring contractors to execute your designs. Or use the *Franklin Report* resource guide (franklinreport.com).

SEEK EDITORIAL SHOWCASES Interior-design magazines are often looking to feature up-and-coming designers. Contact editors and send photos of your work. Some magazines have contests and showcase the winners' designs.

—M.K. □

One of the most difficult aspects of being a new manager is having to manage people who were formerly your peers, says Carol W. Ellis in her workbook *Management Skills for New Managers* (AMACON). The book walks you through seven required interactive skills that will help you become more effective.