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## pattern and color

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# tone poem

Sheila Bridges gives an old  
New York apartment vibrant new life  
for music man Andre Harrell

BY SUZANNE SLESIN PHOTOGRAPHED BY PIETER ESTERSOHN

STYLED BY BARBARA KURGAN

Comfortable sofas were a prerequisite in Bridges's living-room design. These were custom-made by Ernest Studios and covered in chenille from Christopher Norman. The Nepalese rug is from Odegard, New York.



"We really compromised by using traditional  
colors that are a little off-kilter.  
The greens are atypical, as are the reds"

—SHEILA BRIDGES





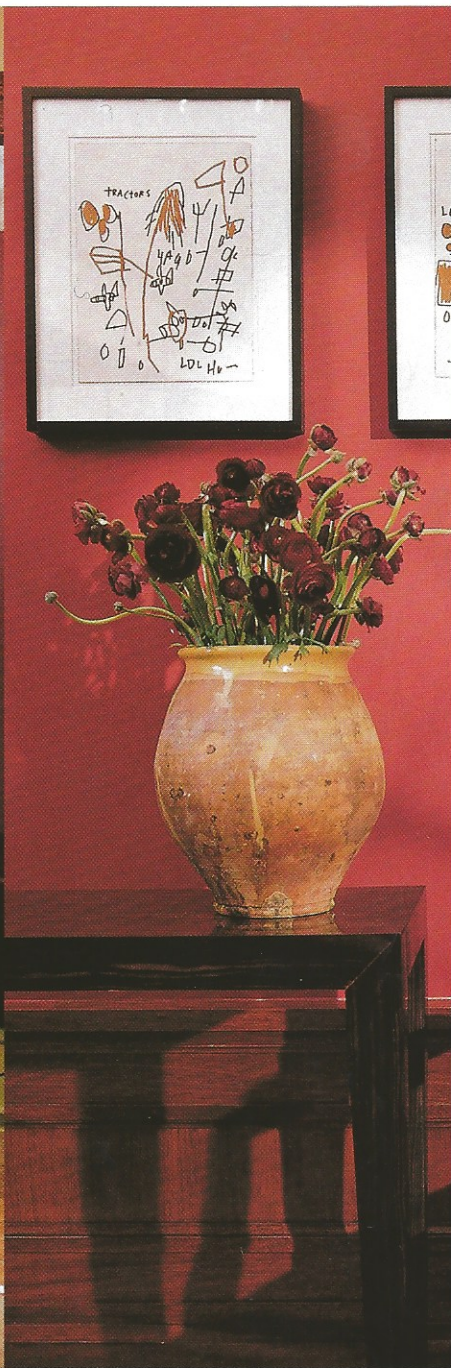


**U** PDATE AND UPGRADE" was designer Sheila Bridges's mantra as she took on the job of decorating a prewar New York apartment for Andre Harrell, the record-company executive who helped put such stars as Mary J. Blige and Jodeci on top. "I wanted it to be livable and have lots of color and for each room to have its own personality," says Harrell, who also requested "sofas that would whisper, 'Lie down on me' as you walk by." It was also to be a place where Harrell's two-and-a-half-year-old son, Gianni, could run around. And, of course, a very elaborate audiovisual system was to be installed.

Combining luxurious comfort and high style, a sense of homeyness with a dash of urbanity, to create an interior where putting your feet up in front of the TV does not preclude going to a candlelit dinner in glamorous attire can be challenging for a designer. Even more so was Harrell's desire for Bridges somehow to capture the feeling of high-toned elegance of the Harlem Renaissance. "I call it 'high Negro style,'" says Harrell, pulling out a vintage print by photographer James Van Der Zee, who documented the vibrant lifestyle of Harlem in the 1920s. "The picture represents

To mask the view but let light into the dining room windows were fitted with frosted glass. A Niermann Weeks iron-and-crystal chandelier is a romantic addition. Dining chairs are covered in a Kirk Brummel checked silk. The custom-made chairs flanking the mantel are upholstered in Portsmouth Linen Velvet and have a bullion fringe, both by Brunswick & Fils. The table on the back wall (seen on the cover) was purchased at Christie's, at auction. The 1993 painting *Chalkboard (8 Cookie Bags)* is by Gary Simmons. Arts and Crafts pottery from Paula Rubenstein Ltd., New York, is on the mantel, above.





## "I wanted it to be livable and have lots of color. I wanted

all that," continues Harrell, "high society, people of southern upbringing who had been exposed to big-city and European experiences—their fashion, their art, and their personal living spaces."

But Bridges, who had designed Harrell's previous apartment, also knew that Harrell liked "moldings, herringbone floors, high ceilings, and generous proportions." Some of these features were already there. Others, like mahogany wainscoting and pocket doors, had to be added.

Bridges, who worked for Renny Saltzman Interiors and for Shelton, Mindel & Associates, an architectural firm, before opening her own office three years ago, came up with a sophisticated yet emphatic color scheme, using

the reds and greens her client was drawn to as well as her own more neutral, lighter palette. "We really compromised by using traditional colors that are a little off-kilter," says Bridges. "The greens are atypical, as are the reds. And I came up with a color for the living room that is sort of like brown paper bags." While each room has a different wall color, the range of hues unites the large public rooms of the apartment. From the red entrance foyer to the green-walled dining room, each is a variation on a theme in which Harrell's favorite, bright colors are modulated by Bridges's quieter shades. When Bridges suggested a green dining room rather than the red-walled space Harrell had previously wanted, the designer introduced





each room to have its own personality” —ANDRE HARRELL

red-and-white-checked fabric on the dining-room chairs to provide a jolt of pattern.

Bridges also went to town in the kitchen. “It’s yellow and green. It sounds horrid, but actually it’s subtle and calm,” she says of the space with stainless-steel appliances, custom cabinetry stained celery green, limestone countertops, and slate floors in tones of gray and green. “I think the apartment is masculine but not overly heavy and dark. It’s not so masculine that it’s not comfortable for women,” says Bridges. It’s certainly not a typical bachelor’s pad, and the quality of solid homeyness is tempered by what Bridges calls “the fun things.” In the dining room, for example, there is a flirtatious crystal chandelier, a chalkboard painting of cookie bags by Gary Simmons, and a

Harrell wanted his apartment to work for formal entertaining yet not to be intimidating. In the living room, opposite page, far left, *Harvest*, a 1994 painting by Daniel Simmons, hangs above a chair by Dessin Fournir from John Rosselli & Associates, New York. The French Directoire-style chandelier in the foyer is from the 1950s. The French beveled mirror is from Rooms & Gardens, New York. Also in the red-painted foyer, center, are Jean-Michel Basquiat drawings from Tony Shafrazi Gallery and a chair covered in a Fortuny cotton. Two armchairs, custom-made at Ernest Studios, New York, in a Decorators Walk velvet, create a congenial corner in the living room, above right. Raw-silk pillows are from ABC Carpet & Home, New York. The Othello table in Makassar ebony veneer is from Kirk Brummel.





Sheila Bridges, top, adapted her neutral color sense to her client's desire for strong reds and greens. The kitchen, left, with custom-made green-stained maple cabinetry by Tuohy Construction, slate-and-marble mosaic floor from Waterworks, and a Viking stove, is striking and subtle. The stools are from Wyeth, New York. In the study, above, a sophisticated audiovisual system was installed. Roman shades are in a silk from Schumacher; the sofa in a cotton chenille from Donghia. The leather club chairs are from a Paris flea market. Sources, see back of book.





**“The apartment is masculine, but not so masculine that it’s not comfortable for women”—SHEILA BRIDGES**

bold painted floor that not only withstands heavy traffic but frees diners from having to maneuver chairs over a carpet.

In the last few months, the apartment has been used for the expansive and frequent entertaining for which it was designed. Bridges visits it with trepidation and, like most designers, would prefer that the rooms stay just as they looked when she was finished. But she’s too realistic to hope for that. “A client has to be

able to travel and bring something home without feeling as though he’s upsetting the balance,” says Bridges, who associates “clutter with chaos.” How, then, can she be so accepting of what happens to jobs like Harrell’s—the new painting here, the extra plant there—once she’s out of the picture? Bridges smiles. “Of course, I sure do not like everything that ends up in places,” she says. “But that’s living your life, I guess.”