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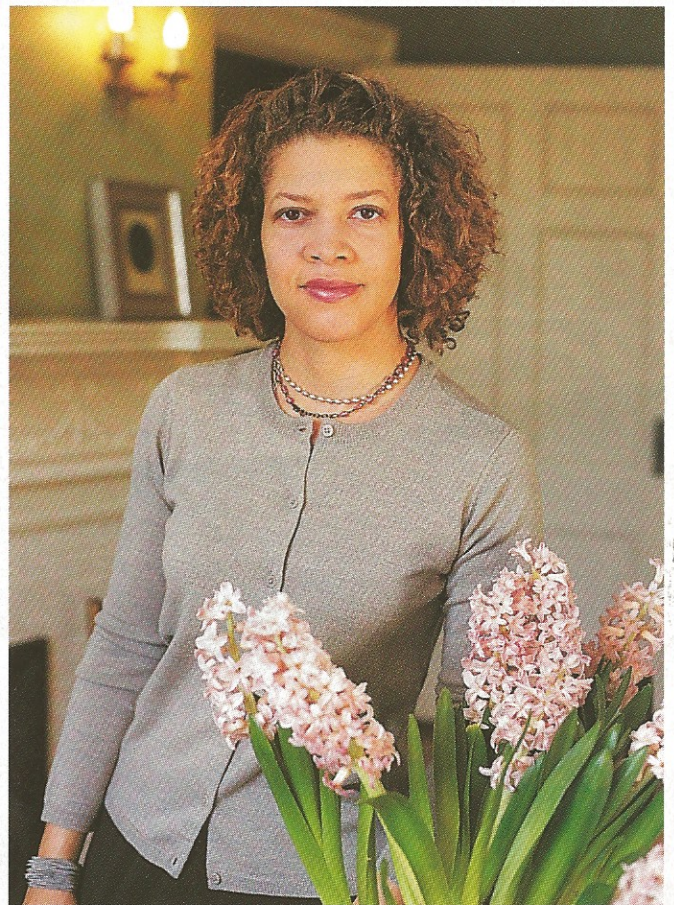


DESIGNER IN RESIDENCE

SHEILA BRIDGES'S STUDY IN SERENITY

By Claire Whitcomb

FAXES WHIRR, MESSENGERS KNOCK,
DOLBY THE DOG BARKS, AND SHEILA
BRIDGES'S APARTMENT BUZZES WITH
THE SOUNDS OF SUCCESS.
BUT THERE'S SERENITY HERE, TOO,
DOWN THE HALL IN A STUDY,
DESIGNED EXCLUSIVELY FOR VICTORIA.



Sheila Bridges's spacious Harlem apartment seemed to have it all: high ceilings, turn-of-the-century detail, and room for two assistants, chests of fabric swatches, and all the trappings of a thriving interior-design business. But when we talked with Sheila last year, she indicated something was missing: a private work space where she could sit quietly and focus on her design projects. She showed us her spare room, filled to the brim with inventory for clients. "Maybe," she mused, and in no time she'd turned the room into an office filled with her signature touches—flats of grass, flea-market finds, and a caned daybed that doubles as a sleeping spot for guests.

PHOTOGRAPHS TOSHI OTSUKI
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR KIM FREEMAN
EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTOR JENNIFER JENKINS



“SINCE OUT-OF-TOWN FRIENDS SOMETIMES
SLEEP HERE, I WANTED AN OFFICE THAT DIDN'T
LOOK OFFICEY,” SAYS SHEILA.

It all began with a desk—a Provençal painted pine antique that Sheila spied in a downtown shop. It had an ample surface for spreading out drawings and fabric swatches, an abundance of drawers for squirreling away projects and plans. But the color, ah the color: a wonderful café au lait that would look perfect with the khaki Sheila envisioned for her new office's walls. “I like my workspace to be very light and have a neutral palette because I'm in it all the time,” says Sheila. “Lately I've been venturing into grays and greens. This shade of khaki is just in between.”

The colors in her apartment run the gamut from apple green in the dining room to a dusky blue in the bedroom. But even at its boldest and brightest, Sheila's style is classically understated. Nothing screams “decorator.” Of course, when you see her living room you think, “that chair, that sofa, that rug, who would want anything else?” You forget entirely that a disciplined hand has placed every object and meditated long and hard on every fabric.

Consider the thinking behind the caned sofa in Sheila's office. When you see it, your eye darts to the pillows—plaids, velvets, hand-painted medieval medallions—and all you want to do is curl up among them. You indulge your impulse, analyze the rest of the room, and then realize you still haven't taken in the sofa's detail.

There's Parisian flea-market ticking upholstering the sofa base, an oversized plaid on the mattress, a check on the pillows, and a stripe on the bolsters, all juxtaposed against the pattern of the caning and the modern geometry of the rug. With the intricacy of a jazz riff, Sheila's played with color and



pattern, tone and texture without straying from her primary melody: a quiet, gray-green room.

As with music, such a feat cannot be accomplished without a few underlying rules. Sheila's a stickler for order and symmetry: pairs of chairs, matching bookcases, twin gold “coffee” tables with a funky flea-market pedigree. She doesn't have much patience for knickknacks. Her greenery is sculptural—table-top topiaries, flats of grass—and so are her accessories, primarily ceramics chosen for their shapes rather than their collectibility (see page 69). Her window treatments are crisp, usually Roman shades like the plaid ones here. And always furnishings are spare. Comfortable, yes, but minimal. Sheila makes a point not to overstuff. She designs for intimate conversations and then positions pairs of chairs on the perimeter of her rooms (mustard-yellow velvet ones flank the flea-market table, detail left). They wait, like well-mannered dance partners, for their cue to join the party.

The total effect is one that keeps her schedule booked with flights up and down the East Coast, and her dog, Dolby, excited by yet another client at the door. “People like to come here to get a feel for my work,” says Sheila. They come, too, for a glimpse of one of New York's most beautiful buildings, Graham Court, built for the Astor family in 1901 by the architects Clinton and Russell. “Harlem has

some of the most beautiful architecture in New York,” says Sheila. “There's scaffolding up everywhere, everything's being renovated. Where else can you live in the city where you still have light and a view?” As Dolby barks she adds, “and have Central Park, six blocks away, to walk the dog?”



When clients or friends visit, Sheila turns her cane-backed desk chair to face the sofa and draws this mustard velvet chair into the conversational circle. For serious solo work, Sheila plugs in a laptop and phone. A tote basket beneath her antique desk serves as a holding bin for design ideas. Top: Initial pillows from Pintura Studio were a gift from a friend.



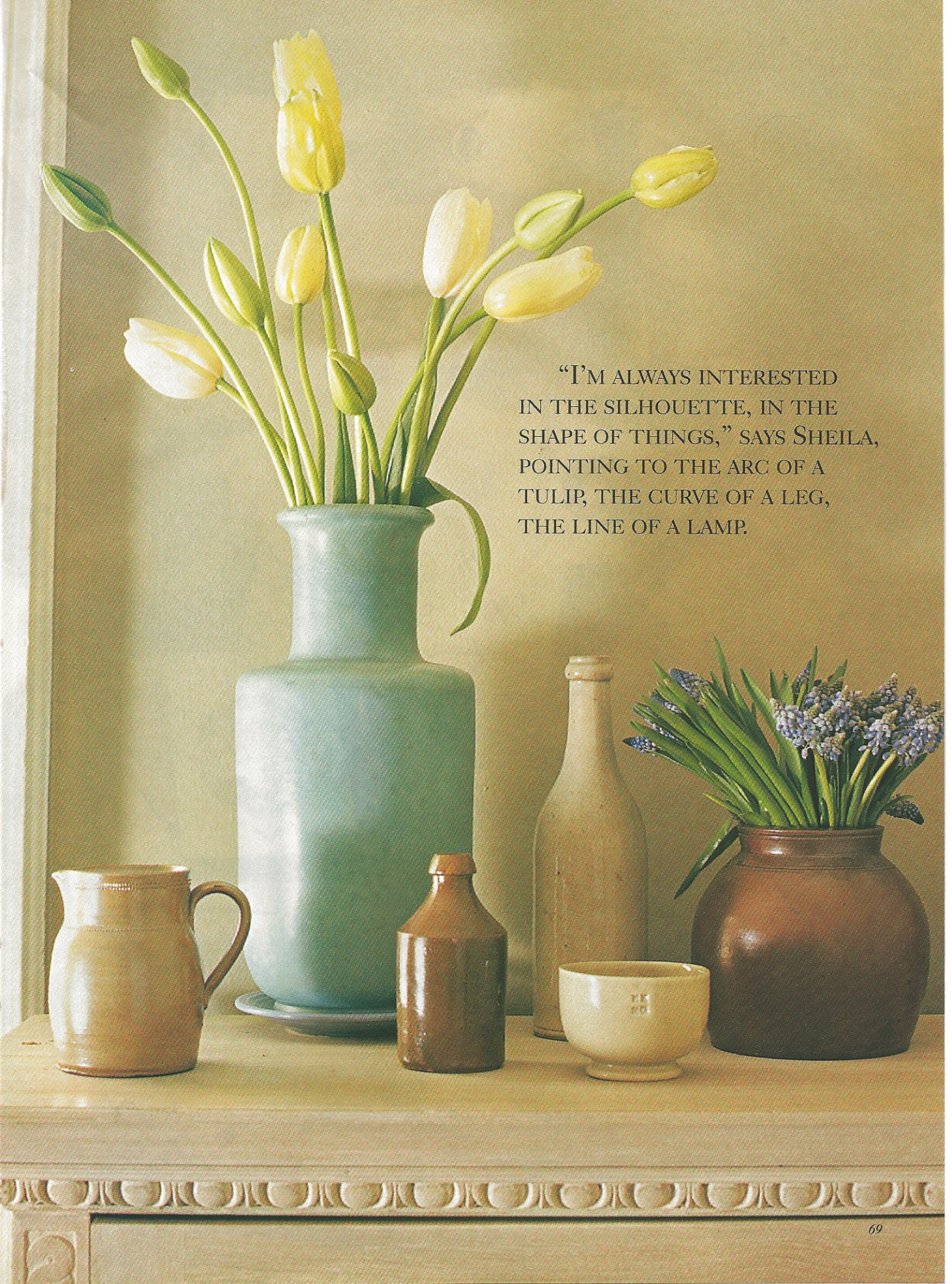
Poised in front of the daybed are flea-market tables that appealed to Sheila because of their graceful legs. Like most of the furniture in her apartment, they make one statement from afar—and another up close.

"I like furniture with workmanship, with details that you keep noticing," says Sheila. Thus, instead of an upholstered sofa, she chose a vintage daybed with carved legs. It is simple and sleek, yet plumped with pillows it provides a mix of patterns that serves as a focal point for the room.

Opposite: Not one for flower arrangements per se, Sheila believes in blooms that are as graphic as their containers. Here tulips and grape hyacinths sit atop vintage carved bookcases, chosen for their size and scale. "I keep moving things from room to room," she explains.

For additional information, see page 114.





"I'M ALWAYS INTERESTED
IN THE SILHOUETTE, IN THE
SHAPE OF THINGS," SAYS SHEILA,
POINTING TO THE ARC OF A
TULIP, THE CURVE OF A LEG,
THE LINE OF A LAMP.