Designing Woman

By Betsy Peoples

FOR SOME PEOPLE, change is difficult, but Sheila Bridges has always made it work for her. As a teenager, she often rearranged the furniture and changed things such as the wallpaper in her bedroom, showing a knack for mixing fabrics and furniture to create her own style.

Now she's helping others do the same.

In 1994, Bridges opened Sheila Bridges Design Inc., an interior design firm in New York. She started the company after noticing the lack of high–end African–American designers. Bridges wanted to provide the same resources and services to African–Americans that she supplied for White clients while working at the architectural and interior design firms of Shelton, Mindel & Associates and Renny B. Saltzman Interiors Inc. in New York.

The world of interior design has sometimes been a struggle for Bridges, who has been in the business for nine years. At one time, she had a completely different career. After graduating from Brown University, she entered a training program for buyers at Bloomingdales. Dissatisfied with retail after three years, Bridges decided to pursue her passion for furniture and decorative arts. She worked in sales during the day, and attended the Parsons School of Design nights and weekends to pursue an interior design degree. "Sometimes we get caught up in careers and never take the opportunity to stop and start over," Bridges says. "If there's something you're passionate about, go after it. The money will fall into place."

Now, Bridges is redecorating an apartment on New York's East Side for Sean "Puffy" Combs and an apartment and country house in Westport, Conn., for former Motown chairman Andre Harrell. She's also working on a 4,500 square–foot apartment on the 45th floor at the Trump International Hotel and Tower near Central Park West.

Since Bridges opened her doors, her sales revenue has been about $1.5 million.

"Though all of my clients are different, with diverse tastes, backgrounds and education, they have a common characteristic: They all want a nice place to live."

That will not change.

Interior designer Sheila Bridges uses her creative talents to help others develop their own style