



Right: Room designed by Courtney Sloane; opposite page top to bottom: design by Sheila Bridges; design by Latosha Lovell

HOME MATTERS

Three top interior designers get personal BY KENDRA STORY

So you've got this new place and you want it to be funky. While it may not be a snap to give your pad your own touch, taking some tips from a few hot interior designers can go a long way. Courtney Sloane, Sheila Bridges and Latosha Lovell work it out on the decorating tip. And for them, where there's work there's fun too.

Sloane, 40, feels the interior design of a home should be natural. "Some people have a natural gift and some people just don't. There are so many visual cues and so much information now, in terms of do-it-yourself, that it's almost contagious," says Sloane, who's 12-year-old New York-based Alternative Design (AD), a multidisciplinary

design studio, has an elite roster of clients including Queen Latifah, Damon Dash, Sony Music and Disney.

Let loose with interior design, but don't lose your mind. Transforming an 800-square-foot office space into a comfortable living room with oversize chairs and a coffee table, a project Lovell took on for an EMI Music executive, may not be in your budget or your creative capabilities. Be realistic with what you want to achieve. Taking the do-it-yourself route can be a plus, especially if you can't afford a designer, which can be expensive.

"You don't have to necessarily make a lot of money to hire an interior designer

because I think everybody has their own sense of style," says Bridges, 39, who's known for creating spaces that are attractive and inspiring as well as functional and comfortable. "What's important is that you learn about it [style], cultivate it and express it in your own personal space."

Named "America's Best Interior Designer" by CNN and *Time* magazine in 2001, Bridges has made it her mission to help people exercise their own style. Under her nine-year-old firm, Sheila Bridges Design Inc., the Philadelphia native has authored *Furnishing Forward: A Practical Guide to Furnishing for a Lifetime* (Little Brown & Co., \$40) and snagged her own TV series, *Sheila Bridges: Designer Living*, on the Fine Living network. Initially run from her seven-room apartment in Harlem, N.Y., her full-scale design firm (now located on Madison Avenue), was one of the leaders behind the rebuilding of Harlem, especially after she designed former President Bill Clinton's 8,300-square-foot Harlem offices on 125th Street.

Maybe you don't have a president's suite, but you've analyzed what you have, and now its time to visualize the design and purchase the items to support your plans. Lovell, 32, advises a trip to your local newsstand. "Develop a concept that can be achieved on your own without a designer

by just going through magazines. Go to your neighborhood paint store and pull paint chip samples. Travel with a camera and take shots of what you really love," says Lovell, who helms her own firm, Dolce Design, in Los Angeles.

Bridges stresses not overdoing it when you get to the shopping part. "Save fun for the smaller [inexpensive] things, accessories, candles, pillows," she says, recommending comparison shopping for more expensive items like sofas and beds.

Slowing down the designing process can save money too. "When you have tight budget constraints and a pretty nice size home, I always encourage clients to do the house in phases instead of buying a lot of items on impulse," says Lovell. "Hire a professional and think it out, even if it takes two years. If after two years your house is exactly how you want, then it was worth the time."

Remember that the cost of hiring a designer generally depends on the level of work and the client's status. Lovell says some designers hire on an hourly basis, while others charge a percent of the budget.

With a little patience, time and grunt work, getting personal with your home can be a blast. "Design and decorating is a process," says Bridges. "A beautiful interior isn't created overnight. What's nice is that it does incorporate some of your personality and style."

