

A Reykjavik Abode

Inspired by the colours of Iceland.

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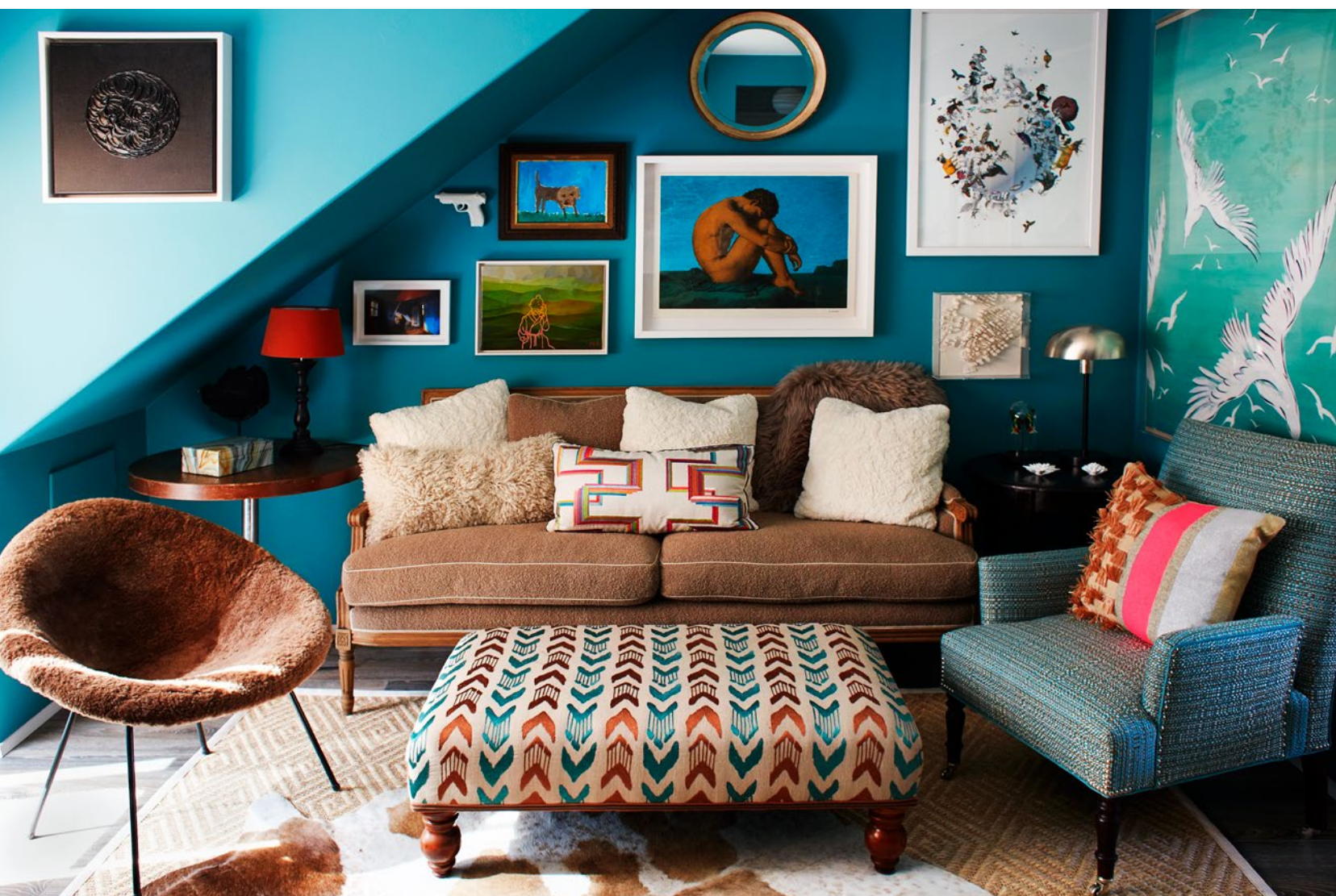
The Reykjavik bathroom of New York interior designer Sheila Bridges is worth spending time in. Like the rest of her home-away-from-Harlem, the apartment glows with the colours of Iceland. Halfway between Europe and North America, between mineral and liquid, lava and snow, primordial landscape and fairyland, the country is known for its diverse, monumental terrain: waterfalls and geysers, black sand beaches, crevasses that glow electric blue, ice caves and air-traffic-halting volcanic eruptions. “My bathroom tile is white like the snow and glaciers,” Bridges says, “but I used thick black grout, which reminds me of the black sand beaches in the south.”

The ombré Brett Design wallpaper evokes a clearing sky, a wholesale lifting of anything oppressive or burdensome. The apartment, in a 1930s building set amidst a multicoloured spill of houses, is awash in exuberant hues. It is full of its occupant’s energy (she visits monthly), but this is juxtaposed with soft, welcoming textures. It is as elegant and cozy as it is dynamic and playful.

Bridges, a native of Philadelphia, graduated from Brown University; she also holds a degree from Parsons School of Design and studied at Polimoda fashion school in Florence. In her 24 years of crafting interiors, she has designed spaces for Tom Clancy, Sean Combs (a.k.a. Diddy), and

Bill Clinton. She once hosted a TV show called *Sheila Bridges: Designer Living* and has written two books, one a memoir called *The Bald Mermaid* about living with an autoimmune disease that caused her to lose her hair. When she’s not in Reykjavik, Bridges spends time in New York in the classical Graham Court building in Harlem (once a location for the Spike Lee film *Jungle Fever*), where she’s lived for 23 years. She’s spent her career designing objects, furniture, fabrics, and wallpapers, two of which are in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

Bridges’ Reykjavik abode has the virtues of both its cosmopolitan urban setting and its proximity to nature, where she rides horses and enjoys listening to the quiet. The renovation included new bathroom fixtures and tile, new appliances and wood floors throughout, fresh paint and wallpaper. She also refurbished the terrace, which overlooks a tidy smattering of low roofs leading to the sea. “Renovating a home overseas is quite a challenge,” she admits, “so I kept



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as many things as I could, but tried to give everything a facelift.”

The apartment amplifies Bridges’ creative strengths—wit, eclecticism, synthesis—because she uses her homes as laboratories for ideas that she may or may not develop later for a client. Bridges revels in mixing old and new, classic and contemporary, and incorporating bold patterns, textures, and hues. “I love renovating my own spaces because I have the freedom to do whatever I want creatively,” she says. “My budget is very different than my clients’, so that is one of the biggest challenges. I also change my mind a lot—one day I want something supercontemporary and then the next day I want something traditional. That’s the part that can be paralyzing.”

Changing her mind, however, serves to weave together opposites in a way that enhances both. Each space is extroverted, filled with objects that, in combination, evoke their owner. In the kitchen she has installed black cabinets, hung a taxidermied

ewe’s head, and juxtaposed a fabric window shade in an Escher-style pattern with a wallpaper (a collaboration between Pratt Institute and Twenty2) depicting Viking ships riding out a rough sea. Using the proper eyewear—which Bridges provides for guests in the kitchen—the storm-tossed boats can be seen in 3-D. Plenty of objects in the apartment are witty or humorous, from the bright blue Inception dish rack depicting the Manhattan skyline to the tiny bedside mouse lamps by Seletti.

Bridges enjoys treasure hunting. She found some of her wall sculptures at the Kaolin Keramik Galleri in Reykjavik and a rug at a nearby flea market. Art hangs in irregular clusters in the living room, including an architectural model of Lower Manhattan by Chisel & Mouse and work by a number of Icelandic artists, including hypergraphical pieces by Kristjana S Williams. “I shop everywhere,” says the designer. “There are many things in my apartment from Iceland, but also from Sweden, Denmark, Italy, and

France. Hay in Copenhagen and Epal and Kraum, both in Iceland, are some of my favourite design shops.”

In the bedroom, both the bed and the carpet below it—a striped emerald wool one by Missoni, purchased from Stark in New York—create a chorus of patterns at play. The custom headboard is upholstered in Jim Thompson Fabrics with Samuel & Sons trim, and Kristi Kohut hand printed the geode-like Funky Agate pattern on linen to make cushions. Bridges mixed her own paint colours and named them: New Nordic Blue in the hallway and Tweety Bird Yellow in the bedroom. The apartment almost hums with a serene energy while remaining intimately cushy. Bridges describes it as “warm, comfortable, cozy, and colourful. Most importantly,” she says, “it feels like home.”

Photos: Interior designer Sheila Bridges splits her time between New York and Reykjavik, where her apartment amplifies her creative strengths of wit, eclecticism, and synthesis.