



SONOS



# Blog



## Union LA and Sonos: Seeking Reflection in Art, Design, and Technology

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**Sonos's collaboration with streetwear brand Union LA on a limited edition Sonos One SL features Harlem Toile, a print included in the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt. Designer Sheila Bridges created it when she discovered that—even after several centuries—there was no version of the pattern that reflected her life experience.**

Sheila Bridges had been a designer for more than 15 years when she discovered something surprising about French toile, a traditional pattern from the late 1700s. While designing the interiors of her new home, she wanted to incorporate the timeless pattern into her space. “I’ve always loved toiles. The issue was that there was no toile that spoke to me culturally,” she said. “I looked at hundreds of them but couldn’t find one that had people of color.” So she set out to design her own—a decision that would eventually land her work in the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

In the decade since she created Harlem Toile as wallpaper for her home, the pattern has come to grace fabric, glassware, bedding, clothing, umbrellas, and now, in collaboration with streetwear clothing brand Union LA, a limited edition Sonos One SL. “As a designer, I think of myself as a visual storyteller, and that’s what toile does. It tells a story,” she said. “For my toile, it tells a story about African Americans and stereotypes. At the same time, it’s also celebratory. It is a celebration of African American culture.”

## From Wallpaper to Clothing

Before he became an owner of Union LA, Chris Gibbs worked the floor at one of the brand’s first stores in New York City. Chris and the rest of the team were encouraged to express themselves authentically while on the clock, which extended to choosing what music to play in the store. That freedom contributed to the confidence that would propel him to become the co-owner of Union LA along with his wife, Beth Birkett. “I wanted Union LA to become a social hub—a place where people could feel comfortable and experience new ideas, art, and music,” Chris said.

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On a visit to The Underground Museum in Los Angeles, he came face to face with Harlem Toile. “When I first saw it, I was blown away,” he said. “I was very familiar with what toile was. And being someone of color, it had never spoken to me through my culture. I thought Sheila’s version was an incredible juxtaposition.” He immediately reached out to Bridges to see if they could include Harlem Toile wallpaper in a new Union store opening in Tokyo. From there, they worked together on a line of clothing featuring the pattern. And then Sonos reached out to Gibbs to explore a collaboration on a limited edition speaker.

## From Clothing to Speakers

A distinct point of view. A strong visual aesthetic. And music as an integral part of the work. These are some of the things that Joe Dawson, Sonos’s Director of Product Collaborations, looks for when deciding which artists to collaborate with on limited edition speakers. “Union LA is a driver of culture and personal style,” Dawson said. “And as a long-time Sonos user, Chris understands the product and how to take full advantage of a storytelling platform like this.”

“Everything I do at Union LA starts with something very personal,” Gibbs said. “And music is very personal to me.” Raised in Ottawa, Canada, his musical tastes were shaped by his parents’ diverse backgrounds. “I have a very eclectic and diverse taste in music that is very organic,” he said. “And my dad was a stereophile. So when I was first introduced to Sonos, what really got me into it was the high fidelity.”

It didn’t take much convincing to get Bridges on board for the project. When Chris first reached out to Sheila about featuring Harlem Toile on the limited edition One SL, she was in the process of installing Sonos in her new home. “I pick and choose these passion projects—things that I think are interesting or exciting to bring into the marketplace,” she said. “Because Sonos was a brand that I was really familiar with and something that I live with in my own home, I thought okay, this makes sense. Plus, music is a huge part of my life. I’m a closeted DJ.”

Bridges’ own musical tastes—heavily influenced by her father and experience growing up in Philadelphia—were expanded by some of her clients who worked in the music industry. “I was with music people all the time in my professional life,” she said. “And the only time that they could meet was usually at night. That meant going to some party or event or musical venue in order to have a meeting and pick their brains about their home. So, in that way, it increased my musical repertoire of things I was exposed to.”





## From Then to Now

Adding Harlem Toile to the Sonos One SL was not without its challenges. “The original pattern is quite detailed, and the one we were using was multicolored with a lot of fine lines. We were losing a lot of detail” Gibbs said, referring to the process of cutting hundreds of tiny holes into the pattern in order to allow sound to pass through from the speaker. To address this issue, the team pivoted to a mono color scheme, drawing inspiration from Delftware “Sometimes when you have these problems, the solutions wind up making something more unique,” he said.

In the decade since Bridges designed the pattern, she believes it’s become more relevant than ever. “The world is starting to acknowledge culture in a different way. And I think it makes people happy to see themselves reflected,” she said. When I first did it, a lot of people didn’t understand. I think we now have a better understanding of why it’s important.”

Although we have only created a very limited run of Union LA Sonos One SLs, you have a chance to win one by [liking this Union LA Instagram post](#) (or [following them](#)) before December 17, 2019. Also, check out the Union LA Limited Edition playlist—inspired by the speaker—and Bridges’ Philly Throwback playlist, featuring some of the tracks that were instrumental in her musical upbringing.