



A PRIVATE GARDEN FEATURES A FOUNTAIN. LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY REES ROBERTS + PARTNERS. OPPOSITE THE LIBRARY BANQUETTE WEARS A CLARENCE HOUSE PRINT. SIDE CHAIR UPHOLSTERED IN A CRÉATIONS MÉTAPHORES FABRIC WITH HOULÈS TRIM; ANTIQUE SWEDISH STOOL WITH A CHRISTOPHER HYLAND HORSEHAIR CUSHION. WINDOW SHADES OF A LORO PIANA WOOL; ANTIQUE PERSIAN MALAYER RUG. FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.



HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

With verve and aplomb, *Sheila Bridges* sensitively updates a vintage country estate in upstate New York

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IN THE LIVING ROOM, A GEORGE SMITH SOFA UPHOLSTERED IN A COLEFAX AND FOWLER PRINT WITH BORDER OF A SAMUEL & SONS VELVET SITS ACROSS FROM A BESPOKE SOFA IN A BRUNSCHWIG & FILS TEAL VELVET. CURTAINS OF A CLAREMONT LINEN PRINT. VINTAGE BRASS-FRAMED TABLES; STARK CARPET. ARTWORKS BY JACOB COLLINS (ABOVE MANTEL) AND RAINER GROSS. OPPOSITE DESIGNER SHEILA BRIDGES, WEARING A SKIRT OF FABRIC PRINTED WITH HER ICONIC HARLEM TOILE PATTERN.

naissance woman in the truest sense, interior designer Sheila Bridges has hosted a TV show, published two books, and created the now-iconic Harlem Toile pattern every socially aware aesthete loves. The AD100 talent talks fast—ideas whirling out of her mind and mouth—and it can be tough to keep up. Searingly quick-witted, she somehow manages to balance charm, warmth, and humor without sacrificing her exacting eye. As layered as her interiors, this gracious spirit has used design as an avenue for experimentation and discovery for the last 30 years. “One of the things I really try to do in my interiors is to not use the same thing twice,” she says.

There’s certainly no fear of repetition in a recent large project she completed in Bedford Hills, New York. Set on 23

acres of verdant land, the Cotswolds-style estate was originally built in 1936 by architect Phelps Barnum as a country escape for avid equestrians, whose passion is shared by Bridges and the current owner. With architect David Abelow overseeing the comprehensive renovation (his third project for the clients), Bridges was tasked with creating cozy, livable spaces within the historic 8,000-square-foot house, all while staying true to its elegant original spirit and the Art Deco details that remained. Those details served as a decorative starting point for Bridges, who did a deep dive into the history of the house and the area in preparation for her work. “My process always starts with a lot of research and design reconnaissance,” the designer explains. “It’s about discovery and learning.”

JACOB COLLINS, RAINER GROSS.

Though large, “the home feels more like a cottage than a grand mansion,” says Abelow. Bridges enhanced the feeling of intimacy by creating an independent decorative narrative within each zone, taking cues from the 1930s features still sprinkled throughout. One of the many well-preserved gems in the house is the pine-paneled library. Here, we see Bridges’s characteristically lush and playful layering come most vividly to life. Comfortable seating and a considered apportioning of the space makes the most of the limited natural light. Bridges upholstered the bay window’s curving seat in a deliciously

wild Clarence House print, depicting a Tibetan-inspired repeating tiger motif. Roman shades in a slightly more subdued Loro Piana textile offer a soothing counterpoint to the cushy riot underneath.

Nearby in the living room, the historical integrity was maintained by preserving the delicate plaster medallions that pepper the ceiling depicting Tudor roses with soft curling petals, as well as a heraldic crest and lion. Grandeur still is the formal dining room, where lively custom scenic wallpaper showing the Bedford Hills property in a fictional past time



ABOVE THE REAR FAÇADE OF THE 1936 HOUSE. **LEFT** THE PRIMARY BEDROOM IS SWATHED IN AN EMBROIDERED FROMENTAL SILK. CURTAINS OF A CHRISTOPHER HYLAND VELVET. DMITRIY & CO. BED IN HOLLY HUNT MOHAIR WITH A CHARLES H. BECKLEY MATTRESS; ANN-MORRIS SWING-ARM LAMPS; WOOL OUSHAK RUG. **OPPOSITE** THE BATH FEATURES A VANITY BY DRUMMONDS AND WATERWORKS FITTINGS. HUDSON VALLEY LIGHTING PENDANT.

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ABOVE A CUSTOM-PAINTED WALLPAPER BY GRACIE SETS A BUCOLIC MOOD IN THE DINING ROOM. **OPPOSITE** ARCHITECT DAVID ABELOW OVERSAW THE SENSITIVE UPDATE OF THE KITCHEN. A FINE PAINTS OF EUROPE GREEN COLORS THE CABINETS. PIERRE JEANNERET STOOLS PULL UP TO A CALACATTA MARBLE-TOPPED ISLAND. NEWPORT BRASS SINK FITTINGS; WOLF RANGE AND BEST HOOD; VINTAGE LIGHT FIXTURES FROM REJUVENATION.

covers the walls. The clients had commissioned a hand-painted mural for a previous home, which Bridges took inspiration from.

A top contender in the battle for the home's best original detail is the dining room's exquisite limestone mantel, carved with the Latin inscription *Dum spiro, spero*, meaning "While I breathe, I hope." A close runner-up might just be the refrigerator—a 1930s "icebox" with countless compartments, which the homeowners had refurbished by a specialist in Maine.

WHEN IT CAME to the main house's five bedrooms, each of which has its own bathroom, Bridges changed her usual approach. "Usually I come up with a scheme for the bedroom, and the bathroom flows from there," she notes. "Here, I worked backward in a way, starting with the bathrooms because all of them were original." The clients' fastidiousness was such that even faucets and handles were sent out to be refurbished, rather than opting for contemporary replacements. In the bath off the green bedroom, original Art Deco tile frames the mirror. The asparagus green of the tile

reappears in the quaint Farrow & Ball wallpaper depicting farmscapes (a subtle nod to the estate itself) that covers the adjoining bedroom's walls. "They love clean walls without a lot of art," Bridges shares, referencing the fanciful wall coverings that proliferate through the house. "So the wallpaper serves as art itself."

Embroidered blossoms in a large-scale Fromental silk sprout on the walls of the primary suite, where a Dmitriy & Co. bed, richly upholstered in a Holly Hunt mohair, takes center stage. Through the sumptuous Christopher Hyland velvet curtains you can catch a glimpse of a majestic totem pole, originally erected on the grounds of a family property of the wife's in Canada, now at home here.

Outdoor space, not surprisingly, is a focal point for this country retreat. Leaded-glass French doors open off a separate family room into a "secret garden" designed by landscape designer David Kelly of Rees Roberts + Partners. Boxed in by tall hedges, the garden lends itself to contemplation, aided by the sounds of trickling water coming from the central fountain and its two adjoining pools. There is also a swimming



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ABOVE A FARROW & BALL WALLPAPER WRAPS ONE OF THE GUEST ROOMS. CIRCA 1890 FRENCH BED; ALT FOR LIVING PILLOWS; VINTAGE JANSEN BEDSIDE TABLES; ANN-MORRIS SWING-ARM

LAMPS; STARK CARPET. **LEFT** A GUEST BATH'S GREEN TILE, SINK, TUB, AND FITTINGS ARE ORIGINAL TO THE HOUSE. HINES & CO. WALLPAPER; SCHOOLHOUSE LIGHT FIXTURE.

pool and poolhouse, from which you can glimpse breathtaking views of the sweeping acreage. Other outbuildings include a new wood barn by Abelow and a historic stone stable with an addition housing a gym and squash court by the architect.

NOSTALGIA AND A RESPECT for history are as present in this home as they are in the rest of Bridges's practice. Unique in its restraint, this project rounds out her richly varied oeuvre, which is defined by her deployment of often surprising color combinations and a fearless blending of periods and prints. The designer's adaptability has made her uniquely suited to the challenges a pandemic-ravaged year has wrought, but this skill at managing change did not come easy. She's faced more than her fair share of adversity in a field where not many people look like her, and she has traversed this rugged terrain with grace and acumen. "My business closely follows the economy," she observes. "That's why I've had such a diverse career—why I was on television, why I wrote a book, and why I was a contributor on NBC. I had to diversify in a way that would allow me to survive." Bridges's hard-won understanding of how the past connects to the present—both on a personal level and in the world at large—helps her envision spaces rich in meaning and intimate in feeling. That insight can be felt in this and all of Bridges's other projects, proving that there are indeed countless ways to achieve and see beauty. ▲



SIGURSOL (LEFT) AND KORKI, A PAIR OF ICELANDIC HORSES, GRAZE OUTSIDE THE PROPERTY'S HISTORIC STONE STABLE.