

ALL THE HATS

Just 2 Percent of U.S. Interior Designers Are Black. How These 5 Women Entrepreneurs Broke Through

Meet some of the Black women entrepreneurs who are breaking the mold in the \$17.5 billion decorating industry. [»](#)

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Interior by Sheila Bridges. Sheila Bridges Design.

● The design world has a serious diversity problem.

Just 2 percent of interior designers in the U.S. are Black, according to data from the job search company [Zippia](#). That's especially staggering when you consider that interior design services have a [U.S. market size of \\$17.5 billion](#). There have been recent pushes for improved [diversity, equality, and inclusion measures](#) in the industry. In 2018, artist and designer Malene Barnett founded the [Black Artists and Designers Guild](#), a community-driven nonprofit that aims to increase visibility for Black creatives across various fields of design. It also provides grants for Black design students and develops educational programming, among other initiatives.

A lot of work remains to be done. But many [Black women entrepreneurs](#) have found success in the industry despite of systemic barriers. These five interior designers have plenty of visual inspiration to share, but their business acumen is worth taking note of, too. These are the strategies that both helped them forge their paths and continue to bring new opportunities.

Sheila Bridges: Expand your offerings

Since the launch of her eponymous interior design firm in 1994, [Sheila Bridges](#) has charted an impressive course through the industry, earning accolades, awards, and impressive clients (including former president Bill Clinton). While high-end interior design services aren't accessible to all, Bridges has also found ways to expand her audience. The designer, based in Manhattan's Harlem neighborhood, released a decorating book, *Furnishing Forward* in 2002. In 2007, she launched Sheila Bridges Home, a home furnishing collection that includes her famous Harlem Toile designs. Her business success has already earned her a mark in history: Her wallpaper is featured in New York City's Cooper Hewitt museum.

Carmeon Hamilton: Pinpoint a void in the market

Memphis-based interior designer [Carmeon Hamilton](#) had been running her interior design firm, [Nubi Interiors](#), and working as a merchandising consultant when she got her big break in August 2021. That's when she won HGTV's design competition, *Design Star: Next Gen*. This landed her a show, *Reno My Rental*, which launched on Discovery+ in September and premiered on HGTV in January. Her unique pitch for the show set her apart, reality show producer Ming Lee Howell told [Memphis Magazine](#): There was no other program on HGTV that appealed directly to renters, and as competitive housing markets lead Millennials to rent rather than buy their homes, the opportunity to appeal to this underserved audience was clear.

Anishka Clark: Work collaboratively

With an MBA from New York University's Stern School of Business, Anishka Clark spent about a decade working in finance and business consulting before she shifted gears to design. After getting a degree in interior design from the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Brooklyn, New York-based creative launched her firm, [Ishka Design](#), with her partner, Niya Bascom. The duo have designed residences worldwide, and in each project they include unique features—furniture, decorative objects, artwork—sourced from local vendors and artisans. Ishka was named to [Elle Decor's annual A-List in 2021](#), which recognizes 101 of the most exciting professionals in the design world each year.

Dani Arps: Find your niche

New York City-based designer [Dani Arps](#) found her niche over the past decade, designing offices for startups like General Assembly, Daily Harvest, and Codecademy. In the fall of 2021, she launched her company, [Artisan](#), which aims to disrupt the commercial real estate industry by providing all-in-one broker, architect, and design services to businesses looking to open or renovate their offices.

Justina Blakeney: Build a strong brand identity

Los Angeles designer [Justina Blakeney](#)'s entrepreneurial journey began early. She moved to Italy for fashion school with her sister after graduating from UCLA and decided to open a boutique in a town outside of Florence. Four years later, Blakeney moved back to the U.S. and took on assorted creative jobs while launching her blog in 2009—which eventually turned into a book deal on her signature bohemian interior design style, a home brand called [Jungalow](#), and several collections with Target, Anthropologie, and other retailers.