

DC BY Design!

Q&A with Sheila Bridges on her P Street Makeover

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New York designer Sheila Bridges—famous in DC for decorating President Clinton’s Harlem offices—is coming back to town, but she won’t be decorating anyone’s house.

This time, she’ll be remaking a block of P Street in Georgetown in honor of Small Business Saturday, the first Saturday after Thanksgiving where people are encouraged to spend their holiday dollars at locally owned businesses. It’s part of a promotion by American Express, which chose Georgetown along with four other “Main Streets” across the country to celebrate the businesses that help make those neighborhoods remarkable.

Sheila was kind enough to answer some questions before she swoops in next week to do her magic on the 3200 block of P Street, right off Wisconsin Avenue. She'll be working on the exteriors of Anthony's Tuxedo and Wedding Creations, consignment boutique Ella-Rue, the P Street Gallerie for contemporary art, stationery and fine tea store Just Paper and Tea, and children's clothing purveyor Little Birdies Boutique.

DC BY DESIGN: So, how do you plan a makeover of multiple exterior storefronts? It must be a little more complicated than redoing someone's living room.

SHEILA BRIDGES: I wouldn't say it's more complicated—simply different. I usually get to take my time when designing or decorating someone's living room. We had a 3-week turnaround for this entire project, so I think that was the real challenge. Right now, the plan is to work on one store window at a time.

DCBD: Did you have your pick of anywhere in Georgetown? What caught your eye about the 3200 block of P street?

SB: What caught my eye at first glance was how charming the street was—cobblestones with trolley tracks, brick sidewalks and the fact that there were lots of trees. There is a great mix of interesting stores and architecture on that block, and I thought it was a perfect location since it was right off of Wisconsin Avenue, where there seemed to be a constant flow of foot traffic. There is also a painted brick wall at the beginning of the street which I thought could be used in my design plan.

DCBD: When you met with store owners last week, what kind of advice or input did they share with you?

SB: All of the store owners were very enthusiastic about having their storefront windows made over. I spoke with each of them about their individual businesses and tried to incorporate that information into my designs.

DCBD: You told The Georgetownian that the street scape will have a reindeer theme. Can you give examples of how that theme will play out at each store?

SB: The inspiration was reindeers, but the street will have a more general deer theme. All I can say is that each store window will look different but will share a consistent theme. Unfortunately, I don't ever share my designs before we install. You will have to come see the finished result on Small Business Saturday (November 29th)!

DCBD: Georgetown has always been a popular destination for shopping. How do you think Small Business Saturday can help here?

SB: I think it can help because everyone (both tourists and locals) needs to be reminded of the importance of shopping at small, independent retailers. There are lots of well known chains in Georgetown, but our focus is the smaller shops that sometimes have a tough time competing with their bigger neighbors. Big retailers usually have deep pockets for advertising, and most small businesses don't, so they can often be overshadowed. Small businesses are an extremely important and integral part of every community, and it is essential that we continue to support them in our local neighborhoods.

DCBD: Did you spot anything at these boutiques that you might want to recommend for holiday shoppers?

SB: I'm not sure about holiday shoppers, but I definitely saw a few things for myself. Ella Rue had a great pair of shoes and a jacket that I wanted to try on, but never had the time during my site visit. Shanlee of Little Birdies Boutique had a plate of freshly baked sugar cookies (my weakness) sitting on a table in her shop. I thought that was so thoughtful and really amazing that she would take the time to do that for her customers.

DCBD: Do you have any current or former residential clients here?

SB: Yes. I have a former residential client in the DC area, and a former client who happens to be a former President whose offices I did in Harlem after he left the White House. Would love to do more work in DC if the opportunity presents itself.

So there you have it—a big thanks to Sheila for taking the time to answer these questions, and you can bet I'll be down there next Saturday to check out her work!