



## INTERIOR DESIGN

# 'Given Where the World Is Right Now, I Want My Work to Bring People Joy' – Sheila Bridges Is as Fearless and Original as Ever and Knows How to Fill Spaces With Personality

In this installment of our Layered Lives series, Sheila Bridges explores how her own style has evolved after shaping the design landscape for over 30 years



By [Pip Rich](#) published 26 February 2026 IN [IDEAS](#)

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(Image credit: Polina Strepetava)

**F**ew designers have shaped the conversation around American interiors quite like Sheila Bridges. For more than three decades, she has forged a career defined by confidence, intellect, and an unshakable belief in the power of personal style.

From her pioneering Harlem Toile to her celebrated textiles and bestselling books, Sheila has consistently challenged the idea that good taste must be safe, neutral, or polite. Her work is layered, narrative-driven, and unapologetically expressive – proof that interiors can be both deeply individual and rigorously considered.

In this interview, part of our *Layered Lives* series, Sheila reflects on what it means to design fearlessly today, at a moment when homogeneity can feel easier than risk. She speaks candidly about instinct, memory, and why trusting yourself – rather than trends – leads to spaces with lasting emotional resonance. Expect practical wisdom, sharp observations, and encouragement to be braver, not just in how we decorate, but in how we live with our choices.



(Image credit: Polina Strepetava)

**Homes & Gardens:** Can you describe the first space that shaped your sense of design?

**Sheila Bridges:** I grew up in Philadelphia, in the home that my parents had for my entire life—it was in our family until I was in my 50s. And that really did shape the

framework I have about design and decoration and the meaning of home. My parents had a great sense of style. Even though it was an old stone house, their design style was more modern, quite 1970s, but with an eclectic mix that included 1960s references, with midcentury modern styles mixed with antiques. For me, having grown up in the historic city of Philadelphia influenced my love of Federal and Colonial houses and classic architecture.

**Homes & Gardens: In a home owned for that long, it must have been filled with sentimental pieces?**

**Sheila Bridges:** Well, I still own a number of things from my parents' home that I've incorporated into my own homes in Manhattan and upstate New York. Things like the more midcentury-style pieces that belonged to them, a chair from my father that was in his home office, a vintage 1960s grandfather clock that was a bit modern and was in my living room my entire life. I also have a lot of their artwork – my mother was a big collector of African American art – and a few accessories of hers, too. There was also a framed drawing in my childhood bedroom that I still have now. All these things were timeless.

**Homes & Gardens: Clearly your love of decor was genetic! Where do you think your parents' interest in design came from?**

**Sheila Bridges:**

homeownership, and were simply interested in creating a beautiful home. Our tastes and sensibilities were very different, but I appreciate a beautiful home because they appreciated it.



(Image credit: Design by Sheila Bridges)

## **Homes & Gardens: What was the first space like that you were able to decorate for yourself?**

**Sheila Bridges:** That was when I was 18 and had left for school – it was my first opportunity to decorate my dorm room, and then later my first apartment. I started to veer into a different style from that of my parents – I didn't have much of a budget, so there was a lot of IKEA. I convinced myself that less is more – really because I couldn't afford more.

**Homes & Gardens: As you were shaping your own style, was there any early influence that helped you work out what that was?**

**Sheila Bridges:** I used to go to a lot of museums with my mother, and I saved money from my summer job to buy art posters from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Back then, they were expensive – there was no online shop, of course, and you had to go to the museum itself to buy these posters. I had a fascination with Wassily Kandinsky and had a Kandinsky poster on my wall, along with one of a Alexander Calder mobile. I've always been fascinated by mobiles and things hanging from the ceiling. My childhood bedroom had mobiles, and I've loved them just as much now as I did when I was a kid – although I don't have any of the original ones from my childhood bedroom anymore.



(Image credit: Design by Sheila Bridges)

**Homes & Gardens:** You talk lovingly about your family home. When you think of “home,” what images or feelings come to mind?

**Sheila Bridges:** Conceptually, home is a place that makes you feel comfortable and comforted, that gives you a sense of belonging. I enjoy being surrounded by

things that make me feel good and inspire me, and that are reflective of my life experience. I like to be able to look around and think, “Oh, I got that from a flea market in Paris, or on a trip to Sweden, or on a Saturday in New York City,” and for me that’s really what home is. Most of the clients who hire me want me to create a backdrop and to take their sense of style and try to elevate that – they often want to make sure there is room for these personal finds.

**Homes & Gardens: Speaking of your clients, looking back to when you first started out, which project felt like a turning point in your career – and why?**

**Sheila Bridges:** There was a client I worked with called Andre Harrell, a music executive who founded the label Uptown Records. I did several projects with him, and he was one of the first people who gave me the opportunity to go out on my own and not have to work for another studio. The first apartment I designed for him was enough for me to take the plunge, quit my job, and set up my own business. We did a lot together. The second project we did was in Manhattan and was on the cover of a major magazine in the 1990s, and that was a big turning point for my career – suddenly, there were a lot of eyeballs on me.

**Homes & Gardens: Why do you think your creative relationship with him worked so well?**

**Sheila Bridges:** He was accustomed to working with artists in the music world, and he treated me like an artist – something I both appreciated and needed. To have a client who was accustomed to artistic temperaments was quite something.



(Image credit: Sheila Bridges)

**Homes & Gardens: And of course your artistry is evident in Harlem Toile, the print you designed that really took off. Why do you think it has resonated as much as it did?**

**Sheila Bridges:** When I designed Harlem Toile, it was over 20 years ago. I created it simply because I was looking for toile for my own home, and I could not find one that really spoke to me. I loved French toiles, so like most designers, when you can't find something you like, you create it yourself. I was very specific about the various scenes that made up the vignettes, inspired by Philadelphia as well as Harlem, and I created both wallpaper and textile versions.

When it was being printed, the man at the print studio said he'd never seen anything like it and asked if I would consider making it available more widely. At first, I said no – it was just for me. But fast-forward 20 years, and it's been out there in the world all this time. It resonates with a lot of Black people because we like seeing representations of ourselves in products, not just in art.

One of the big challenges I face is that not everyone can afford my design services, so how can I make good design accessible to real people? For me, the gateway was my toile.

**Homes & Gardens: Looking back to those Andre Harrell projects in the '90s, and to Harlem Toile 20 years ago, how has your style evolved in that time?**

**Sheila Bridges:**

I do think that more is more now, though, of course, it depends on the circumstances. For me, the challenge is that I'm a collector. I collect art, vintage paperweights, and my mother's vintage Wedgwood – and now I have my own collaboration with Wedgwood. If you're a collector, it's hard to curate and edit, especially if you're a maximalist like me.

Over time, and with all the experience and exposure I've had to great design, my interests have broadened. I'll now pull from a wide range of references when putting rooms together – everything from a Louis XVI chair to a Charles and Ray Eames table. I suppose it makes it harder for me to choose just one thing, because now I know about five more that I also like.

**Homes & Gardens: It sounds like your outlook has really shifted over the years, along with your style?**

**Sheila Bridges:** Yes, my approach to color and pattern has evolved. My own apartment's living room is painted in Oval Room Blue by Farrow & Ball, and it has been that color for many years now, but when I first moved in, I painted it Cameo White by Benjamin Moore. Back then, I played it safe. Now I prefer more saturated color, and I want to play with pattern – mixing stripes and florals. It all adds depth and a sense of layering.



(Image credit: Design by Sheila Bridges)

**Homes & Gardens: And it has all come a long way from your original degree in sociology! Do you ever fall back on that education in human behavior to inform how you put rooms together?**

**Sheila Bridges:** Yes, sociology is the study of social interaction and behavior, and so much of that is what we do in our homes. While it was my major in college, I didn't think it would have much to do with my career as a designer. But it has helped me understand my clients and the way they live and interact in the spaces I design.

**Homes & Gardens: You've spoken before about wanting people to feel something when they enter a space. What kinds of emotional responses are you most interested in creating right now?**

**Sheila Bridges:** I try to be very thoughtful and intentional about my work. Given where the world is right now – and the U.S. in particular – I want my work and products to help bring people joy. It's a very hard time for many people, and I do like designing things that make people think. Ultimately, it brings me a lot of pleasure to create things that bring joy into people's lives.

What emerges most clearly from this conversation is that Sheila Bridges' approach to design has never been about provocation for its own sake. Her fearlessness is rooted in clarity – about who she is, what she values, and how she wants spaces to feel. Whether she's talking about color, pattern, or storytelling, her message is consistent: confidence comes from commitment.

In a design landscape increasingly shaped by algorithms and sameness, Sheila reminds us that originality is a muscle that strengthens with use. The reward, she suggests, is not just more interesting rooms, but a deeper sense of ownership over the way we inhabit our lives.



**Pip Rich**



Pip Rich is an interiors journalist and editor with 20 years' experience, having written for all of the UK's biggest titles. Most recently, he was the Global Editor in Chief of our sister brand, Livingetc, where he now continues in a consulting role as Executive Editor. Before that, he was acting editor of Homes & Gardens, and has held staff positions at Sunday Times Style, ELLE Decoration, Red and Grazia. He has written three books – his most recent, *A New Leaf*, looked at the homes of architects who had decorated with house plants. Over his career, he has interviewed pretty much every interior designer working today, soaking up their knowledge and wisdom so as to become an expert himself.