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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Clean lines, gold accents and pops of pink add a feminine touch; Gibbons followed in her mother's footsteps by becoming a decorator; books and photographs can beautifully enhance a room.

HOME TOUR

# Harlem on My Mind

INTERIOR DESIGNER AND EXPERT ON OWN'S 'HOME MADE SIMPLE' NICOLE GIBBONS SHARES HOW TO GET THE LOOK OF HER STYLISH UPTOWN SANCTUARY

By AMY ELISA KEITH

**A**ny professional decorator's home is his or her calling card. Perhaps the most important canvas, it is the basis of the designer's portfolio and a space that can make or break a business. And for Nicole Gibbons, her 600-square-foot Harlem apartment has been the epicenter of her steady rise to fame, serving as both an office and example of her unique sense of style. Since quitting her job in 2013 as a public relations executive for Victoria's Secret, she has been featured in nearly every major decor magazine and is approaching her second season on the Oprah Winfrey Network's *Home Made Simple*.

"Everything I ever wanted is happening, [but] right now, I still feel like I'm just getting started," says Gibbons, 32. The Detroit native has already partnered with Target, Farrow & Ball (paints) and David Stark Design, and she is also planning to release a line of branded merchandise, solidifying her status as a decorator to watch. "I want to be the next Martha Stewart."

Although viewers tune in to see her surprisingly sophisticated do-it-yourself projects, when it comes to her business, Nicole Gibbons Studio LLC, launched in 2008, the fun-loving tastemaker prefers the professional touch. "I'm a little bit like Sweet Brown when it comes to DIY," Gibbons says half-jokingly. "Ain't nobody got time for that."

A lover of custom furniture and one-of-a-kind decor, her style can best be described as feminine and youthful. Inspiration can come from Rihanna and her Balmain fashion ad campaign as well as striking European architecture or Indian floral prints. "I really like traditional foundations, but I have urban fashion edge that really sets me apart," says Gibbons, whose blog and Instagram feed are

followed closely by industry insiders such as Nate Berkus. Combining high-end furnishings with finds from eBay and West Elm, her goal is to infuse “fun colors, mixed-up patterns and be a little bit more eclectic than the rest.”

Since moving into her modern one-bedroom blocks from the Apollo Theater in 2007, Gibbons has been refining the decor as her taste evolves. Against the backdrop of cool gray wall paint, she constructed her photo collage of framed art found on online retailer 20x200 alongside beloved images from coffee-table books, which she collects by the dozens. Gibbons gets creative stacking the large tomes under side tables and using them as decor on her vintage coffee table, an eBay score.

“I restyle the tabletop every couple of weeks,” says the designer, who updates with flea market finds and flowers. “Even the smallest change somehow makes the room feel fresh and new again.”

Instead of creating a glamorously girly bedroom, Gibbons insists she spends most of her time in the living room, and it is the focus of her design energy. “Half the time, I sleep on the sofa because I’m working,” she



**LEFT:** A chic column of color-coded books keeps clutter at bay alongside a stylishly petite workspace.

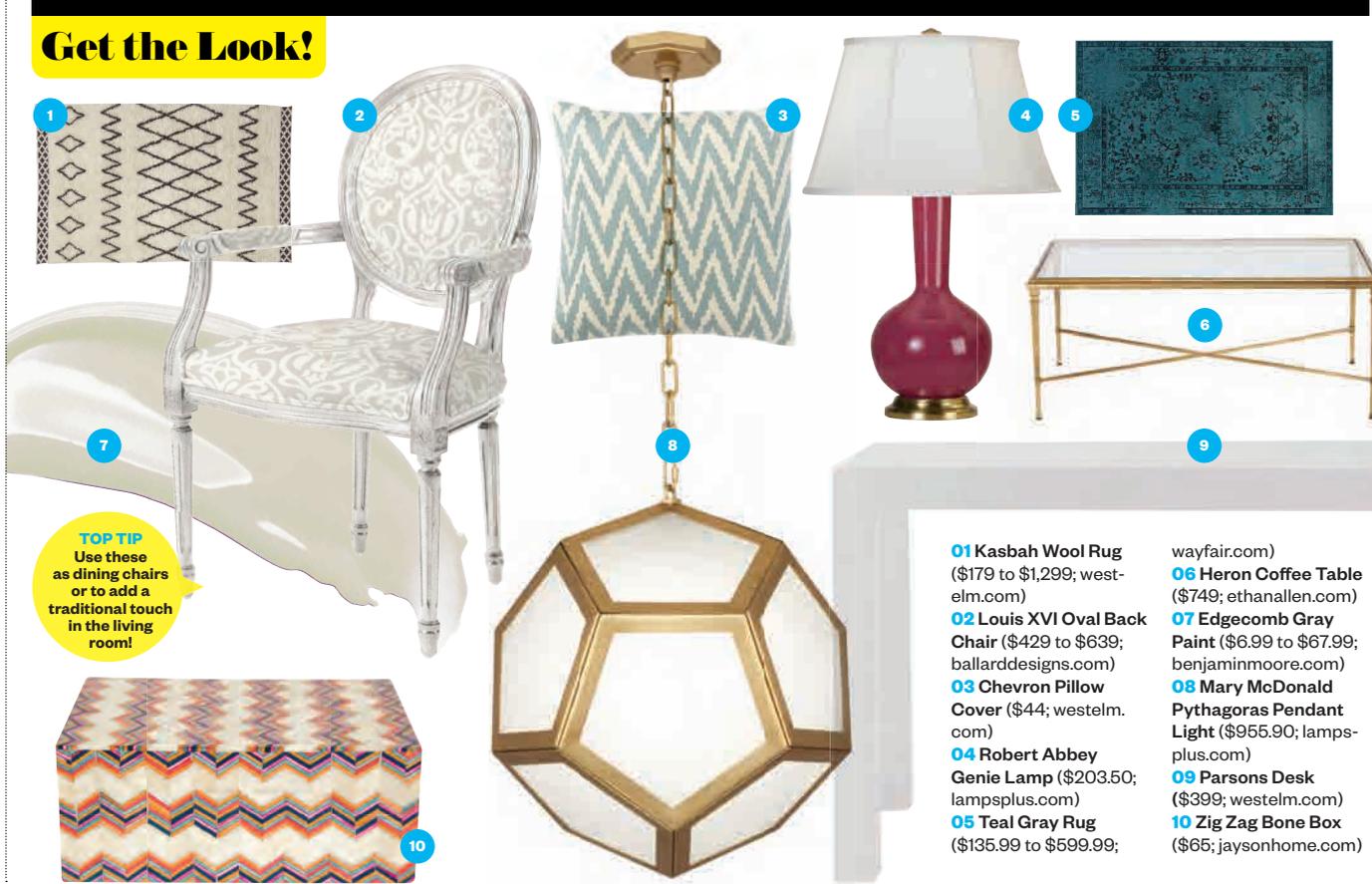
**ABOVE:** Throw pillows and side tables enliven the gray room, preventing it from appearing monotone.

says, laughing. The self-proclaimed homebody is known to host big dinner parties, which is her excuse for collecting dozens of chairs and vintage glassware. The key to her space is mixing and matching with careful balance. Whether you are considering mixing patterns or styles, Gibbons says, “Unify through the choice of upholstery fabric or finish like the dining table and chairs, for example.”

The unifying theme in her life is the goal

to bring beautiful design to the masses, a lesson she has learned, in part, from her boss, Oprah Winfrey. “If I develop products, if I have a TV show, [then] I’m able to educate and inspire,” Gibbons says, before recalling Oprah’s recent interview with Kevin Hart on *Oprah Prime*. “He said success to him was when he knew he’d created something special. I feel like that’s what I want: I want to create something that is really special. I want a legacy.”

**Get the Look!**



**TOP TIP**  
Use these as dining chairs or to add a traditional touch in the living room!

- 01 Kasbah Wool Rug** (\$179 to \$1,299; westelm.com)
- 02 Louis XVI Oval Back Chair** (\$429 to \$639; ballarddesigns.com)
- 03 Chevron Pillow Cover** (\$44; westelm.com)
- 04 Robert Abbey Genie Lamp** (\$203.50; lampsplus.com)
- 05 Teal Gray Rug** (\$135.99 to \$599.99; wayfair.com)
- 06 Heron Coffee Table** (\$749; ethanallen.com)
- 07 Edgecomb Gray Paint** (\$6.99 to \$67.99; benjaminmoore.com)
- 08 Mary McDonald Pythagoras Pendant Light** (\$955.90; lampsplus.com)
- 09 Parsons Desk** (\$399; westelm.com)
- 10 Zig Zag Bone Box** (\$65; jaysonhome.com)