



INTERIOR HERO

Set designer Brian Sidney Bembridge in his set-worthy home studio.



**Brian Sidney Bembridge**

A Lookingglass Theatre Company board member and artistic associate at Timeline, set designer Brian Sidney Bembridge was recently nominated for two Jeff Awards for his work on *The History Boys* and *The Maids*. In addition to his award-winning, spot-on sets, Bembridge once worked for famed Chicago decorator Alessandra Branca.

**Big secret you scored working with Alessandra Branca?** How to mix and match classic with modern design. In one room we paired green Zuber wallpaper with an existing bamboo chandelier we repainted and funky bright gold curtains we designed.

**Most important lesson you've learned about home design from the set?** How to bring theatricality to the home, to look at our home the same way I look at the stage... Most people might hang a few pieces of art, but we covered an entire wall in our place from floor to ceiling.

**What do people say about your home?** "Oh my God, you have so much crap." I'm kind of a hodgepodge-y person. We have jars of beach glass from beaches all over the world. I like rusty, crusty things. I don't know why.

**What's the biggest design feat you've accomplished in a set?** *La Luna Muda* with Lookingglass. We did things that never should have been done in that tiny little space: We put a high wire over the audience, had people singing on a ladder hanging from the ceiling and scenery that appeared out of thin air.

**What should people know about lighting?** Taking old objects and making them into lighting is fun. We have really round Christmas lights with C7 bulbs above our chandelier in our house all the time. We think they're festive and fun. We just staple them up. It's simple.

**Unexpected style secret:** Drive-by shopping: finding things on the street. It's free and the best form of recycling. I found a hairdresser's cabinet with a stainless steel top. I repainted the cabinet and use it for my supplies.

**Secret sources:** I'm a Salvage One, Architectural Artifacts, Nadeau junkie.



**INSIDE JOB**  
Bembridge's wildly creative home and studio space.

# The Up-Stagers

Tricks of the stage inspire Chicago's hottest set designers to turn up the creativity at home

By Tate Gunnerson | Photography by Jeremy Bustos

Designing a deliberately ugly room would be anathema for an interior designer. But for a theater set designer, a stage decked out with cracked linoleum tiles, avocado kitchen appliances and wall-to-wall shag might mean a Tony. It's all about the story. While designers of interiors and stage often have very different goals, the challenges—think fussy clients and time and budget constraints—are very much the same. Despite the limitations, they create over-the-top, mind-bending environments that transport audiences from time and place. And along the way, these set designers have picked up a few tricks for their own spaces. While the whole world may indeed be a stage, for most people, the plot plays out at home.

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