

A Vibrant Reimagining of a Mid-'60s Williamsburg High-Rise Co-op



Cassandra Bromfield inherited the apartment from her mother and has made it her own.

BY WENDY GOODMAN

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT (VINTAGE)



The Terrace
Cassandra Bromfield wearing one of her own designs. The rag doll was made by her late friend Adrienne McDonald. "They were called Urban Faeries," she says, "and she would burn and tie-dye them." Opposite, Cassandra, front row left (in glasses), with friends from P.S. 54, ca. 1965.



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The Kitchen

The renovation began with the kitchen, which was dated and in full view when you'd walk into the apartment. "We picked a blue that wouldn't get old, that she wouldn't tire of," says interior designer Keita Turner. "Cassandra didn't need a dishwasher, so we fit a stacked washer-dryer and a paneled fridge. Something had to give."

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The Mural

Bromfield recently completed her mural, which started with the closet by the entryway years ago and now extends across to the dining area. Turner suggested she continue the work and wrap it around to the adjacent wall—"creating what has become a fabulous mural!" says Turner. A portrait of Cassandra by her father, Samuel Bromfield, is on the right.



CASSANDRA BROMFIELD WAS RAISED in this apartment. Her mother, Elaine Bromfield, was a schoolteacher, and in 1964, she bought this 894-square-foot two-bedroom in South Williamsburg's Lindsay Park, an affordable-housing cooperative that was then brand new. At the time, Cassandra was about 8 years old; she grew up to become a fashion designer and artist.

"When you look at the Mitchell-Lama co-ops," which were designed to appeal to middle-income families like her own who might otherwise have left the city, "there was a great deal that they offered," says Bromfield. "We grew up with a pool; I mean, there were so many amenities when you think about it. There were things they promised—like, the pool was supposed to be a skating rink in the wintertime; that never happened. But we had a pretty good time here."

And she still does. "I'm a person who's been here since the first brick. I saw those buildings go up. I didn't leave. I'm still here," she says in a short 2018 documentary, *Into My Life*, she fashioned from her mother's Super 8 home movies and old photographs (you can watch it on [pbs.org/pov/](https://www.pbs.org/pov/)).

Bromfield's mother passed away in 2008, and in 2016, she decided that the apartment needed some refreshment, starting with the kitchen. She contacted interior designer Keita Turner, whom she had met at an event in the home of

DESIGN HUNTING



The Bookshelves

Turner used the wall unit from Atlas Industries as an organizer for Bromfield's collection of heirlooms and books, including a doll of Ruby Bridges, who was famously photographed being escorted by U.S. Marshals into the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana in 1960, when she was 6 years old.



The Living Room

Turner refurbished and added wheels to the two storage ottomans Bromfield already owned so she could use the space as a work area for her fashion designs. The two large figurative paintings are by Samuel Bromfield, and the wall sculpture belonged to an aunt and uncle. Turner says of the new end tables: "Because Cassandra is a designer and seamstress, I thought, *How cute are these Bobbin tables?*, and we had them custom painted in a pretty teal blue." Bromfield's collection of her handmade beaded dolls are arranged on the surface of the Bobbin table, left.

Malene Barnett, the founder of the Black Artists + Designers Guild. But then the other rooms called, as did removal of the popcorn ceilings and putting down a new floor.

"Although my mother was creative," says Bromfield, who inherited her parents' artistic sensibility, "she wasn't a decorator."

"The first time I walked in, she had that closet door painted in what I thought was a retro-'50s pattern," says Turner. "I thought she should finish it and make it a statement." Bromfield has taken her time completing her painted wall as she has refurbishing the rest of her home. It has happened over years of packing up, editing down, and honoring her family while making the apartment her own. Turner suggested they frame some of her father's artwork, and a painting he did of Bromfield when she was little now has pride of place in the living room. She has not seen her father,

Samuel Bromfield, since that time. "Hopefully, wherever he went, he continued doing art," she says. "I hope that that was the truth."

There are many sculptures of bulls—her mother, a Taurus, collected them—as well as the beaded dolls that Bromfield has made over the years and the artwork of family members. There is a new way to enjoy the terrace that overlooks the neighborhood, set with chairs and artificial grass turf and potted plants.

"There is a drain out there," Turner says of the terrace floor, "and I knew that she used it for dyeing fabric, and I said, 'Don't you want to sit out there?' I convinced her on the grass turf, and we hung a rug to hide that partition."

"The chairs are new," Bromfield says. "But I love that whole vintage look, and they reminded me of something that my grandparents had." ■