Tour a Brooklyn Loft with a Seriously Epic Art Collection

“It feels like a candy shop,” says owner Casey Fremont
By Samantha Weiss-Hills | February 23, 2018

The two anchoring parts of the living room—built-in bookcases made from furniture-grade plywood and the towering Aaron Young work—counterbalance, rather than compete with, each other. The two buttery Barcelona chairs and ottomans balance a petite leopard-print sofa, and the resin coffee table is basically indestructible (a boon with young children in the house).

At the border of Brooklyn Heights and DUMBO, almost directly on the East River waterfront, sits a striking brick building with a barrel-vaulted entry. It’s the kind of dramatic structure that charms every passerby—even if they don’t realize it’s a New York City landmark, having housed the Brooklyn Eagle newspaper in the 1800s when Walt Whitman was its editor. Casey Fremont, a resident of the neighborhood, had always wanted to live in it. So when she noticed a listing for an available apartment inside, she went to the open house with a friend, on a lark. The apartment was in total disrepair, but under all the grime and poor decorations (think: cartoonish, cheesy wall murals and bad bathroom tile) were high ceilings, a 1,450-square-foot layout, and lots of potential. “It was frightening. Nothing made sense,” Casey recalls, but that didn’t stop her and her husband from closing on it anyway and inviting the whole family to see it immediately. “I think they were horrified.”
It should come as no surprise that Casey found beauty in the decrepit space. She’s the executive director of Art Production Fund, which commissions and produces ambitious public art projects such as Ugo Rondinone’s Seven Magic Mountains and Elmgreen & Dragset’s Prada Marfa. A born-and-bred New Yorker with artchops that run in the family (her father cofounded the Warhol Foundation for the Arts, and both her parents were fixtures at the Factory), Casey was steadfast in her vision for the end result.

“It turned out!” says Casey triumphantly. “We fixed it up, we saved the apartment.” And save the apartment they did, but not without a few challenges. Lighting was one of their chief concerns; the apartment is in the back of the building, so the windows face a brick wall. Painting all the walls white—even the brick ones that were “really exciting to uncover” in the living room—helped with that. They also made the decision to drop the ceiling a bit and add lights, a hardly noticeable change since the ceilings were so high to begin with (dream scenario!). The home is filled with lightly colored wood furnishings and marble to keep things bright and warm; it’s the artwork throughout that provides splashes of color. With two young boys in the house, a few pieces work harder than you’d imagine: A leopard print on the sofa hides any stains, and the resin coffee table is indestructible and rounded on the edges. “I like things that you can actually live with, not too precious,” Casey says.

The flooring was another issue, made up, as it was, of uneven closet remnants from when the building was developed in the ’80s. To save some money, they decided not to rip it out but instead use it as a subfloor for a new one. They soundproofed it using concrete, did some leveling, and then finally put prefinished Listone Giordano flooring down. Their walk-in is Casey’s favorite spot in the apartment. “So often in new construction, there’s so little closet space, and it’s so important for your sanity,” she says. Theirs doubles as a hallway, so by making it a more substantial, attractive zone, they also made the walk through it to the bathroom that much more enjoyable.

One change they made when renovating the kitchen—moving the sink to the island from its original location, tucked in a corner—made a huge difference. “It became a functional space rather than just wasted,” Casey explains. The extra storage in the island also helped when they decided to do away with overhead cabinets around the stove. The open shelving was almost industrial stainless steel; a last-minute decision to go with wood instead came after seeing how sterile the steel looked. The warmth plays off the cooler marble and tile, and complements the cheery chandelier that hangs in the space. Says Casey, “It feels like a candy shop.”
Punchy duvet covers adorn the twin beds in the kids' room, with a Curtis Kulig print holding court between them. Casey got the woven headboards from Chairish, and the Plexi-Craft vanity has traveled with her since her first apartment. A dreamy walk-in closet stems off the couple's bedroom and leads into their master bathroom. Crafted out of the same material as the living room's built-in bookcases (construction-grade plywood), and also fitted with ALNO hardware, it's a private space that's still lovely to be in.

Casey and her husband, Brandon Crowe, with their two boys. When the discovered brick behind the walls in the apartment, Casey was ecstatic. They chose to paint it white to help brighten the space, but the texture is still pronounced and keeps things interesting. A Deborah Kass painting hangs out behind the dining room. Four easy ways to make a small bathroom feel big: a clear glass shower partition, a built-in shelf for products, no storage under the sink (stow stuff elsewhere!), and lightly patterned stone, like marble, in select spots. Recognize the marble sink? It's the same marble used for the kitchen counters. A detail of the couple's bedroom, with vintage nightstands bought in East Hampton, sconces purchased in the Hudson Valley, and an RH Modern Bed. An antique brass switch plate is a tiny detail that goes a long way. A Sanford Biggers print hangs above the bed.