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How Bob Dylan's NYC Apartment Was "Forensically" Recreated for

New Biopic

The level of detail "borders on insanity," says production designer François Audouy.

BY KELLY ALLEN PUBLISHED: DEC 25, 2024



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Since Bob Dylan's rise to fame, the **music legend** has lived in a **Manhattan townhouse**, **Malibu mansion**, and even an **estate in Scotland**. But a cramped apartment in **New York City** is where he spent the early days of his career. Naturally, the new biopic, *A Complete Unknown*, starring Timothée Chalamet, makes the the Greenwich Village flat a central character. "We decided early on with [director James Mangold] that it would be fun to really forensically recreate his apartment," production designer François Audouy says.

The production team had roughly 200 photos of the small space to reference. Among them were original black-and-white negatives from **famous photo shoots** in Dylan's apartment along with a couple of color photos, which they used to match the colors of the walls, bedspread, and other furniture. "He arrived in New York at 19 years old, and he was still a young man, and he was kind of a slob," Audouy says. "It was very relatable when you look at teenagers who have moved into their first apartment."



COURTESY OF FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

The set created by production designer François Audouy and his team for *A Complete Unknown*.

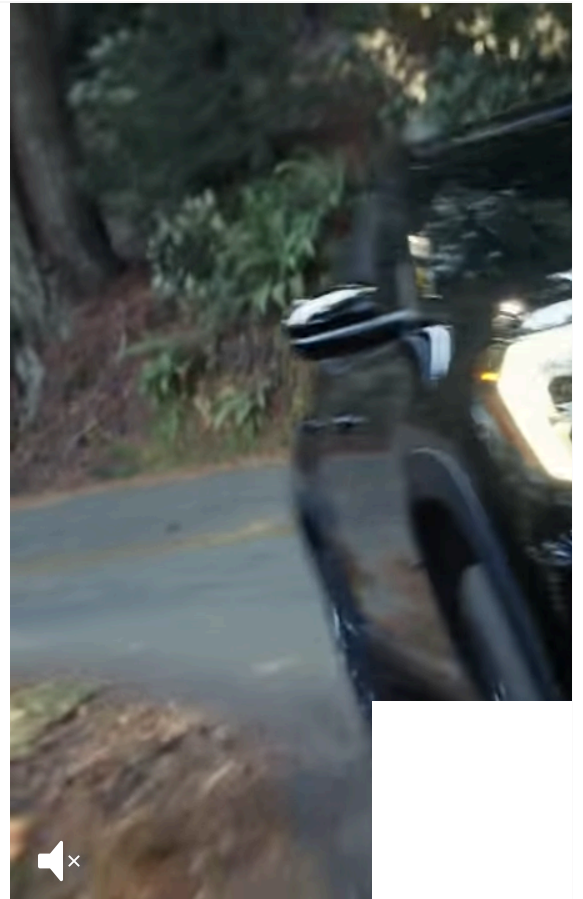


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Beyond the take out boxes, empty coffee cups, and ashtrays full of cigarettes, set decorator Regina Graves and her team went to great lengths to find exact duplicates of Dylan's belongings—including the typewriter, record player, and even a stuffed animal—from antique and thrift stores.

The wingback chair was especially tough to find “because of the channel back, the gold pattern, the studded arms, and the Cabriole leg,” says Graves. They eventually found it on Facebook Marketplace, from the home of the seller's grandparents. Then they had it reupholstered, sanded down, and ripped to look worn exactly like Dylan's chair.



COURTESY OF FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

Other furnishings and art, like the oil painting above the fireplace and his desk, were custom made. "It's a relatively small space, but we had to get everything just exactly right," Audouy says.



COURTESY OF FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

Since the movie, which was mainly filmed in New Jersey, takes place over a few years in the early 1960s, the apartment details evolve with time. When Dylan receives the **Tom Paine Award** from the Emergency Civil Liberties Union in 1963, it's displayed on his mantel. Things belonging to Elle Fanning's character Sylive Russo, an artist, are also around when she's living with him. "We had paint splatters on the floor—signs that she's a presence there in his life," Audouy says.

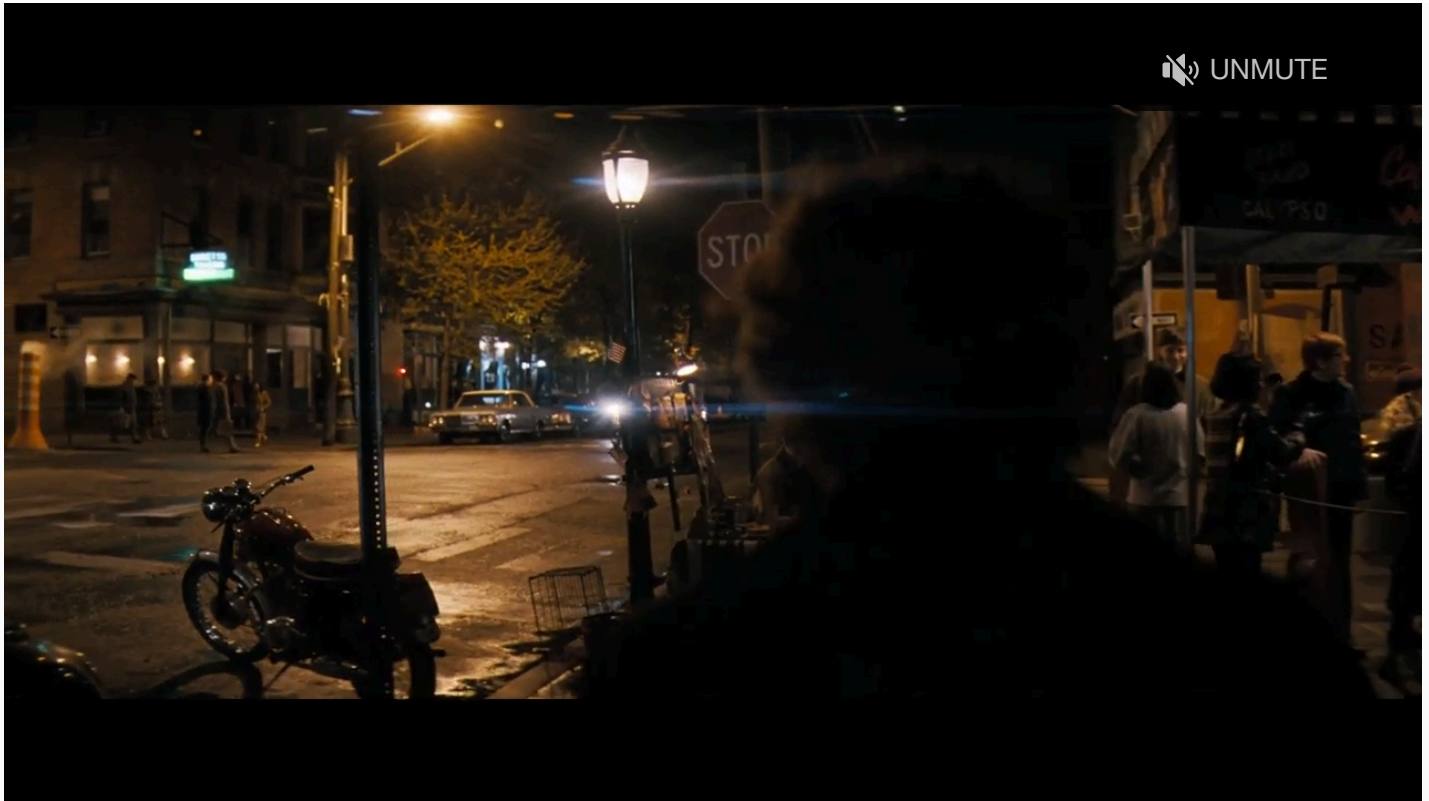
While there are slight differences in the layout of the set and the actual apartment—double sliding doors instead of a single door lead to the tiny “bedroom”—the proportions are close to the original space. Another generous difference in the sets is more windows than the real unit had. Some scenes near the windows were actually filmed in a real apartment in Hoboken, New Jersey, so the design team needed to match those windows on the stage build.

“So much of the movie takes place in this apartment,” Audouy says. “I was struck by how featured it is, even more than what I expected when we were making it. It's like the star of the show.”



COURTESY OF FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

The spaces are an extension of Chalamet's performance, notes Andouy, helping the audience melt into his portrayal of Dylan. "You have like a time machine back into this very specific moment, and you're just drinking it in without any distractions."



UNMUTE

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