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MEMPHIS, Tenn. -- The smallest details can shape the biggest dreams. In 1949, Vernon Presley moved his wife and teenage son Elvis into Apartment 328 at Lauderdale Courts, 185 Winchester, in downtown Memphis. The modestly appointed two-bedroom unit consisted of a living room, bathroom and walk-in kitchen.

A public housing development built in 1938 under President Franklin Roosevelt's WPA, Lauderdale Courts was one of the first U.S. public housing projects. The projects were slated to be razed in the mid-1990s, but Presley fans, along with the City of Memphis and private developers, saved the courts. The 66 red brick buildings of the 22-acre site are on the National Register of Historic Places.

And now you can sleep in Elvis' teenage bedroom.

Presley lived here between 1949 and 1953, when he was attending Humes High School -- key years in his cultural development. He could walk to Beale Street to absorb black rhythm and blues. He attended gospel concerts two blocks away at the since-razed Ellis Auditorium. He saw possibilities.

But this is no Heartbreak Hotel. The beautiful 689-square foot apartment was recently opened for public tours and reservations are being accepted for dates beyond April.

This is the only place on earth where you can live where Presley lived.

Last month I became one of the first to stay in Apartment 328, and the sensory overload surpassed the night I slept between Duane and Gregg Allman's former bedrooms in the Allman Brothers' "Big House" in Macon, Ga. I could only imagine the dreams that Presley must have had in this bedroom.

The courts are part of the Uptown Square development that is bringing life back into downtown Memphis. Uptown Square is a division of the \$150 million Uptown Memphis Movement, which includes the building of more than 1,000 new homes and apartments along with new streetscapes.

Uptown Square restored the Presley apartment with depth, dignity and lots of period detail.

The real kicks come in Elvis' bedroom. A replica 1953 Herald high school yearbook (the King majored in shop and history) rests on the dresser, alongside a jar of Royal Crown Hair Dressing, popular with blacks on Beale Street. (The research team knew Royal Crown was the real deal because Vernon saved all his receipts.) The Elvis bedroom also is adorned with photos of Rudolph Valentino and Tony

Curtis.

When Presley was 15, he was an usher at Loew's State Theater on South Main Street in downtown Memphis. In his critically acclaimed biography *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley*, Peter Guralnick writes that the Lauderdale era played a key role in shaping Presley's style.

"The whole feel of Lauderdale Courts was upward mobility," Guralnick said from Nashville, where he is teaching creative writing at Vanderbilt University. "It was expressed in their motto 'From slums to public housing to private ownership'. People think of Elvis as a deprived child on welfare, but this really is not the picture. He was surrounded by people on the way up. The courts helped mold his democratic ideals."

Ken Black, 71, brother of the late Bill Black, Presley's bass player, reminisced about when his widowed mother Ruby and his eight siblings lived at Lauderdale Courts. (Bill Black was grown and did not live at the courts, but would come to visit.) Ken Black is a member of a group of former Lauderdale Courts residents called "Poor Boys Done Good," who meet every Thursday for coffee at a Perkins Restaurant in east Memphis. They agree their time at Lauderdale provided for some of the best memories of their life.

"I met Elvis in 1949 at Humes High School," Black said while sitting in the Presley living room. "He was in the ninth grade, I was in the 10th. I lived at the other end of the complex. When Elvis moved out, he went to Alabama Street about a half-mile from Lauderdale. I lived across the street and got to know him real well."

The "Poor Boys Done Good" provided rich background for the restoration. "They all had their own stories about, 'You should use this wax or that wax, or this wood was better,'" recalled Alex Mobley, asset manager of the Uptown Memphis Movement.

Communal life in the courts included monthly inspections by the Memphis Housing Authority staff. "Elvis got written up for leaving a cereal bowl on the table," Mobley said. "He was late for school. There was a report like, 'Needs help in cleaning up.' Then they would come back and give you a cleaning lesson."

Presley used to listen to records at the Popular Tunes record store, 311 Exchange Ave., which still stands within walking distance of Apartment 328. "He hung around there some, and there was another record shop real close that was like a teenage hangout from the Bowery Boys," Black said. "I don't even know if it had a name. It is no longer in existence."

Black walked through the apartment with a reflective eye. He saw the trunk at the foot of Elvis' bed, smiled and said, "My mother had a trunk just like that at the foot of her bed."

A retired sign painter, Black pointed out that even the 16-inch deep windowsills were the same as when he lived in the courts. At night, Presley would sit his bedroom windowsill and play guitar. He also practiced in the basement laundry room.

Throughout nine months of research, what was Mobley's biggest Elvis surprise? "It was seeing photos of him when he was here," she said. "He already had the greased hair, color and black satin pants -- with his friends standing next to him in jeans and a shirt. He already looked different than every other boy. Everyone in the courts knew who he was."

Lauderdale Courts bottomed out in the mid-1990s when only 75 of 499 apartments were occupied. The revitalized Uptown Square neighborhood still stands at a crossroads of fortune, with the complex bordered on the north by St. Jude Research Hospital and operations like Angel Bail Bond on the south. The courts have been transformed into 347 new apartments, currently 85 percent leased. Eighty percent of residents pay the market rate, while 20 percent are fixed-income public housing dwellers. Amenities include an outdoor pool, billiard room and fitness and media centers.

No one famous has yet to stay in Apartment 328, although a few weeks ago, Bob Dylan dropped into Sun Studios. Dylan told the studio help he just wanted to "Kiss the X" and bent down and smooched the X on the floor where so many of his musical heroes stood years ago. Dylan will have to add Apartment 328 to his list. Like any visitor to the old courts, he will love it tender.