

# MAD FOR MOD

Flash back to the 1960s with a tour of British-born DJ, drummer and It Girl Tennessee Thomas' cool New York City apartment.

BY EMMA GRADY PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEMMA HART INGALLS



**T**ennessee Thomas might just be having too much fun. The former drummer of the now-defunct indie-rock band The Like, Thomas, 28, spent 10 years touring the world with acts including Kings of Leon, Phantom Planet and Muse. Born in England to rock royalty (her father is Pete Thomas, drummer for Elvis Costello and the Attractions), she moved to New York two years ago in hopes of finding adventure and anonymity after her band broke up—a much-needed respite after a life on the road. There, nestled among a row of townhouses off the East Village's bustling Third Avenue, Thomas occupies a quaint first-floor, bi-level apartment that serves as something of a shrine to retro music and fashion artifacts, as well as sentimental collectibles.

Inside Thomas' world, anything and everything mod reigns supreme. Her place boasts a cozy pink sleeping loft above the red, gray, black and cream living room, with its high ceilings and large windows framed by curtains found on eBay—"they're new," says Thomas. "I just typed in '1950s patterned curtains.'" A spin around the space reveals two vintage 1960s Joe Eula posters—one for a 1965 event called The Mod Ball and another of The Supremes (autographed by founding member Mary Wilson)—a glittery red drum set from the Memphis Drum Shop, chairs from Brooklyn Flea, two retro lamps from Williamsburg's Ugly Luggage shop and a vintage coffee table she scored for free. "It's a quintessential New York piece," says Thomas of the latter. "Everyone has something they found on the street."

Even without the constant touring, Thomas remains quite busy and in demand. When she's not DJing—which

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The knickknack-heavy mantelpiece in Thomas' living room features vintage vases shaped like women's heads and SylvaC bunny figurines below a vintage Beatles poster. **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT:** Tennessee Thomas—in one of her signature mod looks—poses with her sparkly red drum set; a bird's-eye view of the East Village apartment.





# camp



she does three to four times a week, including a weekly gig every Thursday with musician Alix Brown at the Tribeca Grand Hotel—she works in A&R for Downtown Records (where she scouted breaking band Wild Belle) and actively pursues her interest in activism. Thomas has planned teach-in events with the organization The Awareness Experiment and is currently working with friends on a series of PSAs focused on female and environmental issues, including one on getting out the vote, set to the tune of “You Don’t Own Me” by Lesley Gore, who endorsed the video. Her inspiration for all of this again finds roots in her favorite decade, when “musicians were activists in a way we don’t have today.”

Thomas lives alone (her black cat, Minnie, is currently with her parents) but regularly hosts out-of-town house guests—including former bandmate Z Berg—and friends for tea parties. Her best pal, however, is fellow It Brit and fashion icon Alexa Chung, who lives a few blocks away. The duo has traveled together on 24-hour DJ gigs to places like Hong Kong and Moscow, where she picked up a set of matryoshka nesting dolls that now sit on a bookshelf along with a cherry red record player and 1960s fashion and nonfiction books, including *Andy Warhol “Giant”* Size and Peter Doggett’s counterculture history *There’s A Riot Going On*.

Like her DJ sets—which she describes as “psychedelic, garage, girl group” music—Thomas’ apartment is eclectic and fun. To wit, the mantelpiece is decorated with vintage bric-a-brac and family heirlooms, as well as a pair of ’50s-era vases shaped like women’s heads and SylvaC bunny

rabbit figurines her mother and great-grandmother collected from antique shops (a reference to Thomas’ middle name, Bunny).

The focal point of the tidy kitchen is an engraved stone REFRESHMENTS sign Thomas’ father—who’s into decorating—wanted her to have, sending it from her childhood home in England. “It makes me happy,” she says. In true English form, the musician always has a teakettle on and makes a mean shepherd’s pie—sans meat (she’s vegetarian). On weekends she frequents her local farmers market, in Union Square, armed with a wicker basket.

In her girly loft bedroom, a Peter Pan print from Thomas’ childhood bedroom, a family photo and a paper SWEET DREAMS sign from Catbird in Brooklyn display her sentimental side. The mod enthusiast won’t leave home without cat-eye make-up, red lipstick and her signature heavily fringed Marianne Faithfull hairstyle, a ‘do she shares with her mother; she even has an autographed photo of her ’60s style muse near the bed.

A big fan of polka dots, flowers and stripes, Thomas fills her small closets with ’60s fashion finds, funky accessories and designer clothing from favorites such as Anna Sui. She often pairs dresses with patterned tights, saddle shoes and her favorite Mandy Coon Bunny Bag. “I’ve got a polka-dot problem,” she confesses, adding that it runs in the family. “We’re one big polka-dot family.” Also in her closet hangs a treasured vintage purple-bow-patterned Betsey Johnson Paraphernalia dress—the same pattern Edie Sedgwick wore in the ’60s. It turns out It Girls think alike. *F*

## THOMAS’ SUMMER PLAYLIST:

- “Ain’t Got No/I Got Life,” Nina Simone
- “I’m Gonna Get You Yet,” The Dixie Cups
- “What’s So Good About Good-by,” The Miracles
- “Backslider,” Wild Belle
- “Forever Dolphin Love,” Connan Mockasin

THIS PAGE: (Clockwise from top left) Thomas’ bright red record player; a paper SWEET DREAMS sign in the loft bedroom; a side table in the living room holds a retro lamp and a solar-powered radio.

OPPOSITE PAGE: (Clockwise from left) The dining area features chairs from Brooklyn Flea and a Supremes poster that was a birthday gift from Thomas’ parents; matryoshka dolls on a bookshelf; the REFRESHMENTS sign Thomas’ father sent her from her childhood home in England; the stylish musician’s shoes lined up on the apartment’s hand-painted stairs.