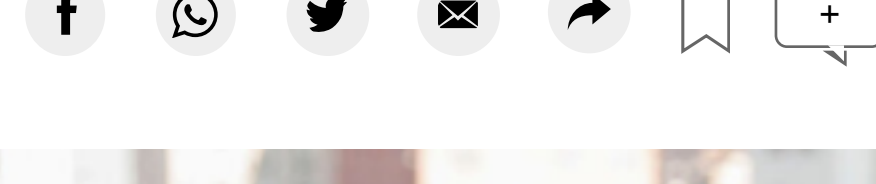


## WHAT I LOVE

## Isiah Whitlock Jr., on Leaving Chelsea for Gramercy Park

The actor, known for starring roles on shows like “Your Honor” and “The Wire,” has a new apartment — with a key to the park.



### Isiah Whitlock Jr.: ‘You’ve Got to Live in a Place You Love’

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Katherine Marks for The New York Times

By Joanne Kaufman

Jan. 19, 2021 Updated 10:01 a.m. ET

Isiah Whitlock Jr. lived in Chelsea before Chelsea was trendy.

“I was looking for an apartment in New York, and I sort of had my choice of Chelsea or Harlem, and I really couldn’t see my girlfriend in Harlem,” he said. “So we chose Chelsea, which at the time was a little bit of a terrifying neighborhood.”

Mr. Whitlock, 66, is one of the stars of the new Showtime mini-series “Your Honor,” but is perhaps best known for playing the corrupt state senator Clay Davis on “The Wire.” He has also appeared in films like “Cedar Rapids,” “BlacKkKlansman” and “Da 5 Bloods.” Two decades ago, when his profile wasn’t exactly high, he got a sweet deal on a duplex a few blocks from the meatpacking district, with two bedrooms and a working fireplace. He put his own stamp on it — Flokati rug and beanbag chairs — after his girlfriend moved out. A few years later, the landlord suggested it was time for Mr. Whitlock to vacate the premises, too, but framed the request in a more flattering manner.



Mr. Whitlock’s sectional sofa arrived in the reverse configuration from what he was expecting. In time, he has come to view it as a fortunate mistake. “This way, it really opens up the room.” Katherine Marks for The New York Times

“One day she told me in passing, ‘You know, I really don’t want you becoming famous, because I don’t want four buses pulling up in front of the house,’” Mr. Whitlock said. “I thought it was sort of a joke, but she wasn’t laughing.”

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“I never did get a solid reason,” he added. “I suspected she wanted a lot more money. I could have paid more, but she wanted me gone.”

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### Isiah Whitlock, 66

**Occupation:** Actor

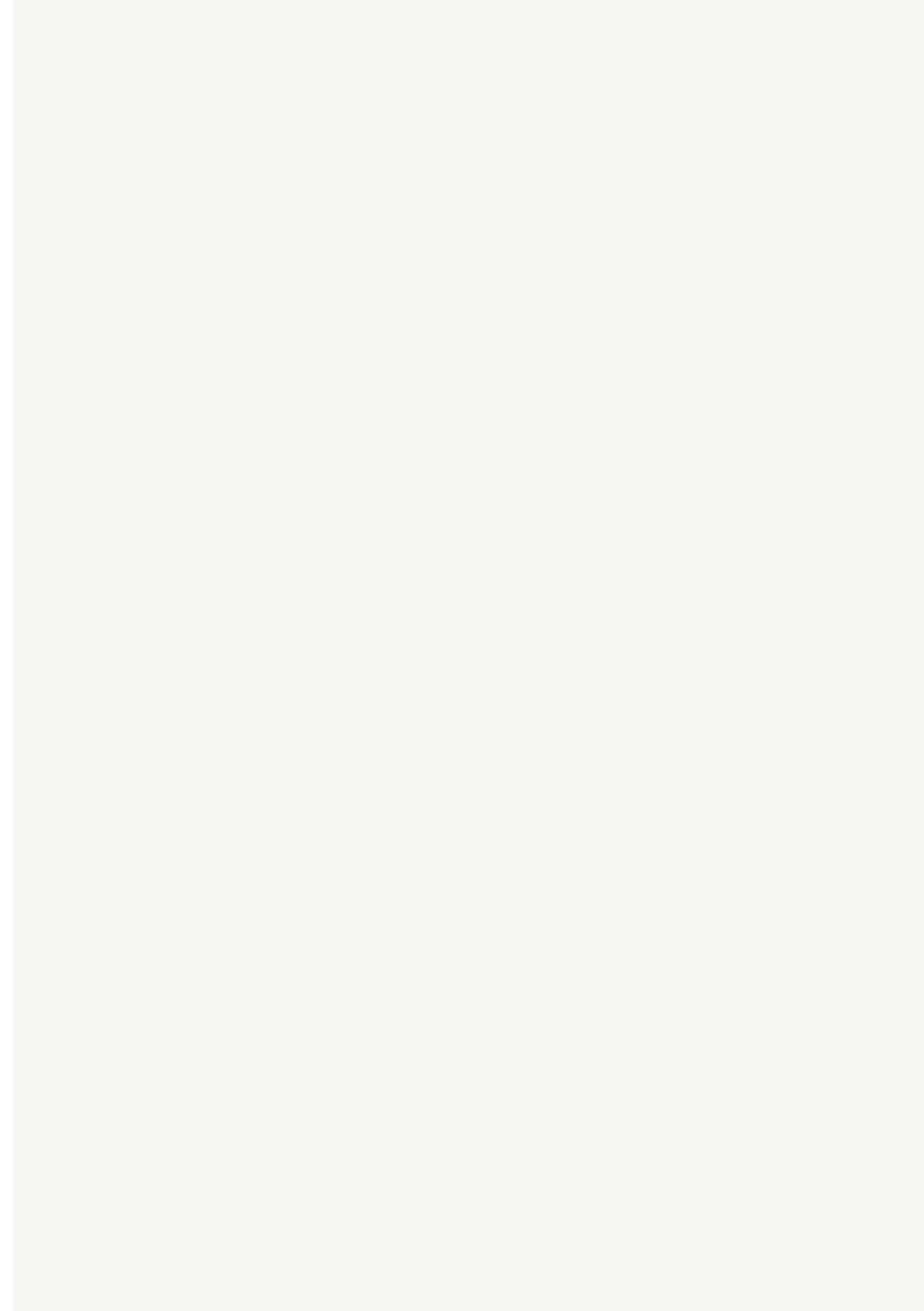
**Home sweet home:** “As an actor, you’re out and about and meeting all kinds of people, and it’s nice to be able to come home and shut the door and kind of chill.”

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Mr. Whitlock decamped to a gloomy walk-up nearby. “It was so dark I sometimes had to go outside and take a walk to wake up,” he recalled. “I would say to myself, ‘I can’t do this anymore,’ and then I’d get a job and be gone for three months. And then I’d get another job and be gone again.” Finally — perhaps it was when intruders started stealing tenants’ mail and packages — he’d had enough.

Last August, friends sublet him their one-bedroom apartment in a postwar Gramercy Park co-op, with a rooftop terrace and a coveted key to the park. “And if my friends are nice to me, they can come in with me,” Mr. Whitlock said. This is his first doorman building and his first elevator building.

“I sort of had a long talk with myself and said, ‘You know, it’s time for you to grow up and stop living the way you’ve been living,’” he said. “When I was working so much and was barely home, it was sort of out of sight, out of mind. But with Covid, I really need to be in a place I enjoy.” He said he intends to buy an apartment when the sublet is up — in fact, was in talks to buy on the Upper East Side last spring, but the pandemic put everything on ice.



“It’s beautiful,” Mr. Whitlock said of his poster of Bill Pickett, credited with being the first Black cowboy star. Katherine Marks for The New York Times

The company he hired to pack and move his worldly goods did a poor job of it, Mr. Whitlock said, necessitating the replacement of several pieces of furniture. Fortunately, a number of treasures arrived intact, including a Robert Rauschenberg silk-screen on mirror-coated plexiglass, part of the “Star Quarters” series; the framed front page of the final edition of the Village Voice; a poster of Bill Pickett, known as the first African-American cowboy star (“It’s a beautiful poster, one of the best things I have in the house”); and a photo of a somewhat younger, somewhat trimmer Mr. Whitlock.

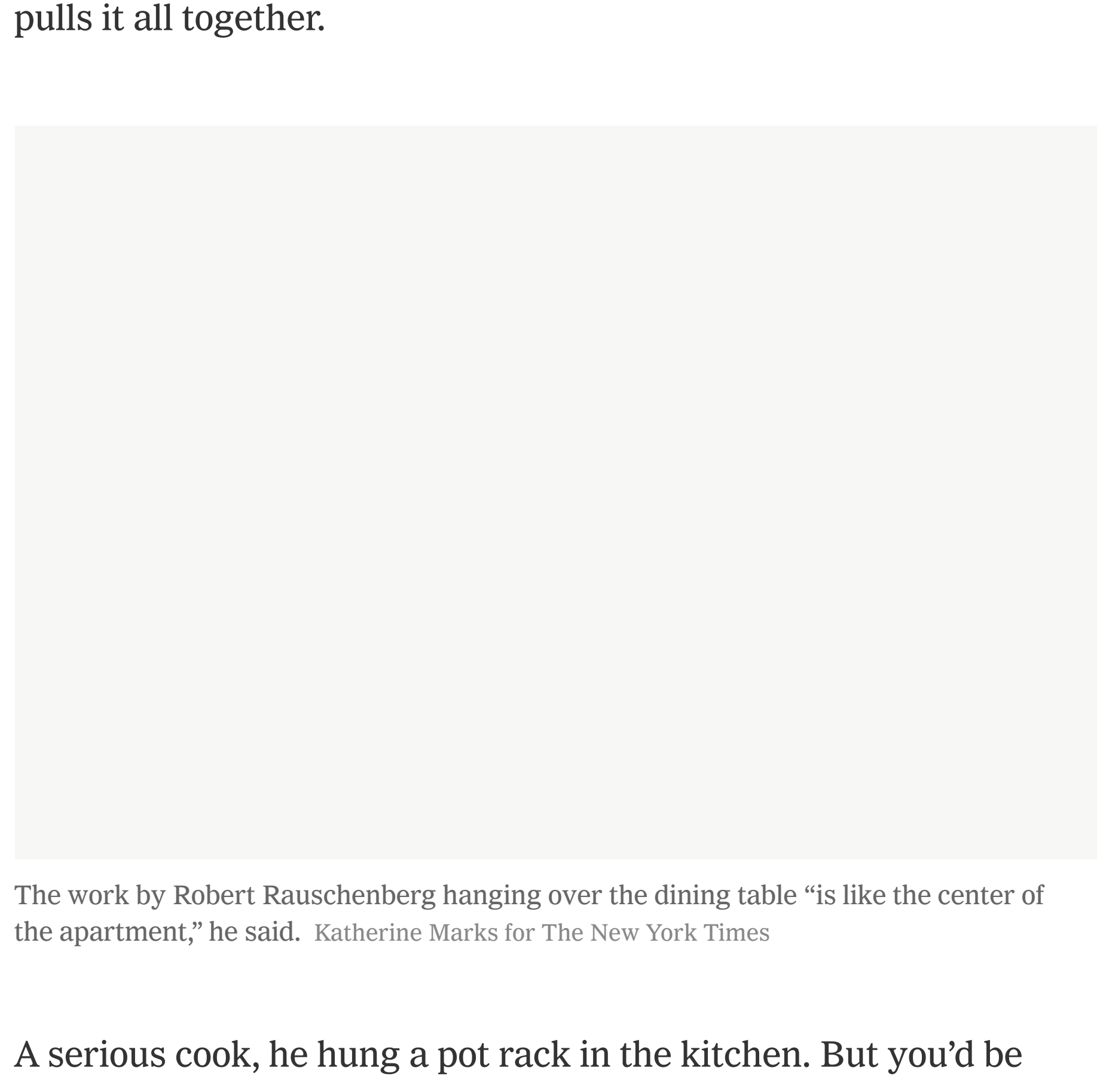
“That’s my band. I used to be in a band,” he said, by way of explaining the picture. “And believe it or not, the guy in the white jumpsuit — that’s me. I didn’t play an instrument. I just sang and danced and drove the girls wild.”

The movers were also mindful of the cuckoo clock Mr. Whitlock bought in Germany; the wood box containing the trinkets he collected during his two trips to Burning Man; and the framed, signed sheet music of a song composed by Arthur Miller for the 1997 Off Broadway production of Miller’s play “The American Clock.” (Mr. Whitlock was a member of the cast.)

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He ordered a tufted, L-shaped teal sectional online, but when it arrived the configuration was the reverse of what he’d expected. In time, he has come to view the purchase as a fortunate mistake.

“This way, it really opens up the room,” said Mr. Whitlock, who lined the sofa with a row of pillows he bought in Vietnam and Thailand while shooting “Da 5 Bloods.” The television sits atop a new credenza made of honey-colored wood. His beloved shag rug pulls it all together.



The work by Robert Rauschenberg hanging over the dining table “is like the center of the apartment,” he said. Katherine Marks for The New York Times

A serious cook, he hung a pot rack in the kitchen. But you’d be forgiven for thinking that Mr. Whitlock maybe cares a bit more about drink than food. He proudly showed off the half dozen hand-painted coffee cups and saucers he had specially made during a trip to Deruta, Italy.

Even more proudly, he offered a tour of the 200-bottle, glass-fronted wine cooler. Harlan Estate, Chateau Montviel, Chateau Latour and Chateau d’Yquem are among the vineyards represented here, with Dom Pérignon at the ready for celebrating when the pandemic is finally over. There are also several bottles of vintage Whitlock, made by you-know-who at a fully equipped site in New Jersey, with grapes from Napa Valley.

“You know, as a matter of fact, I think I’ll just take that out and have it tonight,” he said of a 2014 Cabernet Whitlock. “Trust me, I’ve got a lot of it.”

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