

Taylor Swift's Nashville apartment is an Etsy fever dream, a 365-days-a-year Christmas shop, pure teenage girl id. You enter through a vestibule clad in blue velvet and covered in gilt frames bursting with fake flowers. The ceiling is painted like the night sky. Above a koi pond in the living area, a narrow staircase spirals six feet up towards a giant, pillow-lagged birdcage that probably has the best view in the city. Later, Swift will tell me she needs metaphors "to understand anything that happens to me", and the birdcage defies you not to interpret it as a pointed comment on the contradictions of stardom.

Swift, wearing pale jeans and dip-dyed shirt, her sandy hair tied in a blue scrunchie, leads the way up the staircase to show me the view. The decor hasn't changed since she bought this place in 2009, when she was 19. "All of these high rises are new since then," she says, gesturing at the squat glass structures and cranes. Meanwhile her oven is still covered in stickers, more teenage diary than adult appliance.

Now 29, she has spent much of the past three years living quietly in London with her boyfriend, actor Joe Alwyn, making the penthouse a kind of time capsule, a monument to youthful naivety given an unlimited budget - the years when she sang about Romeo and Juliet and wore ballgowns to awards shows; before she moved to New York and honed her slick, self-mythologising pop.

A year later, in 2017, Swift released her album Reputation, half high-camp heel turn, drawing on hip-hop and vaudeville (the brilliantly hammy Look What You Made Me Do), half stunned appreciation that her nascent relationship with Alwyn had weathered the storm (the soft, sensual pop of songs Delicate and Dress).

Her new album, Lover, her seventh, was released yesterday. It's much lighter than Reputation: Swift likens writing it to feeling like "I could take a full deep breath again".



No matter what happens in life, be good to people.

Being good to people is a wonderful legacy to leave behind.



TAYLOR SWIFT: 'I WAS LITERALLY ABOUT TO BREAK'

Swift's new album comes with printed excerpts from her diaries. On 29 August 2016, she wrote in her girlish, bubble writing: "This summer is the apocalypse." As the incident with West and Kardashian unfolded, she was preparing for her court case against radio DJ David Mueller, who was fired in 2013 after Swift reported him for putting his hand up her dress at a meet-and-greet event. He sued her for defamation; she counter-sued for sexual assault.

"Having dealt with a few of them, narcissists basically subscribe to a belief system that they should be able to do and say whatever the hell they want, whenever the hell they want to," Swift says now, talking at full pelt. "And if we - as anyone else in the world, but specifically women - react to that, well, we're not allowed to. We're not allowed to have a reaction to their actions."

In summer 2016 she was in legal depositions, practising her testimony. "You're supposed to be really polite to everyone," she says. But by the time she got to court in August 2017, "something snapped, I think". She laughs. Her testimony was sharp and uncompromising. She refused to allow Mueller's lawyers to blame her or her security guards; when asked if she could see the incident, Swift said no, because "my ass is in the back of my body". It was a brilliant, rude defence.

"You're supposed to behave yourself in court and say 'rear end,'" she says with mock politesse. "The other lawyer was saying, 'When did he touch your backside?' And I was like, 'ASS! Call it what it is!' She claps between each word. But despite the acclaim for her testimony and eventual victory (she asked for one symbolic dollar), she still felt belittled. It was two months prior to the beginning of the #MeToo movement. "Even this case was literally twisted so hard that people were calling it the 'butt-grab case'. They were saying I sued him because there's this narrative that I want to sue everyone. That was one of the reasons why the summer was the apocalypse."

She never wanted the assault to be made public. Have there been other instances she has dealt with privately? "Actually, no," she says soberly. "I'm really lucky that it hadn't happened to me before. But that was one of the reasons it was so traumatising. I just didn't know that could happen. It was really brazen, in front of seven people."