

InStyle





Houston. "I remember watching Whitney on VH1," says Brandy. "I was in my room. I was like 7 or 8. I remember watching her dance with all that hair and eye shadow and lipstick. I loved it. The next day, I told my dad I wanted to be a singer." It's clear that if Brandy had said she wanted to be a surgeon and not a pop star, she'd be in residence at Cedars-Sinai by now. "Your kids have sparks and you fan the flame," says Willie. "When Ray J wanted to be an artist, I had his painting framed and hung it over our fireplace. When he wanted to be a drummer, we bought him a drum." Brandy was already a lead singer in the church choir, and her father knew she was serious. "They gave up their careers for me," says Brandy. "I can't thank them enough for that."

Sonja didn't know how to break her children into the business, but she was deter-



mined to find out. She got Brandy an agent after a National Teachers Awards Show audition. "We were so naïve," says Sonja. "Everyone had tote bags and dance shoes. We had nothing. All I knew was that Brandy could sing and Brandy could dance."

After a stint on the short-running sitcom *Thea*, Brandy got a record contract (for *Brandy*, at age 14) and then her own TV show. The album went platinum, helping make *Moesha* the no. 1 program on the UPN network. Ask Brandy if she ever thought of it going any other way, and she seems to get spooked. "I would probably be devastated," she says. "Not to have all of my dreams? I would just want to be Brandy, and I couldn't have been." When

**Brandy's grandmother on her mother's side, Mary Ethel Bates (opposite), helped raise the children. Decorator Jackie Mazur did the house, including the living room (above), in shades of cream.**



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