

Checking Out the Noise Level

By JAY
ROMANO

NOISY neighbors and noisy neighborhoods are common annoyances suffered by people who live in multifamily buildings.

And while noise problems are typically discovered only after you have already moved into an apartment, it's possible to identify a potentially noisy environment before you pack the first box.

"Noise is a factor that affects the value, marketability and livability of a home or apartment," said Peter Bell, the president of Balch Buyers Realty in Mamaroneck, N.Y. "And the noise factor is something that every buyer should take into consideration."

Mr. Bell said that when he shows a client an apartment in a co-op or condominium, he recommends that the potential buyer visit it at different times of the day: "in the morning, in the afternoon, and then again at night."



An early-morning visit, Mr. Bell said, will reveal any noise produced by neighbors getting ready for work or school and any unusual traffic sounds; a night visit provides a glimpse into how neighbors spend their evenings — quietly reading or watching television, or practicing piano while ignoring toddlers charging from room to room.

And a visit in the afternoon will make it possible for the prospective buyer to sit quietly and focus on noises from outside the building as well as those produced in the building itself.

"If you're near an elevator, a stairwell or the laundry room, you want to know if sounds from those areas get into the apartment," Mr. Bell said. "And if the apartment faces the street, you want to listen first with the windows closed, and then open them and listen again."

Gil Neary, the president of DG Neary Realty in [Manhattan](#), said co-op and condo buyers should check the building's bylaws to determine whether there are requirements for carpeting in apartments. Many buildings require that 80 percent of the floors be covered.

Prospective buyers should also look out every window to see if there is any noise-producing equipment, like air-conditioner compressors or ventilation fans, in close proximity.

Kathy Jones, a sales agent for the Corcoran Group in Manhattan, said that prospective buyers of upper-floor apartments might want to go up to the roof to see how close the apartment is to rooftop fans, air-conditioning equipment or other mechanical devices that may transmit vibrations or sound.

Thomas Lowy, another Corcoran agent, said that buyers in buildings near restaurants, bars or other businesses should check out garbage pickup schedules. He said that clients once staked out a vacant apartment they were considering at 4 a.m. to evaluate the noise from the garbage pickup at a neighboring restaurant.

Eva Talel, a Manhattan co-op and condo lawyer, said that another way to identify potential noise problems is to examine the minutes of the building's board to determine whether there have been noise complaints. "If there is a problem in the building," she said, "that's one place you might be able to find it."

Another way to determine if there are noise problems is to check for complaints filed with the city's Department of Environmental Protection. "If you write a letter to the Bureau of Environmental Compliance, we will treat it as a Freedom of Information Act request and will do our best to get the information asked for," said Ian Michaels, a spokesman for the department.

The department typically responds only to noise complaints involving stationary sources like air-conditioners, ventilation fans and sound systems in restaurants and nightclubs, he said.

Letters can be sent to the [New York City](#) Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Environmental Compliance, 59-17 Junction Boulevard, Flushing, N.Y. 11373.