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Shhh... Finding Quiet in a Noisy City

City dwellers seeking refuge from noisy streets and busy venues are finding relief in some of the latest luxury amenities such as soundproof spaces and meditation rooms

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*Soundproof meeting pods have been installed for residents to use for work at 30 Kent St., a rental building in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.
30 Kent Street*

Nearly every buyer and renter in luxury high-rise condos and apartments has the same question: Will they hear their neighbors?

"I had one person touring a unit ask me to go to the unit upstairs and tap dance in my high heels so they could see if they could hear it," said Jessica Peters, a real estate agent with Douglas Elliman selling condos at 575 Fourth Ave. in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Most luxury buildings in New York City are built of concrete, which provides good insulation between floors, along with quality windows and walls between units, said Morris Adjmi, principal architect with Morris Adjmi Architects in New York.

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"It's always important to think about the environment around a building and how we can design it to make it a quiet, comfortable place of solace and a retreat from the noisy city," Mr. Adjmi said.

Soundproofing units may be the most important way to create quiet, but architects and developers are also designing peaceful gardens, meditation rooms, soundproof workspaces and music rooms as escapes from boisterous urban spaces.

"Recently, roommates who were looking to share a two-bedroom residence decided to truly test the noise levels," said Chris Wendel, director of leasing and marketing at Magnolia DUMBO in Brooklyn. "One half of the pair went to a vacant apartment next to the model residence to make loud noises and even yell to make sure they wouldn't be able to hear their neighbors."

In that building, like many others in New York City, there are layers of sheetrock between each apartment and double-paned windows with a layer of argon in between for sound attenuation.

"The Solaire was the first LEED Gold high-rise in the United States to be constructed, so from the start, the building had elevated levels of insulation that result in a quiet, environmentally friendly building," said Aaron Goed, sales director at The Solaire in Battery Park City in lower Manhattan. "For example, the entire exterior wall is sealed and caulked for thermal insulation which results in sound insulation, and uniquely, the amenities sit on a park up against boulders imported from the Catskills to offer even more protection from noise. Inside, the design team used 33% more sheetrock in constructing the interior walls, as well as double-paned insulated casement windows, both of which result in a tranquil home."

Zen Gardens and Meditation Rooms

While fitness centers and rooftop lounges can sometimes be noisy communal spaces, many luxury buildings offer quiet amenities for residents. For example, the FÖRENA condo building is in what Mr. Adjmi calls a "hot zone" of buzzy neighborhoods that can feel frenetic. Mr. Adjmi designed the building with an enclosed Zen Garden in the core that incorporates bamboo, wooden horizontal screens, and larger paving stones so the space feels less cluttered.

"The Zen Garden gives our residents a space to decompress and shut out external noise that comes with the hustle and bustle of being located at the intersection of the

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Village, Chelsea, Union Square and the Flatiron neighborhoods [in Manhattan],” said Skyler Rhoten, director of sales at FÖRENA. “The Zen Garden also immediately gives them a setting to feel transported out of the city and into nature. With several seating areas and surrounded by lots of greenery, the space provides a peaceful retreat for the mind, body and soul and offers the perfect ambiance to meditate.”

The enclosed space, which is open to the sky, is designed with multiple seating areas so that several people can use the space while still having privacy, Mr. Adjmi said.

“FÖRENA is a smaller boutique building so it’s easier to create that privacy there, but we also designed Front & York in DUMBO, a 750-unit development with apartments and condos with an enormous private park in the center,” Mr. Adjmi said. “It’s like a giant terrarium in the middle of the buildings to get away from noisy and busy streets.”

Private meditation rooms offer even more peace.

“As part of our extensive health and wellness programming we felt it was important to include spaces that provide for a serene opportunity to decompress and center oneself,” said Jason Hakim, senior development project manager from Avdoo & Partners, the developers of Saint Marks Place in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn. “Our two single-use meditation rooms allow for a quiet reprieve or an opportunity for contemplation which can sometimes be so hard, especially in today’s reality.”

Residents at Saint Marks Place especially like the ability for one person to use the rooms at a time instead of a communal room, Mr. Hakim said

At Maverick Chelsea, a 21-story condo in Chelsea, amenities include spa-like features such as an indoor pool and steam, sauna and massage rooms.

“Maverick’s private meditation room features marble walls, a stone floor and a backlit Himalayan salt wall, creating a beautiful environment that’s perfect for rest and relaxation,” said Fredrik Eklund of the Eklund | Gomes team with Douglas Elliman, who handles sales for Maverick Chelsea. “In addition to this peaceful private room, the building will also have an on-call ‘spiritual concierge’ to assist residents in meditation and other healing rituals. Having a meditation space is important to buyers because it gives them a private space, outside their home but just steps away, where they can truly focus without distraction.”

At 575 Fourth Ave., a private yoga studio can also be used as a meditation space.

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“The studio is designed to be used by one person at a time and has a private entrance, so you don’t have to pass through the fitness center to get to it,” said Ms. Peters. “The interior courtyard functions like a quiet private park for residents, too.”

Soundproof Spaces for Relaxation and Work

While music isn’t always quiet, it does have the ability to soothe the soul. At 575 Fourth Ave., residents can use the soundproof music room for a variety of activities including recording podcasts or even for video conferences.

“The music room has a dropped ceiling and walls that are soundproof and great for acoustics,” Ms. Peters said. “We have microphones, drum sets and guitars in the room, plus residents can bring their own instruments.”

At 378 West End Ave. on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, residents have access to a fully outfitted and acoustically engineered music room and recording studio with a soundproof booth. The building also has a reading room connected to a serene garden terrace, said Tim McCarthy, senior director of sales at the building.

“It’s important to have a place of refuge and quiet to clear your mind,” Mr. McCarthy said. “Our amenity suite offers that through spaces that function as an extension of the home. There are escapes within the building where you can go to have your own peaceful space and alone time in addition to your own home.”

Soundproofing is extremely important for amenity spaces such as music rooms for the people using them and for their neighbors.

“As part of our entertainment amenities we have a music room and a separate karaoke room,” said Mr. Hakim at Saint Marks Place. “It was a requirement of ours that we isolate and soundproof these rooms so the inhabitants can utilize the spaces freely without disturbing other residents.”

At Quay Tower in Brooklyn Heights, amenities that could create noise such as the gym have additional soundproofing material and are located so that no unit shares a wall or floor with the spaces, said Vince Cangelosi, managing director of design and development for RAL Companies and Affiliates, the condo developer.

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"We used special sound-deadening ceilings for the music room, which has a piano and a custom-designed wall panel system," Mr. Cangelosi said. "We also created a quiet area next to the gym that residents can use for stretching or yoga."

While ideally quiet spaces add to relaxation for residents, at 30 Kent St., a rental building in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, soundproof meeting pods have been installed for residents to use for work.

"We're one of the first residential buildings to include meeting pods from ROOM, which are normally used in offices," said Alyssa Brody, co-founder of Development Marketing Team, a sales and marketing team for 30 Kent St. "Our architects suggested that we add these pods, especially because we're aware that in other buildings the conference room is the most-used amenity."

The entire building has an ultra-quiet ventilation system, Ms. Brody said, and the pods also have soundproofing and monitors for video calls.

Whether you want to make some music, focus on work or meditate, quiet may be the most luxurious amenity available in the midst of the noisy city.



*378 West End Ave. 's music room and recording studio.
Williams NY*

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*Interior view of an apartment at Quay Tower in Brooklyn Heights, New York.
Jason Puma*



*Meeting pods at 30 Kent St.
30 Kent Street*