



by Dan Rafter | CTW Features

Your house is buzzing with noise. But it's not the good kind of noise that comes from family dinners or entertaining guests — the noise is from the street outside, the refrigerator in your kitchen or the washing machine in your laundry room.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to reduce undesirable noise in your home. And you can now purchase appliances that are quieter than their predecessors, reducing noise at its source.

The noise in a house depends on the quality of construction, not the age of the building, says Michael Lehman, CEO of Chambersburg, Penn.-based SoundproofCow.com, an online provider of soundproofing materials. Some newly built homes are noisy, while some 100-year-old homes can be quiet.

"Noise is becoming more of a concern, that's for sure," Lehman says. "Sixty to 75 percent of who we sell to are end users, homeowners, business owners and restaurant owners who think their homes or businesses are too noisy. The population is increasing. Density is increasing. It's just getting noisier out there."

That's especially true for Larry Bilotti, the executive editor for home improvement site BobVila.com, who lives in an apartment in New York City. "There are some noises we can't do anything about," Bilotti says. "You can't control the street noise outside your home. But you can take steps

to absorb sound, block the sound or break the noise where it starts."

**1. ABSORB IT** Bilotti recommends taking measures to absorb the sound, which is the easiest way to deaden noise inside or outside the home. The most common ways are to install carpeting or thicker draperies. Acoustical tiles in the ceiling will also do the trick.

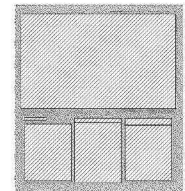
Soft materials absorb sound, but they can be hard to incorporate into modern spaces that are mostly hard materials like concrete and glass, Bilotti says.

**2. BLOCK IT** Blocking sound is more challenging. As Bilotti says, sound is like water: It can seep into your home through even the smallest cracks. Blocking sound requires more mass and more barriers to noise. People can use acoustical caulk to seal around windows and doors or any other cracks in your home.

Installing new, tighter windows can also keep sound at bay. For a more expensive solution, homeowners can add an extra layer of drywall to their rooms. This will create a sound-deadening barrier.

**3. GO TO THE SOURCE** The vibration of appliances is a common source of extra noise in a home. Bilotti recommends putting rubber or cork pads under washer and dryer machines to keep them still. The same holds for refrigerators that occasionally shake. Sometimes though, you'll need to either service old, noisy appliances or replace them entirely with newer, quiet models.

Luckily, appliance manufacturers are aware of the



issue and have concentrated on noise control for several household machines.

Skylink Group, for instance, offers a series of residential garage-door openers with quiet DC motors. These openers accelerate slowly to full speed and slow before coming to a stop to reduce vibration and noise. Kevin Barnak, U.S. account manager for Brampton, Ontario-based Skylink, says, "The heavier and clunkier the motor, the more noise an opener will make."

Appliance-maker Electrolux issues a "second-floor guarantee" with its line of washers and dryers that work with minimum vibration, meaning that they are quiet enough for the second floor of a home and not just its basement.

Lehman expects consumer demand for quieter products and soundproofing to remain strong, so more manufacturers will pay attention to those needs.

"People want to live closer to work today. They don't want that long commute," he says. "But that also means that they are living closer to public transportation and highways and busy roads. That adds to the noise. And that means that people are going to need better soundproofing in their homes." ●