Decor Score: Sound solutions for deadening the din

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: We thought we were moving to the peace and quiet of the countryside six years ago, but now another subdivision has crowded right up against our property and it has gotten really noisy with kids, cars and swimming pool parties. We planted two rows of evergreens along the fence, but they will take several years to grow. Any suggestions on how to control noise in the meantime?

A: The modern world can be uncomfortably hard on the ears, what with outdoor speakers, cell-phone SHADES OF SILENCE - Close out the noisy world with window treatments that effectively absorb sound. CNS Photo courtesy of Hunter Douglas. shouters and evermore-crowded living conditions. Happily, there are several ways to make the outlook quieter for those who seek solace inside our homes. While you're waiting on your long-term solution to grow in - the sound-absorbing trees - your best bet is to think fabrics. Thick, multilayered fabrics on walls and windows are the most effective soundproofing you can utilize.

According to the industry rule of thumb, between 25 percent and 40 percent of a room needs sound-absorbent materials. In notoriously noisy New York City apartments, interior designers often upholster walls with decorative fabrics that are installed over layers of cotton or fiber batting. Lined and interlined curtains, hung against walls as well as windows, also help quiet things down. Rugs help immensely, too, especially when they are laid over thick cushions. Even hefty upholstered furniture will help soften sound.

Some solutions should be seen as well as not heard, for example the billowing layers of fabric folds in the Roman shades on the wide windows in the photo we show here. Called "shadings" by the manufacturer (Hunter Douglas), the window treatment promises to absorb up to 60 percent of reflected sound, putting the quiet on those big, once-noisy windows.

Hunter Douglas offers other styles of sound-blocking "shadings," including dual honeycomb shades and sheer shades with soft vertical or horizontal fabric vanes (take a closer look at www.hunterdouglas.com). Whatever treatment you choose, it's most effective to layer window coverings so they trap and absorb invasive sounds.

For example, hang heavy draperies over sheer curtains over window shades that closely hug the glass. The

Noise Center of the League for the Hard of Hearing offers still more hush-hush advice:

Place vibration mounts under major appliances and foam pads under small appliances. Don't run several kitchen appliances at the same time. Buy quiet products in the first place. The Consumer Product Safety Commission offers details at www.cpsc.gov.

Q: We recently remodeled our kitchen with cherry chocolate glaze cabinets and Giallo Fiorita granite - very dark - and I'm not sure it was the right choice. I would like to put hardwood throughout the house (1,000 square feet), yet I'm not sure what color will blend. Should I tile the kitchen and "wood" the rest of the house, or put hardwood in the kitchen also? Will butterscotch, ginger, gunstock or toffee work?

A: Your choices sound dark, delicious and downright edible! But whether you go with tile or hardwood in the kitchen, I'd say stick to the lighter side of the palette. Light colors at floor level will bounce all the available illumination up and back into the room where you need it to balance your dark cabinets and countertops. It is a trick long known to photographers, who routinely use reflective color boards to shed new light on their subjects.

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