

A QUIET LIFE

From traffic and noisy neighbours to creaky floors, unwanted noise can drive you to distraction. But you can reclaim your little piece of peace, writes *Georgia Madden*.

Your home is supposed to be a retreat from the world, a haven of peace and calm. So nothing zaps your zen faster than the sound of a neighbour's yapping dog or your teenager blaring music, videogames or YouTube videos in the next room.

Noise is a part of life, especially in a busy family home, but there are ways to prevent

it edging towards irritating. In fact, the Australian Building Codes Board provides guidelines for sounds transmission and insulation in buildings, says architect Rebecca Naughtin. "Satisfactory and maximum decibel (dB) levels for rooms such as bedrooms, recreation areas and work areas range from 30dB to 35dB - an example of 30dB is a quiet conversation," she says. ▶

Alumiere Fixed aluminium windows,
POA, Stegbar; 1800 681 168 or
www.stegbar.com.au.



The best time to consider soundproofing is when you're building or renovating, says Clinton Cole, director at CplusC Architectural Workshop. "Start thinking about sound insulation before you purchase, build or renovate a property," he says. "Retrofitting a home to improve sound insulation is generally far more complex and costly than getting it right at the outset." Focus on the areas that matter, advises Naughtin. "Soundproofing should be a priority for bedrooms and studies, where a low level of noise is essential for good sleep and concentration," she says.

When considering an acoustic strategy for your home, it's important to understand where most of the noise is coming from, says Naughtin. "Noise can be airborne - emanating from the outside environment (passing cars, for example) - or it can be impact noise, which is generated inside the home, such as the sound of footsteps."

The keys to tackling airborne noise are proper insulation and sealing, she says. "For all our projects, we install insulation in the floors, ceilings, roof and walls, as well as noise and weather seals around external doors and windows. The rangehood or exhaust cowl is weather-sealed too." As an extra bonus, measures like these will also improve your home's thermal performance. "Double-glazing improves sound and thermal insulation significantly," adds Cole. "There are also various cladding systems that will help."

Some companies provide insulation specifically designed for noise reduction. Bradford SoundScreen is a high-density acoustic insulation that's specially engineered for internal walls in new homes.

NOT RENOVATING? YOU CAN STILL LOWER THE DIN BY SEALING GAPS AROUND DOORS AND WINDOWS; CARPETING ROOMS WITH LOTS OF HARD SURFACES; INSTALLING WINDOW TREATMENTS; AND USING SOLID-CORE DOORS.



ABOVE LEFT Blonde Oak AWO 21 front door with American white oak veneer, from \$499.40/204cmx62cm, and **sidelight**, from \$432.30/204cmx62cm, Corinthian; www.corinthian.com.au. **ABOVE** Björnbärsblomma acoustic panel, from \$595 (120x120cm), Alex & Elle; www.alexandelle.com.au. **OPPOSITE** Superchek plasterboard, \$13.20/m², Gyprock; www.gyprock.com.au.

QUIET OPERATORS

Noisy appliances can be maddening, particularly if you live in a small home or have young children. Fortunately, manufacturers have been working hard to reduce operating-noise levels, says Colin Jones, appliances category expert at Appliances Online. "The average decibel level for appliances is between 45dB and 50dB, which is as loud as rain falling. Jones' pick of the bunch when it comes to quiet appliances includes:



SilentPerformer Animal vacuum cleaner (75dB), \$249, Electrolux.



Serie 6 9kg front-loading washing machine (44dB), \$1399, Bosch.



DD60DCX9 DishDrawer double dishwasher (43dB), \$1999, Fisher & Paykel.

"A common acoustic issue within homes is sound transmitting through internal walls, whether it's the wall separating a bedroom from a bathroom, or a living area from a study or laundry," says Daniel Kelman, customer marketing manager at CSR Bradford. "Installing SoundScreen around noise-affected rooms will effectively reduce loud noises to a whisper." Retrofitting SoundScreen installation starts at about \$400 per room.

Acoustic plasterboard, such as Gyprock's Soundchek, is another product that minimises noise transfer through walls and ceilings, which can reduce 50 to 70 per cent of perceived noise. Acoustic panelling on walls or ceilings (or both) can also muffle sound; choose from timber acoustic panels, such as Screenwood, which can be applied to walls and ceilings in both curves and flat planes, decorative fabric panels, such as Woven Image's Echo Panel, and acoustic 'artworks' from

companies such as Alex & Elle. Acoustic underlay can also help - particularly if you're concerned with noise transference between levels. Quick-Step's Combi-Lay acoustic underlay is specially designed for floating floors and can reduce footfall noise by 30 per cent or more.

A room's layout and decor also impact sound levels. "A home with lots of hard surfaces will create echo and noise," says Frances Cosway, author and head designer at White Pebble Interiors. "Including a good proportion of soft furnishings - curtains, rugs, carpet and upholstered furniture - will help absorb noise. Plus, soft furnishings are conducive to creating a more relaxed and calm space." Smart zoning is another wise move, she says; "Floor plan is key; avoid open-plan retreats and living rooms without doors - use pocket doors so that rooms can be opened up or closed off to create quiet spaces." Silence, as they say, is golden. **H&G**

