

# With so many new condos in Boston, is it any wonder soundproofers are getting more calls?

DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

**New England Soundproofing employees installed a heavyweight sound-deadening door for Andrew Hassey of the North End.**

By [Beth Teitell](#)

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“Experience urban living and dramatic views at Seville Boston Harbor — the first luxury condominium building on the new East Boston waterfront.”

Well, that’s the marketing version, anyway.

ADVERTISING



Another view of life at the Seville Boston Harbor is detailed in a lawsuit brought by condo owners against the developer and the gym on the ground floor, the Beacon Hill Athletic Club.

It describes not the luxe life but rather “frequent disturbing vibrations and noises” coming from the gym, including “loud noises” caused by the dropping of free weights and weight-lifting equipment.

Noise has always been part of city living. Ever since there have been three-deckers and brooms, the downstairs neighbors have been whomping the ceiling telling the upstairs folks to keep it down.

But in today’s world — of high real estate prices and even higher expectations, of mixed-use developments with gyms at street level, of suburban empty nesters moving to the urban core — a growing number of condo- and apartment-dwellers aren’t willing to put up with unwanted sound.

“We’re getting over 10 calls a day from people in condos and multifamilies complaining about how they can hear their neighbors sneezing or walking or watching TV,” said Steven Drago, co-owner of New England Soundproofing in Easton.

Condo owners and apartment renters are dropping dimes on each other with building management, suing developers, and adding anti-noise regulations to condo documents. Some require that 80 percent of floors be covered with rugs or bar residents from wearing shoes in their own living rooms.

They are hiring sound-mitigation experts and spending thousands and thousands of dollars to tear down walls and ceilings to install soundproofing materials.

“It can be over \$40 per square foot,” Drago said. “It’s very disruptive.”

But people who live with neighbors’ noise paint a picture of lives interrupted, with

nowhere to go to get away from it.

“It’s beyond stressful,” a surgical nurse who lives in a \$650,000 condo above the Beacon Hill Athletic Club in East Boston told the Globe. “You don’t know when it’s coming.”

An attorney for the Seville’s developer, Geoffrey P. Wermuth, said sound issues affect only six to eight of the 66 units and emphasized that his client and the gym have made changes to address the complaints — including limiting the volume of the microphones and instructors’ voices at spin classes and installing soundproofing and more pads under the equipment.

“Our client is more than willing to continue to work to address complaints and has made proposals to the condo Trustees. Unfortunately, the Trustees just want to sue people instead of resolving issues,” he e-mailed the Globe.

An attorney for the gym, Michael C. Fee, said his client had no comment.

Sound-reduction professionals say they’re getting more calls for a number of reasons. Sometimes older, cheaply made apartment buildings are converted to pricey condos, and people who have paid \$1 million don’t want to listen to someone else watch “The Big Bang Theory.” Conversely, some new construction isn’t as soundproof as older, more solidly built buildings.



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**Installing the door is Ken Stuart with New England Sound Proofing.**

The sheer number of new apartments and condos in Boston means more potential noise victims. Boston has added 19,954 apartments and condos (in buildings of five or more units) since 2012, according to data tracked by the Boston Foundation.

That's a lot of new city dwellers living in multifamily housing, where neighbors, and their noisy lives, are mere inches, not yards, away.

The state's building code, which is based on the 2015 version of the International Building Code, establishes sound-transmission requirements, but many in the sound field say the code is not tough enough and that buildings that just meet the standard can still be noisy.

Cities and towns have noise ordinances, of course, making it unlawful to disturb the peace with loud music or parties or construction at certain hours.

But a lot of the sound driving residents crazy comes from daily life, not from extraordinary noise. A child playing with a toy truck on a hardwood floor. A cooped-up Jack Russell terrier. A cabinet door being shut.

Right after Andrew Hassey, 27, moved into his first-floor condo in the North End last summer, he learned what it meant to live across the hall from the mailroom: “I’d hear the mailman opening the boxes, people talking to their bosses on their cellphones about getting a project done, people talking to a friend about how amazing their meal was.”

Hassey, an attorney and an MBA candidate at Boston College, said that he wasn’t shocked, “but I wasn’t happy, either.”

He hired New England Soundproofing to insulate walls and his bedroom ceiling. He’s also getting a new, very dense 350-pound door and has new insulated windows — a project so extensive that he moved out temporarily.

“I love the place and my neighbors,” he said. “I just don’t want to hear everything all the time.”

Unlike other negative features of a home — a lack of sunlight, an aging bathroom, a hideous kitchen — sound issues can be hard for prospective buyers or renters to detect before they sign on the dotted line.

When Susan Moore, 62, bought her condo in Waltham, she focused on the (seemingly) peaceful and bucolic setting and had no idea that she’d be able to hear air conditioning units at night while she slept, or tried to.

“You don’t get to spend the night in a place when you’re thinking of buying it,” said Moore, who meditates twice a day and values quiet.

She eventually had her place soundproofed — a job that added a “hidden” \$13,000 to the price of her condo, she said. “But it’s quiet now.”

In some cities, prospective buyers of high-end properties have begun hiring acoustical consultants to perform pre-purchase sound assessments, said Steve Haas, president of the Connecticut company SH Acoustics.

Haas was recently brought in to check out potential noise problems at a \$90 million condominium unit under construction in New York City, and after the developer refused to make suggested improvements — to eliminate noise transmission from HVAC and elevator equipment — the buyer walked.

“When you’re exposed to noise constantly, night and day, it gets in your core,” Haas said, “and you can’t escape it.”

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**Hassey invested in a 350-pound door and wall and ceiling insulation.**

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