

Oh, the neighbor's showering again

From homes to condos, businesses are trying to plug a flood of noise.

By **TERRY WARD**

SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Forget about nose-y neighbors — noisy neighbors are a growing headache for homeowners.

Whether it's the sound of a flushing toilet and the patter of footsteps in the condo above you, the droning hum of a neighbor's air conditioner positioned too close to your bedroom window or the whoosh of traffic from a nearby road, noise pollu-

tion is taking its toll on quality of life as the population grows.

And Orlando is no exception.

"Airport and highway noise problems are still there," says Lisa Beeson, owner of Quietly Making Noise LLC, an acoustical-consulting firm in Oviedo that provides noise testing and solutions for residential and commercial clients.

"But we've added on this new problem of people living close to each other — loft apartments above

a mixed-use area, for example," Beeson says.

Orlando resident Vickie Westmark has firsthand experience with one such noise nuisance. For three months, she sacrificed sleep while sharing a condominium above a busy restaurant in Thornton Park in downtown Orlando.

"On the weekends, when they [the restaurant] have their busiest

PLEASE SEE **NOISE, H11**

Vickie Westmark enjoys her Baldwin Park home. She moved from a condo above a restaurant, where noise was on the menu.



JULIE FLETCHER/ORLANDO SENTINEL

High-octane noise: Shutters help put bra

NOISE FROM HI

evenings, that's when it was the worst," says Westmark.

Even after the sounds of clinking glasses and chatter had subsided, she says, she was subjected to the grating noises of chairs and tables being dragged across the sidewalk as the restaurant's staff cleaned up.

Westmark says her sleep was disturbed, and as a result, she felt fatigued during the day. She contacted Beeson to discuss a solution to her problem but ended up moving out of the condominium before solving the noise issue.

Addressing noise issues was a prime concern during the design phase of her current home, which she had built in Baldwin Park, Westmark says.

"My home design requires that the AC unit be toward the garage, so it would be away from my master bedroom," she says.

Although perhaps most irritating for its intrusion on daily life, noise also can affect a home's value, says Randall Bell, who is a certified general real estate appraiser in California and who specializes in real estate damage issues. According to Bell, the values of rural homes are more drastically affected than those of urban homes when an airport or highway expands in the area.

"Where you see the more pronounced noise issues are in rural areas where people are used to it being a quiet setting," Bell says. "That's where you get the biggest effect on property values."

So what's a homeowner to do?

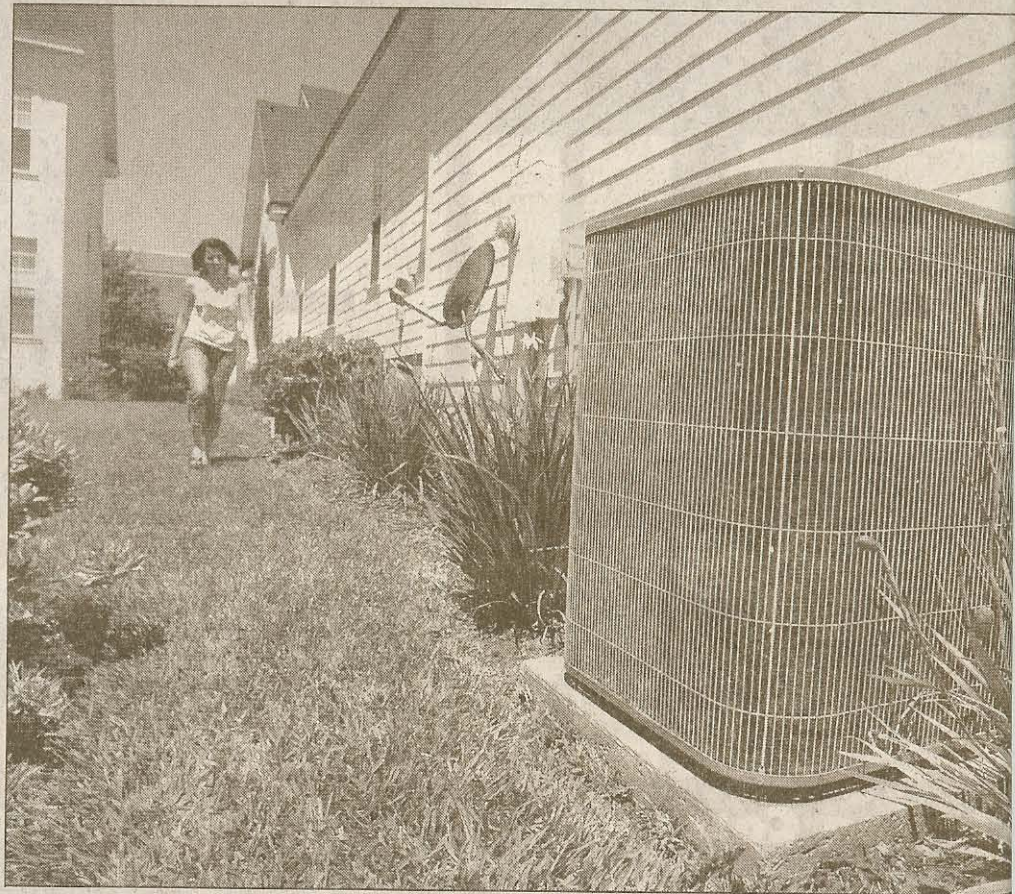
From the top

Addressing noise issues during the initial home search or during the design phase of a home is more cost-effective than retrofitting a house, Beeson says. But whatever your situation, there is usually something that can be done to ease the problem.

"Most people, when they're looking at a home, whether it's a house or condo, they look at how pretty it is," says Beeson. "Very few think of noise before they move in. Not until after they move in do they realize, 'Wow, this is significant.'"

When looking for a home, don't limit your search to one particular day or time, Beeson says.

"Go during the day, at night, on



A cool idea: In her new home, Vickie Westmark says she made sure the air-conditioning unit was n

weekdays and weekends when looking for a house, because noise changes," says Beeson, explaining that traffic noise usually diminishes on the weekends, while weekdays might be quieter as far as noise levels from playing children and outdoor restaurants.

For homeowners building within range of airport noise, the home's roof and windows pose the biggest problem areas for noise infiltration.

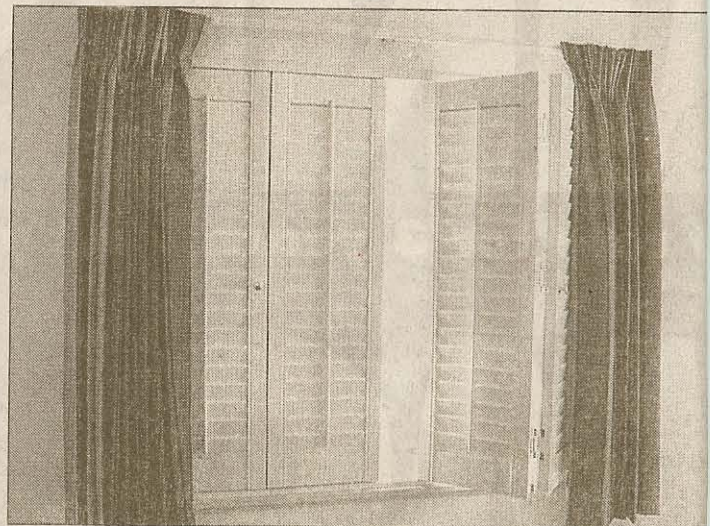
"Roofs in Florida, generally, aren't very good acoustically because we don't design for snow loads and the cold coming through," says Beeson. "Your standard roof is pretty much just plywood with felt and shingles. In the flight path, this often can be the problem."

Standard roofs can be reinforced for sound protection using extra lay-

ers of plywood and special acoustical barriers, Beeson says.

Soundwaves also can be dampened by installing resilient metal channels when constructing ceilings and walls. The strips of metal, avail-

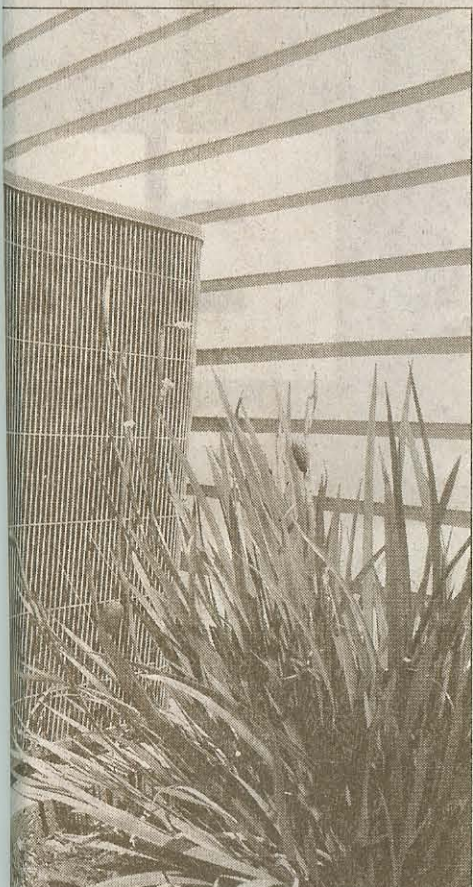
ments on step noise. One such grade rec laid under floors to



LISA BEESON

The designer of Shut-Eye Acoustical Shutters says the accordion-style product can reduce noise inside a room by up to 40 decibels.

brakes on nearby road



JULIE FLETCHER/ORLANDO SENTINEL

ing unit was not outside her master bedroom.



LISA BEESON

accordion-
to 40 decibels.

able at many hardware shops, are used to attach the drywall to the roof trusses. There they act as a spacer barrier that helps reduce vibrations caused by outside noises. Resilient metal channels often are used in media rooms to stop sounds from disturbing the rest of the house.

Mass-loaded vinyl, which looks like thick black rubber, is another material that can be installed behind drywall or laid atop ceiling joists to minimize noise intrusion. It is effective against airplane noise, Beeson says.

There are a variety of acoustical underlay-

ments on the market to combat foot-step noise in apartment buildings. One such product is Regupol, a high-grade recycled rubber product that is laid under wood, tile and carpeted floors to reduce sound transfer from

floor to floor.

Shutter solution

Windows, another major problem zone, are easier to retrofit for sound issues than ceilings and walls because drywall doesn't usually have to be knocked out to fix the problem.

"In most buildings — 99 percent of them — windows are the weak point," says Beeson, explaining that most windows in Florida are single-pane because warm weather doesn't require thermal insulation.

Triple-laminated windows are effective against outside noise, but retrofitting your entire home with new windows can be expensive. Consider starting with just your bedroom windows and gauging the benefits from there.

Beeson has a patent pending on a product she designed called Shut-Eye Acoustical Shutters. They are mounted inside the window frame, operating in much the same way as plantation shutters.

Although the individual shutter slats do not open, the shutters can be pushed back accordion-style during the day to let in light. When properly shut, and depending on the noise source, Beeson says the shutters can reduce noise levels inside a room by up to 40 decibels.

The shutters did the trick for one Jacksonville couple, Henri and Linda Landwirth, who spend about one week per month in a one-bedroom apartment they own on Colonial Drive near downtown Orlando.

Linda Landwirth says the highway noise inside their apartment was so unbearable that she didn't want to visit Orlando anymore.

"We couldn't sleep; it was terrible," she says. "It felt like our bed was in the middle of Colonial Drive."

The Landwirths considered installing thermal pane windows, but because of the condo association's rules, they were unable to alter the exterior look of the windows.

Beeson was inspired to come up with the design for her Shut-Eye Acoustical Shutters when the Landwirths came to her for help.

"I can't begin to even tell you the difference between having them and not having them," says Linda Landwirth, who says the noise has been dramatically reduced. "If we took them down, we would probably have to sell the house."