



Don't Let

Traffic Noise

By Phoebe Chongchua

Get You Down

New windows, creative landscaping can douse those annoying sounds

Depending on the location of the home, one of the biggest challenges homeowners may face is trying to reduce street noise.

Tony Sola, founder of Acoustics.com, cautions homeowners and buyers about too-high expectations when it comes to reducing traffic noise.

"Too many times I have seen homeowners try to do something about the noise by adding another layer of drywall, or something to the wall itself. It's not minimal return, it's zero return," Sola says. "Unless you control the weak point, that does nothing."

Sola says there are some cases where the wall might be the weak point – but that's just 1 percent of the time. The windows are generally the weakest noise link.

So, if you own a home – or have fallen in love with one that you would like to purchase – that butts up a little close to a busy road, there are options to help make the traffic less noticeable.

Windows Are The Key

Starting with the interior of the house, you should first look closely at the windows. They can let in a significant amount of noise.

"The sound almost always goes through the window, and doing anything at all to the walls will be pointless until you have fixed the noise that comes through the window," Sola says.

Windows have a Sound Transmission Class (STC) rating. The higher the rating, the less outside noise you should hear inside the home. A typical single-pane window has only a 22 to 25 STC rating, whereas a dual-pane window might have a rating of 27 to 32. Specialty windows with even higher STC ratings are available.

Choosing windows with the right rating depends on what you're planning to do.

"If you're looking at an STC 30 window versus an STC 33 window, you're not going to notice a huge difference in that – but it might be worth it to you, if they're about the same price," Sola says. "But if you're looking at replacing windows and you're planning to go from an STC 30 to an STC 33, that's a lot of work to get virtually little improvement. If you can get a 5- or 6-decibel difference, then that can start to make a noticeable change."

Quieting The Backyard

Keeping sound from coming into your home is usually only part of the solution. Many people want to enjoy a traffic-noise-free backyard. This can be a little more complicated – but not impossible.

"One of the first things you would look at is the barrier. If you've got a view wall or wrought iron fence, that's not going to block anything. Or if you have large oleander bushes, that might block the view but it doesn't block the sound at all," Sola says.

A solid wall that doesn't have gaps in it will help a little, he says.

"Auto noise comes from the tires. So to control auto noise, the wall will work pretty well because the source is really low – it's at ground level – but truck noise comes from about eight feet off the ground, so even if you build a six-, seven-, or eight-foot wall, that won't help much," Sola says.

However, if you couple a barrier wall with a noise-masking system such as a water feature, you can virtually wash away the traffic sounds.

"A water feature, if done right, can work very well," Sola says.

"You wouldn't want a water feature that's just trickling water. You would want something more substantial that does have a noise level to it and more of a broadband noise," says Sola.

He says the problem with water features is that they tend to be localized. Sola says he's been to some homes where the homeowner placed one water feature in the backyard and it drowned out the traffic noise in that one area of the yard – but the street noise could be heard from other parts of the backyard. That's when a couple of fountains might need to be used.

Getting creative is the key. Working with an acoustics/noise-control expert and landscaper can result in a beautifully designed outdoor area that doesn't reveal any sign of the chaotic hustle and bustle of the nearby road.



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1592 Sixth Street ... \$445,000

On the park! A rare opportunity to live in the center of town overlooking the Minden Park and be surrounded by vintage homes. Well maintained home with cozy knotty pine paneling, hardwood floors, wrap around decking and basement. Large kitchen has loads of storage with floor to ceiling cabinets in the adjoining laundry/mud room. A charmer in an exceptional location. country kitchen has lots of tile counter space and a built in buffet with prep sink and upper china cabinet. Large backyard with brick BBQ, fire pit, a 2 story playhouse and mature shade trees is set to go for those summer parties. There is a single car detached garage with heating and room to enlarge. MLS#90008011



1034 Kerry Lane ... \$289,000

Great little treasure of a house on a big 1.6 acre lot tucked away on a private street and situated on a bluff. Huge wrap around deck offers mountain views on one side and ranch property on the other. All the bedrooms are spacious. There are built-in bookshelves in most every room and the Master has built-in clothes drawers and cabinets. Beautiful cross beamed ceilings in living room. This is a horse zoned property with an enclosed stall building; could be used for extra storage too. MLS#90008009

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