

Choosing an apartment or townhouse:
What to look for.
What to look out for.

Smart Growth Revolution

Avoiding Noise Complaints

Body Corporate Rules



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What kind of neighbourhood would you like to live in?

Location is just as important with an apartment as it is with any property.

But unlike a house in the suburbs, an apartment in the city means you're more directly exposed to the diversity of activities that take place there.

The fact is cities are busier and noisier, and the neighbourhood mix and atmosphere can change dramatically from day to night and from week days to the weekend.

For this reason, it's a good idea to do a "drive-by" of the area at different times and days of the week to get a feel for the flavour of the neighbourhood.

Take a note of what's on your immediate doorstep. Ideally, most of the facilities you need and places you want to go to regularly should be within a 10 minute walk.

Proximity to work of course is a big issue. If you can walk it, bike it, catch a bus easily, so much the better.



checkthezoning

All land has a designated zoning which means it has been approved by the local council as suitable for buildings for specified uses - eg residential, commercial, industrial.

There are many variations on these zones, and it's not unusual for land where apartments are located to be zoned as suitable for mixed development including residential, commercial and retail.

The rules that apply to buildings in each zone can be significantly different from what you would expect in a residential-only area. For instance, rules which protect neighbours' daylight and views in strictly residential areas may not apply in a mixed zone area.

If the development is in a commercial zone, the businesses already there have the right to continue operating as they always have, which may include creating noise, traffic or even odours you may find annoying.

Fortunately, it is possible to overcome these potential problems by designing additional building performance characteristics into the development (see Controlling Noise, page 8, and Gib Quiet Zone, page 10).



“

We enjoy being able to walk to restaurants and the movies, and the park's only five minutes away.

Since we moved, the car's hardly ever used.”

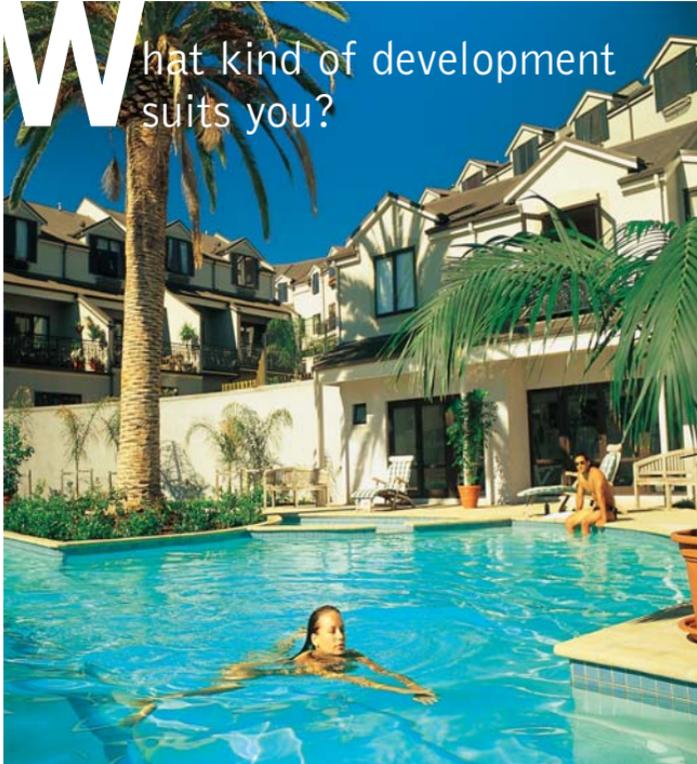


neighbourhoodchecklist



- Check out public transport, bus stops and how long it will take you to get to work.
- Make sure the public amenities you need are close by eg library, park, health care facilities, kindergarten, school.
- Look for entertainment and recreational facilities in the neighbourhood eg cinemas, clubs, bars, gym, tennis/squash courts etc.
- Check the menus of cafes and restaurants in the area.
- There should be a local dairy or supermarket handy.
- Check with the local council to find out what other commercial or residential developments are planned for the area and what is possible under the current land zoning.





What kind of development suits you?

- High rise apartment?
- Terraced house?
- Detached townhouse?
- Warehouse conversion?
- Brand new, off the plans... or pre-owned?

It all comes down to personal choice, your budget and what works best for you.

While appearances and the general ambience of the development will have the biggest influence on your decision, it's important not to overlook practical considerations such as access to facilities, durability of materials and the standard of amenities.



E buying of the plans?

Many apartments are sold "off the plans". However, the fact is that most people have difficulty visualising from plans, and in particular in translating measurements of rooms into reality. Get a tape measure and make comparisons with

various rooms in the home you are currently living in. Use masking tape to mark out on the floor the dimensions of rooms off your plans. Go to the beach and trace out the entire layout of your proposed unit in the sand.

what is a body corporate?

A body corporate is a legal entity that consists of all the unit owners within an apartment complex, and is controlled by a committee elected by them.

The body corporate rules cover issues such as whether you can keep pets, paint the outside in a colour of your choice or if it's ok to have a midnight dip in the pool. With a new development, the developer usually draws up the body corporate rules and controls the body corporate function for a set period of time, after which the apartment owners elect their own body corporate committee.

If you are buying an existing apartment, the supplementary record sheet accompanying the title will show if the rules have been amended or replaced, which can indicate if there have been problems in the past.

body corporate homework

- Read minutes from the body corporate annual general meeting or any general meetings held within the last two years, to gain an understanding of current issues.
- The body corporate annual accounts, budget and unit levy statement will help you ascertain what it costs to run the body corporate and what your annual contribution will be. Swimming pools and tennis courts can be expensive to maintain and you pay a share whether you use them or not.
- Ask if there is a sinking fund (a savings plan) to pay for future big ticket maintenance items such as painting, lift refurbishment etc.
- If you are buying a new apartment from a developer, expect an increase in maintenance costs after the first year when contractors' and manufacturers' guarantees may run out and the cost of compliance with the Building Act commences.
- Check with your lawyer.



"It feels like a haven, a place where we can relax and feel really comfortable and secure even though we're right in the heart of the city."

what about the kids?

A common misconception is that apartment living is for singles and couples only, but that's certainly not the case overseas. In the US, Europe and Australia, children of all ages have been living happily in apartments for years.

If you are planning to move to an apartment with your children, you need to make sure the style of development and range of facilities both within the complex and in the immediate neighbourhood are appropriate.

With younger children, there should be a safe outdoor play area or "pocket park" within the complex, or alternatively a public park or playground nearby.

check it out

- Determine where north is and work out which parts of the development will get the most sun and which parts will be shaded or exposed to prevailing winds.
- Check how the units are located in relation to each other and ensure there is sufficient visual privacy between them.
- Ask what noise control measures have been included in the development to help overcome potential noise problems from outside eg traffic noise, neighbouring businesses, cafes etc. (See pages 8 and 10.)
- Make sure there are sufficient car parks for you and that there is suitable parking nearby for your visitors.
- Check out common areas such as gardens, shared courtyards, hobby areas, gym, pool, tennis court etc and don't forget the functional facilities such as clothes drying areas, letterbox, common rubbish storage.

What to look for in your new apartment

The best way to look at buying a new apartment is the same way you would look at buying any new home.

The most important difference is that you'll be living much closer to your neighbours, so privacy and noise issues deserve extra special attention.

While it is easy with a free-standing home to add rooms or change things you don't like, with apartments it's much more difficult, expensive and sometimes even impossible to do major renovations.

If the design, facilities, building materials, construction techniques and performance standards aren't to your liking from the outset, there may be little you can do about it later.

controlling noise



The effectiveness of an inter-tenancy wall or ceiling (between apartments) at stopping noise transmission is expressed as an STC rating (STC means sound transmission class). The higher the STC rating, the better.

The NZ Building Code requires that inter-tenancy walls must achieve a minimum rating of STC 55. However, experience has shown* that just achieving compliance with the minimum code performance is often not considered satisfactory. An increase to at least STC58 will provide an extra degree of sound control. While an increase of only 3 STC points may not seem like much, it makes a noticeable difference to what you hear – or more to the point – what you don't hear.

Controlling noise between rooms within an apartment is also desirable. A standard wall using timber framing and plasterboard is rated at STC 36. By incorporating a Gib Quiet Zone Solution, the performance level can easily be raised to STC 45, effectively reducing perceived loudness by nearly 50%. There is also an upgrade option where this figure is increased to 70% reduction in perceived loudness.

(*Marshall Dav Acoustics, independent noise control & acoustic consultants.)



Making interiors quieter and more comfortable

Gib have developed a range of design and building recommendations for apartments with the objective of enhancing the overall comfort and quality of your living spaces.

Known as Gib Living Solutions, these recommendations cover not only wall and ceiling linings, but paint and surface finishes, floor coverings, doors, windows, heating, ventilation and many other details.

There are four separate Gib Living Solutions which can be incorporated into an apartment on a room by room basis.

A Gib Dry Zone provides extra protection from the effects of steam, humidity, mould, mildew and moisture damage in "wet areas" such as kitchens, bathrooms, ensuite, laundry and toilets.

Kitchens and bathrooms in particular require special attention to ensure they stay dry, easy to clean and retain their serviceability and good looks. If incorrect linings have been used, moisture problems can lead to damage to tilework and put expensive finishes, cabinets, vanities and fittings at risk.

Main components of a Gib Dry Zone include Gib Aqualine (has a special water resistant core to help prevent moisture penetration), extractor fans, heating, heated towel rails and overflow floor wastes in bathrooms and ensuite, clothes drier vent, rangehood in kitchen.



Compared with a normal wall or ceiling lined with plasterboard, a Gib Quiet Zone can cut noise transmission between rooms and also between floors in two storey units, reducing perceived loudness by nearly 50% (up to 70% can be achieved with upgraded Gib systems). Ideal for bedrooms, study, TV room, bathroom, toilet, ensuite.

Main components include double layers of Gib Noiseline plasterboard (extra dense core provides superior noise control), solid core doors with sound control seals, acoustic glass (eg Pilkington Hushglass), carpet and high quality rubber underlay upstairs to prevent footfall noise being heard downstairs.

A Gib Tough Zone provides protection from wear and tear in high risk areas such as hallways, stairways, common areas, children's bedrooms, gymnasiums and garages.

As you are responsible via the body corporate for the maintenance of common areas, any measures that enhance durability will potentially save you money. Adopting Gib Tough Zone specifications for high use areas can potentially reduce maintenance costs by as much as 50%.

Main components of a Gib Tough Zone include Gib Toughline (twice as tough as standard plasterboard), rounded (bullnose) corner treatments, solid core doors, doorstops, toughened glass, solid timber architraves and skirting, hard-wearing floor coverings.



Enhances the appearance of feature areas such as lounge and dining, entrance way and master bedroom.

The main component is Gib Ultraline plasterboard (provides added rigidity and has a smooth surface paper to enhance finish quality). Specifications may also include Gib designer trims, corner treatments and decorative panels to suit.



Smooth as...

Finish quality on walls and ceilings is something you need to discuss with the developer before your apartment is completed. Here's what you need to know:

There is an industry rating system for the standard of finish for plasterboard walls and ceilings. Level one is the lowest, level five the highest.

Most apartments are finished to a level four standard which is perfectly satisfactory for most people. However, in some circumstances a level five finish may be desirable. This involves covering the entire surface of the plasterboard with a special skim coating



to even out any surface imperfections and variations.

This requires a high level of expertise, involves more work and will cost more.

Talk it over with the developer. You may choose to upgrade to a level five finish only in the main living areas, or where lighting conditions are harsh (see "How colour and light affect your interiors").

How colour and light affect your interiors

No matter how smooth walls and ceilings may appear, there are always some minor imperfections. These are either accentuated or diminished depending on the type of paint used, colour choice and lighting conditions.

For instance, when light strikes a surface at a shallow angle such as light coming from wall-mounted uplights, it tends to exaggerate any surface irregularities. The same is true with natural light coming through a window that is close to a corner or ceiling.



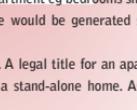
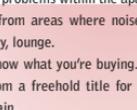
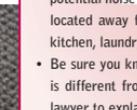
However, when the angle of light is more or less at right angles to the surface, imperfections are less obvious. That's why lighting that channels light downwards (recessed downlights) and not directly onto walls and ceilings can help enhance the appearance of surface finishes.

Gloss, semi-gloss and low sheen paints all reflect light and tend to accentuate small surface imperfections, whereas flat/matt paints help disguise them. Dark colours also highlight imperfections, whereas light colours soften the effect of any irregularities.



check out the apartment

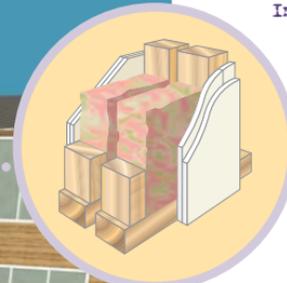
- If buying off the plans, ask whether you can make changes to the specifications or layout of your apartment.
- If you plan to work from home, check the body corporate rules and council zoning to see that it is allowed.
- Check that there is sufficient storage for your sports and hobbies gear.
- Make sure doorways, stairs and passageways are wide enough for shifting your furniture.
- Making changes to the plumbing/wiring/cabling/electrical fittings can be difficult and expensive to do after an apartment has been completed. Make sure you are happy with the current facilities.
- Ask if "above code" noise control solutions have been built into your apartment, such as Gib Quiet Zones ie special noise control plasterboard, solid core doors with edge and bottom seals and noise control glazing.
- If your apartment is on two levels, ask if a noise control floor/ceiling system has been installed which includes carpet and good quality underlay upstairs to help stop footfall noise being heard downstairs.
- Check that the layout of the unit has been designed to minimise potential noise problems within the apartment eg bedrooms should be located away from areas where noise would be generated such as kitchen, laundry, lounge.
- Be sure you know what you're buying. A legal title for an apartment is different from a freehold title for a stand-alone home. Ask your lawyer to explain.





Inter-tenancy wall

For effective noise control, the wall separating apartments should be double frame construction (timber or steel) separated by an air gap, with insulation as shown and two layers of Gib plasterboard on each wall (typically Gib Noiseline or Gib Fyreline). The STC rating of the wall should be 58 or higher.



Bedrooms

Gib Quiet Zone including double layers of Gib Noiseline plasterboard reduces noise transmission between rooms and also between floors in two storey apartments. Look for solid core doors with sound control seals, acoustic glass (eg Pilkington Hushglass) carpet and good quality rubber underlay upstairs to prevent footfall noise being heard downstairs.

Bathroom/kitchen

Gib Dry Zone including Gib Aqualine plasterboard to provide extra protection from steam, humidity, mould, mildew and moisture damage. Check for extractor fans, heating, heated towel rails and floor waste in bathrooms and ensuite, clothes drier vent, rangehood in kitchen.

Passage way

Gib Tough Zone including Gib Toughline plasterboard in all areas subject to extra wear and tear such as hallways, stairways, common areas, children's bedrooms, gymnasium, garages. Check for rounded (bullnose) corner treatments, solid core doors, door stops, toughened glass, solid timber architraves and skirting, hard-wearing floor coverings.





What your apartment is made

of can make a world of difference...

It can make a difference to the level of peace and quiet you enjoy, and also affect the potential to renovate in the future.

The New Zealand Building Code requires that walls and ceilings between apartments in a multi unit development must have noise controlling properties to a specific, measurable standard.

These minimum standards can be achieved with heavy construction materials such as concrete, or light construction using timber or steel frames lined with plasterboard.

It's a misconception that concrete walls provide superior noise control. Timber or steel framing with plasterboard will provide at least the same and in many cases better noise control performance than concrete.

There is a wide range of timber and steel framing systems for your developer to choose from to suit the quality of the project.

look beyond the fancy taps

It's important to be very rigorous in checking out the specifications of your apartment and to look beyond the quality of the fixtures and fittings.

If you are unsure about anything, don't hesitate to call in an independent specialist - a building consultant for example.

If the design, facilities, building materials, construction techniques and performance standards don't measure up to your expectations right from the outset, chances are there'll be little you can do about it later.

let us help you

We've put this publication together to help give you a better idea of the issues involved in buying an apartment.

We are happy to provide further assistance and additional literature

on Gib Living Solutions.

Simply call Gib, 0800 442 4663.



"The bitterness of poor quality lingers long after the sweetness of a cheap price."

has your apartment been built on the cheap? **BARGAIN**

Like all buildings in New Zealand, apartments must conform to the New Zealand Building Code which sets out the minimum performance relating to key components affecting "health, safety and amenity".

However, it is vital to realise that these are the minimum performance standards.

An apartment that has been built to these standards is a bit like a base model car. There are no extras. It's functional, but not necessarily comfortable. Or enjoyable.

For example, the building code requirements for noise control for apartments fall far short of what many people find acceptable.

To ascertain whether your apartment has been built to the minimum standard, or to a quality standard that's acceptable to you, we suggest you do the following:

- * Ask the developer, architect and building contractor for a list of other similar building projects they've been involved in, then go and inspect them.
- * Ask the developer for a copy of the specifications for your apartment and check them against the finished unit before you move in.
- * Ask the developer what warranties or guarantees will be provided.