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## Selling a Home in the City? Turn Those Quirks into Assets



*If ceilings are low, potential solutions include white paint, tall window dressings and low-profile furniture.*

New York City apartments are notorious for their quirks and annoyances, from awkward layouts to windows that face a brick wall. When it's time to sell, these can be major turnoffs for potential buyers. But, with a little creativity, many of these issues can be minimized, and you don't have to spend a lot of money to do it.

### **THE PROBLEM** Low ceilings

#### **THE SOLUTION** White paint, tall window dressings and low-profile furniture

Using a lighter shade of paint on the ceilings than the walls tends to draw the eye upward and make the ceiling look higher. "Use flat, not semigloss, on the crown molding, in the same shade as the ceiling," recommends Pat Christodoulou, who stages for-sale homes in Connecticut and New York. "This gives you an uninterrupted perspective, which results in visually raising the ceiling." If you don't have moldings, she said, adding a cove molding, which begins on the wall and extends to the ceiling, will create an elongating effect. Minimalist furnishings that sit low to the floor will help increase the impression of height. Floor-to-ceiling sheers will also "give the illusion of larger windows and higher ceilings," said Elizabeth Kee, a broker at CORE in Manhattan, who recently hung extra-long curtains in a \$20,000-a-month rental in Chelsea to "create an optical illusion that the ceilings are soaring."

### **THE PROBLEM** Windows that face a brick wall or let in scant light

#### **THE SOLUTION** Pops of bright color, strategically placed high-wattage bulbs or decorative window film



*Adding a cove molding, which begins on the wall and extends to the ceiling, can create an elongating effect.*

“At a window that faced an alleyway or brick wall, we’ve had success with placing a fixture with a florescent daylight bulb behind the curtain,” said Jeff Schleider, the senior vice president of Business Development for Citi Habitats. “It gives the illusion of natural sunlight.”

In a small one-bedroom on the Upper West Side, where all the windows faced out on an air shaft, Joseph G. Sheehan, a salesman with Bond New York, used “cheery yellow drapes” and sheer white curtains to dress up the windows, and bright throws, pillows and rugs to offer “a nod to sunlight and brightness” in the dark space. The apartment, which had originally been listed by another broker for \$399,000, went into contract for \$435,000 just two weeks after Mr. Sheehan brightened it up.

Deanna Kory, an associate broker at the Corcoran Group, recommends white shutters or white wooden Venetian blinds with one- to two-inch slats. “Any light that hits the windows will be reflected favorably and create a lighter feeling within the apartment,” she said. Another option: decorative window film, which lets in light while obscuring an unattractive view; it can be found at Home Depot from about \$25 for elderberry or etched lace designs. Hanging a framed stained-glass panel in front of the window offers a similar effect.

If you’re willing to splurge, a custom etched-glass window may be the solution. That’s what a client of Madeline A. McKenna, a broker at Stribling & Associates, did more than a decade ago in a Midtown apartment with “a very depressing view” from the living room. It wasn’t a cheap fix, she said, noting that the multipane frosted window with silver-and-blue inlay cost about \$10,000. But the investment eventually paid off: In 2005, the client was able to sell the apartment quickly, for about \$975,000. “We didn’t have to apologize or make excuses for the ugly window view onto the ugly, dark, dank air shaft. It became a beautiful centerpiece for the living room instead,” Ms. McKenna said, adding that the unit sold again, in 2012, for \$1.25 million and was re-listed in 2014, at \$1.35 million, with the same frosted window. “Seems everyone likes the aesthetic.”



*If an apartment looks out on a brick wall or air shaft, cheery drapes or sheer curtains in the right shade can dress up the windows.*

**THE PROBLEM** An awkward layout

**THE SOLUTION** Rework the floor plan

The Yorkville, Manhattan, duplex apartment that Jai Lee, a saleswoman at Mdrn. Residential, listed for \$599,000 in July had plenty of assets: “The bathroom was amazing, with heated floor, enormous deep, deep tub and shower heads on both sides,” she said. But to get to it, “you had to walk past the open kitchen into the barely queen-size bedroom.” Down a spiral staircase from the living room was a finished basement area with a half-bath and small adjoining den. “It certainly was not ideal,” said Ms. Lee, who came up with the idea of recasting the downstairs space as an unconventional master bedroom, with the master bathroom upstairs, along with a spacious closet (in what was the old master bedroom). “I started selling the idea of using the ‘master’ as your own dream walk-in closet, with spa bathroom,” she said. To help potential buyers picture her vision, she drafted a new floor plan showing the lower level as a potential bedroom with a half-bath, and adjacent office or hobby room. “I made sure to only show the listing by appointment,” she added. “This way I could control the narrative and envisioning process.” The unit sold within a month for the full asking price.

**THE PROBLEM** A ground-floor unit with windows facing the street

**THE SOLUTION** Curtains, decorative film or window boxes

For ground-floor homes, especially those with bars on the windows, Anna Kahn, an associate broker at Halstead Property, recommends installing window boxes. “Live flowers add color and take away from the starkness of the grates,” she said. Another option: “Bottom-up” curtains, which are opaque near the floor and sheer at the top, to “allow sunlight to enter the apartment while still providing a sense of privacy,” suggested Mr. Schleider of Citi Habitats.

Or consider using opaque film: “We sold an apartment with razor wire outside the bedroom windows,” said Vivian Ducat, a saleswoman at Halstead, who had covered part of the window, obscuring the wire. “Even though everyone opened the windows to see what was out there, they seemed satisfied that the apartment had integrity and could look good, from the look we gave it.”