

# This Old House News and Trends

News and trends impacting home renovators

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## The beauty of quiet

In the spirit of full disclosure, I have to say that I'm hard of hearing, aurally challenged, fluent in "huh?", or whatever you want to call it. Being protective of the hearing I still have left, I'm a sucker for pitches that claim to help in that regard.

So, I was interested when a vendor called Pro Tech Communications asked me review its noise-canceling headphones. Noise-canceling devices take incoming soundwaves and immediately send out a mirror image, if you will, of the soundwaves. This drastically cuts the volume of the incoming sound. There are those who want to deploy them around airports and along major streets. I'd heard about these kinds of headphones, aimed at air travelers, but never investigated.

(This Old House, of course, has [investigated hearing protection](#).)

The NoiseBuster earmuffs, powered by a AA battery, are pretty impressive. I wore them as I walked from my Manhattan office to Grand Central Terminal, and was instantly reminded of what the city sounds like during a heavy snow. But instead of fresh snow absorbing all the noise, the headphones were busy canceling it out. (Go here to see [how loud Manhattan street noise](#) can be--and how loud suburban mowers and leaf blowers are.)

I heard muffled sirens from fire engines across the street and the conversations of people close by. The low-frequency hum of the city--engines, tire noise, exhaust fans, etc.--were all but erased, however. Right now I'm wearing the headphones and every once in a while, I take them off to hear an incredible volume of office background noise that I'd never noticed before.

(Power-tool noise, of course, is something I have noticed. Use this [Centers for Disease Control tool](#) to see how loud specific vendors' equipment is. It's eye-opening.)

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Not that these things are primarily intended for cocooning yourself in the office or walking down the street. The NoiseBuster is heavy duty and, coupled with a construction-yellow stripe on each muff, you stand out when wearing them in the white-collar world.

I did get a little electronic buzzing while walking in the city. It was just along one block and it seemed that there were many mobile-phone chatters around me, so maybe that explains it.

You can hook the music player of your choice to the headphones should you need to shut out virtually all of the world's sound. Pro Tech is listing the NoiseBuster at \$149 with a year's warranty.

If the weather cooperates this weekend, I'm going to mulch the leaves on my lawn with my riding lawn tractor wearing the headphones, and I'll report back here about the experience. -- Jim Nash

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[issued a report](#) warning everyone to renovate within their means.

And, oh by the way, given that you ~~sheep nitwits adults~~ potential pigeons are going to be mesmerized by the likes of sawdust Svengali [Norm Abrams](#), you should consider a