

Combination Units: Are Two Apartments Always Better Than One?

By Leah Hochbaum Rosner | September 23, 2015



A Financial District four-bedroom, five-bath asking \$8,995,000: This potential combination at 15 William Street will have more than 3,600 square feet of combined space plus a huge outdoor space. The master suite has its own private terrace, two walk-in closets and a private entrance. Each of the other bedrooms also has an en suite bathroom and a closet.

Combining two smaller apartments into one sounds like a dream come true. After all, when all is said and done, you get a massive apartment that's designed according to your specifications. But what exactly will linking two separate units entail? [Daniel Hedaya](#), president of [Platinum Properties](#), gives us the lowdown in this week's Buy Curious.

THE WISH LIST:

I sometimes see apartments advertised as a combination opportunity. What should I look out for if I'm considering doing that?

THE REALITY:

When looking for a larger apartment in New York City, it's not uncommon to come across these types of combined units. "In a market dominated by tremendous apartments costing tens of millions of dollars, a combination play may be the best way to get the space you need at a discount," says Hedaya. "You'll need to deal with a bit more headache through the renovation, but in the long-term, it might be the best option for you."

That said, know that these types of homes "come with special circumstances that must be considered," says Hedaya. What to consider:

Be prepared to pay two maintenances at once

Since you'll technically be buying two separate apartments (before combining them into one), know that you'll be on the hook for two separate monthly maintenance payments. If you can swing it, great. But the reality is that two such payments a month is just too pricey for most.

Make sure your specific plans are approvable by the board

While most condo buildings will allow you to do whatever you want in order to combine apartments "unless it affects the structural integrity of the building or the overall building systems," says Hedaya, most co-ops are more finicky about what they will permit. "There may be stringent requirements for layouts, contractors, insurance requirements or architect reviews," says Hedaya. So run your plans by the board every step of the way.

Be mindful of the rules

The most common of these rules is the "wet-over-dry" rule. Many buildings will only allow you to build a bathroom over a bathroom and a kitchen over a kitchen in order to minimize possible flood damage.

Figure out how much it'll all cost

"You should not only get a quote from a contractor, but also an architect," says Hedaya. In addition, an interior designer should probably consult on the plans to ensure that everything ends up looking the way it's supposed to look.

Also, remember that combining adjacent units will be easier (and more importantly, cheaper) than creating a duplex and building stairs. So keep those costs in mind, too.

In addition, see what can be salvaged from the apartments before just clearing out everything and starting over from scratch. "In most combinations, people gut the entire apartment to make a seamless combination," says Hedaya. "However, just because they intend to renovate doesn't mean that some of the materials, appliances, etc. can't be salvaged. Use what you can from the old apartment to mitigate costs of the combination up front. Then, once you're completed, you can upgrade appliances, fixtures, etc. in due time."

Remember that it'll take time

"Construction is a process that takes quite a bit of time and is often delayed," says Hedaya. So make sure you have somewhere else to live in case your contractor goes days, weeks or even months beyond the projected construction time frame.

You'll also likely need to file for permits with the Department of Buildings, which can take as long as 6 to 8 months to be approved. "However, a good architect and a good expeditor should be able to help push these through quickly."

Ensure that the bank will permit the purchase

As you will technically be purchasing two apartments at first, "this is something that may be problematic for your bank," notes Hedaya as "there may be complications with a single purchaser buying two separate units and getting two mortgages on it. So, if you are financing the property, ensure that you make your intentions clear to the bank prior to doing so." In addition, says Hedaya, "many times, people will buy the units cash and then refinance once they are a single unit." Of course, "each bank and lender are different," so make sure you know the whole story before starting in on anything.

Still intrigued? Here are some combinations you might like:



Turtle Bay three-bedroom, two-bathroom co-op, \$1,590,000: Located at 301 East 48th Street between First and Second Avenues is this opportunity to combine two separate one-bedroom apartments into a renovated 1,700-square-foot three-bedroom. The full-service co-op building has a concierge-level doorman and resident manager, as well as a roof deck.



Upper East Side five-bedroom, seven-and-a-half-bathroom co-op, \$5,950,000: This duplex unit at 425 East 58th Street between Sutton Place and First Avenue is actually a combination of three units. There's a private elevator that opens into the apartment. The main level has a master suite with his and hers bathrooms and two walk-in closets, as well as two additional bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, a den and a library. The lower level has two more bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, as well.



Central Park South four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bathroom condo, \$5,450,000: This place at 160 Central Park South is a combination of two high-floor units. The first is a 1,204-square-foot convertible two-bedroom/two-bathroom with a large living room. The second is a 1,575-square-foot convertible three-bedroom/two-and-a-half-bathroom apartment with a spacious corner living and dining room. Building amenities include a doorman, a concierge, maid service, a health club, a spa and a business center.



Upper East Side four-bedroom, three-bathroom co-op, \$2,495,000: Located at 205 East 63rd Street between Second and Third Avenues, this apartment is a combination of a three-bedroom with a junior-four. You can keep the units adjoining but separate, or create a huge great room with four bedrooms, three full bathrooms, a library, a study and an open kitchen with a washer-dryer. The pet-friendly doorman building has a gym, a live-in super and a garage.