

Apartment Combinations: How to Turn Two into One

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A new entrance way installed in a recently completed apartment combination in Manhattan. ▶



by DAVID KATZ
Principal / Founder

In a cramped city like New York, where every square foot of space comes at a premium, homeowners often look for creative ways of expanding their living quarters. Which is why many condo and co-op owners jump at a chance to purchase a vacant apartment next door and combine it with their own.

But two separate apartments that share a wall don't magically become one. Combining them is often a tricky process.



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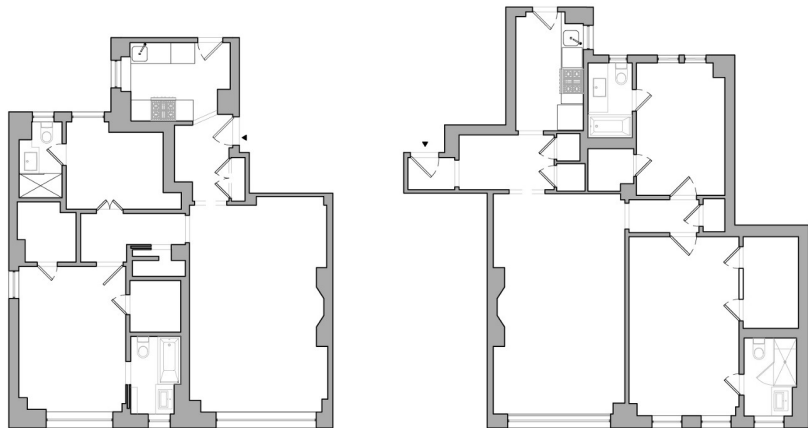
WHAT'S BEHIND DOOR NUMBER ONE?

Ideally, prior to signing on the dotted line for the apartment next door, it is advisable to probe the wall between the two apartments. Any structural elements, utility risers, shafts or other unexpected surprises may radically limit the homeowner's vision.

A client once came to us with two adjacent apartments and great ideas. But, upon review, we discovered a large elevator shaft between the walls. Factoring this in — along with the building pipes that could not be relocated — they were left with a 42-inch-wide space between the foyer and a bedroom as the only means of connecting the apartments. Workable, yes, but it certainly required adjusting their original plans.

Every apartment combination will require working within the boundaries of how the two separate apartments were previously arranged. The best case scenario is that the living room of one apartment is connected to the living room of another. In many cases two adjacent apartments are mirrors of each other and might be connected at kitchens or bathrooms, which proves less flexible.

Plan images for two separate apartments that were later combined in Manhattan. ▶

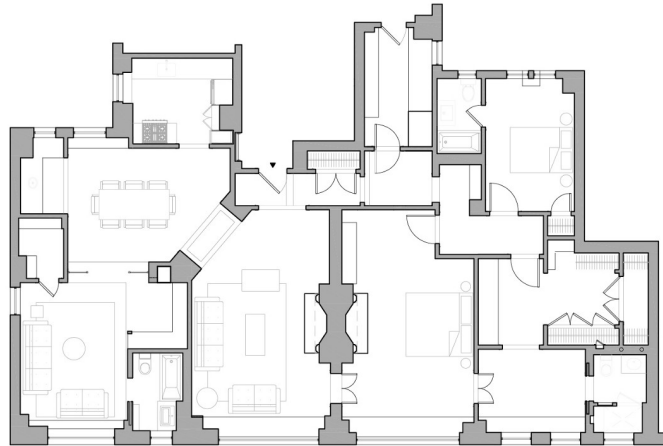


TYPICAL CHANGES TO EXPECT.

Joining the two apartments by removing part of the shared wall is the first step. However, there are other necessary changes to every apartment combination. For instance, by law, one kitchen will have to go. Your new apartment will be much larger, often double in size, so the remaining kitchen may need expansion and re-modeling.

Another important aspect of any combination is determining where the main entrance to the apartment will be located. Closing up one of the entrance doors with a wall might seem like a simple solution. However, in some cases both entrance doors remain for building code reasons or for convenience. It is important to make sure that one of the entry doors is distinguished as the main entryway to the enlarged apartment, by creating a sense of arrival with a vestibule or greeting space.

Plan image after the two apartments above were combined. ▶



Then there are the hallways. The apartment is more spacious, which is great. But how will people move through it? How will living spaces connect to private spaces? How will wet rooms like bathrooms and the kitchen connect in a logical manner to the dry rooms like living rooms and bedrooms?

While the enlarged apartment may allow for that double vanity washbasin in the new master bathroom or for a king sized bed in the new master suite, it is crucial to take into consideration the bigger picture: how the homeowners will live and circulate in the new and improved space.

A new hallway
created in a recent
Manhattan apartment
combination project. ▶



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BOTTOM LINE? HIRE AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL.

Our ultimate goal in every apartment combination is to make the two apartments feel like one. This often requires certain compromises, but results in an apartment that fits our clients' needs — and increases resale value.

With the vision and expertise of a knowledgeable architect, the new apartment will have living and sleeping quarters logically organized and circulation like corridors kept to a minimum. Plumbing fixtures will be creatively and logically rerouted. Radiators and AC units will be properly distributed to heat and cool

the new layout. And rooms will receive the maximum natural light appropriate to their use.

Katz Architecture has the skill and experience to create a cohesive entity out of two separate spaces. We will spare you ending up with an apartment that feels like a maze. On the contrary, it will feel a-maze-ing!

About the Author

As founder of Katz Architecture, David has more than 30 years of experience in the fields of architecture and design. Over this time, he has contributed to a wide range of residential, commercial, retail, institutional, urban design and preservation projects throughout the United States and abroad.

Katz Architecture works as a partner to clients, building managers, design professionals, and city agencies to ensure the ongoing integrity of our built environment.

NEXT STEPS

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