



Old vs. New

When residential buildings face off, who's the winner? Here, a toe-to-toe comparison.

By [S.Jhoanna Robledo](#) Published Oct 29, 2012

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PREWAR

NEW CONSTRUCTION

<p>Solidity</p> <p>Winner: Prewar</p>	<p>Thick firewalls and solid brick or stone, often built on a steel framework. Super-sturdy.</p>	<p>"Almost all modern residential buildings of any height are cast-in-place concrete," says real-estate consultant Jonathan Denham of Denham Wolf. They tend to sway less than steel-framed office buildings, but the prewars still have an edge.</p>
<p>Aesthetics</p> <p>Winner: A matter of taste</p>	<p>If the details haven't been peeled away over the years, there's nothing like it. But there's a point where "charming" becomes a euphemism for "decrepit."</p>	<p>A wide range. The best are beautiful minimal spaces; the worst are drab, corner-cutting shoe boxes.</p>
<p>Layouts</p> <p>Winner: Draw</p>	<p>Graceful Park Avenue layouts aside, many prewars have inefficient, compartmentalized plans, with kitchens too small and master baths rare. Upside: wider hallways, generous foyers.</p>	<p>Most have open layouts. Less strictly useful areas, like foyers, are often eliminated—never mind that buyers often miss them.</p>
<p>Plumbing</p> <p>Winner: New Construction</p>	<p>Old copper and cast-iron pipe holds up for a long time—but not forever. Vintage toilets use much more water than new ones, but they flush without a second thought. Shower pressure is ... well, let's say variable.</p>	<p>The rest of the country has mostly gone to PVC plastic pipe, but New York has largely stuck with durable copper. The new generation of water-saving toilets is much improved from the crappy ones of the nineties. Shower pressure is covetable.</p>
<p>Windows</p> <p>Winner: A matter of taste</p>	<p>Some prewars have pretty ones—Tudor casements, for instance—but if they're original to the building, they're likely single-paned and leaky as anything. They don't block noise well either.</p>	<p>Many maximize views with nearly floor-to-ceiling windows that are double- or even triple-paned and energy-efficient. But you won't see a lot of stained-glass transoms.</p>
<p>Ceilings</p> <p>Winner: Prewar</p>	<p>Averaging around nine feet, with many higher, often with crown molding, beams, medallions, and other ornamentation.</p>	<p>After decades in which builders stuck to eight feet and not an inch more, some plush new projects are going up to nine feet and occasionally more—but most are standard.</p>
<p>Closets</p> <p>Winner: New Construction</p>	<p>There are rarely enough, and those that are there are often inefficiently deep and narrow. Affluent buyers have been known to convert a spare bedroom into a walk-in.</p>	<p>Way better. Often standardized at two feet deep—enough for oversize 22-inch hangers and the clothes on them. Most have doors that run almost the full width of the closet, making access easier.</p>
<p>Air-conditioning</p> <p>Winner: New Construction</p>	<p>If you have it, it's a box in the window. In rare cases, a sleeve has been tunneled through an exterior wall, so you don't have to block the view, but that still limits your options.</p>	<p>Not only central; it's quiet and often sophisticated, with multiple temperature zones. No contest.</p>
<p>Heating</p> <p>Winner: Draw</p>	<p>That old single-pipe radiator system may clank like crazy, and the exposed cast iron can sear your skin—but when it works, it really delivers a fantastic amount of warmth.</p>	<p>Fan-coil systems work just fine, but they don't get really toasty like their predecessors, if that's your preference.</p>
<p>Soundproofing</p> <p>Winner: Prewar</p>	<p>Apartment-building plaster walls and concrete floors block out the neighbors' din better, says architect and building code consultant Michael Zenreich.</p>	<p>Gypsum wallboard—a.k.a. Sheetrock—is good for construction speed and easier to break into for repairs, but a lot of noise gets through. Today's floor slabs, typically cast concrete on steel, are similarly mediocre at soundproofing.</p>
<p>Electricity</p> <p>Winner: New Construction</p>	<p>Old buildings usually have 40-amp service for each apartment—enough for everyday lighting, but don't think about installing an electric oven or anything luxe like a steam shower.</p>	<p>Sixty- to 100-amp service, which will run pretty much anything you can wire or plug in.</p>

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Amenities Gracious spaces like courtyards are nice, but otherwise, it's all retrofitted: a gym in the old steamer-trunk storeroom, maybe.

Winner: New Construction

Everything that might be a selling point has been offered, from concierges to infinity pools. Gyms and gardens are probably the most common, and most widely appreciated.

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Old vs. New

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