

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## TECHNOLOGY

### Luxury Panic Rooms and VIP Evacuation Services Are in High Demand

Celebrities and the super-wealthy are turning to stealth safe rooms and SWAT-like security teams



Panic rooms were installed in units at London's ultra-expensive One Hyde Park apartment building.

Photo: Carl Court / Getty Images



TEXT BY [MEGAN JOHNSON](#)

Protecting the rich and famous is a serious business. That's why many prominent celebrities, athletes, and business tycoons are taking control of their safety and installing safe rooms, often referred to as "panic rooms," in their homes. "It's not a luxury; it's a necessity," say Darren Sukenik, luxury sales broker with Douglas Elliman in [New York](#), "for anyone with significant means or significant staff, or a coterie of people coming in and out of the house."

A panic room is most successful based on its ability to camouflage itself: An extra bedroom, unused maid's quarters, or a few closets that are strategically eliminated from the floor plan provide the most clandestine locations, hidden behind fake bookshelves or doors. Entry requires a passcode or combination, and, in some situations, thumbprints. Common requests include everything from generators and infrared surveillance systems to sleeping quarters and an escape tunnel. Many come equipped with Kevlar lining and autonomous air-filtration systems.

Sukenik says that in the luxury home sales market, a property with a safe room is even more desirable to prominent buyers, particularly if it's able to serve double duty.



A home office that doubles as a safe room.

Photo: Courtesy of Covert Interiors

"A lot of women use it as a dressing room. It truly is your own bank vault in your house. People could also use it as a wine cellar, because they're climate controlled. They could use it for cigars, jewelry, papers," Sukenik says. "It could be a room that's actually used, but completely fire rated or flood protected—and locked off."

"Mostly what we do is more of a useful space than a secluded room," says Chris Cosban, owner of [Covert Interiors](#) in New York and the Hamptons. "It could be a home office, or a pantry in a kitchen that we make look like a bookcase, that also acts as a vault room in case of an intruder or an attacker."

The Hamptons are a specifically popular venue for safe rooms, especially since people don't have doormen as a protective barrier as they would in the city. But of course it also provides prime bragging rights.

"People in the Hamptons, a lot of it is for people to say, 'I have a panic room.' They have indoor pools, a bowling alley, a bar, and they need something else," says Cosban. "It's a conversation piece."

Of course, if you're looking to install a safe room into your existing property, it'll cost you: Sukenik estimates that for a hidden space that requires cordoning off a room, it can cost several hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Many prominent actors, politicians, and financial bigwigs have gone a step further in their mission to protect themselves and their families. Advanced Personal Protective Security Specialists, or APPSS, are an extreme level of experts equipped to protect you from everything from burglaries and terrorist attacks to kidnappings for ransom. But these highly trained professionals are hardly your average security workers. According to Courtney Sojka, president of [\*Ballistic Security Enterprises\*](#), the training process is comparable to a mix of the U.S. Marine Corps and the Secret Service.

"It's extensive and exhaustive, and they're training you to provide service in the most hostile climates overseas," says Sojka. "We're highly trained tacticians."

The rich and famous might not be as safe as they think, says Sojka, who adds that high-net-worth individuals may have fifty people watching out for their financial portfolio but lackluster security protecting them personally. "Taylor Swift's place was infiltrated by a guy in a wetsuit," says Sojka.

"If you were my VIP, and let's say you were the inventor of some sort of new military technology that can erase a population at the stroke of a wand, and you go out to dinner with your family and people catch wind of that, and they don't like you for what you do, they start protesting out in front of the restaurant," says Sojka. "If they can reach out and touch you, they can kill you."

Though having the opportunity to call 911 is important, having the ability to protect oneself proactively will save your life.

"Police are a reactionary element," says Sojka. "That's why you employ people especially to protect you—so you can relax and enjoy life."