

# THE VIP SUITE ... FOR THE NANNY

To attract top-notch, live-in nannies, some homeowners are creating suites with sitting areas, kitchenettes, private entrances and other amenities that rival a luxury hotel; one nanny's \$1,000 decorating stipend.

ELI MEIR KAPLAN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (2)



BY ALINA DIZIK

**ONE SUITE** in Dahlia Mahmood's 8,500-square-foot home in Ashburn, Va., includes a seating area, walk-in closet, kitchenette and a bathroom with custom-made mirrored vanity and crystal faucet handles. This VIP space isn't for overnight guests or in-laws. It's the nanny quarters, says Ms. Mahmood, a 37-year-old mother of three sons.

Some affluent parents say the best way to attract top-notch, live-in nannies is to create a suite that rivals a luxury hotel. These spaces may have separate entrances, kitchenettes and personal living areas. These days, there are fewer career nannies, and those who choose to live-in can be pick-

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**ALL IN THE FAMILY** Nanny Bushra Sghir, top left, in her suite at the Ashburn, Va., home owned by Mounsif Tolab, left, and Dahlia Mahmood, right, shown with sons Jad, 3, Kayden, 15, and Saif, 8.



## MANSION

## THE VIP SUITE ... FOR THE NANNY



DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (3)



**FORMERLY A GYM** In Atlanta, a home gym was converted into a nanny suite for Debra Hill, above. Top, the suite's sitting area. Right, homeowners Michael Kriethe, left, and Travis Reed with their daughter, Lillian, 7.



SARA STATHAS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

**NANNY GETAWAY** The bedroom of the nanny suite in Andrea and Caron Butler's home in Racine, Wis. The suite is in a private wing and has a separate exit that leads out to Lake Michigan.

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ier when it comes to amenities, says April Berube, president of the Wellington Agency, a nanny-placement firm in Palm Beach, Fla. "Before you were looking at Alice from 'The Brady Bunch,' but today you have [nannies] with master's degrees in your home as role models," says Ms. Berube.

Luxury nanny suites are most popular in cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, where luxury homeowners work in entertainment, technology and finance sectors, all known for unexpectedly long hours, says Katie Provinziano, founder of West Side Nannies in Beverly Hills, Calif. Some families offer up to a \$1,000 decorating stipend to help employees customize their suites. Finding a live-in babysitter "is extremely competitive," says Ms. Provinziano, who adds that nannies stay in a home for about two years, on average, before moving on. "And if you could provide a superior setup, it actually matters."

Ms. Mahmood, an interior designer, has created a number of nanny suites for clients, ranging from a \$15,000 basic redesign to \$150,000 for a suite with custom-made pieces. In her home's nanny suite, Ms. Mahmood used a neutral color palette with sparkly textured wallpaper for a "touch of glam." She encouraged the nanny, Bushra Sghir, to "make it her own" with personal photos or artwork.

When Kellie Geres's employers built a new home in Potomac, Md., that included a nanny suite, Ms. Geres, 46, worked directly with the builders to create her own "studio apartment" within the home. "It's not like a guest room that sits empty," says Ms. Geres.

In addition to marble countertops in her full-size kitchen, an office, living area and private patio, she also requested extra soundproofing in the home. Ms. Geres started as a nanny there 12 years ago and is currently a house manager, since the children are now young adults. (The homeowners declined to comment.)

Creating luxury digs specifically for the nanny encourages them to stay awhile, an important consideration for families with young children. In their recently renovated Racine, Wis., home, Andrea and Caron Butler were eager to create a peaceful retreat for their longtime nanny who travels back and forth from California with the family of five. The family plans to relocate permanently once Mr. Butler, an NBA player with the Sacramento Kings, decides to retire.

The nanny suite is next to the gym on the "boomerang-shaped" property, with a separate exit that leads out to Lake Michigan. Having a suite in a more private wing of the home means the nanny, who's "all about exercise," can duck away for a walk along the lake without

wandering through the common areas, says Ms. Butler, a 33-year-old who is active in nonprofits. Upstairs, there is also a small library area that can be accessed directly by the nanny, who wasn't available for an interview.

Ms. Butler's nanny suite is part of a \$3 million expansion of the 1932 traditional brick home. The décor features a wall-mounted leather headboard, a crystal chandelier and a marble bathroom with heated ceilings and floors. She spent almost \$800,000 and nine months decorating the home with Ms. Mahmood, the interior designer, and added plenty of feminine touches, including crystal, velvet and decorative mirrors. "I like things to sparkle," said Ms. Butler, who is the mother of three daughters ages 11, 5, and 4.

Having a nanny suite isn't always a good real-estate investment, cautions Atlanta-based real-estate agent Travis Reed. For example, buyers in an urban area with few young families may value having a gym over a separate apartment. He advises some families to convert their nanny areas back to other rooms if living in a smaller urban home where something such as a home theater, gym or spa area can seem more desirable. "A nanny suite can be a bonus in selling, but not if you were losing other amenities in order to have it," says Mr. Reed, an agent with Harry Norman Realtors, a Christie's International affiliate.

Mr. Reed and his partner, real-estate agent Michael Kriethe, converted part of their home in Atlanta to house a nanny who takes care of their 7-year-old daughter, Lillian. In the 4,000-square-foot home that was built for about \$850,000 in 2005, the couple spent about \$50,000 to finish the lower-level suite and replaced a gym and spa area with a one-bedroom suite for the nanny, Debra Hill, that includes a spa bathroom, kitchenette, dining nook and a sunroom with an exterior entrance to the home's pool. "She needs her own living area so she could get away from us," he says.

When renovating, Ms. Mahmood recommends that homeowners use the same finishes for the nanny areas as the rest of the house. Giving these areas a similar feel won't disturb the natural flow of the home and can make it easier to stage once it's time to resell.

Another solution: A separate apartment. Beth Benalloul, a New York-based real-estate agent with the Corcoran Group, says more New York City high-rises are offering smaller apartments that can only be purchased by condo buyers in the building for the use of live-in staff or relatives. The studios, which alone are valued at over \$1 million, are packaged with the cost of the main condo unit, where prices range from as little as \$4 million up to \$50 million, Ms. Benalloul says.