

REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

It's true what they say: You never get a second chance to make a first impression. And listing photos provide potential buyers with their first impression of your home. Good listing photos can mean the difference between a quick and profitable home sale and months of inactivity. This guide can teach you how to photograph and market your home like the pros!



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WHAT'S INSIDE THIS GUIDE?

Importance of listing photos | Gathering your equipment | Staging your space | Planning your shoot | Getting the light right



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMPORTANCE OF LISTING PHOTOS	1
GATHERING YOUR EQUIPMENT	2
Choosing your camera	
Trying a tripod	
Selecting software	
STAGING YOUR SPACE	3
PLANNING YOUR SHOOT	4
Picking your shots	
Practice makes perfect	
Framing the best exterior shot	
GETTING THE LIGHT RIGHT	7
Lighting and your home's exterior	
Illuminating your home's interior	
ABOUT OUR COMPANIES	8
Richmond American Homes	
HomeAmerican Mortgage Corporation	
American Home Insurance Agency, Inc.	
American Home Title and Escrow Company	
NOTES	11

IMPORTANCE OF LISTING PHOTOS



Once upon a time, prospective homebuyers had to rely on newspaper ads, yard signs and reports from real estate agents to fuel their new home search. Then the internet came along and changed everything.

Fast forward to today... The majority of buyers now begin their house hunt online—where listing photos can be examined, compared, contrasted and discarded in mere minutes (sometimes only seconds!). Such snap decisions mean multiple professional-quality photos can help you, the seller, edge out the competition. After all, the only thing worse than a home with no listing photos is a home with bad listing photos!

Because photography has the potential to make or break a home sale, many sellers choose to enlist the aid of an experienced, professional real estate photographer. This guide contains important information, including tips for staging your home and planning a photo shoot, which can help you prepare for your photographer's visit. Or, if you have a tight budget or simply want to try your hand at real estate photography, this guide can help you capture and market your home like the pros!

GATHERING YOUR EQUIPMENT

It's no secret: good listing photos sell homes faster and for more money. If you want to sell your home quickly—and get your asking price—you're going to need professional-quality photography that showcases everything your living spaces have to offer. The first step in capturing compelling photos (and prospective buyers' attention) is gathering the proper equipment.



CHOOSING YOUR CAMERA

Use the best camera option available to you. If you have multiple cameras and aren't sure which will be most effective, take a test shot with each and compare them side by side on your computer. More megapixels don't always equal a better result. However, you'll want the option of using photos at a fairly large resolution (Zillow® recommends 2048 x 1536 pixels), so make sure your camera can take photos **at least** that size.

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the camera's capabilities. Be sure you know how to turn the flash on and off, set the focus, turn off the date/time stamp, and zoom in and out. Some cameras have extra features like low-light compensation, an HDR application, or wide-angle or macro lens capabilities that could help you get a better shot. Experiment!

TRYING A TRIPOD

Your hand and arm are likely to tire after capturing even just a few shots of your home. Therefore, you may want to invest in a tripod, which can help you keep the camera level and steady. After all, a shaky hand can lead to blurry and unflattering images.

Like cameras, there are a wide range of tripods available. Prices range from approximately \$10 to over \$1,000. Keep in mind that you won't require the most expensive tripod on the market to capture good listing photos.

SELECTING SOFTWARE

Once you've taken your photos, you may also want a graphics editing program to help you crop or resize them and alter their brightness and color contrast. Popular picks include Adobe® Photoshop® Elements and Google Photos™ (free). If you find these don't offer what you're looking for, a quick online search will yield suggestions and reviews of the best image-editing software for your particular needs.



STAGING YOUR SPACE

Staging is an important element of photographing your home. If your house is ready for showings, you've got a head start on this step. If not, you'll want to declutter and clean before the big shoot.

Following are some general guidelines for staging your home:

- Thin out family photography, knickknacks and personal memorabilia so buyers have an easier time imagining themselves in your space.
- Put away seasonal decorations so photos won't appear dated.
- Take stock of your room's furnishings. Are the pieces the appropriate size for the space? Large items (or too many items) can make a room look small and busy. Don't be afraid to move items out of the room you're photographing. By the same token, don't hesitate to borrow items from other rooms to help you show the space to its best advantage. For example, a well-placed mirror from the bedroom may help break up a long, blank wall in the great room.
- Consider adding a houseplant, small floral arrangement or fruit bowl to give the room a fresh, inviting look.
- Encourage family members and pets to bow out of photos. Some buyers may not mind seeing them, but why risk alienating those who do?
- Pay attention to minor details. Close the toilet lid, shut cabinet doors and drawers, turn off the TV and ceiling fan, straighten and fluff throw pillows, etc.
- Don't overlook the exterior. Park cars out of view, sweep the driveway and walkway, stash the trash cans in the garage and make sure your lawn is looking its best.



Which of these rooms appears more inviting?

PLANNING YOUR SHOOT

A little advanced planning can go a long way toward ensuring a successful home photo shoot and—ultimately—a home sale.

PICKING YOUR SHOTS

When it comes to listing photos, more is generally better—but only if those photos are good. Plan to take pictures of:

- The home's exterior (including the backyard if it's especially brag-worthy!)
- Each of the main rooms
- Marketable details, such as French doors, crown molding, an eye-catching backsplash, a swimming pool, etc.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



Prior to your actual photo shoot, walk through the rooms in your home and take test photos to help determine your shot list. As its name implies, a shot list is a list of the photos you plan to take and the order in which you plan on taking them. Having one can help you remember important details and stay on task during the big day!

CAPTURING YOUR HOME'S EXTERIOR

Chances are, a head-on view of your home will not be its most flattering angle. Porches lose their depth, driveways appear too wide and the viewer can't get a feeling for the size of the home. Try shooting your house from each of the front corners of the property, and from various points in between. You'll probably find that an angle opposite the driveway gives you a better overall photo because it shows more grass, landscaping and house than garage and pavement.

Other helpful hints:

- **Time it right.** Try to shoot in spring, if possible. Even if you're planning to stay in your home until fall, don't let the season pass you by without taking some good exterior photos of your property. New leaves on your trees and shrubs, flowers blooming in their beds and fresh, green grass offer much more curb appeal than snow drifts, sun-stressed turf or bare branches.
- **Overcome obstacles.** Find an angle with as few obstructions as possible. Homebuyers aren't as interested in your shrubbery as they are in the front porch behind it.
- **Adjust your altitude.** Try shooting from a ladder or from low on the ground and see if that helps your composition. However, avoid tilting the camera, as that may cause distortions.
- **Avoid any eyesores.** If there's something unsightly on or near your property, try not to let it into your frame. However, be careful not to cover up a drawback that potential buyers will see when they tour in person. Your property will need to live up to the expectations you set.
- **Go wide.** Remember that you can crop your photos later using photo editing software, but you can't widen a shot after it's taken. Back up or use a wide-angle lens if you can't capture the whole house at once.

INTERIOR TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Following are some tips for taking compelling interior shots:

- **Find your angle.** Look for angles that let you show as much of each room as possible (this is where a wide-angle lens may come in handy!).
- **Change your perspective.** Consider taking shots from up on a chair or step ladder, or crouching low to the floor.
- **Get ready to move.** Be prepared to move furniture out of your way to achieve your desired shots.
- **Don't fall for features.** Avoid centering your photos on prominent room features (e.g., the refrigerator in the kitchen, the TV in the living room) or on a room's corner.
- **Beware of blank space.** Try not to shoot into blank walls.
- **Note potential obstacles.** Keep an eye out for possible issues, like surfaces that may show your reflection, narrow rooms that don't have workable angles, areas with poor lighting, etc.

Remember, you don't have to show every part of your home in the listing photos. If there's nothing special about your powder room or your upstairs hallway, feel free to leave them out and let stronger photos speak for your home.



Example 1: This kitchen photo has been well staged and well lit, but it only shows a small portion of the room.



Example 2: Simply by stepping back and finding an angle that shows more of the room, we achieved a better, more useful result. A potential buyer can now see the kitchen's spacious open layout, the convenient dining area and the elegant hardwood floors.

GETTING THE LIGHT RIGHT

You want to cast your home in the best possible light—literally and figuratively. That means working with Mother Nature and artificial lighting sources to capture high-quality photos of both the exterior and interior.

LIGHTING AND YOUR HOME'S EXTERIOR

Perhaps no photo is more important than the exterior shot that will be associated with your home's MLS listing. Therefore, it's essential to get the light right.

General tips:

- **Experiment with time of day.** Factors like the direction in which the home faces and even its paint color can make it hard to guess what time will work best for photographs. Try taking a few test shots shortly after dawn, then at mid-morning, mid-afternoon and at twilight to help determine which is right for your home.
- **Don't be deterred by clouds.** In fact, if you have the chance, take test shots on both cloudy and clear days. A slight overcast could cut down on glare, letting the details of your home pop—particularly if you have covered porches or lots of shade trees.
- **Keep the sun at your back.** If your home is backlit, everything will be lost in shadow.
- **Beware of glare.** If you notice glare in windows and other shiny surfaces, try adjusting the angle of your shot.
- **Use artificial light as needed.** If you're taking early morning or twilight photos, be sure to turn on all interior and exterior lighting. If you're shooting in bright daylight, keep lights off so windows will be dark in contrast.



ILLUMINATING YOUR HOME'S INTERIOR

If you don't have a professional photographer's lighting equipment, you'll need to use the lights you do have to their best advantage. This may require some experimentation, depending on your window placement and orientation, available lamps, window coverings, wall colors and other factors.

General tips:

- **Time it right.** Try taking indoor photography at a time when the sun won't be streaming through your windows, such as midday, twilight or a cloudy day. Sunbeams may be beautiful in person, but your photos may suffer from the overexposure.
- **Light it up.** Turn on all the lamps and lights in the room and adjoining rooms, including the closet and hallway. The goal is to make the lighting in the room as even as possible, with no extra bright spots or deep shadows. Nothing should be backlit.
- **Or, turn it off.** If you have great natural light, turn the lamps off and use it!
- **Forget the flash.** Avoid using your flash, if possible. If you must, aim it at the ceiling to diffuse the light.



Even with great interior lighting, this photo looks washed out, thanks to the strong sunlight coming in through the windows.



Waiting for a different time of day can make it easier to get the shot you're looking for.



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