



Take Your Best Shot

A Lesson in Real Estate Photography

We live in a visually on-demand world and to most, a picture *does* say a thousand words. Today, most home buyers start their home search online, yet most listing photos are not of very good quality. And as the digital age takes over the print world, it will become imperative your photos represent your listing in the best light, not only for the sale of the home but for your own reputation as an agent to other prospective and future clients. Since nine out of 10 home shoppers begin their search on the Web (according to the National Association of Realtors), it's inexcusable that some realtors don't make much of an effort to make their listings presentable and visually appealing. After all, listing photos are your main mode of advertising. And with so many on-line photos to click through, time is precious to most buyers. If the pictures are poor quality (i.e. poor lighting, low resolution, cluttered rooms), or don't show all rooms, or a poorly framed, cut-off view of the front and back of the house, many buyers won't bother to look and ski on to the next home in line.

This tip booklet is designed to help you achieve the highest potential possible for your home photos. ***Remember, the goal is to entice the viewer to make a showing appointment and ultimately sell them home.***

Understanding The Basics

Most agents don't have a budget to spend on home photos. So, unless the listing is \$500,000 or above and truly warrants high end professional photos, many agents will take the photos themselves. Unfortunately, these are often hastily taken and whenever their client says they may have access to the home, be it day or night. It's not surprising that the results are often poorly framed, grainy and either too dark or too washed out. Add to this that many agents simply haven't taken the time to understand the settings on the camera or the use of available lighting. But, you don't need to invest in an outrageously expensive camera to get great shots. However, camera phones and "pocket" cameras often just won't do the best job. Most bad photos are due more to inferior equipment than the person themselves. Excessive grain and pixelation are usually caused by low end cameras trying to shoot in too low of a light situation. Cameras that shoot at 4 mega pixels or above will do the trick. Good news is even if you aren't that handy with a camera, these tips in this handout should help you get flattering pictures of your listing.

Tips from the Experts

Surprisingly, some of their answers ran counter to what real estate agents generally recommend. For example, agents usually suggest that owners depersonalize their homes by removing family photos, completely clearing off tables and countertops, and removing evidence of hobbies and trophies, so buyers can better visualize themselves in the space. While clutter is never good, a few personal items in a room make a photo livelier, says Minneapolis photographer, Jerry Swanson. "You want the home to look as if someone lives there," he says. A cold, uninviting room leaves the viewer uninterested and ready to move on to the next home.

The following are tips from us on how to show the home's best face to potential buyers.

Exterior Photos

For exterior photos, there are a few guidelines that all Carpenter agents must adhere to or the photo may be reject for any use.

1. The primary must be of the front of the house with the exception of waterfront property. A straight, frontal view is the most appropriate however sometimes, an angled view can be dramatic and appealing if the home has a curved drive, unique landscaping or shows too much garage or too many trees from straight on.
2. Sharpness and clarity are critical. Things such as blurriness, lens flares, dirt or rain on the lens are not allowed.
3. All photos, exterior and interior, must be at least 1024x768 standard horizontal when originally shot. They may be larger but not smaller. Check your camera settings. If it's the office camera, have it on the largest, highest setting. **We cannot except panoramic, or vertical shots.**
4. No structure may be cut off on the sides, roof or bottoms, with the exception of attached dwellings such as condos, zero lot lines, duplex units and offices suites. This will be discussed later.
5. No obtrusive items, such as people, animals, car hoods or trunks, etc., may be in any photo.
6. All photos must be taken during the day. No night photos will be accepted.

The following are helpful tips and examples to get the best photo possible of your listing

- Know the time of day the sun is facing the house. Never photograph a house when it's backlit by the sun will make the house look dark and uninviting because it will be silhouetted. Don't shoot if the house is directly in harsh sunlight. It causes "hotspots" that are harsh and contrasting, often causing many details to be lost. Do not shoot at dusk as the overall shot will be much too dark.



backlit and silhouetted



direct harsh light with hotspots



dusk and murky

- **Allow adequate, extra space around the edges of your photos. This cannot be stressed enough.**

Do not "frame" the home in the camera. Because of the way your photo is processed and resized for uses in multiple places (flyers, magazine ads, internet), 10% of every photo will be lost. What you see in the viewfinder at the outside edges will be lost. Also, a cramped photo also leaves the viewer uncomfortably wondering "Why didn't they show me the yard?"

The following are some example of dos and don'ts,



Cut on both sides.



Step back and reframe.



Condo - too tight and cut off bottom. Misleading to the feel of the structure



Step back and reframe

Exterior Photos Continued



Too tight to the edges. 10% more will be lost when processed for use.



Cut off right side.



Cut off garage and chimney.



Step back and reframe.



Door only, unappealing.



Step back and reframe to show off architecture.



Off-center and a car mirror in the shot.



Step back and reframe.

- Remove garbage cans, seasonal decorations (when possible), even the Carpenter yard signs and any general clutter that makes the yard look messy.
- Trees are always problematic. If there are heavy shadows from trees – shoot on an overcast day. Sometimes there is nothing that can be done about them and they simply will have to be in the shot. Experiment to see what will work best.
- As with the front of the house, be sure to get the entire back of the house in the photo – do not cut-off the home on any side or roof. Take a picture of as much of the yard as possible. If there's a swing set in the yard, buyers won't mind seeing it but they will want to see how big the yard is.



Taking on a step ladder overlooking a fence.
A nice view and also more of the yard is in the shot

- Carry a step ladder. They are light weight and collapsible. Stand above fences to get the entire backyard or to take a few photos for a different perspective.
- Make sure that no people or animals are in the shot.
- Occasionally you are going to have a car in the driveway, but try to take the photos without them. Ask if the seller can park their car in the garage or on the street up the block, just for a bit and then you do the same.

Interior Photos

You are at the mercy of the owners and the home itself. But there are simple things you can do that can help out any interior photo.

First and for most, use all available lighting. Dark interior photos can make the most cozy home look dark and depressing. Turn on overheads, and table lamps. Lit table lamps also can make a room more inviting. Be prepared before you leave. Props like the canisters can add a warmer touch to the kitchen, as well as a small live plant, a bottle of wine, pasta jars. All these are inexpensive and can be found at any Hobby Lobby, Michaels, or like store. But, be careful about having too much so that it makes the space look cramped and small. Be prepared to squat down or stand on chairs to get just the right shot.

- If a room is empty, use props such as a chair or decorative baskets to give it a sense of scale.
- Keep the camera straight and level. Tilting it makes things appear off kilter as if there is something wrong.
- Don't get too close to objects with a wide angle lens. This will create distortion, especially with rounded objects.
- Partially close the drapes to lessen over-exposed looking shots.



Open blinds-harsh glare and with many hot spots.



Partially closed blinds - details now show.

- Dark murky shots are never any good and will make the viewer click away and look elsewhere. Use the flash when necessary. If you can, wait for shafts of sunlight to come through the window; they create a friendly mood. Combining a flash with natural lighting is also very effective.



No flash.



With flash, shades partially drawn and lights on.



No flash.



With flash and lights on.



Natural light only.



With flash, shades partially drawn & room lights on.



No flash but overhead lights on.



With flash & overhead lights on.

Interior Photos

- Often it's too tight or difficult to get the entire room. Try a compromise but keep the composition balanced and level. A chair, small edge of a bed or object in the foreground gives more depth to the shot. Get dynamic views by shooting rooms from an angle. They will appear larger. Try sitting on the floor or standing on a chair.



Stand on a chair and shot partial down.



Angles can create a dynamic and enhanced the view.



Can't get the whole room? Focus on tile floor and wood cabinets.



Tight bathroom? Try standing in the shower stall & get just an essence of the floor and cabinets.



Trying shoot along the line of the countertop to make the room look larger.



Stoop down or sit in a chair and shoot partial up. Remember, you're shooting the room, not the furniture.



Shoot from the door slightly down...



Or squat down bed level and shoot slightly up.

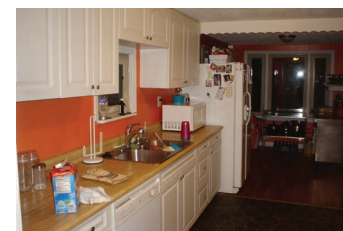
- Don't be afraid to move furniture if it's in the way of your shot or if it's hiding architectural features like a fireplace or handcrafted millwork. Again, you are shooting the room, not the furniture.
- Shoot two walls only, with a only a bit of floor and ceiling. Shooting three walls creates a shoebox effect.
- Fluff the pillows, so you don't have an imprint of where people sat on the bed or sofa.
- If an interior is empty, stand back as far as you can to show how large the space is.
- De-clutter excess items. Put away toys and clothes on hooks. Clean off kitchen counters and coffee tables. Remove toothbrushes, glasses and other personal hygiene items from bathroom counters. Also, remember to close the toilet lid for a cleaner, neater look. If shower stall is cluttered with a multitude of personal items, often simply closing the shower curtain will remedy the problem.



Too many personal hygiene items



Remove and retake



Food & dirty dishes make the place look unkept. This will turn off any potential buyer.



Clothes on the bed and bags on the floor.

- When taking a shot in front of a window, mirrored wall or shower door, make sure you cannot be seen in the reflection. If you can, then you and a flash will most certainly will be in the photo.
- Carry a step ladder – they are light weight and collapsible. Stand “above the room” to take a few photos for a different perspective.

Are you ready to shoot?

Every house is unique and presents unique problems. And there are always exceptions to the rule, i.e. a home with damaged sections or trees that obscure the front door or ends of the home making it appear cut off, clunker cars that are dead in the driveway or utility poles and boxes. And of course, sellers that are simply uncooperative. Still you need to find a way around these obstacles and ultimately entice potential buyers to view the home while online or in printed ads, and then in person and then sell it.

Take the time to experiment. After all, it's all digital and you can look in the viewfinder to see instant results. Take many photos. You can delete what you don't like later. Remember, your goal is to show your listing in its best possible light.

Hopefully these tips will help you achieve the best look possible for your listing. Remember, a good photo can speak volumes when you aren't available to.



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