

# What Real Estate Agents Need to Know About Photography



**For Agents, Home Sellers & Photographers**

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# HOW REAL ESTATE PHOTOS WORK

## Potential Home Buyers Search Online

Ten or fifteen years ago if you were looking for a home to purchase you would first find a real estate agent and tell the agent what kind of home and where you wanted to purchase a home. The agent would then do a search of the local Multiple Listing Service (accessible only to agents) and create a list of homes for you to physically go look at.

Nowadays essentially all home buyers use the Internet themselves to search for a home in the neighborhood, price range, with number of bedrooms, square feet etc., they want. They pare all the possibilities down to a list that's short enough to physically go look at, take that list to their agent and tell them, "We want to go see these homes." When searching online a potential home buyer may have to go through hundreds of homes. If the number of homes, on the market is high in the area they are looking in. In online home searches, you give the search page your criteria and then they typically get a list of short descriptions with a thumbnail photo of the front of the home. In this search process the look of the small thumbnail photo is the first thing that entices the home searcher to click on a link to see more information. This thumbnail is super important and is like the "bait" on the home sellers "hook". For maximum effectiveness this thumbnail photo should be bright, colorful (like a good fishing lure) and fill the frame. This front exterior photo is where a blue sky helps. I think getting a buyer to

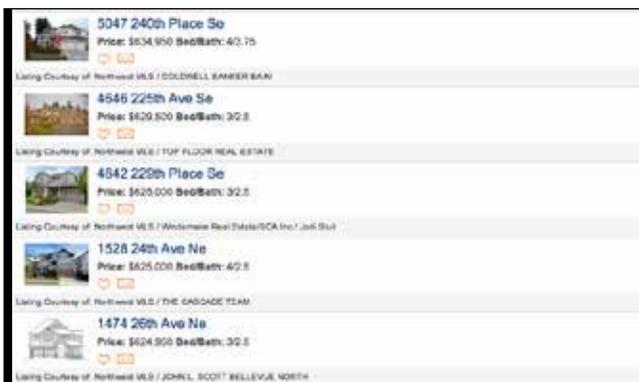
click on the thumbnail link to find out more information and see more photos is not unlike a fisherman using a bright lure to get a fish to "take the bait!"

Then after clicking on the thumbnail to get more details there will be 15 to 20 additional photos and some text describing the features of the home. How these photos present the home will play a major role in whether or not this home gets on the buyers "let's go see it" list!

## The Basics of Visual Psychology

There are a few simple basics that determine if real estate photos are attractive to buyers. There's no rocket science or advanced psychology involved here. These are all things you can verify for yourself:

- 1. Light and bright:** People are not attracted to dark and dull as they are bright and light.
- 2. Disorienting interiors:** We all spend most of our waking hours in buildings; as a result we have a well-developed mental model of how interior spaces work. If interiors are too different from this mental model, in color, perspective, verticals or horizontals, we feel weird. Weird distracts from the effective presentation of interiors.
- 3. Composition:** When presenting interiors visually the way a photo is framed, what's left in and out contributes to its effectiveness. There are some general rules, but most people intuitively recognize when a photo works and when it doesn't. Others are less sensitive to composition but can be taught composition.
- 4. Distractions:** You want to remove all the distractions from photos that don't aid in presenting the features of the home. Things like people, dogs, cats and miscellaneous junk.



# HOW REAL ESTATE PHOTOS WORK

## How Photos Work For the Home Seller

Multiple studies have shown that homes marketed with professional photography get more showings and therefore the property sells faster and for more. The most significant study is the 2010 Redfin study (See: [http://blog.redfin.com/blog/2010/09/a\\_picture\\_is\\_worth\\_a\\_thousand\\_dollars\\_true\\_or\\_false.html#.U9gAqo1dVaF](http://blog.redfin.com/blog/2010/09/a_picture_is_worth_a_thousand_dollars_true_or_false.html#.U9gAqo1dVaF)) that indicates that a home sells for any where from \$900 to \$116,000 USD more.

The info-graphic on the right was created by **Robert Preville, a Wilmington, NC Realtor** from the data from the Redfin study, it illustrates the importance of good marketing photography in selling home.

## Benefits to the Real Estate Agent

As a real estate agent there are compelling reasons for using great photography to present a listing:

- The home seller client will be pleased how you are presenting their property.
- It's a well-established fact that great photos and marketing materials are a way to get more listings. Neighbors of the listing property watch carefully how a property is marketed. If they like what they see, they will ask the agent to list their property when the time comes to sell.
- If there is competition for a listing, the commitment of professionally done photography and marketing materials can help win the listing.

The listing agent is the marketing expert in charge of selling a client's property and it is important they understand the way marketing photos work so they can use photography to the maximum benefit whether they shoot their own photos or hire



a professional photographer.



# REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS

## The Ten Essentials

Here are 10 essential principles that you can use to give your marketing photos maximum effectiveness:

- 1. The primary purpose of real estate marketing photos is to present the features of the property.** Make sure that each photo visually supports this purpose. Any visual distractions that divert the viewer's attention from this purpose need to be eliminated. Items 3 through 9 below are the most common distractions that pull the viewer's attention away from the purpose of the photos. Also, photo composition is all important because it controls the viewer's attention and focuses it on the purpose of the photo.

The two preceding photos illustrate how the angle the photo is taken from can focus attention on the most important features of a room. In the photo on the top it is not clear what the most important features of the room are. In the one on the bottom, attention is focused on the fireplace and the large window.

- 2. Use a wide-angle lens to shoot interiors.** Wide-angle lenses increase the feeling of space in interiors. What's a wide-angle lens? For interiors, a lens should have a 35mm equivalent focal length of between 14 and 24mm. Lenses with a wide enough angle of view to shoot interiors don't usually come with off-the-shelf or point-and-shoot cameras.



## REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS

- 3. Remove clutter and stage interiors for best results.** It's a well-known fact that staging homes pays off. Homes sell faster and for a higher price when they are staged. Most lived in homes have too much clutter. Photos will look better and show more of the home if clutter is reduced and furniture is staged by a trained home stager.



- 4. The primary exterior shot is THE most important photo.** Spend extra time, money and effort to get a “knock-out” front photo because this is the photo that will be seen most and first by prospective home buyers. Online thumbnails of this photo must entice the buyer to look closer at the property. Many homes benefit from an elevated front shot where the camera is 10' to 20'

above street level.



- 5. Render interiors light and bright.** Bright interiors are up-beat and make a more positive impression on the prospective buyer, so you want light and bright photos. Amateur cameras often under expose. Special lighting equipment or photo editing techniques must be used to get interior photos to come across light and bright. Lighting, along with controlling window brightness, is probably the most challenging aspect of real estate photography. The two common approaches to interior lighting are to shoot bracketed exposures or to use multiple small flash units to light interiors.



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6. **Vertical lines (walls etc.) must look perfectly straight.** We live in a world where we unconsciously know that all walls are perfectly vertical. When a viewer sees a room where the walls are not parallel with the side of the photo, the viewer is visually distracted and disoriented. A voice in their head is saying, "This is not right". Verticals that are not perfectly straight with the edge of the photo is the first indication of a non-professional interior photographer. Compare the two following photos and notice the visual tension in the first one where the walls are not vertical and the horizontal ceiling line is not horizontal.

7. **Vertical and horizontal lines must be straight.** Wide-angle lenses cause lines near the edges of photos to curve so special efforts and software must be used to remove distortion.

## REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS



- 8. Don't let bright windows distract.** Unless special lighting or photo editing software is used interior windows will tend to look too bright so the view out the window is not visible. It is always possible to show the view out the window if the view is an important selling point of the property. However, special work by the photographer may be required to make sure the exterior view is clearly visible. Bright windows distract the viewer's attention because the eye naturally moves to the brightest area in the photo. Sometimes the view outside is not important, while other times, with view properties, being able to show the inside and the view out the window is critical.

- 9. Don't let color casts distract.** Strong color casts (typically a strong orange color) distract the viewers attention.

## REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS



a property, so use these principles to produce, select and present your marketing photos for maximum effectiveness.

Since these are well accepted photographic principles, most experienced real estate photographers follow them without being told, but there are some that won't. It's easy to think because you have a digital camera that you can be a professional. Remember, you are the marketing expert, it's your job to make sure the marketing is effective. If it isn't, ask questions.

**10. The way photos are presented online has a huge impact on the overall effectiveness of marketing a property.** Photos have the most impact when presented large (800 x 600 pixels or larger) and in a smooth, easily controllable slide show. Real estate sites typically do not present photos in the most effective way possible. One of the purposes of a virtual tour or slide show is to maximize the impact of marketing photos.

You can hire a photographer that uses these principles or you can use these principles to shoot photos yourself if you are technically inclined or have support staff that shoot your photos. But either way, you are the listing agent in charge of marketing

## IMPORTANT REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY ARTICLES

The following are some of the most significant articles on the subject of real estate photography in the last 5 years. These articles show an increasing awareness of the importance of real estate photography in marketing homes. **Note that the blue title lines are links to the articles.**

- 1. *In Real Estate, A Picture Is Worth \$1,000 or More***, (<http://blogs.wsj.com/developments/2010/10/04/in-real-estate-a-picture-is-worth-1000-or-more/>), Oct 2010: This article is a summary and recap of the original Redfin study listed below in 2.
- 2. *A Photo is Worth \$1000***, ([http://blog.redfin.com/blog/2010/09/a\\_picture\\_is\\_worth\\_a\\_thousand\\_dollars\\_true\\_or\\_false.html#.U81GXo1dVaE](http://blog.redfin.com/blog/2010/09/a_picture_is_worth_a_thousand_dollars_true_or_false.html#.U81GXo1dVaE)) The original Redfin Corporate blog post that talks about a study done in the Seattle area that shows homes for homes over \$300,000 with professionally shot photos increase the final sale by anywhere from \$938 to \$116,076.
- 3. *Look Sharp: Professional Listing Photos Sell For More Money***, (<http://www.redfin.com/research/reports/special-reports/2013/professional-photos-2013.html#.U81Hgo1dVaH>), Dec 2013: From Instagram to Pinterest to Snapchat, digital photos have become their own mode of online and mobile communication. With 92 percent of home buyers using the Internet as part of their home search, listing photos are a critical factor in the selling price of your home, how quickly it sells, and whether it sells at all.

