



Architectural Photography Checklist

An architectural photography assignment is a commitment of time, of resources and of money. Creating high-quality images on location presents a complex series of challenges. Thorough planning and communication among the client, photographer, location owner and representatives at the site can help ensure maximum efficiency and productivity.

The material in this checklist has been gathered from design firms and architectural photographers around the country. While each assignment is unique, the information will be helpful in anticipating issues that may come up during the planning and actual production of a location photography project. It is a useful reference guide for the designer, the client, for others involved in the assignment and for the photographer as well.

The checklist is a working document. It is not copyrighted. Please feel free to revise and expand this information and to use it as appropriate.

Commissioning Architectural Photography

Identify Your Needs

You and your design team have worked hard to bring your latest project to completion. Solving a variety of problems has challenged your creativity, imagination and determination. You're proud of your work. Now you need to commission a photographer to record your project.

Making sure your project is professionally photographed is an essential step in communicating your ideas and design solutions. The photographer will be used to market your firm's expertise, therefore it is important to collaborate closely with the photographer to ensure the images will convey the information you desire.

Identify Your Requirements

Before looking for a photographer, define your goals and identify your needs. In doing so, you will be better able to explain the project and find an appropriate photographer in a thoughtful and productive manner.

Identify the design concepts, architectural elements and other features you would like the photographs to communicate. It may be helpful to prioritize these in order of importance. Develop a list of images as a beginning point for discussions with the photographer. Be prepared to explain any special visual criteria needed for your particular purpose.

Consider how the photographs will be integrated into your overall marketing plan. Are the photographs for your archives only? Will they be used in your internally produced publications? Will they be submitted for competitions? Will they be published in trade journals or books? Will they be used in trade or consumer advertisements? Will the photographs be used by others who worked on the project and perhaps by the client?

By identifying your goals and needs, you will be thoroughly prepared to discuss your specific ideas about the project with the photographer. Clarifying objectives and discussing them at the outset will lead to selecting a photographer who's right for you and for the project to be photographed. This information will also assist the photographer in preparing a proposal and cost estimate consistent with your needs.

Selecting a Photographer

Architectural Photographers can be located by geographic location and specialty.

After identifying suitable photographers, request portfolio reviews. You may want to see assignments similar in scope and building type to the one you have in mind.

If possible, meet with the photographers or their representatives well in advance of your deadline to avoid the risk of compromising your hiring decision or the quality of the photography. If circumstances permit, visit the project with the photographers prior to obtaining proposals. Ask for the photographers' suggestions. This will help define the assignment and clarify each photographer's approach.

Most commercial photographers have areas of specialization. A studio photographer, for example, may have neither the equipment nor the expertise to approach an architectural assignment.

Architectural photographers frequently excel in many related areas. Some may be adept at photographing interior design, industrial locations and commercial spaces. Others may have more experience with architectural models, exteriors, aerials or construction documentation. Still others may be versed in special lighting, styling or residential spaces. Each area requires special skills and equipment. You may find one photographer to work with for all your photographic needs, or you may prefer to collaborate with several, depending on the project at hand.

A talented photographer who specializes in architecture and interior design should understand your needs and be able to communicate them verbally and visually. Ideally, the photographer you select will become an integral part of your marketing team. Creative talent, professionalism, compatibility, specialized equipment as well as the photographer's enthusiasm and experience should all weigh in your decision. Matching your needs to the photographer's strengths will assure the greatest degree of success.

Pricing the Assignment

As a creative professional, you understand the importance of accurately defining the scope of work in order to determine design fees. Similarly, to prepare a proposal, the photographer must have a detailed description of the assignment including information about image requirements, usage, deadlines, site logistics and other specifics.

If uncertain about your needs, discuss a similar project in the photographer's portfolio with your requirements in mind. This should help to clarify the parameters of the assignment.

Commercial photography is priced according to the nature of the work and the client's usage requirements. When the images are used to document and promote design services, rather than advertise products or commercial services, the fee structure is lower. As the use broadens or the number of images to be produced increases, so does the photographer's fee and the costs associated with the assignment.

Creative fees vary among photographers and comprise only a portion of the total cost of an assignment. Factors which affect fee include the anticipated use of the images, the photographer's creative talent and experience, production time equipment, facilities, and staff. Services in addition to the photography itself, such as pre- and post-production time, also must be covered by the creative fee.

Information for Estimating

In addition to the fee, there are other costs specific to an assignment. These typically include film, processing, assistant's fees, travel expenses and photo finishing costs. Other costs may include rental fees for special equipment or props, stylist's charges, location access fees, model fees, special insurance costs and other expenses.

The Value of Photography is determined by various considerations including how widely the images will be viewed, reproduced and distributed. Usage determines a large part of the value and value determines the fee.

Determine the Specific Value

Will the images be used in portfolios? Printed brochures? Award submissions? Editorial reproduction? Corporate publications? Advertisements? Will reprints be required? Will color copies be used in your marketing materials? Do you plan to scan the images for your archives or future use? Will the images be used on a computer information network?

If a single client is commissioning an assignment, the photographer will most likely charge a basic fee. If more than one client contributes to the cost of an assignment, a higher fee will be stipulated since the images will be used more extensively. Identify who is commissioning, receiving and using the photographs.

For an accurate cost estimate, it is important to describe the number of images required and the areas to be photographed in specific terms. Also, define your presentation needs. Do you require transparencies, slides, black and

white prints, color prints, digital files or other special photography? Specify the sizes and quantities you will need.

Tell the Photographer Whether you Require a Bid or an Estimate

The bid implies the price is fixed for set parameters and may be competitive or comparative. Competitive bids are requested when price alone is the deciding factor. Comparative bids consider additional criteria such as working relationship, experience, style, quality and creative approach.

An estimate, on the other hand, is a fair appraisal of what an assignment should cost based on the information provided. Estimates are usually given in a non-competitive situation and may be flexible depending on the nature of the project.

Be aware that changes in the scope of work such as additional images or usage, regardless of how minor, may incur additional charges. It is not unusual for the photographer to ask that changes be approved in writing.

Options for Controlling Costs

What to do if your needs outweigh your budget? Distinguish between your wants and needs. Consider reducing the number of images instead of cutting corners on quality. Strive to obtain greater value from your photography dollar. There will always be someone willing to photograph your project for less, but bargains can be expensive. Shop value not price. Know when professional expertise will save money in the long run. Find out what additional services the photographer can offer to make your job easier, quicker and smoother. Remember that the quality of your photographs is a reflection of your firm's values.

If an assignment is out of town, you may want to consider working with a photographer based near the project site. Not only will a local photographer be familiar with the area, but fees and expenses may be lower.

Copyrights and Usage

Under Federal copyright law, the photographer owns the copyright to the images and licenses specific usage rights to clients by written agreement. Typically, the more extensive the planned usage, the greater the photographer's fee. Prior to photography, negotiate a fee based on what you need now, with the understanding that additional rights and related fees can be arranged in the future. This avoids the unnecessary expense of purchasing rights you may never use. To make planning easier, you and photographer may want to develop a fee schedule for future use.

Keep in Mind

As copyright holders, photographers have the right to control copying, reproduction, distribution, display and derivative works of their photographs.

Usage rights not specifically licensed to your firm remain with the photographer.

Physical possession of photographic material, such as slides, prints, transparencies or digital files, does not grant the right to reproduce the images. Without specific permission from the photographer, it is a violation of Federal copyright law to reproduce photographs in any form, including color copying and scanning. Therefore, it is important to arrange licensing for the full scope of usage you require.

Under the 1976 Federal Copyright Act and the Bern International Copyright Agreement, photographs automatically receive copyright protection even though a copyright notice is not displayed. Absence of the copyright notice does not relieve the prospective user from the responsibility of obtaining permission from the copyright holder.

Licensing agreements should be in writing. Generally, the photographer's proposal will describe the usage rights granted in addition to outlining the scope of the work and costs. Some photographers specify reproduction rights on their invoices. To protect everyone's interests and prevent misunderstandings, agreements should be signed by all parties involved with the photography.

Who can use the Images?

The photographs can be used by those licensed in the agreement. If a number of commissioning clients share in the

cost of an assignment be sure each party clearly understands the agreement and the usage rights granted.

If you plan to give the photographs to others who were not involved in the assignment, or if you have received photographs without written permission for their use, remember only the photographer can license rights. Copyrights and usage rights cannot be transferred by the client, except with consent of the copyright holder.

To avoid misunderstandings, either contact the photographer before passing the photographs along to colleagues, suppliers and publishers or have them contact the photographer directly. Members of the design team, contractors, product manufacturers, clients, tenants, magazine editors and other third parties must arrange for the rights to use the images with the photographer.

Analog

The analog 4x5 inch large format camera is still used for photography for the following reasons:

It works independently of complicated technology and focuses on the essentials.

The high definition camera still offers the best precision work as well as maximum flexibility.

Analog 4x5 inch transparencies are good archive materials because of their durability and the material resistance.

The transparencies are well tried and tested media for printed publications.

Digital

In 2000, digital productivity was extended, with the result of increasing the capacity of analog photography and combining old and new technologies.

The main task is to meet quality requirements in architecture documentation through to the presentation in the appropriate media.

This is achieved by the photographer who has thorough knowledge of the digital process - from taking the initial photograph to the finished file. The necessary adjustments are made with skill and sensitivity. The prerequisite is a calibration system which guarantees minimal loss and true color matching when transforming it into the appropriate format. The photographer will prepare and treat for different applications images that architects have selected from their own archives. This facilitates the logistics of print and internet production.

Description of Assignment and Preparation of Job Proposal

Great work is seldom created by chance. By allowing enough time to plan the assignment and collaborate closely with your photographer, excellent results can be achieved.

There are many variables with architectural photography assignments. Some, like weather, are beyond our control. Others, such as completion of construction and relations with clients and tenants, are subject to some degree of influence. The most productive assignment is one with few or no surprises. There are numerous preparatory steps that can be taken before the photography begins to help create the best images possible.

The Architectural Photographers Specialty Group (APSG), of the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), along with numerous architectural and design firms have worked together to prepare a checklist which includes many of the considerations involved in photographing architecture and interior design. Copyright and usage matters are covered, as well as reminders about site access, preparation, logistics and other suggestions to help ensure a successful photography assignment.

The Client to Specify

Exact location of the site, description and documentation required

- Walk through the project site with photographer if feasible
- Provide maps and/or plans with accurate North arrow

- Provide construction progress photos

- Clearly describe goals: areas to photograph, number of views

- Detail design materials, light sources, spaces in use, etc
- Communicate problems or flaws that photographer to downplay/avoid

Who is commissioning photography and for what purpose?

- Images for single client only?
- Multiple parties sharing photo costs and each using the images?
- Outline permissions required for use of photography
- Same rights for all parties?

Delivery deadline and presentation form of the images

- Prints, slides, transparencies, digital media?

The Photographer to Specify

Copyright

- Explain clearly that copyright is retained by photographer unless specifically transferred in writing
- Permitted/Restricted use of images

Indicate scope of uses

- Archives, A/V or multi-media presentations, portfolios
- Brochures or collateral materials
- Design competitions:
- AIA or other design organizations,
- Product/specialty competitions
- Commercially sponsored competitions

- Editorial features
- Publicity:
- Marketing use
- Press releases, Folios, Flyers

- Advertisements: trade or consumer

- Other

License for reproduction or distribution

- Description of media
- Scope of usage
- Length of time for use of images
- Subsidiary rights

Delivery of images

- Indicate the form to be supplied
- State clearly whether the photographer will hold all original film and digital media or whether such material is to be delivered to the client(s)

Negotiation and Fees

The photographer's fee is predicated on the use of the images and the costs of production. Broader usage increases the value of the images and fees are adjusted proportionately.

Client and photographer must understand if there is leeway in the budget for unexpected conditions, extra views, variables in time, materials and job costs.

If the budget is fixed, are the limitations clearly understood by all parties? If the client needs to negotiate a lower fee, what can be given up in return? This might involve restricted usage, few images, less elaborate lighting or styling, smaller format film for less formal photographs, more flexible schedule with longer lead time, more prominent credit line for the photographer, among other options.

Once all terms are understood and agreed upon, the client should be willing to sign a proposal or contract and to provide a purchase order along with advance payment to confirm the assignment.

At the Site: Issues to Consider

Are the owners or those at the site expecting the photographer and crew?

Do they understand the level of production and length of time involved?

(Some people assume a photographer will show up with a hand-held camera, take snapshots and be finished in a few minutes. Don't surprise them).

Will client or representative be present during the shoot?

The photographer must know how to contact:

- Client with office, home and weekend numbers for day and evening
- Building owner
- Security force

- Maintenance personnel
- Electrical service for permission to control site lighting and computer controls
- Union representatives
- Others involved in the project

Has full access been arranged to the site?

- Is there parking available for the photographer?
- Can photographer, crew, equipment get in after hours? And get out afterwards?
- Does photographer need keys or security codes for access to any areas?
- Are the elevators working? Alarm systems turned off?
- Are all the rooms and areas accessible?
- Can windows and blinds be adjusted?

Consider the time of year and the weather to be expected

- Natural light and the angle of the sun
- Which way does the building face?
- Sun on the main façade?

Consider the season

- Leaves on the trees?
- Flowering shrubs and plants?
- Snow on the ground?
- Seasonal decorations?

Consider the day of the week

- Moving automobile traffic and/or parked cars?
- Pedestrians, office workers, services or deliveries?

Consider the best time of day for the photography

- Interiors. Exteriors.

- Natural light. Sun. Shadows. Mixed lighting. Views.
- Is it best to shoot at night?

Has all the construction been completed?

- Has the client representative inspected the site recently?
- Trailers, dumpsters, scaffolding, fences and debris removed?
- Construction and leasing signs removed?
- Permanent signage in place? Illuminated?
- * All spaces, including ground floor stores, occupied?
- * Landscaping complete?

Site conditions should be reviewed before the photographer arrives.

- Windows clean? None broken?
- Grounds well maintained?
- Lawns green? Gardens watered?
- Mature plants? Or just wisps?
- Watering apparatus turned off to keep the building dry?
- Request delay in facility maintenance during the shoot (mowing, road work, window cleaning...not today, thank you).
- Fountains working?
- Flags and banners in place?
- Find out about other possible disruptions such as trash pickup, deliveries, street festivals, parades
- Graffiti on building? Fences? Posters? Signs?

If access is required from nearby buildings, consider the following:

- Have advance arrangements been made?
- Fees and/or permits required?
- Proof of insurance needed? "Additional insured" on policy?

Electrical considerations:

- Be sure to have information on the color temperature of all light sources.
- All bulbs in working order. All the same color. Spares available.
- Arrange access to circuit breakers or computers controlling lighting.
- Access, too, for window shade controls and security systems.
- Be sure timers and light sensors can be adjusted for proper exterior lighting at dusk and at dawn.

For photography of interiors, be sure to consider the following:

- All tenants and neighbors notified about the photography?
- Public and private spaces clean?
- All furniture installed?
- Paintings hung? Sculpture and other artwork in place?
- Flowers and plants available? Props arranged

Permission for moving (and replacing) personal objects?

Arrange a safe place for the photographer to store equipment. And a clean darkenable area to load film.

Photographer may need client participation to obtain property and model releases.

Architectural Photography Checklist
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