



AIA Best Practices: Preparing for your project's final photoshoot

Contributed by Sara Boyer, AIA

Summary

Achieving successful final photography requires coordination amongst the design team and with the chosen photographer. All parties should be aware of factors influencing the shoot, such as seasonal changes or award submission criteria. Keep this checklist at hand to make sure you're preparing for the best possible final product without undue stress to owner, photographer, or firm.

Introduction

Achieving successful final photography requires coordination amongst the design team and with the chosen photographer. It is important to establish copyright permissions amongst the various team members and cost-sharing responsibilities. It is advisable to have someone intimate with the client and project to escort the photographer during the shoot, the duration of which can be half a day to multiple days. For exterior shots, dawn and dusk provide the most dramatic light; therefore be prepared and notify the client and building management.

Another cautionary tale is the race against time between punch list completion and the change of seasons. For instance, if exterior photography needs to be taken before leaves have fallen from the trees, the timing shall be coordinated, as awards submissions are often also in the fall. If you don't make it, then you are looking at spring, which will push your timing on getting photography until the following awards season.

A professional photographer will also see the project "through a new lens" and often will propose a unique vantage point to capture the facility or space. At the same time, the final photoshoot is an opportune time to obtain documentation photos—you never know when you might need a photo of a custodial room or other back-of-house space. Also, documenting how details were constructed and any variations from the contract documents are valuable lessons learned to share with others.

Below is a checklist to help you prepare for the final photoshoot.

Final photoshoot checklist

As early as possible:

- Confirm date(s) with owner; usually dusk through "last light" one day and dawn to "first light" plus full sun the next (that's three different time frames).

- Discuss any potential events happening at the facility that might conflict or be advantageous to the photoshoot.
- Coordinate with the Owner about obtaining photo releases for people who may appear in the images. This is critical for projects such as K–12 facilities and may require extra time to coordinate with administration and parents.

One week (or more) in advance:

- Drone approval from campus security, community, etc.
- Notify the owner (and any authoritative agency) about the use of the drone.
- Notify the owner to have the facility cleaned.

Two to three days prior:

- Confirm with the owner that interior lights, exterior lights, TVs, video boards, etc. will be on.
- Lights need to be on through the dusk and dawn time frames noted above.
- Request the owner to relocate any furniture away from windows (for exterior shots).
- Remind the owner to have the facility cleaned.
- Request an escort or access to the facility. This is necessary for moving unsightly items from view, even through windows.
- Describe the process to the owner. They need to think through the logistics, e.g., do vehicles need to be parked elsewhere?

Inform the owner:

- Various pieces of furniture will be moved, including trashcans and traffic control devices.

Tips:

- Wear the most comfortable shoes you have.
- You will be moving furniture; dress appropriately.
- Bring water and snacks; these are long days.

Did we miss anything? Please email bestpractices@aia.org to share your final photo shoot best practice.

About the contributor

Sara R. Boyer, AIA, is an associate principal of Moody Nolan's dedicated Sports and Recreation Studio, with 20 years of experience. She graduated from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (B.S. Arch Studies)

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