



# AIA Best Practices:

## Project photography: a reference guide

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Contributed by Ali Lari, AIA

### Summary

This document is a reference guide to help architects hire an architectural photographer for their completed projects. The intent is to expand your knowledge of what is possible, effective, and advisable. Make your project photos sing!

## Plan the shoot

**1. Permissions:** Get appropriate client permissions.

- **Durations:** Confirm with your photographer how many days and hours of photography are required.
- **Dates and times:** Confirm dates and times in coordination with your photographer, including any events that may conflict or add value to the photos.
- **Photo releases:** Coordinate obtaining photo release permissions from people who may appear in images. This will allow the client to collect these in advance.
- **Usage intent:** Clarify photo permissions based on intended use. Some clients will give you full usage rights (from portfolio to publication); some may give you limited use (such as logo/name cannot be mentioned or appear in photos).

**2. Point of contact and coordination:** Select somebody on your staff familiar with the project to act as the single point of contact in coordinating with the photographer and owner.

**3. Intended shots:** Plan which angles and details you intend to shoot.

- **Mark a floor plan:** Mark the intended angles of internal and external photos on site and floor plans, along with elevations or other relevant drawings. Project renderings can help the photographer understand what you hope to achieve in camera position and lighting.
- **Advance walk:** Walk around and through the project, taking your own photos. A smart phone or small camera will be sufficient since these photos are only for identifying views. This process may reveal possible shots you may not have considered.
- **Keep an open mind:** Although you've planned the shots, keep an open mind about shots your photographer may suggest.

# Hiring a photographer

The process of selecting and hiring a photographer may be similar to how you hire other consultants. Here are some tips:

## Prepare a brief

The clearer the brief, the better your expectations will be met.

- **General information:** Location (address), building drawings (including floor plans and elevations), important features, site restrictions, etc.
- **Shot list:** Using your marked-up drawings, develop a list of all the exterior and interior views you would like shot. Don't limit your shots to just the "beauty" views; in some cases, such as healthcare projects, you may want to photograph functional support spaces to demonstrate your firm's expertise in designing such spaces. Typically, the photographer will get these shots plus anything else they find worthy. Your shot list should also include what you do not want to be shot for various reasons, such as client confidentiality or security concerns.
- **When:** Timing of photography, particularly for interiors, is important. The window of project availability is usually between substantial completion and building occupancy. Coordinate with the owner to determine when photography can happen. Come to agreement with your photographer about when preliminary photos will be ready for your review.
- **Licensing:** Clarify the intended use and the parties that will be using the photographs, as the photographer retains the copyright granting licenses for use.
- **Exclusive use/confidentiality:** Do you mind your photos appearing on your photographers' website or social media? Can the photographer sell the photos to others? Or use them for their own promotional purposes? Clarify what you expect in this regard.

## Review portfolio

As with any creative professional, review the photographer's portfolio and keep the following in mind.

- **Online work:** Begin your search online and look at the prospective photographers' past photos posted on their website, Instagram, or other social media. Make note of whose work you like most.
- **Relevant work:** Look for photographers who have photographed projects similar to yours. For example, for a hospitality project, a seasoned photographer would understand how to work with the staff to show the space and highlight the service/functionality in action.
- **Photography style/mood/vibe:** There may be a certain style, mood, or vibe you're looking for in your photos. Watch for that as you browse through the photographers' work.
- **Drone photography:** To get certain types of shots, you may need the photos to be shot with a drone. As you look through the photographers' work, keep an eye out for this. For drone photography, you will likely need approval from the owner, and possibly local authorities.

## Quotes and proposals

Once you have made a shortlist of photographers, contact them to get quotes and proposals.

- **Minimum of three quotes/proposals:** Unless you have a specific photographer you would like to work with, it is best to have at least three proposals for comparison and negotiation purposes. Check the proposals to ensure they capture all you expect.
- **Speak to your photographer:** Email isn't sufficient to get a comprehensive understanding of the person and the work expectation. Try to meet the photographers in your office. Otherwise, at least interview them via video conference to ensure they are aligned with your expectations.
- **Pricing:** Photographers may price the photoshoot based on an hourly, half-day, or daily rate. This rate would include the actual photoshoot, editing/post-production, and licensing. Others may divide the rate in such a way that the photoshoot is separate from the licensing, especially if multiple licenses are requested.
- **Deliverables:** Confirm photo format, file type, and method of delivery. You may want to receive both high and low resolution versions of each photograph. Will they be made available for download via website link, and if so, how long will the link remain active?

## Photo copyrights and licenses

Legally, the photographer, as a professional, owns the photos and the copyrights for their use. Although you are paying the photographer to shoot the images for you, you don't own them. Instead, the photographer is granting you a license to use those photos. That license limits who may use the photos, the specific purposes for their use, and over what specific period. Make sure the licensing terms you agree to with your photograph meet your needs.

### Multiples licenses and cost sharing

An alternate arrangement could be made with the photographer in which multiple licenses are agreed on between the photographer and the architect, interior designer, furniture manufacturer, art consultant, etc. The collective purchase of licenses allows for the cost per license to be negotiated and reduced.

## Best time to shoot

There are several things to consider in regard to timing your project photography.

### External

Time of the day

- **Dramatic shots and façade lighting:** The most dramatic times are around dusk and dawn. By shooting at these times, and using long exposures, good photographers can capture interior and façade lighting without the sky being too bright.

- **Façade orientation:** Depending on which facades are being photographed, the photographer will plan the shoot for different times of the day based on how sunlight interacts with each façade.

Time of the year/ season

- **Landscape:** Depending on the surrounding landscape, you may want to wait for a season when the trees are fuller to complement the architecture (or perhaps when the trees are barer to show the architecture better). This could also relate to building completion; if the building has recently been completed, certain areas may not be planted yet or the plants may be too small to give the desired effect.
- **Climate:** Schedule the photo shoots to avoid rainy seasons. Check the weather forecast to avoid rainy days or other climatic conditions not conducive to your intent. On the other hand, you may want certain climatic features, such as snow, in your photographs. In urban areas where air pollution can dull a photo's effect, try to shoot immediately after a heavy rainfall, when the air is cleaner.
- **Design competition submissions:** If you are planning to submit the project for design awards, you may want to schedule your photo shoot to align with the award submission deadlines.

## Internal

Lighting

- **Natural lighting:** Certain views and spaces may be better lit at different times of the day. Keep that in mind as you select the time of day to shoot each view and space, especially if the way daylight enters the space is important.
- **Artificial lighting and additional lighting:** The building's interior artificial lighting may be insufficient, because of either light levels or lamp temperatures (and resulting colors), to get the right shot. In those cases, the photographer may require artificial lighting.

## Preparing for the shoot

As you approach shooting day, consider the following.

### Things to check

- **Facility manager escort:** It is important to have somebody from the building owner's team, such as a facility manager, present during the shoot to help alleviate any arising issues.
- **Clean and functional:** Make sure the spaces are clean and any items that need to be maintained, such as light fixture lamps, are taken care of before the shoot.
- **Spaces unlocked:** Make sure that locked spaces are unlocked and that any special security clearances have been obtained.
- **Positioned and aligned:** Ensure all movable items, like artwork and furniture, are in the right position.

- **Furniture for external shots:** It is recommended to move furniture away from glazing for exterior shots. Discuss this with your owner and photographer.

### Paraphernalia

- **Things to add:** Some spaces may require accoutrement to make them appear livelier, such as towels, soaps, and candles in a bathroom shot or a flower arrangement on a feature table. Think of how you want the space to be viewed, visited, or used. Your photographer may want to add personal items to make the space appear less sterile. This may be coordinated with the photographer by asking for their suggestions and arranged with the owner, where applicable.
- **Things to remove:** You may want to remove things, such as movable trash cans, equipment, or temporary fencing and traffic barriers, to avoid visual distractions in the photos. Many distracting items that can't be moved, such as hose bibs and exit signs, can be removed from the images digitally during post-production.

### After the shoot

- **Receipt of electronic images:** Confirm the file format and resolution of the images you will receive from the photographer. If you requested both high and low resolution, confirm the file naming convention used by the photographer to differentiate between the formats.
- **Save images to centralized storage location:** Establish a folder structure and file naming convention that allows you to easily organize your photos by client, project, and date. Determine which employees should have access to this folder for future marketing tasks, such as social media, promotional website, and/or new business presentations.

## Conclusion

In following the above steps, you will streamline your photography process by identifying your objectives, planning among all parties and executing your plan to achieve photos that make your projects stand out and sing!

### References

- AIA Best Practices: Preparing for your project's final photoshoot
- AIA Best Practices: Tips to make project photos sing

## About the contributor

Ali Lari, AIA is Executive Director at Hassan Lari Group, a real estate development firm in Bahrain, leading the firm's development portfolio. He's worked on projects of various scales across the globe, including the world's second largest cancer center, Kuwait Cancer Center. He's a former President of the AIA Middle East

and currently serves as a Board Member in Bahrain Society of Engineers' Architecture Chapter and the Saudi Umran Society's Eastern Chapter and as Secretary of Bahrain's Building Facades Committee. He also hosts in-depth conversations to promote critical thinking on Minwar Podcast.

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