

Photos of Your Home Matter in Real Estate

Before the days of the Internet and online [real estate listings](#), a [buyer's](#) first impression of a new home for sale was often the "drive by." An [agent](#) would see the new listing in his real estate book and would call or fax the buyer with the address. The buyer would then go to the address and drive by to get a first look. Or, if a buyer was just starting to look, he would read a brief description of the home in the Sunday paper and decide whether or not to attend that day's [open house](#).



Either way, curb appeal mattered because it was usually the first glimpse a potential buyer would have of a property. If there were weeds, dead grass, peeling paint or rusty nails that stood out, the buyer's first impression of the home was tarnished — no matter how great it looked inside. That's why real estate agents worked closely with [sellers](#) on curb appeal before going on the market.

Curb appeal will always be important, but today, buyers are busier than ever and may not have the opportunity to do a drive by (unless they're seriously interested). Instead, the first impression buyers most often get of a home is from the photos in the MLS listing, which they automatically receive in an email from their agent, or the pictures that accompany an online listing. With limited time and countless listings to review, buyers will quickly move on if photos don't reflect well on a property.

Proper equipment

Properly lit, high-resolution photos are the only type of pictures that should be used in a home marketing campaign. Like any other sales effort, it's important to put your best foot forward. If an agent takes property photos with a smartphone, it's often a red flag to buyers. Smartphone pictures are fine for informally sending photos quickly back and forth between agent and buyer, but they can't measure up to the quality of pictures taken by an experienced photographer with a good camera.

Don't have photos of the property yet? Don't list the home until you do. With so much information available online these days, you only have a few seconds to grab potential buyers' attention. If they do an Internet search or check the MLS email and your home is listed without pictures, there isn't anything for them to look at. Buyers will likely move on and probably won't come back.

Staging and prep

Because of the importance of a good first impression, sellers and their agents should spend as much time and energy on the photo shoot as they do on creating curb appeal or [staging](#) an open house. This means planning the shoot well in advance, sometimes as much as a week.

As a seller, you know when your home gets the best natural light. Make sure the photos are shot during those times. Have the home fully cleaned and in top shape before the shoot, too. As with an open house, clear out all the children's and pet's toys and fully [declutter](#) the home. Imagine the photo shoots retailers and catalog companies do to showcase their products. Would they release a catalog with photos of stained living room furniture or with improper lighting? Of course not — and neither should a seller. A home is a product for sale, just like any other, and should be marketed as such.

Lasting impression

Often, after buyers have toured your home, they return to their computers and look at the property again online. This time, they can put together the floor plan and understand how the home flows and how each room relates to the next. High-quality photos that show the home well will keep them interested, perhaps even encourage them to go take another look. On the other hand, if you cleaned your home before the open house and got the buyer in the door, but then they go back and look at dark photos online or see imperfections, you can easily turn them off.

If you or your agent don't have a good-quality camera and real estate photography experience, consider hiring a professional who does. While it's another expense, consider this: When you put a home on the market, you're competing against lots of other properties. If those properties are highlighted with attractive, well-lit photos and yours isn't, you're going to have more trouble getting potential buyers in the door. This could cause your home to sit on the market longer than it would have otherwise — making what would be seen as a "fresh" property look stale.

Brendon DeSimone is a licensed Realtor and an HGTV real estate expert. He has collaborated on multiple [real estate books](#), and his expert advice is regularly sought out by print, online and television media outlets like FOX News, CNBC and Forbes. An avid investor, Brendon owns real estate around the U.S. and abroad and is licensed in both New York and California. Note: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of Zillow.