Best Practices

Commissioning Architectural Photography
Preparing for Professional Photography: A Checklist

A Little Advance Work Pays Off

Photography, like any outside service an architect might need, has both cost and quality parameters — one to be minimized, the other to be maximized. By choosing an experienced professional and, in particular, by following the due-diligence steps recommended in the earlier pages of this series, you can be reasonably assured of getting the quality of results you need. Likewise, you can minimize the cost by working closely with your photographer in advance of and during the assignment.

The most productive photography assignment is one with few surprises while on location. Delays, downtime and retakes are too often the cause of both unnecessary expense and hasty compromises that may lead to disappointing results. With this in mind, the American Society of Media Photographers has compiled a checklist that covers many of the details involved when photographing architecture and interior design. By collaborating closely with your photographer and paying attention to details, you will maximize efficiency and productivity.

General Considerations

Has the architect walked the site with the photographer?

Who will be the architect's representative during the assignment?

What is the site contact name and number?

Is security clearance required?

Is there a security department that must be notified about the assignment?

Is parking available for the photography crew?

Are certificates of insurance required? Who needs to receive them?

Private residence of the architect, David Hovey Sterling Ridge at Desert Mountain, Scottsdale Ariz (Optima). Photograph by Michael Baxter, www.BaxterImaging.com.

Interior Photography

Site access and security

Where is the loading dock? Are there restricted hours?

Will the photographer have total access or need keys to specific areas?

Will the crew and equipment be able to get in or out after hours?

Will a floor plan be provided?

Will elevators be working?

Does the photographer have access to ladders and dollies?

Does the photographer have access to vacuum cleaners and cleaning supplies?

Will the air-conditioning or heat be off during the assignment? Do special arrangements need to be made to keep the HVAC on or to turn it off?

Will all alarms be off?

Is there a secured place to store equipment during multiple-day assignments?

What are the emergency phone numbers for assignments taking place during weekends or after hours?

Illumination

Does the photographer need approval to adjust interior, exterior and ambient light?

Is the lighting computer-controlled?

Are the lights controlled by motion sensors?

Is all lighting operational and are the bulbs consistent within areas?

Will spare bulbs be available?

Can lights be manually turned on and off from a circuit breaker?

Will the photographer have access to the circuit box?

Is a building engineer or an electrician available if required?

Are there windows in the space? Is there a way to control ambient light?

Furniture and fixtures

Do any decorations or signage need to be removed?

Can desks be rearranged without permission?

Will props or models be necessary?

Does the photographer have permission/password access to turn on computer screens, television monitors and AV equipment? Must specific images be loaded into the devices in advance?

Personnel

Consider who should be present and who should not be present during the photography, and make sure that everyone is fully briefed on the roles he or she will be playing.

Are the owner and the occupants expecting the photographer and crew? Do they understand the nature of the project and the duration of the photography?

Is there a cleaning crew in the space after hours? Can they and the photographer work around each other?

If models will be used, are they employees of the tenant or the architect? Do they understand what they may be required to do and to wear and how long they may be needed?

Are model releases required? (This is especially important for children.)

Who is responsible for meals and for supplying water, coffee and snacks?

Will a memo be sent to employees or tenants regarding advance cleanup and the assignment date and time?

Is any union permission required for photography?

Exterior Photography

Will a site plan be provided ahead of time?

Is there any construction activity?

Are there window washers on the building?

Is any facility maintenance scheduled?

Will the interior of the building be accessible to adjust window blinds and lights?

Can customer or tenant parking be controlled?

Will the Police Department be needed for parking or traffic control on public streets? Do any government authorities require that permits be obtained?

Landscaping and surroundings

Is the landscaping complete and mature?

Are there any fountains? Who can control them?

Are there any computer-operated sprinkler systems, and can the photographer control them?

Will the photographer have access to exterior lighting and signage?

Are there any decorations, signs or banners that need to be removed?

Are the lights controlled by timers or photo sensors? Can they be manually controlled?

Has a client representative checked the site recently for dumpsters, scaffolding, window stickers, fences, debris, graffiti or snow markers?

Conclusion

This checklist is not intended to be exhaustively complete. It should serve as a stimulus to your planning and a reminder of the range of issues that may need your attention in advance of the photography session. Every site is different; every season has its special concerns. With a bit of forethought, you can help your photographer get the work accomplished efficiently and without disruption to other activities while also delivering the quality of results that you expect.