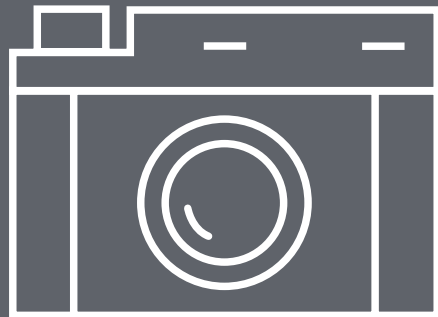


The Complete Guide to Photography

Tips for capturing your work and
getting it noticed



Introduction

More than 40 million people come to Houzz every month, searching for home remodeling and design inspiration. A big part of that process involves looking through the more than 13 million photos on Houzz not only for ideas, but the pros that can make those ideas come to life.

Showcasing your projects with great photography is one of the best ways to give potential clients an idea of what you can do. “We’re surrounded with so many images on a daily basis. When a project is photographed well, it stands out,” Brian Berg of Rockwood Cabinetry says. “Photography that captures your work perfectly makes a big difference to potential clients who are looking to hire.”

In this guide, successful Pro+ pros share their advice for getting great photography that will wow potential clients. We’ll cover best practices for setting up photo-shoots, working with photographers and making the most of your photos once they’re captured.

Communicating With Clients



Discuss the photoshoot early

Discussing the photoshoot at the very first meeting will help set clients expectations properly and avoid tensions in the future. Although some clients are flattered and excited about having professional photos of their home, others may be reluctant to let you capture images of their private space. Starting the conversation at the beginning of the project will give you plenty of time to address any hesitations.

Explaining to clients that having photos of your work is vital for growing your business can help them understand the importance of the photoshoot.

“At the beginning of every job, I hype them up and tell them how excited I am and how great their home is going to be,” says Anne Santulli of Santulli Designs. “Then I tell them I’d love to photograph their house when we’re finished and they’re totally on board. It starts by having a great relationship with your clients.”

PRO TIP: OVERCOMMUNICATE

Take the lead by having answers to common client questions about photoshoots prepared before your client asks. Putting together a one-sheet that tells them how you will be protecting their privacy, what the photoshoot will entail, and where the photos will end up can put them at ease.



Put it in the contract

One way to talk about the photoshoot from the beginning of the project is to have a release as part of the contract. It not only jumpstarts the conversation, but also creates a formal agreement allowing you the right to photograph your work.

“Great photos are an amazing sales tool, so we always have a release as part of the design contract,” says Dave Marciniak of Revolutionary Gardens. “It’s a signed document stating that the client agrees to let us photograph and allow free use of images for other marketing materials.”

However, while a signed photo release is a legally binding contract, keep in mind that your clients can be a strong source of referral business and getting photos of their property may not be worth having an angry customer on your hands.

“Having those photographs can pay dividends, but at the end of the day, if a client still doesn’t want us to photograph, we have to ask ourselves if it’s really worth burning that bridge even if we have a signed release,” Marciniak says.



Send a reminder

As the work begins to wrap up, be sure to remind your client that you're excited about the upcoming photoshoot and discuss potential timeframes for the photographer to come by. Include details like how much time is needed so the photographer has enough time to set up and shoot.

"After a project is completed, we always ask the homeowner again through email if we can come back to take professional photos, though often times our production manager will have already mentioned this desire in person during a final walk-through," says Michael Dolan of Pine Street Carpenters & The Kitchen Studio. "We tell the homeowner that we like to use these photos for marketing, both online and in print, and we always give them the opportunity to opt-out if they're not comfortable with it."

Shooting the Project



Timing is everything

Schedule the photoshoot as soon as the project is done; the space will look beautiful and the homeowners won't be quite moved in yet, so it won't look messy. In addition, taking photographs as soon as the work is done causes the least inconvenience for the homeowner because you won't have to bug your clients for access down the road.

“If I let three months go by, I know for a fact the client is going to be less likely to let me in because they get busy with work, kids, activities, holidays,” Sharon Flatley of Sharon Flatley Designs says. “If you can get in as quickly as possible after the project is completed and appliances are installed, that's the best. I'll just ask really casually, ‘So we can do the photoshoot next week, right?’”



Hire a professional

People hire you because you're an expert at what you do; the same is true for professional photographers. Professional photographers spend every day capturing eye-catching images.

"Don't shortchange yourself by not opting for professional photography," Eugene Sakai of Studio S Squared Architecture advises. "You may think you're saving money, but in reality, you're costing yourself potential clients by not representing your work in its best possible light."

In addition, professional photos are more likely to be featured in the photostream, used in Houzz editorial stories, and saved to Ideabooks. If you're looking for a professional photographer to shoot a recently finished project, the Houzz Photographer Network is a great place to find one: houzz.com/getPhotos

PRO TIP: SHOW PROGRESS

Many pros will take progress shots before or during the project so they can compare the before and after images. While you can hire a professional, using a good smartphone or digital camera will be enough to represent how the space looked before you finished work on the project.



Working with photographers

Home professionals vary in their involvement when it comes to photoshoots. Your role may depend on how much control you'd like over the finished photos and the length of your relationship with your photographer.

Whether you like to be more hands on or hands off with the photoshoot, make sure you communicate your goals for the photoshoot to your photographer so they can capture your project the way you want potential clients to see it. Homeowners on Houzz like to see a combination of wide shots and close ups, so identify specific design details for your photographer to capture.

"We'll do a walk through with our photographer and scout out certain design elements," Cathy Cherry of Purple Cherry Architects says. "Overall house photos look nice, but we know specific design elements will appeal to our viewers."

PRO TIP: STAGE THE SCENE

Whether working with professional stagers or not, making sure your projects look consistent will help homeowners visually identify your work at a glance. For example, some pros add a splash of color to every shot with a well-placed accessory or fresh flowers that liven up a space.

Getting the Most out of Your Photos



Upload photos regularly

Don't you love to see fresh new photos on Houzz? Consistently adding photos keeps homeowners coming back to see your latest work. Adding new projects not only shows that you are in demand, but will continue to highlight your capabilities. In addition, the Houzz algorithm looks at whether you're uploading fresh work on an ongoing basis.

"We're constantly updating our profile so people searching on Houzz don't see the same photos," Jenny Sneller of Sneller Custom Homes says. "If people don't see any change to our profile, they might wonder if we're still doing projects worth posting or if we're going downhill. We want to show potential clients that we're still churning out new stuff."

ASK YOUR SUPPORT SPECIALIST

Too busy to upload photos? Pro+ customers can send their support specialists images to upload photos and place in projects. "I'll get two or three projects at a time and then send them to my account manager who will upload them all for me," Eva Healy of Avenue Design says. "I love it. It's one less thing on my plate."



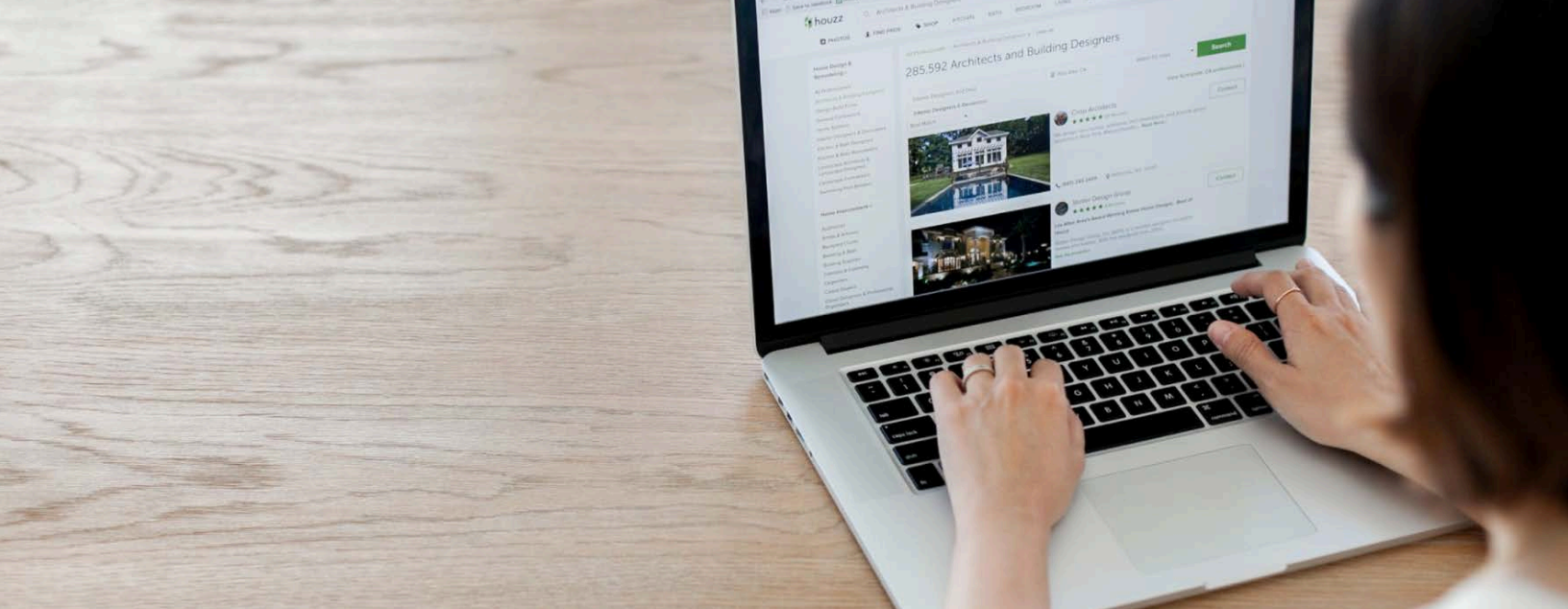
Amplify your impact

In addition to your Pro+ program, which is already increasing your exposure, you can amplify the attention your photos get organically. The Houzz photostream displays photos based on an algorithm that takes multiple elements into consideration, such as image size, keywords, search filters, descriptions and locations. For image size, keep in mind that photos must be 1000 pixels wide to show up in the photostream and 2400 pixels wide to show up on Retina displays. Detailed descriptions also help when homeowners search for specific terms.

“Once I upload photos, I’ll tag them with brands, products, and details about actual material and finishes because a lot of times homeowners are searching for those specific things,” Julie Lehite of KabCo says. “The more informative I can make the descriptions and keywords, the more likely users are to find the photo.”

PRO TIP: TAKE A SHORTCUT

“When I’m uploading a lot of photos of the same room or outdoor area, I can usually use the same description and keywords for each,” Morgan Tedford of System Pavers says. “There’s a neat function on Houzz that lets me copy and paste the keywords and description from one image to the next so I don’t have to write it for each photo.”



Put your photos to work

Savvy pros know that photographs can work for them in more ways than one. During consultations, show potential clients your projects on Houzz so they can react to your work and better communicate what they envision for their project. Encouraging them to start an Ideabook filled with your photos will help keep you on the same page for the next meeting. Make sure they add you as a collaborator!

Some pros use their photographs to request reviews from clients, if they haven't already written one. Once your photos are uploaded to Houzz, email the project link to the client along with a request for a review. They'll be reminded of your great work and enthusiastic about letting other homeowners know about the services you provide.

ASK YOUR ACCOUNT MANAGER

One unique benefit of Pro+ is your dedicated Houzz account manager who can help you upload photos, add keywords and organize your projects. Ask your account manager to help you figure out the best process for getting great photos and uploading them consistently, so you can make sure your latest projects are attracting new customers on a regular basis.