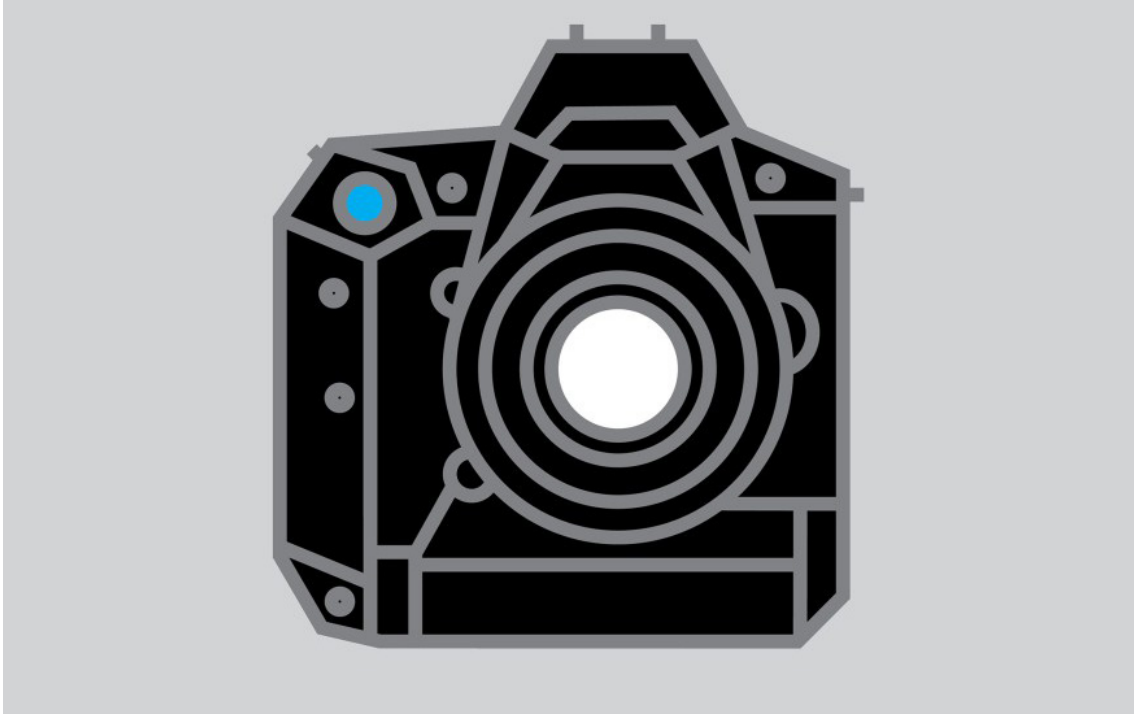


How to Commission an Architectural Photographer

Best Practices

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Photography lets architects chronicle and promote their work. But not all photos—and all photographers—are created equal. Below, design and photography professionals lend some advice on finding the right artist, prepping for the shoot, and more.

Finding and Selecting a Photographer

Knowing what kind of photographer to hire requires knowing what kind of photographs a project needs. Francesco Breganze, founding partner of the New York-based interdisciplinary design practice Spazio Primario, breaks those needs down into four categories: editorial, technical, marketing, and photos for internal use.

While more informal photos, such as those for tracking construction progress or issues, can be taken by staff, portfolio or marketing photos require a professional. But when it comes to finding the right person for a specific job, Breganze often relies on design colleagues for recommendations. “You need to find a photographer with your taste, that can reflect the feeling of your project in their photos,” he says. “That is why we constantly pay attention to [who took] our colleagues’ photos in magazines and websites. I think that is the most powerful advertisement for photographers.”

Katie Gutierrez, co-founder of the Coral Gables, FL.-based interior design firm Errez Design Studio has also found photographers through word-of-mouth, scouring photo credits, and reviewing online portfolios. “At the end of the day,” she says, photographs are “all you have when you hand over the keys.”

But not every shoot has to be magazine quality, and there are less expensive options for basic documentation of projects. Gutierrez points to the on-demand real estate photography service Obeo, which connects designers to less experienced photographers for smaller jobs.

Negotiating Rights

Before the camera shutters start clicking, the terms of the shoot and its outcome should be established. “It’s important to figure out what your rights are from the outset,” says Erica Stoller, director of the Mamaroneck, N.Y.-based architectural photography firm and archive Esto, which represents more than a dozen architectural photographers and licenses their work.

Typically, Stoller says, the photographer retains the copyright to the images, licensing them to firms for

specified uses for a limited length of time. Some architects may choose to license the photographs in perpetuity for long-term use in their own marketing materials or to provide for free to print and online publications, as well as for use on social media. Architects can reduce how much they pay for licensing fees by deciding which photos they will use more often and those that they may only need for a single use. Stoller says knowing up front if the photos will be used by any of the other project team members, such as an engineering firm or a product manufacturer, is also critical to determining fees and what components of the project the photographer should focus on.

Prepping for the Shoot

The shoot itself requires a significant amount of preparation. Stoller, daughter of renowned architectural photographer Ezra Stoller, offers a checklist of things to consider ahead of time, including everything from scouting visits to determining the equipment and props needed for different seasons and times of day. The architect and photographer should work closely throughout the planning and preparation process to get the best results. “You want someone who understands what the

design problem was, and how the design solved the problem,” she says.

During the shoot itself, the designer should be an active participant. “It’s a very demanding day or two,” says Mary Burnham, AIA, partner of Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects in New York. Her firm often has the project manager and a marketing person on site during a shoot to guide the photographer. “We almost always go in with a set of floor plans and arrows where we think we want to shoot,” she says. “You have to line up all the shots you want to get. There’s not a whole lot of time for fooling around.”

And though photographers are often given a fair amount of autonomy, many designers say they help direct the shoot. “We stand right behind the photographer with every photo they take,” Gutierrez says. Breganze compares the relationship to a joint venture. “Trust your photographer because they usually know what they’re doing,” he says. “But you have to be honest, and not be afraid to communicate about changing the angle or the light.”

