



# PHOTO FINISH

By Regina Ludes

Lisa Harris, CRS, with RE/MAX Center outside Atlanta, Georgia, sometimes must navigate around steep hills to capture the best shot of a newly listed home.



In these situations, she uses a drone to take aerial photos from above the trees.

"Some homes are located up on a hill or down a sloped road. I've seen agents stand on their cars to take photos to show that it's a level lot," Harris says. "When buyers arrive for a showing, they're disappointed to see that it isn't level like in the photo. I like to show that the home is on a hill to target buyers who might be interested in that type of home."

With a majority of buyers beginning their home search online, using quality photography to capture a home's best features is more important than ever. Without photography, the home would likely linger on the market. Photography isn't just a tool to help you sell a home; photos—whether traditional headshots or candid home images on social media—are a critical part of marketing yourself. With some planning, staging and the right technical equipment, agents can get the right photo every time.

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of homebuyers say they won't consider looking at a property if it doesn't have listing photos.

For more photography strategies, watch the recording of Five Elements of a Photo that Sells Homes presented by Jack Cotton, CRS, at [CRS.com](https://www.crs.com).

## PREP AND STAGE FOR PHOTO SHOOTS



According to the National Association of REALTORS®, 87% of homebuyers say they won't consider looking at a property if it doesn't have listing photos. Good photography is the best way to get people to view a home in person, says Rebecca Sabot, a REALTOR® with RE/MAX Capital in Bismarck, North Dakota. "If there's no photography, there's no pull to the buyer."

Sabot understands the importance of getting the right shot. Before entering real estate, Sabot worked as a commercial photographer, specializing in product and fashion photography. She says prepping the home and staging are keys to creating the best images. Details matter, so take time to move furniture that will detract from the features you want to highlight. Check if the curtains hang evenly, electrical cords are hidden and the trash can is out of sight. Rolling up area rugs and moving them out of the way can make the room appear larger.

The biggest mistake is poor lighting, resulting in images that appear too dark. "Our eyes see more than a camera does," Sabot says. "We have to make adjustments so the camera captures what our eyes see. A good photographer will make sure you're getting the best exposure of both the inside and what appears outside the windows to create a balanced image. When agents do their own photos, they rarely do that well."

## GET CANDID FOR SOCIAL MEDIA



While Harris hires a professional for her listing photos, she shoots her own photos for social media. Harris sets her iPhone 12 on the 0.5x setting, which allows her to zoom out to capture the whole room. She then posts the photos on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn as part of a "coming soon" marketing campaign. Harris says she likes to focus on the neighborhood's lifestyle amenities, such as golf courses, swimming pools, clubhouses and wineries. During listing shoots, Harris takes a photo or two with the photographer and posts it to her sites to show followers what she is doing that day.

"Most people want to see the best photos for the listings, but they also want to see casual shots of the amenities and community lifestyle," Harris says.

Harris uses an app called Splice, which allows her to edit photos and video plus add captions before posting to her sites. The app is easy to use and costs about \$60 a year. Another app she uses is Photofy, an image and video tool with preformatted sayings and graphics that can be added to photos.

For agents taking their own photos, Harris offers several suggestions. Set the resolution at the highest level, and use a tripod if your hands tend to be unsteady. If the house appears dark, bring additional lighting. Keep all your devices charged. On windy days, the drone battery life can drain faster, so bring a portable battery as a backup.

## WORK WITH A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER



Though Sabot could do her own listing photography, she prefers to hire a professional. She chooses from several photographers in her area and hires one depending on the price point of the listing. She then selects which photos best represent the property. “I carefully choose which photos to use and in what order. I want to create a story for the buyer,” Sabot says.

Jill Guenther, CRS, a broker with Don Nunamaker in Hood River, Oregon, says some agents in her area use their phones to take their listing photos, but she prefers to hire a professional. During photo shoots, she shows the photographer the features

she wants to highlight, such as vaulted ceilings or polished wood floors.

“We’ll walk around the home before a photo shoot to see what areas buyers might love. Good photographers will know what to shoot because they know what’s important,” Guenther says. For example, if a home has spectacular views of the mountains, she picks a day with full sun to show off those views.

However, if a home isn’t in the best condition, Guenther will help the owner move clutter so it doesn’t show up in the photos. She may post only three or four of the best images to accompany the listing, then note in the private remarks section to look beyond the clutter.

Good photography, Guenther says, is about creating positive first impressions. “There’s something about the right angle and right lighting that makes a difference in the listing photo,” Guenther says. “That first image might be the outside of the house, or it’s that moment when you walk in the front door. You need to be aware of the way items are placed inside the home, and it helps to tidy up.”

## DON'T OVERLOOK HEADSHOTS

When marketing yourself, don’t overlook headshot photos, which should be updated every few years. “Your headshot is part of your brand,” says Sabot. Think about your wardrobe and what colors look best on you. Make sure you feel comfortable with what you’re wearing. Have your hair and makeup done professionally beforehand. On the day of the shoot, discuss with the photographer what your goals are for the session.

Also think about the message you might be sending to buyers and sellers. If your headshot is outdated, clients might assume that other facets of your business are outdated, too.

“Great pictures take work. While a photographer can help make an image look good, making the home look its best is up to the agent and seller,” Sabot says. **TRS**

