



## *Picturing Your Work: Tips for Hiring a Professional Architectural Photographer*

*Juliet Farmer, ConcreteNetwork.Com Columnist*



The word "photography" is derived from two Greek words, meaning "light" and "stylus" or "paintbrush," and taken together they mean "painting with light." In other words, it's an art form. Which is why, when it comes to showcasing your work, it may be time to hire a professional photographer to capture your creativity for the world to see. After all, the products you create are your "calling card" for years to come. [Continue >](#)



Northwest Architectural Photography  
[www.educationaldesign.net/photos.htm](http://www.educationaldesign.net/photos.htm)

“A photographer’s images should knock your socks off,” says Dale Christopher Lang, Ph.D., AIAP, with Northwest Architectural Photography ([www.educationaldesign.net/photos.htm](http://www.educationaldesign.net/photos.htm)) in Washington State. “If you are not impressed with their work, find someone else that you like. You may also want to get references just to be sure that the photographer acts professionally and will be prompt and timely, especially if there is a deadline involved.”

## Calling in Experts

Like most professions, photography has specialties, including the one you’ll need architectural photography. According to the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), a trade association for working publication photographers, commercial photographers often specialize in a certain type of work, a unique style of imagery of specific geographic locales.

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“Architectural photography is a real specialty that requires specific equipment and techniques that are unique to the architectural shooter,” say John and Cassidy Olson of Olson Photographic, LLC ([www.olsonphotographic.com](http://www.olsonphotographic.com)) in Killingworth, Connecticut. “Cameras and lenses, lighting equipment and technique are all unique to accomplish truly outstanding architectural images.”



## What Makes An Expert Photographer

“I am totally opposed to thinking it is adequate for a photographer to shoot interiors with no supplemental lights, or make multiple exposure photos (which I consider sloppy) and ‘fix them’ in Photoshop,” says Mike Penney, owner of Photo By Mike ([www.photobymike.com](http://www.photobymike.com)), located in Seattle, Washington.

“So, a question to ask (if you are seeking magazine-quality architectural photography) is: what do you use for lights? Who cares what the brand names are. That isn’t point. The point is if the photographer says, ‘Oh, we only use natural light,’ then get someone else....[and] a photographer who doesn’t own a level isn’t an architectural photographer.”

Doug J. Scott, owner of Doug Scott ([www.dougscott.com](http://www.dougscott.com)) in Washington state, adds, “Is your photographer professional in all respects? Image quality and deliverables, response time, planning, appearance, communication, transportation, packaging, turn time and organization all add up to the services you are buying. If you want to really get to know a photographer, ask him for a close look inside his equipment cases. Organization will be a solid indication of the pride he takes in his work.”

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All the experts agree—you get what you pay for. “Whatever your current budget is for the photography of your projects, be ready to increase it,” says Scott. “Now more than ever, it requires significant capital to remain on the cutting edge of image making. If you commission a photographer based mainly on price, you’ll likely be the one who calls us with the ‘we’ve tried other photographers’ story.”



## Licensing and Usage Rights

In addition, photographers concur that in general, the most misunderstood aspect of hiring a photographer is that of licensing and usage rights. "Legally, photographers automatically own the copyright for all images that they are commissioned to shoot, unless they specifically license or give those rights away," explains Dan Gair, owner of Blind Dog Photo, Inc. ([www.blinddogphoto.com](http://www.blinddogphoto.com)) in Kittery, Maine.

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"This means that only those usage rights that the client negotiates for are included in the pricing," adds Gair. He says that the more rights a client requires, the higher the price, and that factors such as length of use, print ad placement specifics, Web use and geographic coverage can all affect usage fees.

"While it is always possible to find photographers that don't manage their rights or simply give them away, that lack of management almost inevitably goes hand-in-hand with lack of experience and inferior quality," he observes.

Before you contact a photographer, consider how you'll be using the pictures. Will they be used in brochures and other collateral materials? How about on your website? Will they be used in direct mail or magazine advertisements? Your answers will help guide the negotiation process.

A good place to start looking is ASMP's Find a Photographer ([www.findaphotographer.org](http://www.findaphotographer.org)), where you can search by photographic specialty or geographic location, as well as the Advertising Photographers of America ([www.apanational.com](http://www.apanational.com)).



## Working with a Pro

First, let the photographer know your tastes. "I often ask new clients to show me images from trade or consumer publications that they either like or don't like so that I can tune in on the style of photography that they are looking for," says Gair, adding that for the past several years, he's been shooting digital with the camera directly tethered to a laptop computer, which enables him and his clients to thoroughly proof the shots for composition and lighting while on location and ensures that his clients get what they are after.



Scott Van Dyke Photography  
[www.scottvandykestudio.com](http://www.scottvandykestudio.com)

Next, remember this is a collaborative process. "I find that most of my clients already have the shot in mind," observes Scott Van Dyke, owner of Scott Van Dyke Photography ([www.scottvandykestudio.com](http://www.scottvandykestudio.com)) in Southern California. "We always discuss this beforehand. What I do is give them the shot they are asking for and Then give them my interpretation...I have noticed that some clients feel uncomfortable letting the photographer know their ideas...I'm all about the creative process and how two of us will come up with a great shot."

## It's All in the Details

There are lots of little things you can do to help ensure you get the best shots possible. Penney recommends shooting interiors before things get worn, dirty or used, and before the space is filled with undesirable client-provided art or furniture. He adds that exteriors may have to be shot a year or two years after project completion to provide for more mature landscaping



He also advises putting a "permission to photograph for any use" clause in construction contracts, as well as getting the tenants out of the space for the photography (or shooting before occupancy). "Sometimes we work all night to avoid people problems," Penney adds.



Blakely Photography  
[www.alan.blakely.com](http://www.alan.blakely.com)

Alan Blakely, owner of Blakely Photography ([www.alan.blakely.com](http://www.alan.blakely.com)) in Salt Lake City, Utah, adds that a property must be "photo-ready" when the photographer arrives. "Ask the photographer for suggestions as to how best prepare the property for the shoot," he says. "This will save [you] both time and money."

### **Communication is also key.**

"The most important thing that a client can do to ensure desirable results is to tell us what is important for him/her to show or feature," observes Olson. "Unique characteristics, important details and relationship to other elements are key for us to understand. Once we have this knowledge, we explain what the medium of photography can (or can't) do and what to expect in the final images."

### **Dollars and Sense**

Remember, you get what you pay for. "Avoid the nickel and dime mentality," says Scott. "You can quickly kill the creativity of your photographer by always talking about cost. This can result in an adversarial relationship. We have actually had requests for quotes even before the scope of the photography is provided. This is a dead-end street, since the inquiry is due to a lack of familiarity with the actual value of high-end imagery."



Thus, Scott advises that if you increase the scope of a shoot, you should expect to pay more. "Respect the extra effort and added value created by your photographer...such an attitude will result in a highly motivated photographer," he adds.

Here's a sampling of rates submitted by various photographers:



"My rates vary according to the end use of the material produced," explains Gair. "In general, a regional client can expect to pay about \$2,500 for a day of shooting that would include a bundle of usage rights adequate to cover all of his or her promotional needs. A manufacturing client using the material for a national or international campaign could expect to pay more, while less expensive pricing can be arranged for small independent clients with strictly local usage needs."

"When I'm working with lots of lights and magazine quality is expected (and I need an assistant to work with me), we bill about \$1,500 a day," says Penney. "This is on the low end of people I think I compete with who may charge up to \$3,000 for the same thing...But I am working more than they are."

"I quote a job taking many factors into consideration, how is it going to be used, how long, for what purpose," explains Tim Lee, owner of Tim Lee Photography ([www.timleephoto.com](http://www.timleephoto.com)) in New Milford, Connecticut. "A job for a national ad will cost much more than a shot for Web use only. A typical one-day shoot for a small company that wants to use the photos on their website, make a brochure and maybe advertise regionally would be in the neighborhood of \$2,000."

Tim Lee Photography  
[www.timleephoto.com](http://www.timleephoto.com)



Scott notes, "We bill based on a 'Per Image Usage Fee' concept. This fee can currently be as low as \$250 (a high-volume shoot) or as high as \$6,000 (i.e., national ad campaign). In any case, these fees include our comprehensive photography packages, containing the highest quality components to facilitate a firm's use of our imagery in today's marketplace."

Scott Van Dyke Photography has two rates. One is a day rate for non-major advertising clients (interiors designers or people who do not plan on advertising on a national level like in a magazine), and the other is a day rate for advertising clients.

Van Dyke says he charges \$2,500 per day plus expenses for non-major advertising clients (an assistant or two at \$250 to \$275 a day, film, processing, polaroid and scans, or a post production fee for digital that can run anywhere from \$400 to \$1,500 a day, depending on how many shots were taken). His rate for advertising clients is \$3,500 plus expenses and a usage fee, which depends on how the photos will be used.

Olson Photographic generally charges an hourly rate of \$275 for the first two hours with a two-hour minimum, and \$125 per hour for each additional hour. And Northwest Architectural Photography's rates are \$125 per hour for the shoot, \$85 per hour for editing, and \$75 for the initial set up of each space.

"I also offer half-day and full-day rates that are more economical than the hourly rate," explains Dr. Lang of Northwest Architectural Photography. "Multiple projects or buildings receive a discount unless they are really tough."



Blakely sums it up, adding, "It's always best to ask exactly what you're getting for the rate quoted...Clients should inquire as to the usage rights the photographer grants for the price quoted." He adds that another important consideration is the fact that assistants, props, travel, film/processing, digital files, prints, CDs, etc., are usually always billed in addition to the photography fee quoted.



## **Ways to Save:**

The good news is there are several ways you can reduce the cost of professional architectural photography.

"Many photographers will offer package prices for multiple shoots or retainer arrangements for progress photos," says Gary Easter of Gary Easter Photographics ([www.garyeasterphoto.com](http://www.garyeasterphoto.com)) in southeast Michigan. "Clients who have a need for photography on a regular basis may also negotiate a retainer program with a photographer. I have an arrangement with a client that stipulates that each time I am in the area of his large project doing aerial photos I will also shoot his project. I am able to offer him a rate that is significantly lower than if he were paying for the whole shoot."

There are also co-ops.

"One great way to save money is to participate in a multi-party contract with the architect, construction manager or other contractors that might have interest in the work," explains Gair. "This is not simply a divvying-up of the price, however. Make certain to negotiate the arrangements with the photographer or his/her representative, so that all of the various uses by all parties are licensed and accounted for."



Penney recommends approaching real estate and leasing agents, property management companies, architects, interior designers, landscape architects, city archives, historical societies, garden tour groups, subcontractors and commercial product vendors, all of which have some kind of budget to market themselves.

"The overall bill might be quite high, but once you divide it all up it has to be a good deal for everyone," Penney adds. "[But] be specific and careful about negotiating rights to the use of the work. Limited use may result in a lower fee. For example, if all you need is a photo for a contest I will bill you less than a full rights-released photo. Of course, you can't just go down the road and use the photo anyway you want or you are going to get the rest of the bill, so be specific."



Treve Johnson Photography  
[www.treve.com](http://www.treve.com)

"I have a concrete client that I have shot for eight years...We have a very nice barter arrangement," explains Lee. "I was remodeling my bathroom and loved their product (but couldn't afford it) and they agreed to do my bath in exchange for photos. A word of caution, make sure that you quote the job as any other and you receive the same value in photographic services."

Scott recommends asking your photographer about multi-client discounts. "Some photographers offer percentage discounts to each client when more than one client is to receive 'Usage License/Deliverables' from the photographer," he adds. "A 25 percent discount per client is not unusual in a two-client scenario."



According to Lang, the biggest draw on his time is the cleaning up, arranging furniture or objects, setting up lights, ladders or lifts, and looking for the perfect lighting angles. “I would say that 80 percent is set up and 20 percent is photographing,” he adds. “Often my clients will come and help set up the shots with me to save money. Otherwise I need to hire a helper or stylist to help me set up a particular scene.”

Lastly, Treve Johnson of Treve Johnson Photography ([www.treve.com](http://www.treve.com)) in California’s Bay Area, says, “I know architects that simply take snapshots, and then they send the snapshots to magazines with a query. If the magazine picks up the story, they will more than likely send a photographer at their expense, and you may be able to obtain rights to use the resulting images for a fraction of the cost of hiring a photographer.”

“If I was a [decorative concrete contractor], I would want my company’s image to say quality, value, professionalism, understanding and credibility,” concludes Jason S. Gray of i-Pix Productions ([www.ipixproductions.com](http://www.ipixproductions.com)) in Valencia, Calif. “Many people don’t understand that when it comes to marketing, photographs are the first thing a potential client sees and understands. If a picture is worth a thousand words, I would want every one of them saying something great about my company.”



i-Pix Productions  
[www.ipixproductions.com](http://www.ipixproductions.com)



## Sherpa info

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Juliet Farmer is a Sacramento, California-based freelance writer. In addition to writing for The Concrete Network, Farmer is also a regular contributor to several publications, including Sacramento magazine, FanFare, Wholesale Source, Bridal Sources, Smart Meetings, Physical Therapy, Southern California Physician and NurseWeek. She's also a columnist for Inside Publications in Sacramento.

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## Sherpa info

### SUMMIT DATE

This document reached the summit (was created) on December 28, 2005 and is based on the best information available to the Sherpa at that time. To check for updates please click here <http://www.ConcreteSherpa.com/photographer>.

### NAVIGATION & USER TIPS

You can move around this guide by using your mouse or keyboard arrows. Left mouse button goes to the next page, right mouse button goes to previous page. Click on the right arrow (→) for the next page and the left arrow (←) to go the previous page.

#### KEYBOARD SHORT CUTS

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Full screen/normal screen view	[Ctrl] [L]	[⌘] [L]

### ABOUT THE CONCRETE SHERPA

The Concrete Sherpa is a team of people that represent the experience, teaching and learning of our team members and other industry leaders *on a mission to make life better for the concrete contractor*. We are an idea center striving to deliver thought provoking ideas based on “Concrete Advice for Business and Life” to stimulate you to reach new heights. As a user, you should remember to consider all information you receive, here at the Concrete Sherpa or elsewhere, not as a *cast in concrete* recommendation, but rather as an idea for you to consider and ponder.



## Sherpa info

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### THE JOURNEY LEADING TO THE CONCRETE SHERPA PROJECT

The Concrete Sherpa Project (A Sherpa is a “guide”) was born at The Concrete Network in mid 2004. Here is how it happened:

The biggest surprise, or gift, since starting The Concrete Network in 1999 has been the concrete contractor friends from around the country we've made and witnessing the passion they have for what they do. These people include Dave Pettigrew, up in the San Francisco Bay Area, or the Verlennich brothers in Minnesota, or Bob Harris in Georgia, the list goes on and on. It's quite inspiring.

We were once asked, “How are you so excited every day about concrete?” Well the answer is simple, it is impossible to not be excited about concrete when you have the job we do—interacting with hundreds of concrete contractors from every state in the country.

The thing we've learned about concrete contractors is that most are passionate *craftsmen*—they are often less passionate and experienced in the “office stuff”. Human nature channels us to do what we are most comfortable with; learning how to use a new saw-cutting tool is comfortable; learning and implementing a new estimating strategy, or job management tool, is not so comfortable.



## Sherpa info

### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...

So Sherpa was born to provide FREE and easy to use information on topics many contractors are not too comfortable with.

- Concrete Sherpa is here to provide help to contractors who are often 'Lone Rangers' and don't have anyone to get solid business advice from.
- Concrete Sherpa is here to provide help for contractors who have to work too hard and too many hours in their business, and one day realize they need to work *on their business, not in their business*.
- Have fun with Concrete Sherpa and go faster towards reaching success than you might have on your own.
- To skeptics who think something free can't be valuable, or there must be a trick- visit Concrete Sherpa and decide for yourself.

We hope you make great use of the Concrete Sherpa and it helps you to become an awesome success for yourself, your family, your church, and your community.

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