

INDUSTRY: RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

Is house really picture-perfect?

Real estate ad photos must entice buyer

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Most home buyers – about 77 percent, according to the National Association of Realtors – start their search by looking at home listings on the Internet. But the home photos they find on real estate Web sites can vary widely – from a single grainy shot to a gallery of views, inside and out.

Give the real estate agents the credit, or the blame. They're responsible for the photos, and not all of them seem to understand what's at stake.

With photos, "you're giving buyers a reason to go and see this house," said Joseph Cooper of Realtec Consulting in Washington Township, a former real estate agent who now works as a professional photographer shooting houses.

"Homes that aren't visually appealing on the Internet are going to attract less attention," said Norm Fisher, a Canadian real estate agent who has created the Unbelievably Bad Real Estate Photos Hall of Fame on the Internet to spotlight the problem.

Fisher's hall of shame showcases graphic crimes like a kitchen that appears to be tilting because it was photographed at an angle; rooms in shadow because the photographer apparently never heard of a flash; and a kid's bedroom with an unmade bed and clothes scattered on the floor.

Even worse, some agents don't even include photos, or include just one exterior shot.

But most successful agents include a number of shots. Kathryn Platt, a top agent with Burgdorff



JIM ANNESS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Joseph Cooper of Realtec Consulting in Washington Township photographing a house in Old Tappan for best effect. Many real estate ad photos are blurry or not exposed properly, and sales suffer as a result.

ERA in Hillsdale, said she always includes at least six to eight shots on her listings.

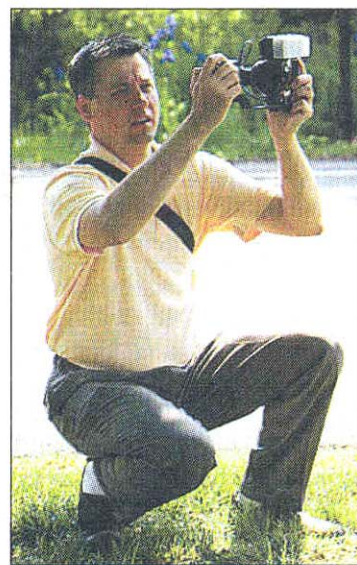
How can real estate agents make their listing photographs sizzle?

To start with, your photography technique should be good. There's no excuse for blurry or grainy photos. Platt said she and her assistants make sure to put on the lights, open the curtains, and remove clutter before they take photos. And they take multiple shots so they have more to choose from when they get back to the office.

"It comes down to taking the time," Platt said.

With the most expensive listings, Platt hires Cooper to take the shots.

Of course, just as the most talented photographer can't turn the average American into An-



gelina Jolie or Brad Pitt, there's no way to make beautiful photos of some houses. If the interior is

shabby and the landscaping is grubby, how exactly can a real estate agent make that property look pretty in a photo?

In those cases, said Cooper, the house needs to be staged – with clutter removed, or at least shoved to the side, out of the camera's view.

"If you can do some staging to make it look more appealing, that's great," agreed Fisher.

Still, you probably can't turn an ugly duckling into a swan, and that's OK.

"There's a market for those properties," Fisher said. "If you represent them accurately online and if the price is attractive enough, you're going to attract the right buyer."

Residential real estate news appears Wednesdays.
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