

Property Preparation

Everyone wants the property to look its best. I want it to look good to have an easy and quick photo-shoot, and the Realtor® and seller should want it to look good to sell fast. And buyers want to walk into a home that's ready to be theirs.



So here are some general and specific suggestions for getting the property ready for photography. Some of these points relate to getting ready for showings, too.

- David Reed, Photographer

General Tips

Places to Hide Things

I generally don't photograph the insides of closets, so that's a great place to hide clutter, dog beds, etc. Consider coat closet, bedroom closets, utility closets, pantries. I also generally don't photograph the garage or the laundry room, but check with your Realtor® whether or not they'll be wanting me to photograph those because they're also a great place to hide things like pets. Deep sinks and bathtubs are also a great place to hide things from the camera. The oven and microwave are also a good place to hide things so long as you remember to take them out before turning it on. Don't ask me how I know this.

Temperature Controls

You want buyers to be comfortable. For showings, turn on the air conditioning or the heat, whichever is needed to make the house a comfortable temperature. You don't want potential buyers to come in and want to run back to the car because it's too hot or cold. Photographers like it to be comfortable, too. (hint hint) I don't want ceiling fans on for photography, but on at low or medium is great for showings – but not so fast that they wobble or make noise.

Big Things vs. Little Things

Remember: these pictures are for the Internet and brochures. As such, a window smudge or some dog hair on the carpet or some dust on the fans are going to be mere pixels in size -- if that -- while the pile of paperwork on the kitchen counter is going to be fairly large. Spend your time working on the big things to get ready for photography and showings.

Showings

Does the house have to look for showings like it did in the photographs? Exactly? No. You can probably leave the paper towels on the counter, for example. But another huge pile of paperwork should be stashed in the microwave. Note: Get into the habit of checking the oven *before* turning it on. How I know this is not important.

Indoors

Declutter, Declutter, Declutter

This one can't be emphasized too much. Remove clutter. Magazines, mail, paperwork, kids' homework, the kids' artwork on the walls, refrigerator magnets -- everything. Hide the remote controls. If there's a bottle of water on your nightstand, hide it. A few books on nightstands and end-tables are okay, but not like my stack that's ten high.

Lights

Check all lights. If there are bulbs burned out, replace them. It may not seem like much, but non-working lights tell potential buyers that even the simplest maintenance hasn't been done and may make them wonder about bigger maintenance items. Under-cabinet lighting looks great but not if only half of them work. Lights you may not consider: range hood lights, bathroom vanity lights, ceiling fan lights you seldom use, that single light over the bathtub -- pretty much if there can be a bulb in it there should be and it should be working.

Remove Anything Seasonal

We all want the property to sell fast. Just in case it doesn't, let's not advertise it and fix the photoshoot date in concrete. Having pumpkins in the pictures kinda advertises that we took them in October or November. Stockings hanging by the fireplace...well...you can figure it out.

Remove Anything "Polarizing"

This may offend some folks -- sorry. But I don't think you care who buys your house. That being said, it may put off some buyers if they see a gigantic cross on the wall and they're of a different faith. For some they may have a negative emotional response to a huge Dallas Cowboys banner in the bonus room. Same with political signs outside or in the window. "Neutral" is what you're going for here.

Huge Family Pictures

Small family pictures aren't usually a big deal; however, huge ones are. Do you really want that huge close-up of your daughter on the Internet? Stand back at the corner of the room and look: if you can identify people in the pictures, so can everyone else. Some agents will have the seller remove *all* personal pictures, and that's fine, too.

"Questionable" Art

I was at an open house one time and there was a series of huge nude portraits on the master bedroom's walls. Tasteful and artistic, mostly, but still obviously nude women. As I was about to leave I saw a woman with two young children arriving. I hung around to watch the reaction. Let's just say it wasn't pleasant what she said to the showing agent after walking into the master bedroom with her kids.

Pets

If you've got pets, remove toys, beds, scratching posts, food and water bowls, litter boxes, etc. Also, please put the pets in an area where they won't be wandering around and getting into the pictures. If I had a nickel for every time some dog photo-bombed my shot, I'd have a lot of nickels. Additionally, we don't want them to escape as I'm opening doors.

Bathrooms

Remove as much as you can from countertops – things like toothbrushes, soap dispensers, and tissue boxes. At the very least move them to the very end of the counter by the door. If the bathroom has a separate water closet, put things where they can't be seen from the main door such as atop the toilet tank or in the bathtub. Check with your Realtor® on whether or not they want your throw rugs in the pictures. Or maybe it's time to buy new ones. Remove shower items that can be seen, too, or at least put them where they can't be seen in the bathtub.

If you've got a lot of shampoo and soap bottles in your shower, you may want to consider an easy-to-carry shower-caddy to remove shampoo and soaps and things from the shower quickly and easily for showings.

Kitchen

Kitchens help sell homes. Remove anything from the counter that distracts such as rolls of paper towels, the dish drainer, dirty dishes, or a bottle of dish soap. Some color such as cookbooks and small decorations are okay. We can move things around to hide them as needed, but you can't do that during a showing. Remove any dish towels, dirty dishes, or other clutter. Make sure the hood lights all work. Your blender and mixer and toaster probably aren't part of the home's price, so those should be removed, too.

Some agents will ask that everything be removed from the counter, and that's their choice. I think that looks *too* clean – sterile almost – rather than warm and welcoming.

Dining Areas

Some people like place settings out, some don't. I don't particularly care so long as it's simple and not distracting from the room or the house. A giant centerpiece doesn't help. Placemats can hide glare from an open window, but a giant wine or water glass can create even more. Check the lights in the china cabinet, too.

Offices

If it's like my office at home, you may be tempted to just close the door. However, if that's not an option, get a box and put all paperwork and desk items in it to move out of sight. Try to cluster cables together neatly.

Bedrooms

Make the beds. Fluff the pillows. Check the dust ruffle. If you stash things under the bed, push them back so they can't be seen. Close all closet doors.

Kids' rooms are probably the toughest with toys and things but do the best you can.

Outdoors

Vehicles

Remove all vehicles from the outside of the property. This doesn't just mean move them to the curb, but put them in such a place where they can't be seen from inside either; don't want to see your car outside the dining room window. (You'll notice I'll park far away, too.) If you've got neighbors parked where their cars can be seen from inside, perhaps ask them if they can move them for 20 minutes.

Landscaping

Does the grass need watering? Mowing? Raking? Then water, mow, or rake. If you've got a pet, clean up after them in the yard. Probably won't show up in the picture, but I've got to traipse around out there, too. If your hedges look really uneven, consider hiring a landscaper or trimming them yourself. If you've got a security sign outside, I'll move that and replace it.

Hoses and Equipment

Hoses should be coiled/rolled up or, better yet, put away and out of sight. Yard equipment should be stored out of sight. This includes garbage cans – in the garage or out of sight on the side of the house or behind a gate. I often won't photograph a narrow side yard, so that's a good option for hiding things.

Swimming Pools

Remove and put away any pool toys, floats, and cleaning equipment. You can leave the sweep and chlorinator unless you really want to remove those and stash them away, but please do so *at least an hour* before I arrive so that the area around the pool can dry off. If you have umbrellas around the pool, put them up with any chairs or chaises underneath them. If there are a lot of leaves in the pool, skim it. I can Photoshop-out a dozen leaves; a thousand, not so much.

Furniture

If you have patio furniture, remove the covers and stash the covers out of sight. If you've got an outdoor dining area, wipe the table off and consider simple yet colorful placemats and dishes. Be sure to get stuff that's not breakable.

Barbecues

Barbecues are great, but they should be clean; if it's stainless, give it a good wipe down. Tools should be out of sight -- throw them into the barbecue if you can't come up with anyplace else. Bags of charcoal and bottles of lighter fluid should be removed, too. If the grill isn't very attractive, consider a cover.

Seasonal Items

Remove anything seasonal such as holiday lights, a blow-up Santa, pumpkins, 4th Of July decorations, a big banner welcoming spring, or that posable life-size skeleton with the cigar and Martini glass (now you know what my house looks like at Halloween).

Lights

If we're doing a twilight/evening shots, make sure *all* outside lights are working. This includes any landscape lights, walkway lights, and pool lights.

Windows

Stand outside and look at the house. Are all the blinds open? In the same position? If you have plantation shutters position them "flat" with all the slats horizontal to the ground. If you have some plantation and some blinds, make them all flat for consistency. Cleaning the windows may help, but a small smudge isn't really going to be seen.

Checklist

Outdoors

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hoses wrapped up | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pool toys put away |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cars not in driveway | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dog toys put away |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lawn raked | <input type="checkbox"/> | Towels put away |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lawn watered | <input type="checkbox"/> | Dog messes cleaned up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Window treatments consistent | <input type="checkbox"/> | Barbecue cleaned/covered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Windows clean | <input type="checkbox"/> | Barbecue tools put away |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights all working | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hedges trimmed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lawn equipment put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | Garbage cans away |

Indoors

Bedrooms

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Beds made with pillows | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights on and bulbs all working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Clothes put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fans off |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Toys put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | An item or two on a nightstand |

Bathrooms

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Counters cleared | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carpets/mats straight or hidden |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Nothing visible in showers | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights on and all bulbs working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mirrors cleaned | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Dining Room

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Place-settings out, simple | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights on and bulbs all working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Glassware out | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fans off |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Centerpiece but not too huge | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights in China cabinet working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Chairs all match and placed | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Living and Family Room

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|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Televisions off | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights on and all bulbs working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Magazines neat or gone | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fans off |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Remotes put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | Large pictures removed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pet beds put away/hidden | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Kitchen

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Counters reasonably cleared | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights on and all bulbs working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sponges and soap put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights in range hood working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | All food put away | <input type="checkbox"/> | Lights in oven working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Eat-in table/counter set for eating | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pet bowls put away/hidden |