

# Commissioning Architectural Photography

## Identify Your Needs

You and your design team have worked hard to bring your latest project to completion. Solving a variety of problems has challenged your creativity, imagination and determination. You're proud of your work. Now you need to commission a photographer to record your project.

Making sure your project is professionally photographed is an essential step in communicating your ideas and design solutions. The photographers will be used to market your firm's expertise, therefore it is important to collaborate closely with the photographer to ensure the images will convey the information you desire.

## Identify Your Requirements

Before looking for a photographer, define your goals and identify your needs. In doing so, you will be better able to explain the project and find an appropriate photographer in a thoughtful and productive manner.

Identify the design concepts, architectural elements and other features you would like the photographs to communicate. It may be helpful to prioritise these in order of importance. Develop a list of images as a beginning point for discussions with the photographer. Be prepared to explain any special visual criteria needed for your particular purpose.

Consider how the photographs will be integrated into your overall marketing plan. Are the photographs for your archives only? Will they be used in your internally produced publications? Will they be submitted for competitions? Will they be published in trade journals or books? Will they be used in trade or consumer advertisements? Will the photographs be used by others who worked on the project and perhaps by the client?

As the majority of work is now supplied to clients as digital files, (a digital file for a website is totally different in dpi for instance than a digital file required for a brochure). Each image is tailor made by scanning, digital colour spacing and sized to you're the specific requirements to achieve maximum quality for all parties concerned.

By identifying your goals and needs, you will be thoroughly prepared to discuss your specific ideas about the project with the photographer. Clarifying objectives and discussing them at the outset will lead to selecting a photographer who's right for you and for the project to be photographed. This information will also assist the photographer in preparing a proposal and cost estimate consistent with your needs.

## Selecting a Photographer

Australian members of The Society of Advertising, Commercial and Magazine Photographers Ltd (ACMP) can be located through Find a Photographer at [www.acmp.com.au](http://www.acmp.com.au) by geographic location and specialty. After identifying suitable photographers, request portfolio reviews. You may want to see assignments similar in scope and building type to the one you have in mind.

If possible, meet with the photographer well in advance of your deadline to avoid the risk of compromising your hiring decision or the quality of the photography. If circumstances permit, visit the project with the photographers prior to obtaining proposals. Ask for the photographers' suggestions. This will help define the assignment and clarify each photographer's approach. Most commercial photographers have areas of specialisation. A still life studio photographer, for example, may have neither the equipment nor the expertise to approach an architectural assignment.

Architectural photographers frequently excel in many related areas. Some may be adept at photographing interior design, industrial locations and commercial spaces. Others may have more experience with architectural models, exteriors, aerials or construction documentation. Still others may be versed in special lighting, styling or residential spaces. Each area requires special skills and equipment. You may find one photographer to work with for all your photographic needs, or you may prefer to collaborate with several, depending on the project at hand.

A talented photographer who specialises in architecture and interior design should understand your needs and be able to communicate them verbally and visually. Ideally, the photographer you select will become an integral part of your marketing team. Creative talent, professionalism, compatibility, specialised equipment as well as the photographer's enthusiasm and experience should all weigh in your

decision. Matching your needs to the photographer's strengths will assure the greatest degree of success.

## **Pricing the Assignment**

As a creative professional, you understand the importance of accurately defining the scope of work in order to determine design fees. Similarly, to prepare a brief, the photographer must have a detailed description of the assignment including information about image requirements, usage, deadlines, site logistics and other specifics.

If uncertain about your needs, discuss a similar project in the photographer's portfolio with your requirements in mind. This should help to clarify the parameters of the assignment. Commercial photography is priced according to the nature of the work and the client's usage requirements. When the images are used to document and promote design services, rather than advertise products or commercial services, the fee structure is lower. As the use broadens or the number of images to be produced increases, so does the photographer's fee and the costs associated with the assignment.

Creative fees vary among photographers and comprise only a portion of the total cost of an assignment. Factors, which affect fees, include the anticipated use of the images, the photographer's creative talent and experience, production time, equipment, facilities, and staff. Services in addition to the photography itself, such as pre- and post-production time, also must be covered by the creative fee.

## **Information for Estimating**

In addition to the fee, there are other costs specific to an assignment. These typically include film, processing, assistant's fees, travel expenses and photo finishing costs. Other costs may include rental fees for special equipment or props, stylist's charges, location access fees, model fees, special insurance costs and other expenses. The value of photography is determined by various considerations including how widely the images will be viewed, reproduced and distributed. Usage determines a large part of the value and value determines the fee.

## **Determine the Specific Value**

Will the images be used in portfolios? Printed brochures? Award submissions? Editorial reproduction? Corporate publications? Advertisements? Will reprints be required? Will colour

copies be used in your marketing materials? Do you plan to scan the images for your archives or future use? Will the images be used on a website. These are just some of many uses?

If a single client is commissioning an assignment, the photographer will most likely charge a basic fee. If more than one client contributes to the cost of an assignment, a higher fee will be stipulated since the images will be used more extensively. Identify who is commissioning, receiving and using the photographs.

For an accurate cost estimate, it is important to describe the number of images required and the areas to be photographed in specific terms. Also, define your presentation needs. Do you require transparencies, slides, black and white prints, colour prints, digital files or other special photography? Specify the sizes and quantities you will need.

## **Tell the Photographer Whether you Require a Quote or an Estimate**

The quote implies the price is fixed for set parameters and may be competitive or comparative. Competitive quotes are requested when price alone is the deciding factor. Comparative quotes consider additional criteria such as working relationship, experience, style, quality and creative approach.

An estimate, on the other hand, is a fair appraisal of what an assignment should cost based on the information provided. Estimates are usually given in a non-competitive situation and may be flexible depending on the nature of the project. Generally quotes and estimates remain fixed from 30 days from date of issue.

Be aware that changes in the scope of work such as additional images or usage, regardless of how minor, may incur additional charges. It is not unusual for the photographer to ask that changes be approved in writing.

## **Options for Controlling Costs**

What to do if your needs outweigh your budget? Distinguish between your needs and your wants. Consider reducing the number of images instead of cutting corners on quality. Strive to obtain greater value from your photography dollar. There will always be someone willing to photograph your project for less, but bargains can be expensive. Shop for value not price. Know when professional expertise will save money in the long run. Find out what additional

services the photographer can offer to make your job easier, quicker and smoother. Remember that the quality of your photographs is a reflection of your firm's values and professionalism.

If an assignment is out of town, you may want to consider working with a photographer based near the project site. Not only will a local photographer be familiar with the area, but also fees and expenses may be lower.

## **Copyrights and Usage**

Under Federal copyright law, the photographer owns the copyright to the images and licenses specific usage rights to clients by written agreement. Typically, the more extensive the planned usage, the greater the photographer's fee. Prior to photography, negotiate a few based on what you need now, with the understanding that additional rights and related fees can be arranged in the future. This avoids the unnecessary expense of purchasing rights you may never use. To make planning easier, you and the photographer may want to develop a fee schedule for future use.

## **Keep in Mind**

As copyright holders, photographers have the right to control copying, reproduction, distribution, display and derivative works of their photographs.

Usage rights not specifically licensed to your firm remain with the photographer. Physical possession of photographic material, such as slides, prints, transparencies or digital files, does not grant the right to reproduce the images. Without specific permission from the photographer, it is a violation of Federal copyright law to reproduce photographs in any form, including colour copying and scanning. Therefore, it is important to arrange licensing for the full scope of usage you require.

On July 1998 Section 35(5) the Australian Federal Parliament Copyright Act came into being, bringing Australia into line with the Bern International Copyright Agreement, photographs automatically receive copyright protection even though a copyright notice is not displayed. Absence of the copyright notice does not relieve the prospective user from the responsibility of obtaining permission from the copyright holder.

Licensing agreements should be in writing. Generally, the photographer's proposal will describe the usage

rights granted in addition to outlining the scope of the work and costs. Some photographers specify reproduction rights on their invoices. To protect everyone's interests and prevent misunderstandings, agreements should be signed by all parties involved with the photography.

## **Architectural Photography Checklist Who can use the Images?**

The photographs can be used by those licensed in the agreement. If a number of commissioning clients share in the cost of an assignment be sure each party clearly understands the agreement and the usage rights granted. If you plan to give the photographs to others who were not involved in the assignment, or if you have received photographs without written permission for their use, remember only the photographer can license rights. Copyrights and usage rights cannot be transferred by the client, except with consent of the copyright holder.

To avoid misunderstandings, either contact the photographer before passing the photographs along to colleagues, suppliers and publishers or have them contact the photographer directly. Members of the design team, contractors, product manufacturers, clients, tenants, magazine editors and other third parties must arrange for the rights to use the images with the photographer.

Great work is seldom created by chance. By allowing enough time to plan the assignment and collaborate closely with your photographer, excellent results can be achieved. There are many variables with architectural photography assignments. Some, like weather, are beyond our control. Others, such as completion of construction and relations with clients and tenants, are subject to some degree of influence. The most productive assignment is one with few or no surprises. There are numerous preparatory steps that can be taken before the photography begins to help create the best images possible.

The Architectural Photographers Specialty Group (APSG), of the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), along with numerous architectural and design firms have worked together to prepare this checklist which includes many of the considerations involved in photographing architecture and interior design. Copyright and usage matters are covered, as well as reminders about site access, reparation, logistics and other suggestions to help ensure a successful photography assignment.