# ADPRO

**TREND REPORT**

## A complete guide to styling and shooting your projects

# Ready, Set, Shoot

## Good photography is worth every penny—here's how to get it right

**BY ALYSSA GIACOBBE**

A Santa Barbara living room by Genevieve Trousdale was intended for lively conversations and cozy fireside chats, captured in a wide-lens photograph that plays up natural light. *Photograph by Amy Barnard Photography*
**Cover:** For her own Santa Monica kitchen, designer Kathy Taslitz aimed to balance light and dark—and the photography followed suit. *Photograph by Trevor Tondro. Editor: Alyssa Giacobbe*

**WHEN YOUR NEXT CLIENT** is just a click away, having the right images of your work is crucial: While you may have a chance to share *how* you work once you've begun talking with a prospect, photography can be the piece that makes that conversation happen—or not—in the first place. And as *AD* editors can attest, bad photography can be a dealbreaker for landing your project in the press.

"Imagery is an essential part of the business of design," says **Sean Yashar,** an L.A.-based brand consultant for designers. "Most potential clients will never see a designer's work in the flesh, especially if the designer specializes in residential work. So, one can argue that photography of the work is, in a way, the work itself." Read on for tips on how to think about photography and styling in order to benefit your bottom line.

### Determine when to shoot...

"I'm from the camp of 'document everything,'" says Yashar. "Often I hear designers saying that they're waiting for a 'perfect' moment to shoot, usually when they feel the interior will be finished, but there are so many variables that can cause a project to slip from the designer's hands. I believe it's best to shoot during install or shortly after the project is completed, or—if you can afford to do so—at each phase as the project moves along."

### ...as well as what and how.

Not all photos serve the same purposes. Are you shooting for media outreach? For a website? Instagram? For marketing to prospective clients? "Not all projects can speak to all goals, so work backwards from your main objective, and the right projects to shoot will become clearer," he says. Here's a PRO tip from **Genevieve Trousdale,** the founder of design network Circaphiles: "Provide the photographer with the fabric, paint, and wallpaper sources—or actual samples, if you have them—so they can color-correct those pieces to best convey the actual color."

## Choose the right photographer...

When shopping for and interviewing photographers, take note of the spaces they shoot, advises Trousdale. "Are they modern or are they traditional? Some photographers tend to work better with certain styles," she says. And then go with your gut: Does your initial conversation feel natural? "You need to feel comfortable expressing your personality with a photographer," she says. Finally, be sure to give credit where credit's due, says Trousdale: "Always credit the photographer on your website and in social media posts."

## ...and stylist, too

You might be thinking: But making spaces look good is what I do! "A stylist wasn't something I knew I needed until I worked with one," says **Chauncey Boothby,** an interior designer in Rowayton, Connecticut. "They know exactly what's needed for each particular shot. I used to micromanage way too much and it took me a while to let go, but now I just dump all my props on a table and let my stylist do her thing and it always turns out far better than I could have imagined. A stylist is worth every penny."

Palm Beach interior designer **Caitlin Kah** says she often picks up tips from stylists and photographers on how to make her behind-the-scenes iPhone shots more dynamic for Instagram: "I am sometimes so emotionally invested in my projects that I have a hard time disconnecting from the project itself in order to get the best photo. Some of my best photographs have happened when I have been on a conference call in the other room and I have left it up to the professionals!"

● Caitlin Kah, who designed this terrace in Jupiter Island, Florida, says that investing in photography is one of the best choices a designer can make for their business. *Photograph by Carmel Brantley*

● When she was first starting out, Elisa Baran—who designed this spare but dramatic entryway—hired friends to help her take photographs; as she built her business, she factored photography fees into client costs. *Photograph by Jared Kuzia*

## Remember it's an investment...

"I always try to think of the costs as a percentage of what I've made on the project that I'm shooting," says Boothby. "It helps me put it into perspective, especially if it's a multi-day photoshoot. Good photography is definitely an investment, but a very necessary one to help your business grow. It's something you should always budget for on a yearly basis."

## ...but don't spend beyond your means

When she was first starting out, Manhattan-based designer **Elisa Baran** leaned on her iPhone and her own creative eye to shoot her work, and enlisted friends with professional cameras also interested in building their portfolios. Later, as her business grew, she began to factor photography fees into consideration when submitting a proposal to clients. "I've noticed pricing of around $2,000 to $4,000 for 20 edited photos depending on who you hire," but it can often be more, she says. It's also important to ask how many edited photos you'll get for the price negotiated, she points out. "These are the photos you will be allowed to use for press, social media, and your own portfolio," she says. "Make sure to own the rights to these photos as well," and depending on how much money you have to spend, that could be for either an unlimited or a limited amount of time.

# Stylists Share Their Secrets

## Three of *AD*'s regular contributors—Colin King, Mieke ten Have, and Michael Reynolds—divulge tips for creating magazine-worthy compositions

**BY JENNIFER FERNANDEZ**

Gieves Anderson

## Colin King

@colinking

### Move things around

"Don't be married to where things are. I could see a little piece of artwork in the second-floor guest bathroom and bring it into the entry and it totally transforms the space. And don't be afraid to pull things off the wall. The most beautiful rooms have this sense of movement, and the most poetic rooms have unexpected floating items."

### Get creative with art

"Play with art in a way that's not so predictable. People get really scared of putting holes in the wall, but I love art that's weirdly offset so it's almost uncomfortable. I love low-hanging art, I love bigger mats to make a piece look bigger, I love leaning art for a more casual look. And don't skimp on framing: It's equally if not more important than the piece itself, and it makes anything—kids' art, old charcoals—more substantial."

In this well-balanced living space King styled for the November 2018 issue of *AD*, a painting by Ethan Cook sits slightly askew atop a Jacques Adnet sideboard. *Photograph by Gieves Anderson*

A minimalist dining space designed by Ashe Leandro and styled by Colin King, as seen in the March 2019 issue of *AD*. *Photograph by Shade Degges*

### Know when less is more

"Leave room for the space to breathe. I love negative space. Every corner doesn't need something. Quieter moments can do a better job of drawing your eye to what's there. Especially in the bathroom. It's a cleanliness thing."

● A shaded patio in designer Michelle Nussbaumer's Mexico home embodies Mieke ten Have's philosophy of making a space feel like lived-in, and like home. *Photograph by Douglas Friedman*

Donna Dotan

# Mieke ten Have

@mieketenhave

## Make the space feel lived-in

"Don't anesthetize a space too much. I like to make a space feel like it has an author, like it has an owner. You want to feel like the rooms are inhabited, not just a backdrop. I like to create an installation of flowers down the center of the dining table to break it up into a few different pieces. And remove some of the chairs while still making it look believable. You lose the form of the chair if there are too many. You want to find that happy space."

## Incorporate something living

"You can't underestimate how important it is to have flowers or something living in a space. Just go and get some branches from right outside your door, or find something that's living from the landscape. Artichokes are so beautiful and sculptural, and their texture is so elegant. Or I'll do a bowl of lemons and limes for a bright pop of color—but I go big. I'll get a big box of them."

## Find your "anchovy"

"Find that strange, offbeat, bizarre thing that you can add to your tableau. I often come back to a saying the designer Thomas Jayne once shared with me: 'It's like adding an anchovy to a room.' For example, I collect bird nests near my home and put them on bookshelves. But your anchovy can be something that you've picked up on travels, something found or discovered—not something found in a store. Maybe it even clashes. I hate it when things are matchy-matchy. It's not interesting."

● What's an "anchovy?" In this tiled bathroom, it's a 19th-century painting. *Photograph by Douglas Friedman*

Matteo Prandoni/BFA.com

# Michael Reynolds

@michaelreynoldsnyc

● Plants bring life to any space—and photograph, says Michael Reynolds, who styled this shot of John Derian's apartment. *Photograph by Stephen Kent Johnson*

## Bring in the natural world

"It's lovely to bring in something organic or natural—a mineral, crystal, skull or bone, wood, fur, metal, stone. Something organic but visually delicious and textural and brutal, in a way. These materials speak to us on levels we can't always articulate, but a room really feels good because it taps into another level subconsciously."

● The lighting in this *AD* shoot heightens the drama in the bedroom of Apparatus cofounders Jeremy Anderson and Gabriel Handifar. *Photograph by François Dischinger*

## Know when to shoot

"It's really important to pay attention to what time of day you are shooting in. A place may sing during the evening, but if you're shooting it during the day you're not going to capture that. You can bring life into a dead room by the way you light it, with shadow and the way things are positioned."

## Remember that opposites attract

"You want to create an expression of opposites coexisting by way of textures, shapes, light and dark, organic versus inorganic, animate versus inanimate. I always try to find an expression of the polar opposite and to achieve a compositional state of balance. You want there to be dark and light in terms of energy. I try to bring order to chaos, or sometimes I bring a bit of chaos to too much order. It's all about creating a sense of yin and yang."

# What Makes a Great Photo?

## Sure, beauty is subjective—but when it comes to interior photography, you'll want to follow a few golden rules

**BY KAITLIN MADDEN**

● Interiors photographer John Stoffer finds that full-room shots and wide angles outperform close-ups or vignettes on Instagram. *Photograph by John Stoffer*

**IN THE AGE OF INSTAGRAM,** it's not an overstatement to say that killer interior design photography is a requisite for a savvy design business. "Quality imagery of your work is a must," affirms **Summer Thornton,** owner of Chicago-based Summer Thornton Interiors and a sought-after architectural photographer (as well as an Instagram pro). "Without it, how can future clients see the caliber of your craft, your creativity, or your attention to detail?"

There are a few ways to think about taking the kind of photos that attract clients. If you're just starting out, a great place to experiment is social media. **John Stoffer,** of Chicago-based Stoffer Photography, began shooting interiors when his mother, kitchen designer Jean Stoffer, asked him to photograph her work. In the years since, both Stoffers have seen their stars rise—in no small part due to the elder Stoffer's Instagram account, which to date has 422,000 followers. "We've been very intentional about photographing her work, and all of our clients' work, for Instagram," Stoffer says.

But don't just wing it. Stoffer's advice for creating the most Instagram-friendly photos includes using bright, airy images; branding your content with a consistent photography style; and taking up as much real estate as possible. That is: "Post as many things as you can in portrait orientation, or using the 4 x 5 crop, so it takes up more space on people's phones," he says. "If you shoot landscape, it takes up half the amount of space and makes less of an impact."

For portfolio shots, finding a photographer you truly click with is worth the time and effort (and in most cases, it will take both of those). **Amber Lewis,** founder of Amber Interiors, Shoppe Amber Interiors, and the blog *All Sorts Of,* regularly shares photos of her work with more than two million fans across her three Instagram accounts. Key to her success has been finding the perfect-match photographer. "I started using professional photographers pretty early on, and I've been working with the same photographer on almost all my projects over the last five years," Lewis says. "She just gets my aesthetic, and her photography style and my general vibe work well together."

An interior by Summer Thornton, who recommends photography as a way of getting the word out about your business. *Photograph by Summer Thornton*

Thornton agrees. "When you're choosing a photographer, you want to make sure you share an aesthetic vision, and that the work they create is the style that you'd like yours to be captured in," she says. "Is it light and bright or is it dark and moody? Do they shoot the subject head on, which is more graphic, or at angles, which feels softer?"

**WHEN IT COMES TIME TO SHOOT,** think of the day as a true collaboration between designer and photographer. Lewis makes it a priority to be at every single shoot, no matter how busy she is. "These photos live on forever," she says. "If I spent years designing it, I want to make sure the shots are perfect." A full day is to be expected, but to maximize the number of shots you get, style the space in advance. This lets the photographer work through the home without any downtime, and frees up the designer to be in the room making final adjustments and approving shots.

A common mistake is not getting the client on board from the get-go—nothing's worse than completing a project you're proud of, prepping to document it, and learning the client would just rather you not. "We typically talk to clients about shooting their homes before we agree to do their project or have a contract in place," says Thornton. "It's a requirement for us—otherwise we don't take the project."

While Thornton finds most of her clients are happy to oblige, she does run into occasional pushback from high-profile homeowners. "In those cases, we work through it with them to ensure they feel protected and that their privacy is maintained while we are still able to showcase our work," she says. "We also include a section on photography and promotion in our contract that references the need to photograph the project and how it can and will be used by our firm in promotion, as well as language that helps the client understand that we won't exploit them by using their name or any identifying details without their written consent."

# How to Shoot It Yourself

There's no substitute for professional photography, but if it's simply not in your budget or you're using your phone to capture behind-the-scenes shots for social media, there are ways to make sure your DIY snapshots are top-notch, says **John Stoffer** of Chicago-based Stoffer Photography.

### 1. Set it up right

Clean off your lens, turn off all the lights in a room, let in as much natural light as possible, and turn on your phone's grid lines feature to get an even shot.

### 2. Shoot from the hip

"Get a power stance going and shoot from a little bit above your belly button," he says. "This makes a space feel grander and invites people into the room."

### 3. Consider exposure

Before you take a picture, tap the brightest spot on your phone's screen (often a window or open door), says Stoffer. This exposes your photo for the highlights in the room. Your raw photo might look dark, but you'll be able to brighten it up when you edit without creating blown-out highlights.

### 4. Always edit

Editing will have a major impact on the look of an iPhone photo. Stoffer swears by the popular VSCO app. "I always sharpen things just a little," he says. "Plus-two on the sharpening scale adds a lot to phone images, and the human eye loves when things are sharp."

# Mastering the "Before" Shot

## Photographers share the do's and don'ts of capturing projects for maximum impact

BY ALEXANDRIA ABRAMIAN

**IF YOU WANT** to get your work published, quality "before" images can be key to sealing the deal. Many editors are eager for interior photography to show as much drama as possible. To stand out in the swell of design publications, a big reveal—such as a room transformation—can be enticing fodder. If you've got the budget to hire a professional photographer to document your before, do. But if not, it's entirely possible to capture quality shots using your iPhone. Here, *AD* photographers share some tips.

### Shoot from multiple angles as well as straight ahead

"Don't just rely on the angle you get from entering a room," says **Karyn Millet,** who has collaborated with talents including Celerie Kemble. "Before and after shots have to perfectly match up, so more points of view are better than fewer." **Frank Frances** advises moving in a semicircle from "corner to corner" when shooting a room, typically photographing at three to six points along the arc. "Get in a straight-ahead shot as well," he says.

### Favor wider shots over small vignettes, and horizontals over verticals

Editors want before shots of entire rooms, not details: Think living, dining, and kitchen spaces, as well as bathrooms and bedrooms. "Turn your phone so it's horizontal as much as possible," says **Roger Davies.** "You can always crop a wide shot, but you can't expand a tight one." Frances agrees on the importance of shooting horizontally but encourages designers to duplicate each shot with a vertical version for social media.

At top, Amy Bartlam grounds her "after" photo of a Santa Monica home by using straight lines and mirroring the composition of the "before" shot. *Photograph by Amy Bartlam*

At bottom, the studio Shapeside gave the living room of an interior project in Santa Monica a spare yet indulgent makeover. *Photograph by Genna Margolis*

### Keep your lines as straight as possible

Pay special attention to making sure your lines are straight, says Davies. "Photographers keep the verticals clean; designers need to do the same," he says, adding that a tripod isn't necessarily a requirement. Millet agrees. "Keep the horizon line straight and the sides level as much as possible when shooting, then adjust them with your phone's photo editor to make them perfect," she says.

At top, shared architectural features and consistent lighting in this project by JG Gordon Interiors help viewers easily track the changes from before to after.

At bottom, for a poolhouse renovation, Photographer Jen Brittell used the structure's dramatic vaulted ceilings as an orienting element in the before-and-after photography. *Photographs by Jen Brittell*

## Keep lighting consistent

Keep a similar lighting vibe between before and after shots. Most photographers will turn off all artificial illumination and rely instead on natural light, which means you should do the same for your before shots. Give yourself time to see what the sun does to spaces throughout the day, says Millet. "If amazing light is happening, like coming down a staircase or through lead-paned windows creating beautiful shadow, shoot that as a before," she says. "Note the time of day and the time of year when you shot it so that your photographer has the best chance at recreating the same feel."

## Plan for big moments before they exist

Planning your before photographs around your biggest design moments is critical, says Davies. "If you know you're going to be installing a white marble carved staircase, make sure that you get that bloody staircase in its before state," he advises. "Or if you're putting a color paint over the mantelpiece because that's where the Diebenkorn is going, that is a key before on your list."

## Highlight an architectural feature to maximize the contrast

Windows, staircases, fireplaces, and other architectural elements connect before images with after shots to heighten the design impact. "Repeating an architectural detail in the exact same space for before and after shots gives context and emphasizes the contrast," says Frances. Davies emphasizes getting clean images of these elements. "Don't crop something like the fireplace. Get all of it."

## Do everything possible to heighten the difference between before and after

If you're designing a highly colorful space, consider using a black-and-white filter on the before, says Millet. And when it comes to the after, don't skimp on a stylist. "Even if you don't have the budget to hire one, have friends who are creative help style shots," says Frances. "I find that designers are sometimes too close to their projects and that having a different point of view when styling is very valuable."

## Know where you hope to pitch the project—and pick your camera accordingly

As a general rule, before shots are mostly used for digital and social publications. Few magazines will use them in print, which means an iPhone is going to be sufficient, says Millet. If you are pitching your project to a magazine that specifically runs before images in print, however, you should opt for a DSLR camera, says Frances. "They can get expensive, but there are also great places like Foto Care where you can get high-quality used cameras."