

Photography is a subjective art, and rules are made to be broken. Nevertheless, as someone commissioning new photography, there are certain things that I believe you should expect. (Most of the points below also apply if you are purchasing stock photography).

This is not really a guide to taking good photographs. There are plenty of websites and books that talk about composure, the 'rule of thirds' and so on. As a purchaser, you do not necessarily need to know about the workings behind the shot. However, you should be able to identify the tell-tale signs of a bad photograph. This aim of this guide is to draw attention to some of the things to look out for when purchasing photography, so that you know you are getting your money's worth.

This is a work-in-progress, and I welcome feedback. If you think I have missed something important, or included something that you think is irrelevant, please feel free to contact me.

### General issues

#### What to look for

Sharp and in focus shots.

Blurred people and vehicles can add to a picture (and in the case of people is often necessary to avoid identification). But static subject matter should be sharp, and not like the building in the example photo.

#### Clean files

There should be no dust marks like those visible in the sky of this shot. These are easily removable in software, and repeated occurrence in supplied files shows lack of attention to detail.

#### They should not look like:



No vignettes.

Some lenses at certain focal lengths produce a darkening in the corners of the picture. Sometimes this can produce an attractive effect, but generally not. It is fixable in software so should not appear in supplied files.



Level horizons.

This problem can be much subtler than the example shown, but is easily fixable in software. Of course, jaunty angles often add to a shot (particularly architecture shots), but it should be obvious when it is an intended effect.



Shooting into the sun.

Occasionally this can be effective, but much of the time it means burnt out skies and no light on the building itself. Typically it means the photographer was not there at the optimal time. (Though note the orientation of the building might make it unavoidable, e.g. a north facing building photographed in the winter).



### Perspective-adjusted architectural shots

When a camera is angled upwards to photograph a building it produces an effect known by a number of names, including converging verticals, perspective distortion and keystoneing. Shots A and B below demonstrate this.

Artistically, the effect can be pleasing, and there are times when it can be used to good use, such as when photographing a skyscraper, or the details of a building. I would say picture B below is an example of it being used well, while picture A is an example of it being used to bad effect.

A



B



This effect can be eliminated in most situations using specialised equipment, such as a range of lenses known as tilt-shift lenses. **Any professional architectural photographer should know of this effect and have the necessary equipment for avoiding it.**

Using tilt-shift lenses would produce the following shot (taken from a slightly different spot to A, but gives the right idea). You can see that the edges of the building are parallel to the edges of the photograph.

C



It is important to reiterate that perspective-adjusted shots are not always better than those that aren't. Good composure, good use of light and so on is still very important. But architects, in particular, should expect any photographs they commission to be perspective-adjusted where appropriate. (And a good architectural photographer will know when is an appropriate time to do so!).

[It is worth noting that perspective adjustments can be made in software like Photoshop. For minor adjustments this is acceptable, and I occasionally do so myself. However, for major adjustments it is not ideal, and is much better to get it right 'in-camera' in the first place].

## Common sense

*Unless it is specifically part of the brief, the following should not appear in your photos:*

- Overflowing litter bins or litter on the ground
- Parked or passing cars
- For sale or to let signs in windows
- Graffiti
- Traffic cones, temporary fencing and so on
- Dull and rainy days for external photography

## Other things to look out for

Whenever I carry out a commission (depending on budget constraints and the brief) I try to do the following.

- Avoid booking in particular times or dates for external photography. Rather, I work with the weather and make great effort to be on site when the weather and light is good.
- Visit the site at various times of the day so that different parts of the building have the light on them. Dawn and dusk are key times.
- Supply a good mixture of portrait and landscape photography
- Supply a good mixture of wide angle and detail photography.

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Feedback on this guide is welcome.

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