

Photo Finishes

Because the kitchen and bath industry is visual by nature, professional photography and styling can be among the most worthwhile investments you can make.

BY NICOLE HOGARTY

Nothing can sell your products or services like a photo. The kitchen and bath industry is, above all, a visual business. Kitchen and bath designers, remodeling contractors, appliance dealers, cabinet manufacturers, hardware dealers – basically, anyone who works in the kitchen and bath industry – needs to understand this.

For that reason, getting a photo of your project should be a top priority. Once you're convinced of the value of getting a photo, then getting a *good* photo should be your focus.

Getting a photo. A photo of your product or project is essential because it not only sells your "stuff" to prospective clients, it can also be your ticket into a magazine, a television program, a book or a vendor brochure.

In the kitchen and bath industry, everyone is *looking* to see what you have to offer. There are those unique salespeople who can talk a dog off a meat wagon, but most folks won't buy until they actually *see* the product. Therefore, a few photos of your best products or projects are the key to getting publicity for your company and getting more business in the end. As you plan out



Photo: John Ferrarone

It's hard to believe this is the same kitchen, but the only thing that changed in these shots is the props. Clarke's Connecticut showroom live kitchen theater is dressed one day to create a contemporary urban European ambiance and another day as an Asian-inspired kitchen. Details including artwork, place settings and plants show off the kitchen design in these showroom photos. Design: Clarke

next year's budget, add a line for photography. It's a worthwhile investment.

Getting a good photo. With the advent of digital cameras, many contractors, designers, and salespeople think they are professional photographers. They aren't. The camera equipment does not make you a professional. And, while getting a photo is your first priority, and a digital snapshot for your Web site is a good start, there's nothing that compares to a professional photographer's efforts when you want to stand out visually.



Photo: John Ferrarone

Photo: John Ferrarone



Food and flowers bring kitchens alive and are essential when photographing projects. This island is set with salad preparations, while the stove has a large pasta pot boiling...the idea is to photograph the room as if it's been caught during a slice of real life activity. Renovation: Dow Design & Construction

Unless you're independently wealthy, you probably won't be able to afford to hire a professional photographer to chronicle every project or product, but if you pick those that you consider your best, the investment in professional photography can be invaluable to your business.

You can expect to pay anywhere from \$1,200 to \$5,000 per day for a professional photographer, depending on where your business resides and where the project is located.

The best way to go about finding a professional photographer is to call photographers in your area. Interview them. Ask to see portfolios. Ask for their day rates. Ask if they shoot on an hourly rate or half-day rate, as well. Most times, you'll need a full day to shoot a room or a selection of hardware or faucets or flooring. Sometimes you'll need more than one day. Discuss this with the photographers, and call more than one so that you can compare work and prices.

Selecting a photographer is a very personal decision. Don't just choose the cheapest day rate. A more expensive photographer may give you a far better product in the end, so make sure you scrutinize his or her portfolio and ask for references.

You have to feel comfortable with the person. You should ask if you own the photos, if you are buying certain rights (for instance, use in a brochure or on a Web site), or whether you need

Photo: John Ferrarone



Photographing this kitchen project through the pass-through to the family room shows depth and more interest. A simple glass of red wine helps to break up the large expanse of granite and gives the photo warmth. Renovation: Dow Design & Construction

to pay a usage fee every time you use the image.

There are many considerations, but don't let it dissuade you from finding a professional photographer to capture your work. This is essential as the market tightens and you want to differentiate yourself from the competition.

Styling is essential to good photography. Once you are committed to photography and you find a photographer in whom you feel confident, you have one more hurdle. You must consider styling the products/projects so that they are photographed to sell, sell, sell.

Try this exercise. Pick up three shelter magazines. Go through the magazines and look at each photograph that is portraying

something similar to your product or service. Look at the editorial photography. Look at advertising photography. And, as you go, imagine taking away all of the fresh flowers and food. How do they look now? Pretty blah, huh? Take away the stacks of books, the pillows on the beds, the copper pots hanging in the kitchens. Wow! Very different, huh?

Some of you might say, well, what's left is my product. My beautiful cabinetry or my handcrafted hardware or my exquisite floor plan or layout. That, you may say, is what you want the viewer to see. But that's not what sells. Look at the catalog or magazine that you drool over. The one in which you wish you were featured. Chances are, it doesn't have just stark shots of products. It's more likely that it creates a mood, a slice of life, a lifestyle.

What sells is the dream. You need to create the dream for the viewer of the photograph. The well-stocked refrigerator without a hint of leftovers. The large center island for all the entertaining we envision ourselves doing if only we had that island. The freshest ingredients we'd use, if



This photograph, which captured the attention of editors at *This Old House* magazine, as well as HGTV, is styled to enhance the beautiful period design. Design: Cameron Snyder, Kitchen Concepts

Photo: John Ferrarone

PROMOTING YOUR FIRM

only we had that new kitchen.

Your photographs must turn brick and mortar, tile and wood, stainless steel and water into a room where children are never fighting, husbands are never late for dinner and there's no junk mail or papers to clutter our lives.

This is all about props. If you're in the kitchen and bath industry, you should fill your photographs with fresh flowers, luscious food, fluffy towels and steaming pots. Even if you're selling a drawer pull, it's the life that your drawer pull will bring the customers that will make them select your product.

That's not to say that the drawer pull or your cabinetry or your faucet shouldn't be prominent in the shot. It should. It should never be overtaken by the props, but appropriate accents will create a photograph that will make the viewer believe that such a livable room could not exist without your products or design expertise.

So, how do you achieve this? Well, you can do it yourself, if you have a keen sense of what I'm talking about and the time to make it happen. Or, you can partner with interior designers. Pay them to transform the room you want to photograph. Perhaps you can barter finished photos for their portfolio in return for their time styling for you.

Another option is to hire a professional stylist. This is a person who makes his or her living helping the photographer create

This shot could work to sell the work of the kitchen designer, tile manufacturer, custom hood fabricator and others. Imagine it without the pot, pasta, topiaries, cookbook or napkin and you realize how much styling adds to a photograph.

Design: Cameron Snyder, Kitchen Concepts



Photo: John Ferrarone

just the photograph you imagine. This could cost you an additional \$400 to \$800, but it's what will get you that great photo that will get the editor interested in doing an article, the manufacturer inter-

When this shoot began, the sideboard was home to a pile of cookbooks and a telephone answering machine...the cookbook stand, wine bottles and small lamp set the scene in a far more inviting way. The cutting board and artichokes in the foreground add depth, while never detracting from the beautiful cabinetry.

Design: Cameron Snyder, Kitchen Concepts



Photo: John Ferrarone

Detail shots capture the imagination. Though it was easier to just put a shiny, empty pot on the stove, it's the details that make the shot. In this photo, adding a bed of tissue paper inside the pot boosts pasta up beyond the rim. Turning on the water adds animation.

Design: Cameron Snyder, Kitchen Concepts



Photo: John Ferrarone

ested in featuring you in the next catalog, or the customer dedicated to using your firm.

You must learn to think of photography and styling as an investment, not an expense. The

initial cash outlay will often sting, especially if you're a small firm, but the reward for big-picture thinking will be huge.

In this bear market, the surest investment you can make is in great photography of your best projects and installations. If a customer is making a choice between two resources and there must be a deciding factor, it will be a photo finish. The one with the better photography will win.

Nicole Hogarty is an interior designer and photographic stylist based in Providence, RI. In addition to her design work with homeowners throughout New England, she has assisted builders in designing spec homes and decorating model homes, and she works with several professional photographers on styling residential and architectural photography. She can be reached at nhogarty@earthlink.net.

Styling is an Art: A Short Primer of Practical Tips

Styling is as much art as science, but there are plenty of practical tips that can help transform well-designed rooms into visually stunning masterpieces. Below are some ideas to bring your rooms to life.

- If flowers have not opened to their fullest potential by the time of the photo shoot, place them in the tub filled with warm water.

- Often the smallest gestures make the difference...fill a wine glass rather than leaving it empty next to an unopened bottle.

- Take the extra step to select the wine, food and props that complement the décor, i.e. a library might have a cognac with a pipe, a sunroom should have an iced tea with sliced lemon in the pitcher, a family room should feature comfort food, books and red wine.

- When photographing appliances, bring them alive. A warming drawer should have bread inside, ranges might show a pie through the window, wine storage should hold a collection of wine bottles. These little details will often make your shot.

- Cabinetry with glass doors should have clean glass

and everything inside should be carefully arranged and color-coordinated. Remember, you're selling the dream!

- In bathrooms, fill the tub...a bubble bath can evoke a feeling of relaxation. And remember that few bath rugs photograph well. Though you wouldn't want to step out of your shower or tub without a mat, it's better to show off the flooring in your photography.

- A cup of tea and a book make great bath companions, old fashioned hand mirrors or brushes can make a vanity "pop," and a proper gentleman's shaving kit can evoke a special feeling in a luxury bath photo.

- For large bathrooms, consider placing an antique chair in the empty space and, if visually pleasing, draping a robe over one arm or place slippers on the floor.

- Always look at everything through the camera lens, in Polaroid proofs or on screen, in the case of digital photography. Keep tweaking the photo until you get it right. What looks good in person often shows up horribly in your photo, and a decorative touch you'd never consider leaving in the room might be just the accent you need to make a photo work.