



REAL ESTATE

SESSION PREPARATION

Client Guide

Before I Arrive

Please use this guide as a room-by-room checklist. Not every item will apply to every property. If a room or feature is important to the listing, prepare it as though it may be photographed from several angles.

- ✓ **Be fully shoot-ready:** Cleaning, staging, repairs, and furniture placement should be complete before the scheduled start time. I may make small composition adjustments to lightweight décor, but the appointment is not intended for cleaning, staging, or moving furniture.
- ✓ **Secure pets:** Dogs and cats should be off the property or safely secured in an area that will not be photographed. This protects pets, people, and equipment and keeps animals from appearing in the final gallery.
- ✓ **Plan for occupants to be out of view:** Ideally, occupants should leave the property during the shoot. If that is not possible, please remain in a room or area that is not being photographed. People can appear in reflections, cast shadows, interrupt sight lines, or limit camera placement.
- ✓ **Protect valuables and private information:** Put away medications, jewelry, financial paperwork, mail, school information, passwords, account numbers, and anything else you would not want visible in a marketing image.
- ✓ **Complete visible repairs:** Replace missing switch plates, repair obvious wall or trim damage, address loose fixtures, and finish touch-up work before photos. Editing should not be relied on to conceal material defects or change the condition of the property.

A QUICK RULE OF THUMB

If an item is something you would not want visible during a showing, it is usually best to remove it before the photo appointment. When in doubt, simplify.

What I will handle

I will choose camera positions, manage lighting, make minor adjustments to small décor and chairs when helpful, and photograph the home to present the layout and selling features clearly. I will not move heavy furniture, make beds, clean rooms, organize personal belongings, or perform landscaping. The property is generally photographed as presented at the start of the appointment.

Exterior Preparation

- ✓ **Clear the driveway:** Move all vehicles out of the driveway before I arrive. When practical, move vehicles that are parked directly in front of the property as well.
- ✓ **Hide trash and recycling bins:** Place bins in the garage or along a side of the property where they will not be visible from the front, rear, or aerial viewpoints.
- ✓ **Coil and hide hoses:** Move hoses the day before the shoot so dripping water has time to dry and does not leave puddles on pavement or patios.
- ✓ **Prepare the yard:** Mow, edge, blow off hard surfaces, trim obvious overgrowth, and remove toys, tools, sports equipment, pet items, fallen branches, and temporary lawn clutter. Complete wet yard work at least a day in advance when possible.
- ✓ **Turn off sprinklers:** Do not water the lawn, driveway, walkways, patio, or deck immediately before the appointment. Wet pavement, puddles, and active sprinklers can limit exterior photography.
- ✓ **Clean the entry:** Sweep the porch, wipe the front door and glass, remove excessive doormats or shoes, straighten furniture, and clear cobwebs. The front entry is often a key first impression.
- ✓ **Prepare patio and outdoor furniture:** Wipe dust, pollen, leaves, and cobwebs from tables and seating. Arrange cushions neatly and remove covers. Avoid hosing furniture down on shoot day.
- ✓ **Pick up after pets:** Remove pet waste from all areas of the yard that may be photographed or walked through.
- ✓ **Check signage with your agent:** If a for-sale sign and/or other marketing materials are already installed, please remove beforehand. PRAR is very clear on this rule and, ideally, marketing signage should be scheduled for installation the day after the shoot. Although I can try to remove signage in post-production, it is not a 100% guarantee nor it is part of my duties as outlined in the book agreement.

Pools, Spas & Water Features

- ✓ **Pool:** Have the water clean, the deck clear, and the cover removed. Put away nets, chemicals, cleaners, floats, toys, and maintenance equipment unless intentionally staged.
- ✓ **Spa:** Remove the cover and make sure the spa is clean. If it should be running for photos, leave simple instructions for the agent or photographer.
- ✓ **Fountains and waterfalls:** Clean the feature and make sure it is operational. If it should run during the shoot, provide access or instructions in advance.

AERIAL / DRONE APPOINTMENTS

If aerial media is scheduled, assume more of the property will be visible than from ground level. Clear driveways, side yards, pool decks, rear patios, sheds, and other open areas that may appear from above. Leaves should be blown from roof; removal in post-production will incur an additional fee.

Interior Preparation

Whole House

- ✓ **Deep clean:** Vacuum or sweep floors, dust surfaces, clean glass and mirrors, remove fingerprints from stainless steel and glossy finishes, and address visible cobwebs or smudges.
- ✓ **Declutter surfaces:** Reduce visual clutter on countertops, tables, mantels, desks, shelves, and nightstands. A few intentional decorative items are usually better than many small objects.
- ✓ **Open curtains and blinds evenly:** Open window treatments to bring in natural light and keep similar windows consistent. If a window faces an unattractive view or close neighbor, I may adjust it during the shoot.
- ✓ **Turn on lights:** Before I arrive, turn on interior lamps, overhead lights, under-cabinet lighting, and other built-in accent lighting. Replace burned-out bulbs in advance, and when possible use bulbs with a similar color temperature within the same room.
- ✓ **Turn off ceiling fans:** All ceiling fans should be off and completely stopped before photography begins.
- ✓ **Turn off TVs and monitors:** Screens can create reflections, color casts, or distracting content. Leave them off unless we have intentionally planned a specific display.
- ✓ **Hide cords, chargers and remotes:** Tuck away obvious charging cables, extension cords, game controllers, TV remotes, and other small electronics when possible.
- ✓ **Hide portable fans, heaters and cleaning equipment:** These items can distract from the room and sometimes suggest a comfort or maintenance issue that is not relevant to the listing.
- ✓ **Clear entryways and hallways:** Remove shoes, backpacks, umbrellas, pet leashes, laundry baskets, excess coats, and other items that interrupt the visual flow through the home.
- ✓ **Close cabinet and standard closet doors:** Keep ordinary closets and cabinets closed unless they are a feature to be photographed. Large, finished, or custom walk-in closets can be prepared as showcase spaces.

Keep the home comfortable

During a longer appointment, especially when lights are on and equipment is being moved from room to room, a comfortable interior temperature helps the session move efficiently. Please avoid making major HVAC changes immediately before the shoot.

Room-by-Room Checklist

Kitchen

- ✓ **Clear the counters:** Put away dishes, dish racks, sponges, cleaning products, paper towels, excess small appliances, food packaging, and everyday clutter. One or two intentional items such as a plant, fruit bowl, or coffee setup can remain if they add to the composition.
- ✓ **Clean appliances and sink:** Wipe stainless steel, glass cooktops, cabinet faces, and faucets. Empty the sink and hide dish soap and scrub brushes.
- ✓ **Clear the refrigerator:** Remove magnets, calendars, notes, photos, invitations, and school papers from the refrigerator and surrounding cabinetry.
- ✓ **Straighten dining areas:** Center tables when appropriate, push chairs in evenly, simplify place settings, and remove high chairs or booster seats unless they are intentionally part of the staging.

Bathrooms

- ✓ **Clear personal items:** Hide toothbrushes, razors, hair products, medications, makeup, toiletries, cleaning supplies, plungers, toilet brushes, scales, and wastebaskets.
- ✓ **Close toilet lids:** Leave every toilet seat and lid down.
- ✓ **Simplify linens:** Remove bath mats and toilet rugs when possible. Hang clean towels neatly and straighten shower curtains. Remove shampoo bottles and other products from visible shower shelves or tub edges.
- ✓ **Clean mirrors and glass:** Water spots, toothpaste marks, fingerprints, and streaks are especially noticeable in high-resolution images.

Bedrooms

- ✓ **Make beds neatly:** Pull bedding square, arrange pillows intentionally, and remove laundry, clothing, tissue boxes, water bottles, chargers, and excess items from nightstands and dressers.
- ✓ **Close ordinary closets:** Closet doors should generally be closed unless the closet is a large or upgraded feature. If a walk-in closet will be photographed, organize shelves and floors and reduce visible clutter.

Living Rooms, Offices & Flex Spaces

- ✓ **Simplify décor:** Straighten pillows and throws, remove stacks of magazines, excess toys, pet beds, charging cords, and visible household storage.
- ✓ **Protect work and personal information:** Clear loose paperwork, sticky notes, calendars, whiteboards, client information, phone numbers, and account details. Diplomas or framed credentials can remain unless you prefer them removed.
- ✓ **Define the room:** If a flex room has a clear purpose for marketing, stage it accordingly before the shoot. Avoid leaving a room halfway between uses.

Twilight Preparation

Twilight photography has a short working window. Everything should be ready before the scheduled start time so the session can focus on the changing exterior light rather than property preparation.

- ✓ **Turn on all interior lights:** Make sure lamps, overhead fixtures, accent lights, and visible rooms are illuminated. Replace burned-out bulbs before the appointment.
- ✓ **Turn on exterior lighting:** Porch lights, landscape lighting, sconces, pathway lights, and other exterior fixtures should be on and working.
- ✓ **Prepare the pool and spa:** Remove covers, turn on pool and spa lighting, and activate jets or features if they are part of the intended look.
- ✓ **Turn on water features:** Activate fountains, waterfalls, fire-and-water features, or similar amenities before I arrive, unless we have arranged otherwise.
- ✓ **Clear vehicles and outdoor clutter:** Twilight images are often wide exterior compositions. Make sure cars, bins, hoses, toys, tools, and pool equipment are out of sight before the light begins to change.

Final 15-Minute Sweep

- ✓ **Walk the home once:** Start at the front door and move room by room. Look for anything that was set down after cleaning: cups, mail, keys, shoes, chargers, laundry, pet items, or cleaning supplies.
- ✓ **Check doors and windows:** Straighten blinds and curtains, close ordinary closet and cabinet doors, and make sure interior doors are positioned neatly.
- ✓ **Check lights and fans:** Lights on, burned-out bulbs replaced, ceiling fans off, TVs and monitors off.
- ✓ **Check bathrooms:** Counters clear, toilet lids down, towels straight, mirrors clean, bath mats removed if possible.
- ✓ **Check the exterior:** Driveway clear, bins hidden, hoses put away, sprinklers off, patio staged, and front porch clean.

IF THE PROPERTY IS NOT READY

If significant cleaning, staging, decluttering, or furniture moving is still required when I arrive, I cannot photograph the property as-is. We will reschedule the appointment so the final media can meet my intended standard. Any rescheduling or return-visit terms are governed by the booking agreement.

Questions before the shoot?

If you are unsure what should stay, what should be removed, or how a specific space will photograph, send a few phone photos before the appointment. It is much easier to make those decisions ahead of time than while the camera is set up.

Standards & Scope of Service

THE GOAL

A clean, photo-ready home lets the camera focus on the property: the space, lighting, layout, finishes, and features that buyers need to notice. The best time to finish cleaning, decluttering, yard work, and staging is **the day before** the appointment so the shoot can begin as soon as I arrive.

My goal is to deliver photographs that present each property at a professional standard and represent both the listing and my work well. Achieving that result is a collaborative process. The property should be fully cleaned, organized, landscaped, and photo-ready before the scheduled appointment.

My photography service is designed to **photograph a property once it is ready to be presented**, not to make the property ready for photography. Cleaning, staging, landscaping, moving furniture, removing debris, and other property-preparation tasks should be completed before I arrive.

Property Readiness

If a property is not reasonably photo-ready at the scheduled appointment, I may require the session to be rescheduled. Examples include significant interior clutter, unmade rooms, unfinished cleaning, excessive yard debris, leaves or debris on visible rooflines, landscaping that has not been maintained, or rooms that have not been prepared for photography. A rescheduling fee will apply.

I will occasionally make small adjustments that improve a composition, such as straightening a chair, moving a small decorative item, or adjusting a curtain. However, substantial cleaning, staging, furniture rearrangement, landscaping, or property preparation is outside the scope of a standard photography session.

Post-Production is Not Property Preparation

Professional editing is an important part of my process, but Photoshop is not intended to replace proper preparation before the shoot. Standard post-production includes the work necessary to create a polished, natural finished photograph, including exposure balancing, color correction, perspective correction, window and lighting adjustments, and reasonable visual cleanup.

Requests to digitally correct conditions that could reasonably have been addressed before the appointment may be considered additional retouching. This can include removing large amounts of yard debris or leaves, cleaning visible roof areas digitally, removing numerous objects, digitally repairing damaged surfaces, significantly altering landscaping, or reconstructing portions of a room or property. When this type of work is possible, **additional editing fees may apply based on the amount and complexity of the retouching requested.**

**Some corrections may also be declined when they would materially misrepresent the property.

RAW & Unfinished Files

RAW photographs and other unfinished working files are not included with photography services and are not released as part of the final delivery. These files are the starting materials used to create the finished photographs rather than completed photographs themselves.

The product being commissioned is the **finished image**, which includes both the photography performed at the property and the post-production necessary to bring those photographs to my professional standard. Delivering unfinished files would be similar to delivering an incomplete version of a commissioned work rather than the final product.

My Standard for Delivered Images

I do not deliver photographs that prominently feature avoidable clutter, poorly prepared spaces, excessive exterior debris, neglected landscaping, or other conditions that substantially diminish the presentation of the property. This protects the quality of the listing, the expectations of the agent or seller, and the standard associated with Donald M. Barnes Photography.

Good real estate photography begins **before the camera comes out**. Proper preparation allows me to spend the scheduled session creating the strongest photographs possible rather than solving issues that could have been addressed beforehand.

This kind of list can feel a little obvious at first, as most of it is common sense: clean up, put things away, open the blinds, and make the home look cared for.

But I still think it is worth spelling out plainly because I want to photograph your home at its best.

I really enjoy photographing homes. I like working with listing agents to focus on the features they want to highlight, and I especially enjoy seeing how each home is different. Every property has its own layout, light, details, and strengths. The better the home is prepared before I arrive, the more I can focus on those things.

Capturing your home works best when the space feels clear, settled

Most of the prep for a property shoot comes down to removing clutter and cleaning up every room. But there are a few details that can make a real difference, which I've included.

And by no means should you feel like you have to overdo it. I am not expecting every inch of the house to be perfectly dusted, and the goal is not to make the home feel empty or overly staged. The goal is to clean up each room, and to remove all the other smaller distractions.

Clean up and Let the Room Breathe

The best preparation is simply cleaning and then subtracting. After cleaning each room, begin removing the small distractions and clear off all surfaces so we can let the room's full layout carry the image.

Think: What should the camera see first, and what would quietly support that?

So, before our session, walk through each room from the doorway. This is often close to where the camera will begin. Look for anything that would interrupt a first impression: bright colors, loose cords, extra shoes, laundry baskets, stacks of mail, remote controls, pet items, cleaning supplies, or anything sitting out where it does not belong.

A room does not need to be stripped of personality, but it does need to be clean, tidy, and uniform.

Clear the Main Surfaces

Counters, tables, nightstands, bathroom vanities, and desks tend to collect the most visual clutter. These surfaces matter because they sit close to the camera and can quickly make a clean room feel busy.

Put away excess things.

In kitchens, clear most items from the counters and clean off all surfaces. Plants, cutting boards, or simple appliances can stay, especially if it helps the space feel lived in without crowding the image.

In bathrooms, I think it is best to err on the side of overly staging it, because that's one room that should not remind viewers that this bathroom is lived-in, in my opinion. So, there are several things to do. Remove everything from the counter and shower and hide it from view, which includes toothbrushes, razors, and soap/shampoo bottles. Old towels should be removed, and any decorative towels should be neatly folded. Hide from view trash cans, plungers, and cleaning products.

For bedrooms, I cannot emphasize enough that beds should be neatly made. Bedsheets should be tucked and smoothed so that there are no bumps showing through on the cover. Pillows should be smoothed and pillow inserts should face away from the doorway. Since the bed is usually the visual anchor of the room, it should feel calm and finished.

Clear the nightstands, and remove laundry, chargers, water bottles, and personal items from view.

Use Light Well

Open blinds and curtains before I arrive unless there is a specific reason not to. Natural light helps a room feel more open and gives me more light to work with.

Turn on lamps and interior lights. **Be mindful to keep all ceiling fans off.** Replace any burned-out bulbs ahead of time, especially in kitchens, bathrooms, hallways, and exterior fixtures.

When listing your property, it is best to avoid mixing too many different bulb colors in one room. If that is the case with your home, now is the time to fix that. If one lamp is warm and another is cool, the room can feel uneven in the final images.

Do a Floor and Corner Check

Floors and corners are easy to overlook in person, but the camera will pick them up. All things should have their place to put away; stray shoes, bags, cords, toys, pet beds, trash cans, and anything else should be removed from view.

This is especially important in smaller spaces, where every visible object carries more weight in the frame.

Prepare the Exterior

The first impression often starts before anyone steps inside. Sweep the porch and clear the driveway. Trash bins should be either put away or hidden from front-facing view. Coil up loose hoses, straighten outdoor furniture, and remove loose items from the yard. If you haven't cleaned the pollen off your porch rockers, now would be a good time to do so.

If there are planters, cushions, doormats, or porch decor, make sure they look intentional and only keep out if they are clean/non-distracting. Also keep in mind, small exterior details can help a property feel cared for, but too many competing items can make the entrance look cluttered. Please remove all flags, as I want 100% of the home's exterior to be visible.

Finally, all cars should be moved away from the driveway. I would advise to park streetside if possible. The property should be the sole focus.

Think About What the Photos Need to Show

Good property photos serve a very effective purpose. They are not simply pretty pictures, because they help someone understand the home.

The camera needs to show how rooms feel, how spaces connect, where the light comes in, and capturing the parts that make the home appealing. When viewers see these pictures, they should see all of the right things.

Before the session, make sure the most important features are the easiest to see. If there is a room, angle, detail, or feature that matters to you or your listing agent, make sure it is clean, accessible, and ready.

A Simple Final Walkthrough

Before I arrive, walk through the home once more with the camera in mind:

- Open curtains.
- Clear counters.
- Straighten bedding.
- Hide cords.
- Remove trash cans.
- Check mirrors and glass.
- Put away personal items.
- Clear the driveway.
- Turn on useful lights.
- Look at each room from the doorway.

The house does not need to be perfect. It just needs to feel cared for, clean of debris, and ready to be seen.

The better the preparation, the better I can do my part.