

# TECHNICAL CORNER

(1.0 AIA/CES/HSW LU)



## Light Keeper



### TIPS TO CREATE GREAT ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHS

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Today's Digital Single-Lens Reflex, DSLR, cameras are capable of producing very high-quality images and have mostly replaced traditional 4x5 film cameras for architectural photography. DSLR's are easier to use and transport, and they come with a wide variety of optic options and accessories. While digital tools have dramatically changed the photographic workflow, many principles of photography remain the same. Careful planning, execution and post-production editing are still critical components to create successful architectural photographs that present a cohesive and compelling story.

Start by doing research and get prepared. Great light is a must have, so monitor the weather and plan ahead to take advantage of days with interesting conditions. The best light oftentimes is right after a storm, during early mornings and late evenings. Try to schedule the shoot when the sunlight illuminates the building front.

You want to create a variety of image types that work together to convey a complete understanding of the building, even if the viewer has never been there. Every image should show something unique, so selecting vantage points is a primary concern. Capture a mix of both exterior and interior views, wide-angle shots and close-ups.

Most important is the establishing shot that depicts the entire building exterior with an emphasis on the building entrance. A sense of scale and dimension is achieved by including two sides of the building. To ensure that the building is the main subject of the image, leave equal spacing left and right, top and bottom around the structure. Verify that the structure is level and in focus. A correctly skewed and rotated building will not appear to tilt or lean back. The image will have parallel vertical and horizontal lines throughout.

For some visual variety, it's a good idea to create exterior photographs from a few different perspectives. Sometimes it's appropriate to include wide overviews of the surrounding environment to illustrate the context of how the building is situated. Also consider including exterior detail shots to highlight specific elements such as the front entrance, signage, pool, balconies, unique materials and other ornate elements.

Twilight occurs a few minutes before sunrise and after sunset, and this is a highly desirable time to create exterior architectural photographs. The dramatic light with engaging colors is usually the most interesting with a dark but not black sky. Turn on all lights inside and outside and open all blinds and drapes to help draw attention to buildings.

Interior photographs differ from space to space. For commercial buildings, you generally want to capture the lobby, commercial retail spaces, common areas and office spaces.

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Residential interior shots should include the kitchen, living room, bedrooms and oftentimes bathrooms. You want to present a scene that is free from mistakes so make sure to start with a clean space. Evaluate decorations and accessories to determine if something should be removed. In some cases, props may be added. For example, many kitchen spaces look better with fresh flowers and fruit.

Just like with exterior photographs, it's critical to capture straight perspectives with parallel lines for interior photographs. Tilting the camera up or down results in strange perspectives and crooked angles, which undermines the architectural design and construction efforts. Position the camera perpendicular to the wall. Keep it straight and raise or lower it appropriately.

One of the most important tools for architectural photography is a sturdy tripod. Tripods are essential to create long exposures during twilight as well as for HDR and composite images. Tripods slow down the shooting process but that gives you time to compose the shots and ensure the best compositions. Look around all edges of the frame. Is something interfering? Do you have something interesting in the foreground and background?

Create three-dimensional depth and make a space feel larger by featuring multiple rooms in the same image. A view from one room to the next room provides a good understanding of spatial relationships. Similarly, showing a connection between inside and outside is oftentimes a desired effect. However, this can be difficult to achieve since the outside light usually is much brighter than the light inside. To solve the problem, add artificial light, create an HDR or make a composite with multiple images.

Once you have captured the images, you need editing software to make the pictures look sharper, brighter and more colorful. Post production tasks range from minimal enhancement to complex composites. The most common image adjustments include fine-tuning contrast, brightness, color balance, sharpness and correcting the perspective.

The real challenge is to create images that evoke emotion and persuade the viewer to want more. Embrace creativity and experiment with new tools and techniques.

Photography is a process without certainty of outcome and many great shots are the results of happy accidents.

## DO's

1. Schedule shoots based on natural light and weather patterns.
2. Take advantage of elevated locations, like a nearby hillside or an adjacent building.
3. Use a tripod!
4. Shoot in RAW and white balance for the dominant light source.
5. Shoot at f8-f22 with ISO 100-400.
6. Bracket exposures to ensure best capture and for editing options.
7. Keep the camera straight with a level horizon.
8. Capture unique design features and architectural details.
9. Compose images with large margins to accommodate different aspect ratios.
10. Add light to brighten the scene, highlight key elements and bring materials to life.

## DON'T's

1. Don't shoot during midday hours.
2. Don't photograph the building front when it is in shadow.
3. Don't shoot in heavy precipitation.
4. Don't include light poles, trees and other obstructions.
5. Don't shoot into the sun. Block the sun to prevent flare.
6. Don't shoot too close. Move further away and zoom in.
7. Don't feature too much foreground and/or too much sky.
8. Don't capture your reflection in mirrors and windows or be prepared to edit yourself out.
9. Don't over-skew or over-rotate.
10. Don't over saturate.



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