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Preparing a Home for Photos (Why It Matters)

Luxury sellers: how to stage your home so it looks as valuable online as it feels in person.

By Tracy Scott, REALTOR® · DRE# 00957686 · November 2026

Most buyers meet your home online first. In the luxury space, photos are not just a marketing step, they are value perception. Great photography can make the right buyer book a showing. Poor prep can make a great home look ordinary, dark, or dated, and that can cost attention, time on market, negotiating leverage, and a lower sales price.

The goal is not to make your home look “perfect.” It is to make it photograph truthfully at its best: bright, open, intentional, and easy to understand.

Why Photo Prep Matters in Luxury

- Photos set the price conversation. Buyers anchor to what they see first.
- Luxury buyers filter fast. If the story is unclear, they move on.
- Listing photos must read well on a phone. Small distractions become big.
- Prep reduces 'unforced errors'—like glare, clutter, or rooms that feel smaller on camera.

The Camera Sees Differently Than Your Eyes

Cameras exaggerate contrast (bright windows vs. darker interiors), flatten depth, and capture details you stop noticing—cords, labels, countertop items, and fingerprints. Photo prep is about removing visual noise, so the architecture, views, and finishes become the main event.

A Simple 48-Hour Photo Plan

Use this two-day approach so photo day is calm, not frantic:

Day 1: Reset + Repair (the “quiet fixes”)

- Replace burnt bulbs; match color temperature where you can (avoid mixed warm/cool light).
- Patch obvious dings; touch up scuffs on high-visibility walls and baseboards.
- Clean glass and mirrors; wipe stainless steel and glossy surfaces.
- Declutter surfaces to about 20–30% of what is normally there.

Day 2: Stage + Shine (the “photo read”)

- Create clear walk paths and open sight lines—especially entry, living areas, and primary suite.
- Simplify décor. Fewer, larger pieces photograph better than many small ones.
- Reset textiles: smooth bedding, straighten pillows, align rugs.

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- Hide personal items: toiletries, hair tools, pet bowls, kids' items, paperwork.

Room-by-Room Photo Priorities

Entry

- One focal point (art or console), nothing on the floor, mat aligned.
- If there is a view line, keep it clear so the home feels immediate.

Living / Great Room

- Remove extra chairs and side tables if the room feels tight.
- Center the main seating group; hide remotes, chargers, and loose throws.
- Open shades evenly; clean sliders; stage the view.

Kitchen

- Counters nearly empty: keep 1–3 items max (e.g., bowl, coffee setup).
- Remove dish racks, soap bottles, magnets, and small appliances unless built-in.
- Polish fixtures; align barstools; replace mismatched towels.

Primary Suite

- Hotel-simple bed (smooth, symmetrical), nightstands clean, cords hidden.
- Clear dresser tops, remove laundry baskets, close closet doors.

Bathrooms

- Zero clutter: no products, no tissues, no extra towels.
- Close toilet lids, remove bathmats unless they elevate the look.
- Buff mirrors and fixtures, straighten shower glass/curtain.

Office / Den

- Hide paper stacks, cords, printers, and charging stations.
- If it is a flex space, stage it to match buyer demand (office, gym, or guest).

Outdoor Living

- Set chairs as a conversation area; align cushions; sweep hardscape.
- For pools/spas: skim, clear floats, hide hoses, and remove service equipment.

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Light, Windows, and the View

Luxury photography is largely a light management project. A few small choices can change the entire feel of the images:

- Turn on all interior lights unless the photographer directs otherwise.
- Match bulb brightness in the same room (dark corners read as “tired”).
- Open shades consistently. If privacy is a concern, use sheers rather than uneven blinds.
- Clean windows inside and out where practical; it matters most on view-facing glass.

Common Photo-Day Mistakes to Avoid

- Over-staging: too many props make rooms feel smaller and less premium.
- Mixed lighting (warm bulbs + cool LEDs) creating odd color shifts in photos.
- Leaving daily-life items out: mail, chargers, soaps, shampoo, trash bins, pet items.
- Trying to “fix it in editing.” Good prep is cheaper than extended retouching.

Photo-Day Checklist (15 Minutes Before the Photographer Arrives)

- All lights on, ceiling fans off, TVs off.
- Toilet lids closed, towels aligned, trash removed.
- Kitchen counters cleared, sink empty, faucet polished.
- Beds made, floors clear, cords hidden, doors aligned.
- Cars moved, garage doors closed, bins and hoses out of sight.
- Pets secured, bowls and litter boxes out of frame.

If you want, I can walk through your home (in person or by quick video) and build a personalized photo-prep list that focuses on the highest-impact items. That way, you are not doing busy work, you are doing the steps that show up in the photos and protect your price.

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