

Real Estate Image Integrity Checklist

AI and advanced editing tools make it easier than ever to modify real estate photographs. Before making a significant alteration to a listing image, use this checklist to determine whether you're enhancing the photograph, visualizing a possibility, or potentially misrepresenting the property.

DRONE BUSINESS STRATEGY MAGAZINE

1 Identify the Request

What is the client asking me to change?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Exposure, brightness or contrast | ☐ Virtual furniture or staging |
| ☐ White balance or color correction | ☐ Paint color change |
| ☐ Highlights or shadows | ☐ Flooring modification |
| ☐ Sharpening or noise reduction | ☐ Appliance or fixture modification |
| ☐ Lens or perspective correction | ☐ Building or architectural modification |
| ☐ Vertical alignment | ☐ Removal of utility poles or wires |
| ☐ Cropping | ☐ Removal of neighboring structures |
| ☐ Sky replacement | ☐ Removal or concealment of property damage |
| ☐ Lawn or landscaping modification | ☐ Modification of a view |
| ☐ Furniture removal | ☐ Other: _____ |

2 Ask the Reality Question

Does the edited image still accurately represent what a buyer would reasonably expect to see at the property?

- ☐ YES — Continue evaluating.
- ☐ NO — Stop. The modification may materially misrepresent the property.
- ☐ UNSURE — Don't guess. Verify applicable requirements before proceeding.

3 Classify the Edit

GREEN Photographic Enhancement

The photograph changes. The property doesn't.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Exposure correction | ☐ Noise reduction |
| ☐ HDR blending | ☐ Lens correction |
| ☐ White-balance correction | ☐ Perspective/vertical correction |
| ☐ Reasonable color correction | ☐ Cropping |
| ☐ Highlight/shadow recovery | ☐ Sensor-dust removal |
| ☐ Sharpening | |

GREEN LIGHT — Generally proceed as part of normal professional photographic processing, provided the edit doesn't materially misrepresent the property.

YELLOW**Visualization or Material Modification***Shows something different from the property's current appearance.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Virtual staging | ☐ Virtual twilight |
| ☐ Virtual furniture | ☐ Sky replacement |
| ☐ Furniture removal | ☐ Proposed construction |
| ☐ Conceptual paint colors | ☐ Removal of temporary objects |
| ☐ Conceptual landscaping | ☐ Other significant AI-generated modifications |
| ☐ Renovation concepts | |

YELLOW LIGHT — Slow Down and Verify. Before proceeding:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Check applicable MLS rules | ☐ Preserve the original photograph |
| ☐ Check state/local requirements | ☐ Document the client's request |
| ☐ Check brokerage requirements | ☐ Clearly identify visualization when required |
| ☐ Determine whether disclosure is required | ☐ Consider providing the original alongside the altered version |

*If you cannot determine whether the modification is permissible, don't assume that it is.***RED****Potential Misrepresentation***Could cause a buyer to misunderstand the property's condition, features, surroundings, or view.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Removing structural damage | ☐ Concealing cracks, stains or deterioration |
| ☐ Digitally repairing a damaged roof | ☐ Replacing existing flooring |
| ☐ Removing permanent utility poles | ☐ Adding fixtures or appliances that aren't present |
| ☐ Removing neighboring buildings | ☐ Creating a nonexistent view |
| ☐ Eliminating undesirable permanent features | ☐ Removing permanent environmental features |
| ☐ Adding windows, doors or architectural features | ☐ Digitally remodeling a property and presenting it as current |
| ☐ Enlarging rooms or changing their proportions | |

RED LIGHT — STOP.

Do not perform the alteration merely because *"the agent asked me to."* A client's request does not automatically make an alteration appropriate, compliant or strategically wise. Verify the applicable requirements before proceeding.

4 Apply the Buyer Test

Before delivering an altered image, imagine the prospective buyer standing at the property with your photograph open on their phone.

Would a reasonable buyer feel misled by the difference between my photograph and what is actually here?

- ☐
- No
- ☐
- Possibly
- ☐
- Yes

If your answer is Possibly or Yes, reconsider the edit.**5 Check the Rules****Before materially altering property imagery, determine which requirements apply.**

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ State real estate advertising law | ☐ Brokerage policies |
| ☐ State licensing regulations | ☐ REALTOR® ethical requirements, when applicable |
| ☐ Local regulations | ☐ Client contract |
| ☐ MLS photography rules | ☐ Your company's image-integrity policy |
| ☐ Virtual-staging requirements | |

Never assume the rules in one market apply in another.

6 Preserve the Original

For materially modified images:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Original capture retained | ☐ Modification documented |
| ☐ Edited version retained | ☐ Client request documented |
| ☐ Final delivered version retained | ☐ Required disclosure included |

ORIGINAL → EDIT → DELIVERY

Storage is inexpensive. Disputes aren't.

7 Document the Decision

JOB RECORD

Property: _____

Client: _____ Date: _____

REQUESTED MODIFICATION

CLASSIFICATION

- ☐ GREEN — Enhancement
☐ YELLOW — Visualization/Modification
☐ RED — Potential Misrepresentation

DISCLOSURE REQUIRED?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown — verification required

ORIGINAL RETAINED?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

CLIENT REQUEST DOCUMENTED?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

FINAL DECISION

- ☐ Approved ☐ Approved with disclosure ☐ Additional verification required ☐ Declined

NOTES

The 10-Second Image Integrity Test

When you're under deadline pressure, ask these five questions:

- 1 Does it exist?**
Is what I'm showing actually present at the property?
- 2 Is it permanent?**
Am I removing or changing something a buyer will encounter?
- 3 Is it material?**
Could the alteration influence someone's perception of condition, value, surroundings or desirability?
- 4 Is it disclosed?**
If this is visualization, will the viewer understand that?
- 5 Would I defend it?**
Would I be comfortable explaining exactly what I changed to the agent, broker, MLS, buyer — or an attorney?

If #5 makes you uncomfortable, stop and investigate before delivering the image.

THE BUSINESS STRATEGY RULE

Enhance the photograph. Don't misrepresent the property.

AI should make your production workflow better — not introduce unnecessary liability into your business.

Professional real estate photographers aren't paid simply because they know how to operate cameras, drones, Photoshop or AI.

They're paid for their judgment. Protect that value.

DRONE SKILLS + BUSINESS STRATEGY = GREATER PROBABILITY FOR PROFITABILITY

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Educational resource only. This checklist does not constitute legal advice and does not determine whether a particular image modification complies with applicable law, MLS rules, brokerage policies or professional standards. Requirements vary by jurisdiction and may change. When uncertain, verify current requirements with the appropriate authority or qualified legal counsel.