



## Before & After Project Photos

By Deborah Rowell

So you've contracted the project, obtained a building permit, ordered materials, and are ready to get to work. **WAIT—before any demolition begins, take “before” pictures!** Documenting the site “before” and “after” can be enjoyed by the homeowner later, but more importantly for you it can be a **marketing tool** for referrals and to build a website for an online portfolio of your work. At minimum you want before and after pictures to document the work for yourself. At best you want to use these photos in various ways to market your remodeling skills. Homeowners who are dreaming and planning for their own project love to look at what others have done for ideas and inspiration.

**Permission is important.** *National Lumber PRO Force will provide you with a sample photo release form as a Word document file, which you can customize for your business.* This is the client's home and they may be shy about having strangers see inside. A photo release is simply a written agreement of how you plan to use the photos so that there is not a misunderstanding with the client later. If they are tentative, wait on getting the formal permission release signed until the end of the project when they are pleased with the results. Once you've accomplished a few “before” and “after” sets with clients, you can show future clients examples of how you've used such pictures in the past.

**Now you say, “I'm not good at taking pictures.”** With today's relatively inexpensive and easy to use digital cameras, even the most inexperienced person can take basic pictures. If after trying it you still feel that you aren't happy with the results then enlist help. Perhaps you have a spouse, employee, or friend who is willing to help. If all other options didn't work, ask the homeowner if they're agreeable to use your camera to take some photos.

For indoor shots be sure to leave the flash on automatic, just try to avoid having the flash reflect in a mirror or other reflective surface. Stand at an angle to mirrors when possible to keep you and the flash out of the main picture field. Take a lot of pictures. Especially since there's no film to go to waste, take a lot of pictures just in case some turn out to be blurry or simply not what you thought you saw in the viewfinder or preview screen. The more you take the more likely you'll come away with a few that are really good examples of the project.

Take pictures of the room from different angles. The goal is to get the important elements of the room documented. For example in a kitchen you want to see the work areas of sink, stove, countertop space and storage areas. Small spaces can be a challenge because you can't always back up far enough to get everything you want into the frame. Take several pictures instead from angles that allow you to see as much as possible. With practice you'll gain confidence.

For outdoor pictures, if possible try to choose a time of day when the area is not overly exposed to the sun. The pictures may be washed out by the brightness.

**Before:** Get an overview of the existing room and/or adjacent rooms that will be affected by the change. For a kitchen, take pictures of the existing elements which you will soon be improving. If the project is a deck or room addition, then take pictures of the view of the yard toward the home where the new deck or addition will be installed.



If possible, ask the homeowner to de-clutter if necessary before you take these pictures. While better organization will be one goal of the renovation, the existing structure should be shown rather than the clutter from lack of storage space. If it makes the conversation with the homeowner easier, tell them that you want to document this for them so that they can better appreciate the reason and process of making changes while they are patiently waiting for their dream room during the construction phases. The human memory can be a funny thing. It can be easy to forget the before and remember it more fondly during the messiness of construction.

**During:** While not as essential as “before” photos, perhaps you’ll want a picture of something unexpected that was found during the demolition, or the plumbing being ready for inspection, etc. You’ll be busy working hard to get as much done each day as possible, but if you make it a habit to document construction milestones of the project then you’ll have a more complete record.

**After:** This is the “money shot” that will show what beautiful results you provide. The composition of this picture is about the beautiful cabinetry you’ve installed, the convenient layout of the room, and the eye-appealing design elements. The finished kitchen will look best if tastefully dressed with a vase of flowers, bowl of fruit, standard kitchen accessories, etc. Look at magazines for examples of what your potential customers are expecting. While your budget most likely doesn’t include a professional photographer, you or your support person should be able to take acceptable photos by following these general guidelines.

**What kind of camera do you need:** Go to the local discount department store and check out name brands such as Canon, Kodak, Sony and Nikon. For example, right now Walmart ([www.walmart.com](http://www.walmart.com)) is advertising the Canon PowerShot Bundle (camera, printer and photo paper) for under \$180. While we are not promoting one brand as better than others, staying with name brands will give you the best value for your money.

**For immediate and easy marketing of your services,** provide the client with a set of the before and after pictures at the end of the job. As they brag about their newly renovated home to their friends and relatives, this expands “word of mouth” advertising by visual reinforcement of what terrific work you did.

**Next time we’ll discuss using the sets of photos you’ve taken this season to build a website to promote your business.**

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