

Digital Photography & Home Inspections, Part III

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Stay Focused! There is a myriad of techniques regarding photography and the art of taking pictures. For the purposes of photography within a home inspection, two simple rules apply; keep it as simple as possible and you can never take too many photos! Remember, you are not taking a picture that will win a Pulitzer Prize! The photo will be kept within your own archive as a historical record of the property and its condition at the time of the inspection. And since we are in the business of giving technical information to our Clients, then they should be considered as nothing more than an additional pair of eyes during the inspection.



Choosing Your Subject. One of the most frequent questions from home inspectors regarding the use of digital photography with home inspections is subject matter. In other words, what should you take a photo of? Which condition qualifies? Are you taking enough photos? Can you take too many? The best answer I can give is to use your best judgment. In my own practice, I digitally record the following; all conditions that will appear in the report, any inaccessible areas and conditions that may limit access or create liability (dogs, ponding water, etc.), as well as general subject photos of the entire property (the exterior, each interior room, hallways, appliances, etc.). Since I have adopted the use of digital photography in the field, I have come to realize that I am taking more and more photos with each inspection. Currently I average more than 150-175 shots per house! It's a lot easier than it may seem and because of the different storage mediums available today, archiving photos has become quite easy.

Shooting Your Subject. Let me reiterate, this should not become an art project. Just follow these 4 basic rules;

- (1) ***decide on a subject;*** As mentioned above, use your best judgment as to which subject conditions will be shot.
- (2) ***check your lighting;*** Make sure that your subject has sufficient lighting. This takes an educated eye, so give yourself the time needed to adopt this skill.
- (3) ***frame your subject;*** When framing your subject, be careful to look around the subject condition. There is nothing more embarrassing than showing your Clients a picture of the primary condition only to see a secondary condition within the picture framing. Inevitably the secondary condition will become the focus of attention, which will divert the importance of the primary condition.
- (4) ***focus and shoot;*** Always be sure that your subject is in focus before shooting. Most digital cameras today have an auto-focus feature, which makes this task a lot easier.

Viewing Your Subject. There are a multitude of image processing and viewing programs on the market today. Some of them like EZ Photo (www.valusoft.com) or HP Cartogra (www.hp.com) are fast and easy to use and can be downloaded for free on the Internet. More extensive programs are available. Some of the more popular include MS Paint (available on most PC's with windows), Adobe Photoshop (www.adobe.com), Corel Draw / Paint (www.corel.com) and MGI Photo Suite III (www.photosuite.com). These programs can be used to make alterations in the pictures such as brightness, contrast or adding captions. The software program that I have found to be superior is Firehand Ember 2000. This program is exceptionally fast, gives you the ability to view pictures in a thumbnail format and allows you to make all of the changes mentioned above plus add arrows for aid in identification. A trial version of Firehand can be downloaded for free at; www.Firehand.com.

In ***Part IV***, we will close this series with a discussion regarding the benefits of using digital photography with Home Inspections.

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