

LUXURY HOTELIERS

2nd Quarter 2018

SPOTLIGHT ON

Ted Teng

President & CEO,
Luxury Hotels of the World



ILHA
MEMBER GIVES
FEEDBACK ON
**LUXURY
STANDARDS
CERTIFICATION**

**MODERNIZE
YOUR PAYMENT
EXPERIENCE**

THE HIDDEN WORKFORCE

Hiring out of the Box

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Luxury Hoteliers magazine is a collaborative venture with the International Luxury Hotel Association's dynamic community of hospitality professionals interested in sharing their incredible knowledge of trends, industry intelligence and inspiration.

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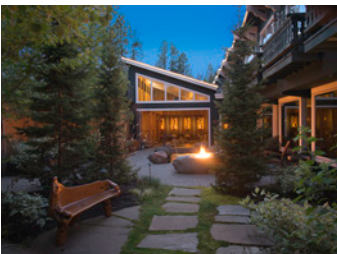
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Cover Picture Credit **Château Rhianfa** by Antonio Cuellar

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WAVES

TEN

“not so obvious”

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE HIRING A PHOTOGRAPHER
TO ENHANCE YOUR BRAND

By Antonio Cuellar



I have been a photographer for 17 years now and lately, I have noticed that the title of “photographer” does not seem to be as unique as it once was. Technology has brought many advances to the field of photography. Therefore, it has become much more accessible to call yourself a “photographer.”

Hilton Boulevard Hotel, Las Vegas

I certainly don't see this phenomenon happening as much in other art forms, and it has been a fascinating process to watch. We all enjoy a good painting or listening to good music. However, there is not yet a device that, with a click of a button, assists us in creating a fresco painting or in writing an uplifting song.

These changes are not necessarily a bad thing for the industry. One of the most positive things that have emerged from these changes is that it has forced photographers, who wish to continue making a living as a working professional, to elevate their game both artistically and technically.

This phenomenon also has repercussions in the hospitality industry. Luxury hotel brands have run into similar problems as images that were considered cutting edge twenty years ago, most likely, are at best mediocre by today's standards. It has become harder for luxury brands imagery to stand out, and we can all agree that imaging plays a substantial role in building a brand. Additionally, due to the growing number of photographers out there, selecting the right photographer has become very challenging. More prominent brands have even decided to step in and create a list of approved photographers

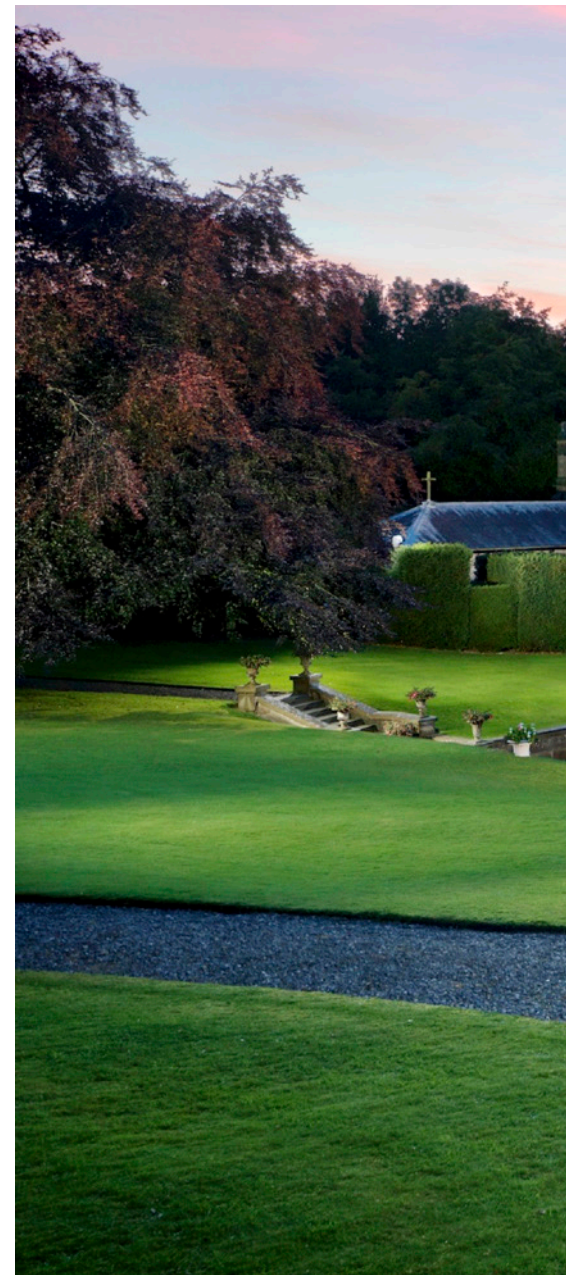
to provide some assistance.

In recent years I have focused my career exclusively in the area of luxury hotels. As a result, I have gathered valuable insights when it comes to successfully hiring photographers.

My insight comes from the other side of the fence, and I thought it would be interesting to share my perspective. Ultimately hiring the right photographer, whether it is to highlight food on a menu or to make a hotel's interiors shine, it is the first step in the right direction.

1. Choose a photographer who specializes in your needs. Photography is a big field with many specialties. I have re-shot many jobs where the client spent much of their marketing dollars hiring a very successful photographer, who did not specialize in luxury hotel photography. Food photography is an entirely different world from fashion photography, and architecture & interiors photography is worlds apart from wedding photography. In other words, if you need an outstanding professional athlete, don't hire LeBron James if you are putting together a hockey team. This suggestion is surprisingly not as evident as one might think.

2. Ask photographers to submit a job that they have previously completed. Requesting to see prior completed work, in addition to an online portfolio, is the best way to determine the quality of the images a photographer can produce. Most commercial photographers have a professional website with private galleries including all the photos from a single job. As an example, it can help determine how the photographer adequately addresses challenging lighting situations along with styling abilities. It is often easier to present a small selection of beautiful rooms that offer no challenges.



3. Avoid requesting a large number of images. One of the most common mistakes to make is to require too many photos. Commercial interiors photography is a prolonged and meticulous process in which a very experienced photographer can take an average of eight to ten images per day. The reality is that all it takes is a single image to get you excited about visiting a location. Remember that there will always be one best shot of the space or setup. Moreover, by reducing the number of images a hotel requires, they might be able to fit into their budget a superior photographer. Quality will always beat quantity.
4. Avoid having virtual tours. The idea of having a virtual tour is fascinating at first. The reality is that most virtual tours cheapen the brand. Consider this; a photographer uses his years of experience choosing a viewpoint that would best suit a room. He then turns to artificial lighting to accentuate that viewpoint. All of this while trying to select the props that best suit the room while setting the best camera angle. Why hire an artist to assess all of these things and then to expose your customers to a raw version of the room with terrible lighting and in most cases distorted angles? Virtual tours are not very popular with social media, and even though they are not as hideous as they once were, they leave nothing to the imagination and therefore nothing for the traveler to look forward to. Hotel meeting spaces could be the only acceptable exception, in my humble opinion, so long as they are only available upon request.
5. Request liability Insurance. There are so many things that can go wrong on a photo shoot anywhere from a guest tripping on a power cable to an aerial drone falling on someone. A professional photographer should always have



Broughton Hall Castle



Solmar Resort, Cabo San Lucas

before the photoproduction would be the second-best thing that can ensure image satisfaction.

10. Make it a priority to remove the old images from your site and any online booking sites. As much as perception is elevated when a potential customer sees a shining new photo of a room, that same perception can change when the same person sees an old picture of a space shot from a wrong angle or one that includes outdated furniture

If you want to hire a professional photographer to effectively capture your property and showcase

it to its best advantage, then it can be effortless to ascertain who is the best for you. Remember to hire someone who has experience working with a similar style property as yours. Remember to ask the big questions about liability insurance and drone licensing. Finally, ask to see a history of their work – if they can provide all these things that you ask for then you are very close to hiring the right photographer.



About the author

Antonio Cuellar is an award-winning commercial photographer that focuses exclusively on Luxury Hotels and Resorts. His passion for his craft has earned him multiple photography awards including being selected by American Society of Media Photographers as one of the top 20 photographers of 2013. In recognition of his achievements, Antonio is invited to contribute as a Hotel judge for LTG, a publication that showcases the newest and most stylish hotels around the globe. For more info visit <https://antoniocuellarpotography.com>

the appropriate coverage. I like to think of insurance as a good filter. In many cases, it helps separate the amateurs from the pros. More prominent brands make it mandatory for vendors to hold at least two million dollars (or pounds) of liability insurance.

6. Be extremely careful with drones. Drones have opened up endless possibilities regarding what a professional can achieve with aerial photography. However, a hotelier needs to be aware of the liability issues that exist regarding the use of drones. The FAA now requires commercial drone operators (anybody who flies a drone in exchange for money) to be fully licensed. There are areas where one can and cannot operate a drone because of interference with air traffic control. Las Vegas is an excellent example of a place where flying a drone is impossible due to the frequent helicopter tours close to the strip. You can only imagine the size of the lawsuit that will fall on a hotel if a photographer was not aware of the appropriate usage of a drone. An FAA license is also a proper filter to assist in differentiating the amateurs from pros.

- 7. Allow photographers to include valuable team members such as a stylist and assistants. At first, the use of a stylist could sound like an unnecessary expense, but the reality is that styling is the most time-consuming aspect of Luxury hotel photography. Having more people involved in production can mean that more photographs can be taken on a daily basis reducing the overall cost. Moreover, additional artistic eyes on the set will always lead to better images. Not to mention cutting production time will minimize disruption to guests.
- 8. Don't waste time preparing a photography schedule on your own. A professional photographer will have the skill and expertise to determine the best time to photograph an area. My advice is to meet a day before, right after scouting, to establish a common ground that will work for everybody.
- 9. Be an active participant in the project. Be involved in the project. The chances of being extremely satisfied with the images will skyrocket if you are involved. If the hotel is short staffed or there is any reason that you will be unavailable during the shoot, arranging a scouting day for the photographer