

# The Value of Architectural Photography

And how to increase it

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Architectural Photographer





“If everything else stops, all that defines the architectural practice is the photography.”

Paul Owen, Architect

## Preface

The value of architectural photography is difficult to determine and certainly not a static fact. What strikes me is that clients themselves can do a lot to increase the value of my work. How does the photographer work with the client on a win-win situation?

Winter months are ideal for the architectural photographer to think through these kinds of issues (if there are no leaves hanging from the trees, there is less demand for architectural photography). I hope this eBook makes a small contribution to our knowledge of the economic and creative process between photographer and client. I would like to express my gratitude to Michael Noordam (VOCUS Architecten), Pieter dHaeze (EOSZine) and Herman Couwenbergh (Couwenbergh Communiqueert) for their very helpful comments on a draft of this eBook. And of course also to all clients who make it possible for me to practice the beautiful profession of architectural photography!

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Breda, Netherlands, 2021



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## RESUME

Although the world is flooded with images, the architectural photographer nourishes his/hers niche in the market. An important reason for this is that having architectural photos taken is an economic decision by the client. It is an investment by the architect in improving his own brand experience and thus his market position. The return on that investment can be increased in a number of ways: if it falls into the fertile soil of a well-thought-out (commercial) communication strategy of the client and an optimal collaboration between client and photographer.





## INTRODUCTION

Never before has society been so visually oriented as it is now, never before has the daily production of images been so overwhelming. A professional architectural photographer produces a very small drop on that glowing visual plate, but a drop for which a client is willing to pay. Originally trained as an economist, I am always looking for the economic value of the architectural photographer's product. An economist also looks for opportunities to increase value. In this case: how can the economic value of architectural photography be increased, both by the client and the photographer?

### **The visual world as an environment for the architectural photographer and the clients**

In 2020, 1,436,300,000,000 photos were taken. 90% of all our available data has been produced in the past two years (!). Every day the timelines on Instagram are enriched by nearly a hundred million photos. Actually a small number, Snapchat users share 10 times more. Then we have Facebook, Twitter, etc. Only 7% of the 1.4 trillion annual photos are taken with a camera designed for this purpose.



### Surviving the photo-tsunami

Many types of professional photography suffer from the daily tsunami of photos. Fifteen years ago, a photographer could earn a decent living from, for example, stock photography. However, the concept of intellectual property has completely eroded in that segment. In addition to the rise of large numbers of (amateur) photographers who make good images for little money, this income has now been decimated. In many other types of photography it has become complex to distinguish yourself as a photographer and, perhaps more importantly, to put the added value in the spotlight.





### Characteristics of the architectural photographer

The architectural photographer works in the business-to-business segment and usually retains the intellectual property of the images he / she creates. An architectural photographer develops his own style and delivers custom work with high-quality images that meet (and preferably exceed) the expectations of the client. The client then uses the images to strengthen and expand its own market position. This is crucial: architectural photos are an investment in improving the client's market position. That creates a clear economic value for the images and the client can make a rational, economic assessment of whether or not he / she wants to invest in them. This accurate process between client and architectural photographer requires knowledge and experience from both parties, not only about taking photos but also about how the images can be used best. So we limit the definition of an architectural photographer somewhat to the photographer who works on commission. There is also potential for a broader definition in which you dive into the field of fine-art: urban photography, black and white architecture photography, etc. The following is not about that.





## Value increase of the investment in architectural photographs by the client

The architectural photographer can do a lot to maximize the value of the photos for the client. That is what the next chapter is about. The obvious is sometimes overlooked: the client him / herself can also do a lot to increase the value of architectural photography as a crucial part of the communication strategy that must support his / her branding.



### Mindset about communication

The most important thing is the mindset of the client. Paul Owen, an architect in Brisbane, Australia, aptly tells in a podcast about architectural photography: “After finishing the building, something that's gonna be there for quite a while, the client gets that building, obviously we get fees, but if everything else stops, all that defines the practice is the photography. It's like being a musician and if you don't record your work, you don't exist. This seems logical, but I don't know how many practices of designers think this way.”



How true is this existential interweaving between architect and photographer! Any time of the day, 24/7, someone who could be your next client can check your website. Your referential projects are always accessible and visible. This is no different for an architect than for the photographer himself.

Let me stick to a question of conscience: do you consider your website the best way for you to show off and do you therefore always think about ways to improve the presentation of your work? Or is the website a necessary evil for which (sometimes) time is found between deadlines?



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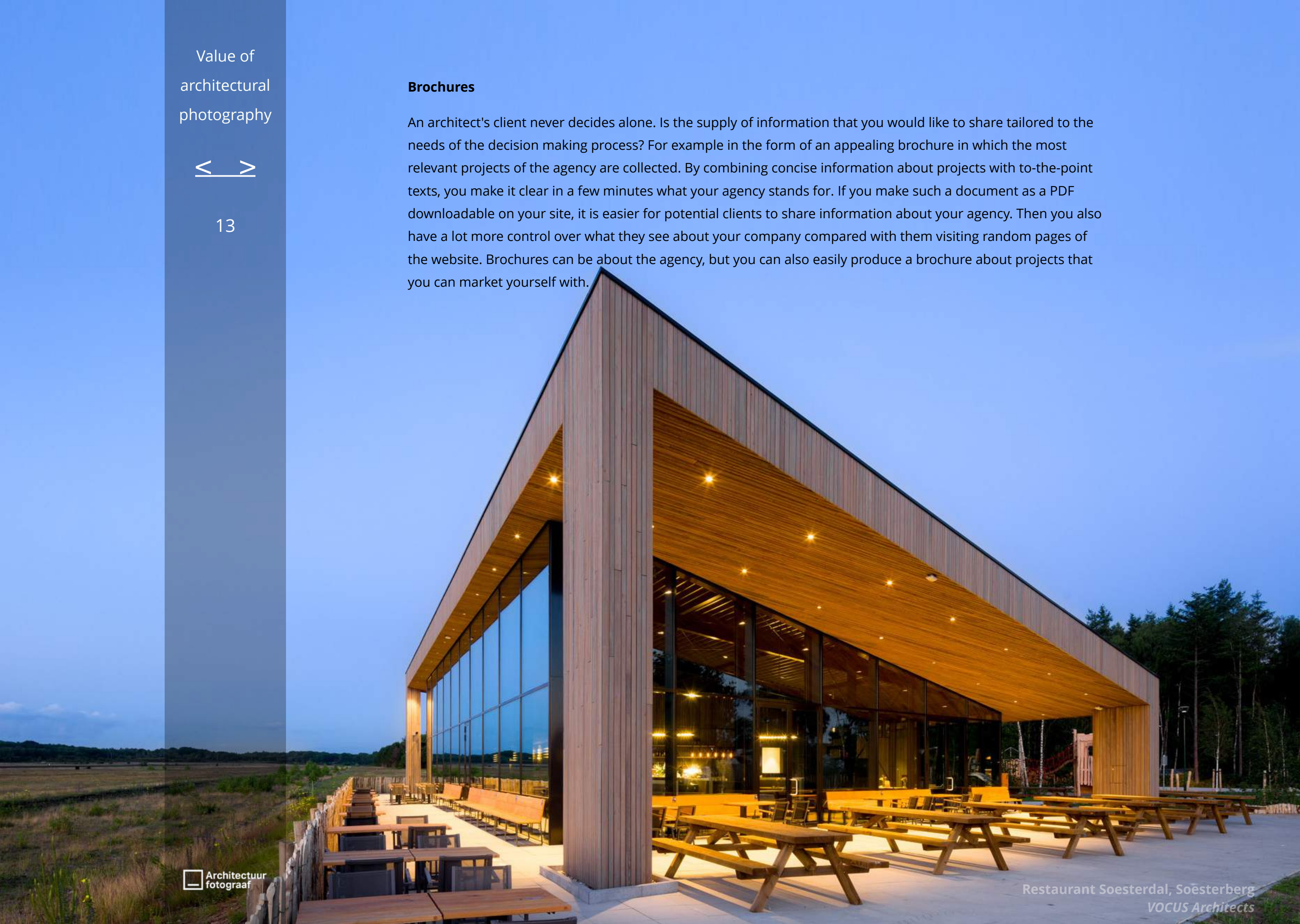
The more catchy the images and accompanying texts, the more a potential client will be triggered to further investigate your knowledge and skills. That provides countless possibilities to make optimal use of the architectural photos in which you have invested. I will mention a few.





### Brochures

An architect's client never decides alone. Is the supply of information that you would like to share tailored to the needs of the decision making process? For example in the form of an appealing brochure in which the most relevant projects of the agency are collected. By combining concise information about projects with to-the-point texts, you make it clear in a few minutes what your agency stands for. If you make such a document as a PDF downloadable on your site, it is easier for potential clients to share information about your agency. Then you also have a lot more control over what they see about your company compared with them visiting random pages of the website. Brochures can be about the agency, but you can also easily produce a brochure about projects that you can market yourself with.



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### Free publicity

Publications about your project in professional journals / websites and magazines give you the opportunity to grab the attention of potential clients at no cost. Competition for attention is fierce, so an investment in appealing architectural photography will certainly help!



### Commercial publicity

Solely being dependent on free publicity is too one-sided for many clients. Commercial publicity is a necessary element in communication strategy because it allows you to search very specifically for the right recipients for your information. It is evident that good images are important here, because it increases the return on investment in commercial publicity.



### Quotations

If you have reached the final phase of the decision-making, the combination of text and image is the means to make a difference. The presentation of your office is also better when using good architectural photos to support your story.

### Archiving

Less conspicuous to the outside world, but very necessary for every design agency: good archiving of all completed projects.

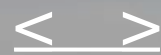


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VALUE INCREASE OF THE INVESTMENT  
IN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
THE PHOTOGRAPHER



The better the architectural photographer is able to capture the client's story in the photos, the higher their economic value. What kind of instruments are used?

#### LISTENING EAR

Being able to listen carefully to the wishes of the client is the starting point for a successful fulfillment of the assignment. That does not necessarily have to be a long and in-depth, real-life conversation. Email and telephone are often sufficient. In fact, sometimes that is the only means of communication I have with a client. Even after years, I have never met some in person! On the other hand: many clients also just enjoy being present at the shoot, and that certainly has many advantages such as instant feedback on the image series that is developing throughout the shoot.



#### PHOTOGRAPHIC EYE AND EXPERIENCE

The challenge for the architectural photographer is to reap the benefits of the listening ear with the photographic eye. By definition, the photographer has an eye for composition, otherwise he / she would have had to choose a different profession. But for the architectural photographer it is important to do this in such a way that the economic value of the images that are created is maximized. Experience plays an important role in this. Experience with all aspects of the shoot: studying in advance what the best moment for capturing will be, dealing with surprises on the spot, with people who play a role in the images, etc. After all, an architectural photo is not in the photo category: I stand and I shoot (-:).

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## LEARN ON THE JOB AND DON'T STOP LEARNING

Experience is important, but a photographer should always prevent inspiration from being displaced by it. Each shoot is unique and appeals to all the skills the photographer has. This means that he / she has to have an open mind when facing challenges. Learn from the client's questions, learn by gaining more experience every time and continue to learn externally. The extreme amount of knowledge available online, if properly channeled, is a mecca for anyone looking to advance their skills. The open attitude of "learning on the job and don't stop learning" is essential for the photographer to increase the added value of his / her images.



### GEAR

Architectural photography is quite technical. An architectural photographer works with very high resolution cameras and special tilt-shift lenses. Investments in the best possible gear pay off in better images, and thus more added value for the client. In addition, the architectural photographer uses the latest techniques in (usually) Photoshop to actually convert the files that come out of the camera in high-quality images.





## CONCLUSION

Architectural photos are an investment by the architect in improving his own brand experience and thus his market position. The return on that investment can be increased in a number of ways: if it falls into the fertile soil of a well-thought-out (commercial) communication strategy of the client and an optimal collaboration between client and photographer.



## About the author

In 2015 I started as an architectural photographer with *"Ruimtes in Beeld"* (Images of Spaces), the name of which was changed in 2020 to *Rob van Esch | Architectural Photographer*. The 10,000 hours that you need to have in your luggage to be referred as experienced have been made. With every assignment I strive for perfect images and experience helps without hindering the - always necessary - open mind.

Experience also provides a basis for reflection on the challenges involved in the life of a full-time architectural photographer. This eBook proves this; earlier I wrote *"Trends in Architectural Photography"*.

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