

# THE SCREED



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## Real estate photography is the subtle art of stacking the deck all your way...

If you follow Bloodhound Realty's Facebook page – *BrokerGregSwann* – you'll see me pointing out a lot of errors in listing photos. The goal is to get more things right, of course, which begins by getting fewer things wrong, but, even so, real estate photography is more art than science, more poetry than philosophy. *Nota bene:* The objective is to Close Escrow, not to flesh out a database with exhaustively illustrated details.

Every picture tells a story? Almost every deck of real estate photos tells me a lot about the seller and the listing agent. That's the error before all others: The photos should be telling a story, image by image, of how much better the buyers' lives are going to be in their new home.

It is very common in real estate listings to be led, room-by-room, on a museum docent's tour of the property. Any order is better than a random sequence, but those agents are selling the features, not the benefits. Your goal is a showing appointment, so the buyers must resolve that the home is answering enough of their needs to warrant a closer look.

If you get that far, you're winning, but the best prize is to hook the buyers with the photography before they ever set foot on the property.

**Here is my deck-stacking strategy for leading with your strongest photos:**

1. **Unobtainium.** Waterfront lot? Golf course lot? Diving pool? Diving pool *on* a golf course lot? When you have what the other folks don't, you lead with it. Shoot from the patio, and show why the unobtainable amenity makes the home that much more livable.

2. **Wow-Factor.** If the kitchen is stunning, lead with it. It's the homiest room in the home, so stage it for livability – and declutter for dear life! – but wow-factor photos can sell the home on their own. Plus, having the kitchen as the primary photo will make the listing stand out among all the head-on elevations in thumbnail-sized photos.

3. **Hominess.** It's where the heart is. See *The Screed* last month for decluttering, cleaning and staging advice. Add just enough homey elements in the staging to let the buyers know how welcome they will be, when they move in.



*"If you buy three bedrooms, guests, maybe even grandkids, will come."*  
That's marketing – sell the benefit, not the feature – and it is well done.

4. **Cleanliness.** I like to say, "Nothing sells like clean." The truth? Nothing repels like grime. The trick to making a home squeaky clean in its real estate photos is to make it squeaky clean, first. That means every room, even the garage and the utility space, but it goes double for the kitchen and bathrooms. Don't lose buyers over a minor chore.

5. **Charming details.** Are there interesting light fixtures? Orange buds about to blossom? Does the home take the light perfectly at sunset? Every house is unique and perfect in its way, even a house that may need twice as much in rehab as it can sell for, for now. You can't sell what isn't there, but you can sell tight close-ups of any home's potential.

Open with your strongest cards, less is more and when in doubt, leave it out. Remember that you're telling a story, and stack your deck that way, to lead the buyers where you want them to go.



## What price unobtainium? What's a waterfront lot worth?

That's a Sun City question, or at least a Greater Phoenix question. In the Valley of the Ever-Fecund Sun, all of our lakes are fake, so a waterfront lot qualifies as most-unobtainable. Only desert mountainside homes – paradoxically – are harder to come by, and we have precisely zero of those in Sun City.

I've been reading every listing in town for more than a year now, and I can ballpark any footprint, adjusting for Phases One, Two or Three. I can give you the turnkey number, and therefore also the dowdy or Wow-Factor numbers, and I can easily adjust for pools or golf course lots.

In consequence, I can see the listing agent's pricing strategy. I can tell from the typically stupid or sleazy Original List Price what the agent thinks the home is really worth, and from there I can predict where it will sell.

None of this is a substitute for a true CMA, but, until there is a house in play, it doesn't have to be. It's just a quick and easy way of digesting listings as they come in, as they are reduced, and as they are Closed, Cancelled or Expired.

But: So far, I have no idea how to adjust for fake-lake waterfront lots. I was talking to my wife about this: To get the adjusted value of a pool, do three true comps with a pool and three without and take account of the difference. The homes are truly comparable *EXCEPT* for the pool, so the difference in sold price *IS* the pool.

The same principle applies to golf course lots, but a little less precisely. Homeowners on Sun City golf courses keep up with their own Joneses, and they tend to over-improve and expand more than the folks across the street. It ends up being better to comp them to each other – and even then with a close eye on disparities in prestige amenities. The owners have spent 60+ years making each home unique. But even then, it's easy to price the lot premium itself, even if you have to do it golf course by golf course.

Fake lakes are another kettle of fish. There are almost no waterfront lots in Sun City, hence the lot premium is huge – at least \$150k, but that is nothing but a guess. As above, you can only price them to each other, and each one has been even more over-improved and über-expanded – Scottsdale sensibilities squeezed onto 9,000sf flat caliche lots. They make a perfect war on their tract-home

### **The Bloodhound Way: Seniors Serving Seniors**



**Seniors Serving Seniors**

I've written before about 'The Sun City Business' – the way too many nearby vendors take advantage of our neighbors. It's why I'm focusing my listing practice on Sun City – to throw my body in the path of inept listing strategies that cost home sellers tens of thousands of dollars and months of irreplaceable time. I'm happy to share everything I know, happier still to deliver the goods at Close of Escrow.



*I think the neighbor has the better idea: The best way to enjoy the lakefront views is from your outdoor soak tub...*

origins, and each one is unique and utterly non-fungible – jewelry box homes in bold defiance of Del Webb's production-home ideal.

Give me one to sell, and I will do the research necessary to pin down the waterfront lot premium. The listing from which the photo was filched came in at around \$200k, subtracting the value of the same property if it were across the street. That seems outrageous to me, but unobtainium commands its own price..

### **Consult with me and I will share my marketing plan with you – even if you list with someone else!**



Sun City real estate listings start high, sell slowly and close low. Over and over again.

There's a better way of doing things: Marketing for the highest, safest, soonest offers – so you get the most money you can for your home in the fastest possible time.

I'm Greg Swann, a long-time West Valley broker. I can get more money for your home faster – and I have the stats to prove it. And: I am the hardest-working listing agent you will ever work with, and I will be happy to prove that, too.

I love living and working in Sun City, and I love helping my neighbors hang on to the value of their homes. I want to be the champion of your equity. Call me, and we can talk about how I can keep your money in your pocket when you're ready to sell. It costs you nothing, and I will show you how to get your home sold in this market – even if you choose to list it with someone else.

**Call today: 602-740-7531**