

#1 Real Estate Photo Distraction: Converging Verticals

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One of the most common mistakes Realtors make with marketing photos is to use images that have walls that don't appear to be vertical. This problem is caused by not holding the camera level in the front-to-back plane. When using a wide-angle or ultra wide-angle lens this problem is exaggerated. This effect is also referred to as "converging verticals".

Surprisingly many real estate photographers don't understand the negative aesthetic impact of having converging verticals in real estate images. I think part of the reason is that many times we see images of buildings that have converging verticals that are being used for other non-marketing purposes and the impression is that these images are creative or arty. Quite, the contrary, images like this occur when the real estate photographer is in a hurry, not paying attention and is not willing to take the time it takes to correct the image.



Camera is pointed up to get the top of the house in the photo



Camera is pointed down to get more in an interior photo

What's the problem with converging verticals?

The reason it's important to have vertical, verticals is that it's a huge distraction if verticals are converging. The purpose of real estate photographs is to make the homes and rooms look their very best and motivate people to say to themselves, "wow, that's a beautiful room; I'd like to buy this home!" Anything in the image that gets in the way of this purpose is a problem.

When anyone looks at the above photos they know very well that the walls are really vertical and plum, that's just the way homes are built. Everyone is so used to seeing perfectly vertical straight walls that when one looks at one of the photos above their eye keeps coming back to the strange walls at the edge. The strangeness of the walls is so unusual and disorienting it's hard to pay attention to the real purpose of the photograph. Thus, the images are not as effective as they could be if the walls were vertical as expected.

If you are still not a believer in keeping verticals, vertical take a look at Architectural Digest which sets the standard for Architectural Photography. There are no converging verticals in this magazine because all the photography is done by the top Architectural Photographers in the world.

How to minimize converging verticals when shooting

There are a number of ways to prevent converging verticals:

1. Keep the camera body level in the front-to-back plane when shooting. You can do this by putting a bubble level in the hot-shoe of the camera body or on the top of the camera body and shoot with a tripod.
2. Use the vertical edge of the image in the view-finder to judge how level the camera is. Just keep the vertical edge of the view-finder lined up with a vertical in the image.
3. Squat down lower than a normal standing position when shooting. This will tend to keep the camera more level. Normally you tend to slant the camera downward when you shoot from a standing position.
4. Another way to minimize converging verticals is to use a tilt/shift lens. Canon makes the TS-E 24mm and Nikon makes the wide angle shift 28mm f/3.5 PC-Nikkor. Both of these lenses list at over \$1,000.

How to correct converging verticals with photo-editing

I find that no matter how much I try I can't hold the camera perfectly straight when shooting so I always straighten in the photo-editing part of my work-flow. I'm always too busy paying attention to everything else to keep the verticals perfect when shooting.

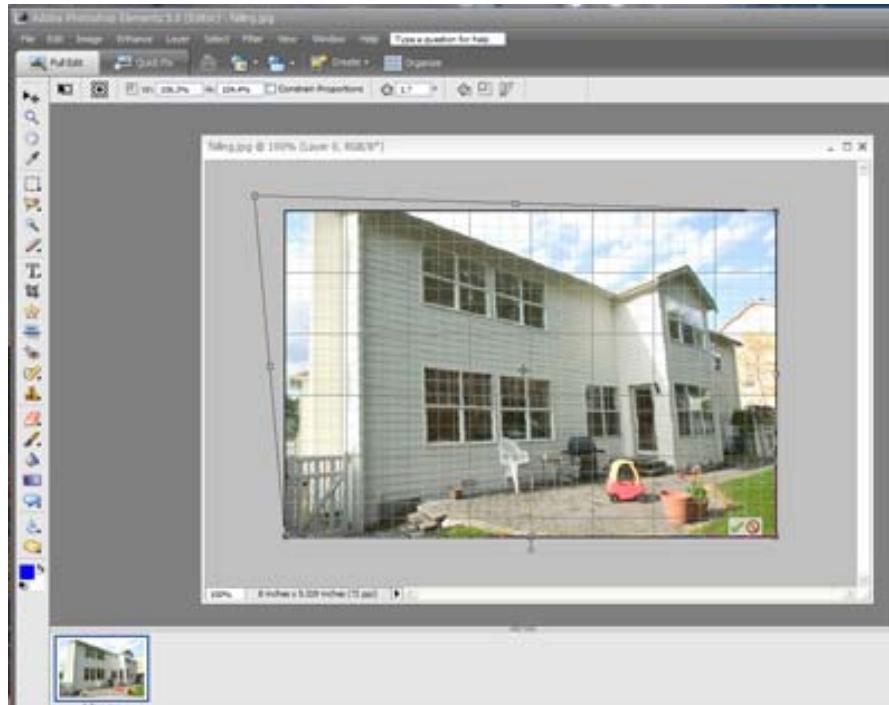
There are many shooting situations in which it's impossible to get the camera level front-to-back and still get the shot. The classic example for the real estate photographer is when you are shooting the front of a home from the street which is lower than the home and the only way you can get the shot is point the camera upwards. This is the situation that the tilt/shift lenses were designed for. However, in the new digital environment there is a quick, easy and inexpensive photo-editing solution for converging verticals.

Fixing verticals is easy in photo-editing applications like Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. Below I give two ways to fix converging verticals:

Older Versions of Photoshop and Photoshop Elements

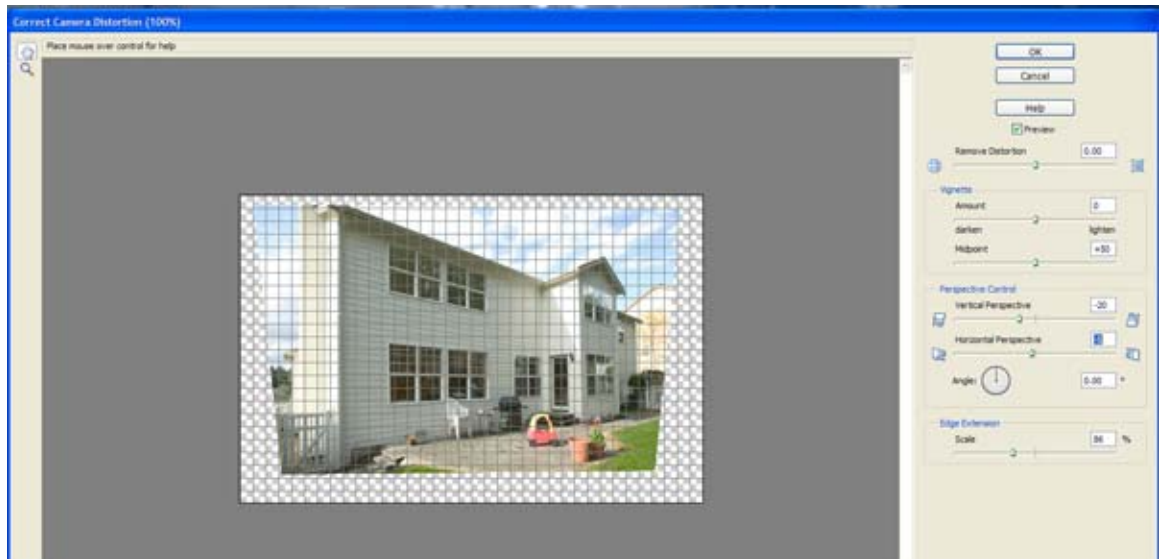
1. Open the image that needs fixing.
2. Under "View" click on the "Grid" command. This displays vertical and horizontal reference lines so you have a perfect reference for vertical.
3. Under "View" (PSE) or "Edit" (older versions of Photoshop) click on "Transform", "Distort". This results in 'handles' on each corner of the image. These handles allow you to distort the image.

4. Click and drag on the which ever corner of the image you need to, to get the verticals to appear vertical.
5. Press enter to finalize the changes. Note that you may loose some of the image. If you don't want to loose any of the image you can add some extra "canvas" to the image before starting by increasing the canvas size.
6. Save the file



Using the "Correct Camera Distortion" Filter in PSE 5

1. With the image you want to correct open in the edit window select Filter>Correct Camera Distortion...
2. This filter allows you correct a number of distortion problems one of which is "Vertical perspective".
3. Make sure the "Preview" check-box is checked.
4. Use the "Vertical perspective" slider to line up the verticals in the image with the vertical reference grid.
5. The "Edge extension" slider will create extra space around the image if desired.
6. Click "OK" to finalize the adjustment.
7. You may need to crop the resulting image.



When you get practiced, this only takes 15 to 20 seconds per image and it is well worth the effort.