AI-Altered Real Estate Listing Photos Create New Risks for Homebuyers

Buyers Brokers Only offers consumer guidance on virtual staging, digital photo alterations, and the growing problem of "housefishing"



Illustrative Example of Altered Listing Photo [AI-Generated Image]

GREATER BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Artificial intelligence can make real estate listing photos brighter, cleaner, and more appealing; however, increasingly sophisticated digital alterations can also make homes appear substantially different from what homebuyers will see in person.

Buyers Brokers Only, an exclusive buyer agent real estate brokerage serving homebuyers in Greater Boston, is encouraging consumers to understand how artificial intelligence and other digital tools may affect the listing photos they rely on when searching for a home.

Consumer concern about AI-altered real estate photos has grown as technology makes digital changes more realistic and harder to detect. Misleading listing photos have even prompted the term "housefishing," describing situations in which an online property does not match what a prospective buyer sees at a showing.

"Listing photos are often a buyer's first introduction to a property, so buyers naturally rely on them to decide which homes are worth seeing," said Rich Rosa, co-founder of Buyers Brokers Only. "Virtual staging can help buyers imagine how a room might look with furniture or other decor, but there is an important difference between showing possibilities and changing a buyer's understanding of what is actually there."

– AI-Altered Real Estate Photos Are Becoming More Common

One study showed that more than 10 percent of listing photos across several major real estate portals may have been digitally altered.

Reports of misleading alterations have included rooms appearing brighter or larger than they are, different fixtures and finishes, and even features that do not exist at the property.

The National Association of REALTORS® has cautioned real estate professionals to use artificial intelligence in listing photos to "show possibilities," not to "rewrite reality." Its Code of Ethics also states that REALTORS® must refrain from exaggerating, misrepresenting, or concealing pertinent facts and must present a "true picture" in advertising and marketing.


Rich Rosa, co-founder of Buyers Brokers Only

The National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents (NAEBA) issued guidance in March 2026 encouraging consumers to look for labels such as "digitally altered," request original photographs when appropriate, and independently verify important property characteristics.

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> *Rich Rosa, co-founder of Buyers Brokers Only*

"The concern is the gap that can occur when images imply features, scale, or conditions that aren't there in person, especially when digital changes are not clearly disclosed," Rosa, a past president of NAEBA, said in the guidance.

– Massachusetts Association of REALTORS® Recommends Disclosure

The Massachusetts Association of REALTORS® (MAR) addressed AI-enhanced real estate photographs in its May 2026 legal hotline guidance, identifying accuracy as the primary concern.

MAR recommended disclosing the use of AI or other software that enhances photographs so consumers understand they are essentially viewing virtual staging.

It also advised real estate professionals not to use digital tools to remove permanent fixtures or modify visible defects. The guidance specifically cited digitally removing a water stain from a ceiling as an example that could lead to a misrepresentation claim.


David Kres, co-founder of Buyers Brokers Only

The association further cautioned real estate professionals to examine AI-generated content for potential fair housing violations.

Misleading property images also could have legal implications under Massachusetts consumer protection law.

“Home buyers should be able to expect that real estate advertising accurately represents the property being offered for sale,” said Dave Kres, co-founder of Buyers Brokers Only. “Depending on the circumstances, materially misleading photographs could violate Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 93A, which prohibits unfair or deceptive acts or practices. Buyers should ask questions when the home they see in person does not match how it was presented online.”

– States Begin Regulating Digitally Altered Real Estate Images

Several states have begun addressing digital alterations in real estate advertising.

California legislation that took effect in January 2026 requires licensed real estate brokers and agents to disclose digitally altered images in certain real estate advertising and provide a public link to the original image.

Wisconsin has enacted legislation scheduled to take effect in 2027 requiring real estate licensees to disclose when technology materially alters how a property is depicted in marketing images.

New Jersey has also considered legislation addressing AI-generated real estate images, while New York officials have issued consumer warnings and considered additional disclosure requirements.

The developments reflect growing attention to whether consumers can distinguish between an accurate photograph of a property and a digitally created representation.

– What Homebuyers Can Do About AI-Altered Listing Photos

Buyers Brokers Only encourages home buyers to treat listing photographs as one source of information rather than definitive evidence of a property's condition, dimensions, or features.

Consumers can take several steps when evaluating real estate listing photos:

* Look for disclosure language. Check photographs, captions, and listing descriptions for terms such as "virtually staged," "digitally altered," "AI-enhanced," or "digital rendering."

* Ask to see original photos. When an image appears heavily edited or virtually staged, buyers can request an unaltered version for comparison.

* Compare photographs with the property in person. Pay particular attention to room size, lighting, fixtures, finishes, windows, views, and the property's surroundings.

* Verify dimensions and features independently. Photographs can make rooms appear larger or different from their actual dimensions. Homebuyers should review available measured floor plans.

* Do not rely on photographs to evaluate condition. Digital editing can make cosmetic problems difficult to see. Buyers should rely on their own observations, available property information, and an independent home inspection when evaluating condition.

* Ask questions about discrepancies. If something visible during a showing differs substantially from the listing photos, buyers can ask what was digitally changed and why.

"Home buyers should be able to tell whether a listing photo shows the property as it exists today or a digitally enhanced version of it," said Rosa, also a licensed attorney. "Clear disclosure helps buyers know what they are looking at and what they may need to verify in person."

About Buyers Brokers Only, LLC

Buyers Brokers Only, LLC is an exclusive buyer agent real estate brokerage representing home buyers throughout Greater Boston. The company represents home buyers exclusively and does not list property or represent home sellers. Since 2005, Buyers Brokers Only has helped more than 2,000 home-buying clients purchase more than $1 billion in real estate.

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