

I was kneeling on cold concrete at 9:12 a.m., hood up, phone flashlight doing the best it could against the shop's yellow fluorescents, while a guy from the shop named Marco watched me like I was auditioning for a CSI spin-off. Rain had been spitting all morning in Mount Pleasant, and the street outside still smelled like wet asphalt and sambal from the corner pho place. My hands were damp from the rain on the car and from leaning on a towel I forgot to bring. I had to remind myself to breathe, and to stop taking the same shot of the front bumper from slightly different angles.

This is what I learned doing quality control photos after my car got ceramic coating and a full front ppf bancouver install — and yes, I mean full front, not "mostly front." I wanted a checklist I could hand to the shop and to myself so I could stop guessing whether a speck was in the film, on the paint, or on my camera lens.

Why I started photographing everything

I booked the work because my last winter in Vancouver had been rough on the paint — gravel on the Granville off-ramp, salt mist, that one time someone scraped a grocery cart along the curb. The shop quoted \$450 for the front bumper ppf bancouver piece and \$1,200 for the ceramic coating for the whole car, split across two days. It was expensive enough that I didn't want "close enough" quality. Also, I had read one too many forum posts where people complained about ghost lines, trapped dust, or installers cutting corners.

I still don't fully understand how the warranty photos need to be submitted for claims, but apparently the right photos, taken at the right angles, make <https://made-magazine.com/beyond-the-logbook-the-brisbane-car-maintenance-your-logbook-forgot-to-mention/> life easier. So I made a list and went photo-happy.

The weirdest part of standing in someone else's garage

Lighting messes everything up. The shop had two fluorescent banks, one over the bay and one nearer the office. The one over the bay was warm, the other cold. Reflections showed every overhead pipe and the Neighbor's red Mazda sitting two bays over. Marco kept saying, "We can buff that out," and I kept thinking, buff what? The reflection of the ceiling? I learned to angle the phone so reflections were minimized, but not eliminated — because some reflections actually help show whether the coating is uniform.

Also, tools are everywhere, and most of them are blue. The blue makes your camera white balance go nuts. I took a bunch of flat-lay shots of the tools and tape they used when masking. It felt silly. It helped. Those photos later proved a thin 1 cm peel near the fog light was from the film edge, not a scratch.

My practical photo checklist (what I actually brought and used)

- phone with at least 12 MP camera, fully charged
- microfiber towel, small tripod, and a cheap LED ring light I bought for \$28
- a roll of painter's tape to mark spots and write tiny numbers
- a pen and a small notebook for timestamps and notes
- the shop's job order and my invoice for reference

How I framed shots so they helped, not hurt

I made myself take the same set of photos for each panel: wide, medium, close, edge, and a water-beading test. Don't overthink the names, just shoot that sequence. Wide gives context, medium shows relative placement of any blemish, close is for detail, edge shows the film lift risk, and the water test proves the coating's hydrophobic behavior.

Specifics that stopped arguments later

- Take time and date stamped photos when possible. I used my phone's video timestamp feature as a backup.
- For edges, get the camera almost parallel to the surface. If the edge is lifting, a parallel shot makes it obvious. Angled shots can hide lifting.
- Use the LED ring light for close-ups. It helped reveal micro-scratches and trapped dust under the PPF.
- After the water bead test, take a photo from about 1.5 meters away and then a close shot. The big shot shows overall beading, the close one shows whether beads are rounding correctly or flattening.
- For ceramic coating texture or orange-peel, put the light at a low grazing angle. This shows texture better than a head-on flash.

A frustrating detail that nobody warned me about

Masks and wrap overlaps read differently in photos. The painters' tape lines on a glossy black bumper throw weird highlights that look like scratches. I spent 20 minutes once zooming into a spot that turned out to be a tape residue. The residue cleaned off easily, but that 20 minutes of paranoid zooming could have been avoided if I'd carried a bottle of isopropyl and a small applicator. Now I do.

When to call someone over

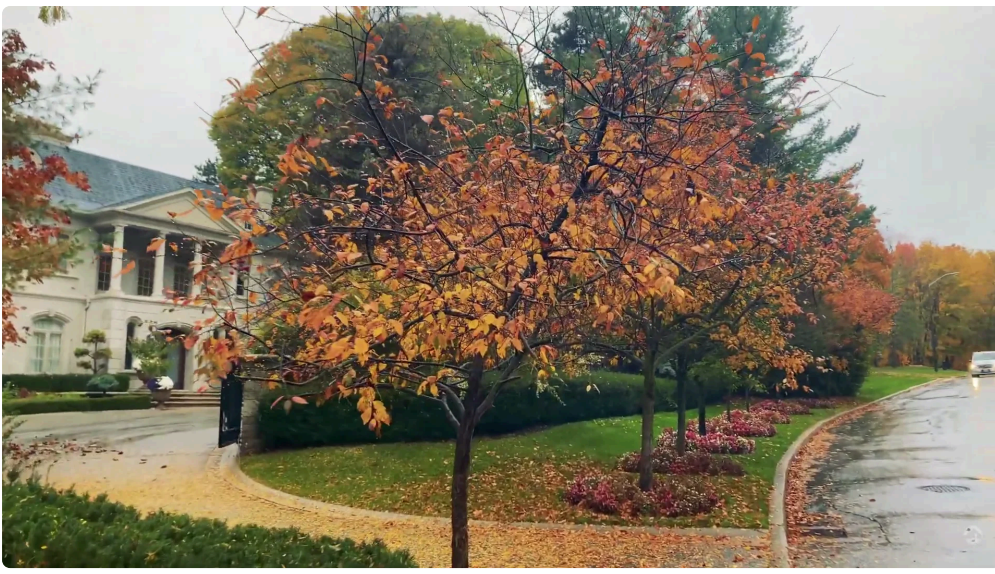
If you see any of these in your photos, flag it immediately: bubbles under film, a 2 mm or larger lift at an edge, fine but continuous scratches in a pattern (usually improper prep), or water that beads into irregular sheets instead of discrete spheres. I called Marco over for a tiny bubble the size of a sesame seed, and it got fixed before the car left the shop. Small wins like that make me feel like this whole checklist isn't obsessive, it's necessary.

The awkward conversation about cost and "perfect"

I paid a deposit and the shop gave me a 12-month warranty with conditions. I understood half of it. They said things like "we don't cover stone chips" and "normal wear will occur." Fine. What I didn't fully get was the part about "warranty void if ppf maintenance done elsewhere." So I asked, at 11:05 a.m., in the middle of taking a photo of the A-pillar, what "maintenance" meant. Marco said, "If someone peels it, or uses solvents that we don't recommend, it affects it." I still don't know what a "we-recommend" solvent is, but I wrote down the shop's recommended products and added them to my wallet.

Neighborhood noise and the human side

People came and went. At 11:30 a woman from upstairs poked her head in asking if we could move her old Prius. A delivery guy beeped the horn outside in Gastown-style impatience. A bicycle courier left his wheels outside and called Marco for a coffee. These small interruptions teach you that quality control isn't a sterile lab task, it's a human, messy, communal thing. The car left the shop at 4:20 p.m., covered and humming like it was proud of itself.



Final damage to my wallet and my sanity

Between the coat and the ppf bancouver work, my total was \$1,650 after tax. It hurt. It also bought me peace of mind and a stack of photos that, if needed, would probably get me somewhere in a warranty claim. I still don't fully trust my own photo skills, but I feel equipped. And for the first time since October, I looked at my car without squinting for the next day's weather forecast.

If you end up doing this yourself, don't stress perfection. Aim for consistency. Take the same shots for each panel, carry the small LED, and be ready to ask awkward questions about warranty wording. I don't know everything about coatings and films, and I still get confused by some technical jargon, but photos don't lie. They make conversations clearer, and they stop you from losing sleep over a speck you might never have noticed if you hadn't taken a dozen pictures in a damp Vancouver morning.

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