UPDATE, 5:57 p.m. ET: The New York Times has published a new editors' note about the altered photo essay that was published in Sunday's Times Magazine. The newspaper says "most of the images did not wholly reflect the reality they purported to show." The note does not address which photos were altered, or whether the photographer misrepresented them to the editors. PDN has tried to reach Edgar Martins, the photographer, but has not heard from him. Here's the Times' note:

"A picture essay in The Times Magazine on Sunday and an expanded slide show on NYTimes.com entitled 'Ruins of the Second Gilded Age' showed large housing construction projects across the United States that came to a halt, often half-finished, when the housing market collapsed. The introduction said that the photographer, a freelancer based in Bedford, England, 'creates his images with long exposures but without digital manipulation.'

"A reader, however, discovered on close examination that one of the pictures was digitally altered, apparently for aesthetic reasons. Editors later confronted the photographer and determined that most of the images did not wholly reflect the reality they purported to show. Had the editors known that the photographs had been digitally manipulated, they would not have published the picture essay, which has been removed from NYTimes.com."
UPDATE, 5:03 p.m. ET: The New York Times plans to run an editors’ note about the altered photographs in tomorrow's paper, according to Kathy Ryan, photo editor at The New York Times Magazine.

EARLIER POST:

The New York Times Magazine has withdrawn a photo essay by Edgar Martins — described in print as having been produced "without digital manipulation" — because several of the photographs show signs of digital manipulation. The photo essay, which ran in the July 5 issue of the magazine, shows abandoned real estate projects.

An editors' note now appears when you try to view the online version of the essay.

In the Sunday print edition, the Times Magazine made a big deal out of the fact that the pictures weren't digitally altered. Here's how the magazine described Martins' essay (emphasis ours):
"Last fall, The New York Times Magazine commissioned Edgar Martins, a 32-year-old Portuguese photographer based in London, to capture on film the physical evidence of the real estate bust in the United States. Martins, who creates his images with long exposures but without digital manipulation, traveled from rural Georgia to suburban California, visiting large construction projects that began during the speculative boom years and then came to a sudden halt, often half-finished, when the housing and securities markets collapsed."

Update: Working from a copy of the Times Magazine, PDN has identified evidence of manipulation in three of Martin's six published photos. A blogger first noticed the project was suspect based on a photo that ran online only.

In all four cases, unlikely repetitions of elements suggest that they are composites or have had some elements covered up.

One picture shows an evenly-lit room in an unsold mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut. The room appears near-perfect in its symmetry, down to have two identical thermostats and light switch plates facing each other on opposite walls. There are also repeating patterns in the leaves on the floor.
New York Times Magazine Withdraws Altered Photo Essay

Written by Daryl Lang
Another picture shows a Las Vegas development with construction fencing in the foreground.
New York Times Magazine Withdraws Altered Photo Essay

Written by Daryl Lang
A third picture, of a home in Dawsonville, Georgia, has a patch of trees repeating in the background.
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The question of manipulation first surfaced on a message published Tuesday on Metafilter, a community blog, which accused the photographer of using a mirror effect in one of his photos of a house under construction. That photo ran only on the Times website. A poster used an animation to show that the photo was too perfectly symmetrical—even the wood grains on boards matched perfectly.
“original”
Photog claims this is how it looks

raw flip
Left mirrored to right side
New York Times Magazine Withdraws Altered Photo Essay

Written by Daryl Lang

Times Magazine photo editor Kathy Ryan confirmed that the Times learned of the alterations from a reader, and that altered photos appeared in print and online. She said an editors' note was planned for Thursday's paper. No one answered a phone number listed on Martins' Web site, and Martins did not immediately return an e-mail.

Martins' work has been described as free of manipulation before. The publisher's description of his 2008 book "Edgar Martins: Topologies" begins: "With artful composition and controlled framing—but no digital manipulation—Edgar Martins creates sublimely beautiful views of often un-beautiful sites."