



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Scheme Arrives Too Late.

Ask them before you sign an architectural rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one asks for a call to explain question two.

START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

Architectural rendering projects rarely fail on image quality. Good portfolios are everywhere. They fail on the five things below, and every one of them could have been spotted in the first email, if anyone had asked.

WHAT THE SALES CALL PROMISED	WHAT YOU FIND OUT IN WEEK THREE
01 "Plenty of time before the committee"	The draft lands two days before the planning or competition deadline. There is no room for a second view or a revision.
02 "Priced per render, nice and simple"	The competition board, the website, the client deck and the press image each cost a full render, although the scene was already built.
03 "I'll handle it personally"	Planning comes back with a change to the massing, and the freelancer who built the scene no longer answers email.
04 "Our in-house 3D team"	The agency sends your drawings to a subcontractor you have never met. Every design comment travels through two inboxes.
05 "We only do the renders"	The BIM model from your office or another vendor does not open cleanly. You pay to rebuild the building and lose two weeks.

You are not choosing a portfolio. You are choosing a process.

The twelve questions on the next two pages test the process. Each one maps to one of the failures above, and each has an answer you can check.



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THE TEST, PART ONE

Questions 1 to 6: deadlines and budget

Send these as they are. You are not looking for enthusiasm; you are looking for numbers, names and dates. Vague answers are an answer too.

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
1. When would I see the first draft, counted from a complete brief?	A number of working days, 3 to 5 for a still, and what "complete" means for drawings and materials.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.
2. What date would the finished set land, and what could move it?	A date, plus the things that would push it: late drawings, a design change after the draft.	A date with no conditions, or no date.
3. What happens if the submission date moves forward by a week?	A rush option with a price, roughly half the time for around 40% more.	"We'll make it work" with no price attached.
4. Once the scene is built, what does one more view cost?	Noticeably less than the first view, because the model, materials and lighting already exist.	Every extra view priced as a new render.
5. What does a crop for a board, a deck or a press image cost?	A small fee or included, since it comes from the same master file.	A new render fee for each format.
6. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?	A fixed number, typically two at draft and one on the final, with a round defined as one consolidated list.	"Unlimited revisions". It means nobody has priced them.

Why question 2 matters most

Architectural visuals serve a date that does not move: a committee, a competition or a client presentation. A studio that cannot name what would push its delivery date has not planned for your drawings changing, and they usually do.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: team and model

ASK THIS

A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE

WALK AWAY IF

7. Who exactly will model and render my building?

Named roles on the studio's own team, and who you will talk to day to day.

"Our partners", "our network", or silence.

8. Is any part of the work passed to another company?

"No", or an honest "yes, the entourage library" with the reason.

A pause, then "we have a trusted team".

9. If my contact is away, who picks up the project?

A second person who already knows the scene.

It depends on one person being available.

10. If planning asks for a change, can you reopen the scene months later?

Yes: the working scene is archived, and new views start from it, not from zero.

Only the final JPEGs exist after delivery.

11. Can you work from our Revit, ArchiCAD or SketchUp model?

Yes, with a note on what needs cleaning, and the same model later serves animation and 360 views.

"We'd rebuild it anyway", or a partner for motion.

12. What would you need from me to start this week?

A short list: drawings or the model, site photographs, a reference or two, the views you need.

A thirty-page questionnaire before a quote.

10 - 12

GOOD ANSWERS: HIRE, AND ASK FOR THE FIRST DRAFT DATE IN WRITING

7 - 9

ASK FOR ONE PAID TEST VIEW BEFORE COMMITTING THE FULL SET

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE PORTFOLIO LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 8

Subcontracting is common and not always bad. Hiding it is the problem, because you cannot fix a timing or quality issue with a team you are not allowed to talk to. Ask it plainly and listen to how long the answer takes.



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SEND IT

One email, three studios, one day

You do not need a call to run the test. Paste the email below, attach what you already have, and send it to the three studios on your shortlist at the same time. Replies arrive within a working day, and the difference between them is usually obvious by the second paragraph.

THE EMAIL TO SEND

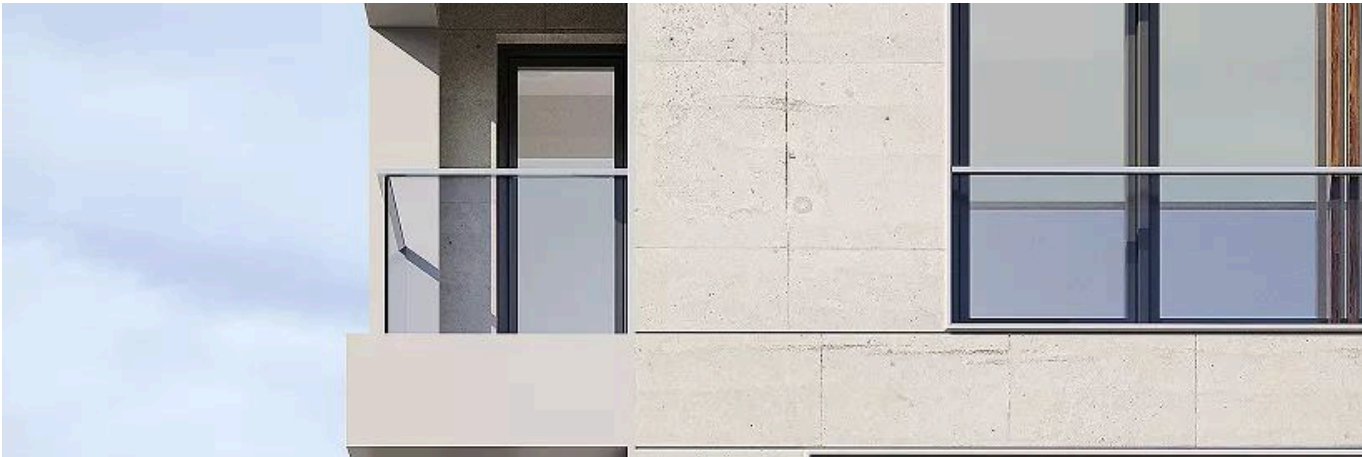
01	Subject	Architectural renders for [project], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [number] views of [building type] in [city] for [planning / competition / marketing] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: drawings or the [Revit / SketchUp] model, site photographs and two references.
04	Line 3	Please answer the twelve questions below with numbers and names, not ranges.
05	Line 4	Paste questions 1 to 12 from pages 03 and 04.
06	Line 5	We will decide within a week of receiving all three replies.

What good replies have in common

They are short. They answer in working days and dollars, name the people, and ask you one or two questions back about the model and the views.

What we would answer

Our own numbers are on the next page, in the same format, so you can score us with the same test.



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WHAT THINGS COST

Market rates and our terms, so you can check any quote

Ranges seen across the market in 2026, freelancer to studio. Use them to sanity-check any quote, including ours.

DELIVERABLE	FREELANCER	STUDIO
Single exterior still	\$100 - 300	\$250 - 600
Single interior still	\$120 - 350	\$300 - 700
Package of 5 - 8 views	\$600 - 1,500	\$1,500 - 4,000
Animation, per minute	\$1,000 - 3,000	\$3,000 - 8,000

Our standard timelines and revision terms. They are what we quote unless a project needs something else, and we say so before work starts.

STAGE OR DELIVERABLE	MAVERICK FRAME STANDARD
First draft of a still	3 to 5 working days from a complete brief
Finished stills, package of 5 - 8	2 to 3 weeks, drafts included
Animation, up to one minute	4 to 6 weeks, storyboard and preview first
Revision rounds included	Two at draft stage, one on the final image
What counts as a round	One consolidated list of comments, sent at once
Rush delivery	Half the time for about 40% more, when the schedule allows

Line up a studio before the deadline is on fire

The most expensive projects we see are not the badly briefed ones. They are the ones briefed in a panic, after the first supplier failed and the launch date did not move. Vet one or two studios while nothing is urgent.

A note on in-house: one artist needs around ten software subscriptions, a workstation and a stack of adjacent skills - modelling, lighting, post-production and client communication. It pays off only when that person is busy every day. Below that, the arithmetic favours outsourcing on its own.

NEXT

Send us what you already have

Plans, a model, photographs or a draft brief, in whatever state they are in. We will reply with a scope, a price and the questions that decide it - as a reply, not a sales call.

The contact form	maverickframe.com/contacts/
Architectural work	maverickframe.com/services/3d-architectural-rendering-services/
Or simply	reply to the email this guide arrived in.

Written by the people who read these briefs

Dim Kuzmenko is the founder of Maverick Frame Studio. The figures in this guide come from our own inbox and our own rate card, not from an industry survey.