



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before the Tower Meets the Investors

Ask them before you sign a skyscraper design and rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask how it builds the city around your tower.

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START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

High-rise rendering projects rarely fail on the hero image. A glass tower at dusk is in every portfolio. 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 TWO	
01	"Photoreal, of course"	The skyline view looks great. The lobby, the amenity floors and the views from the floors stay as drawings, and the sales team has nothing to show.	
02	"We follow your drawings"	Floor counts, setbacks, the podium and the crown drift. A design review board compares the view with the elevations and asks why they differ.	
03	"The city is included"	The tower stands on a stock skyline or an empty grid. Investors cannot judge its height, and the review board cannot see its street.	
04	"Interiors too"	The amenity floors come from another vendor, in another style, and the tower inside looks like a different building from the tower outside.	
05	"We'll have it ready"	The images arrive after the investor meeting, the hearing or the sales launch. None of those dates moves for a late render.	

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: the drawings, the city, the date

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. What do you need from us to start modelling the tower?	The architect's CAD, BIM or Revit model or the drawings, the uses floor by floor and the site plan. For a concept, a massing study and a brief.	"Send us a finished 3D model first."
2. How do you keep floors, setbacks, the podium and the crown true to the drawings?	Your architect's drawings are the source of truth, checked against them on previews, floor by floor.	"We approximate the facade from the elevation."
3. How do you build the city around the tower?	The district modelled with its real streets, river and neighbours, so the height reads true from every camera.	"We drop it into a stock skyline photo."
4. When would I see the first draft, counted from complete drawings?	A number of working days, 3 to 5 for a still, 1 to 2 weeks for a first exterior and interior set, and what "complete" means.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.
5. What happens if the investor meeting or the design review hearing 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.
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."

Why questions 2 and 3 matter most

A tower is judged by people who check the drawings and the skyline. A lender compares the views with the pro forma, a design review board counts the floors and looks at the street, and a neighbour looks at what changes outside the window. Both questions are decided by how the studio builds the model before it starts.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: amenities, views, films, files

ASK THIS

A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE

WALK AWAY IF

7. Can you design and render the lobby and the amenity floors in the same style as the exteriors?

Yes, from the same tower model: lobby, sky lobby, restaurant, sky bar, spa and fitness, designed and lit as one building.

"Interiors are a different team."

8. Can you show the real view from a given floor?

Yes, from the model with the city around it, for the level and the direction you name, so tenants and buyers see what they pay for.

"We use a generic skyline behind the glass."

9. How do you show the tower from the street for design review?

Accurate massing in its real context, at eye level from the corners the board names, by day and at night.

"We make it look nice; accuracy is the architect's job."

10. Which formats do you deliver for the deck, the hearing, the sales gallery and the leasing book?

Deck and print resolution, web sizes, hoarding, sales gallery screens, social and ad formats, agreed before cameras are framed.

"We send JPEGs, you resize them."

11. How do you price the next phase or a second tower on the same site?

Lower than the first: the city model, cameras, light and materials are reused, so each new phase costs less.

Every phase quoted as a new project.

12. Who exactly will model and render the project, and is any part passed on?

Named roles on the studio's own team, an NDA before drawings change hands, nothing published without approval.

"Our network", a pause, or silence.

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 SET

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE PORTFOLIO LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 12

Subcontracting is common and not always bad. Hiding it is the problem. A tower that is not funded or approved yet should not travel to people you never signed an NDA with, and a wrong facade cannot be fixed by a team you are not allowed to talk to.



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SEND IT

One email, three studios, one day

Copy the email below, fill in the brackets and send it to three studios on the same day. Compare the replies side by side: the differences show up in the first answer, not in the portfolio.

THE EMAIL TO SEND

01	Subject	Tower renders for [project], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [number] views of [a condo tower / an office tower / a mixed-use tower / a hotel tower with branded residences] for [investors / design review / the sales launch / leasing] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached, or after you sign our NDA: the drawings or the architect's model, the uses floor by floor, the site plan 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, offer an NDA and ask you one or two questions back about the uses, the amenity floors and the city around the site.

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/
High-rise work	maverickframe.com/solutions/high-rise-rendering/
Or simply	reply to the email this guide arrived in.

Written by the people who read these briefs

Dim Kuzmenko is a co-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.