

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Year-One Trees Look Like Year Ten.

Ask them before you sign a landscape rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask about the planting schedule.

Dim Kuzmenko
Co-Founder, Maverick Frame Studio

maverickframe.com

START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

Landscape rendering projects rarely fail on image quality. Lush gardens are 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 THREE
01	**"We can turn it around quickly"**	The draft lands after the planning submission. There is no time to fix the planting or add the second season.
02	**"Priced per render, nice and simple"**	The winter view, the website hero, the deck and the social crop each cost a full render, from one garden.
03	**"I'll handle it personally"**	The planting schedule changes after tender, and the freelancer who built the scene is on another project.
04	**"Our in-house 3D team"**	The agency passes your landscape plan to a subcontractor you have never met. Every species comment travels through two inboxes.
05	**"We do the garden, they did the building"**	The architect's model does not open cleanly at the landscape studio. Levels and paving are rebuilt, and two weeks go.

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: seasons, time and money

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 plans and planting.	"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 what would push it: a late planting schedule, changed levels, a new paving layout.	A date with no conditions, or no date.
3. What happens if the submission 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 garden is built, what does another season or view cost?	Noticeably less than the first view, because the terrain, planting and lighting already exist.	Every season or view priced as a new render.
5. What does a crop for a board, a deck or a banner 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 4 matters most

A landscape rarely stays one image. Summer, winter, dusk and the view from the terrace are usually wanted by someone before the project ends. The price of the second season decides your real budget more than the price of the first.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: people and planting

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
7. Who exactly will model the site and place the planting?	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 plant 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 the planting schedule changes, can you swap species in the scene?	Yes: the working scene is archived, so new species or paving start from it.	Only the final JPEGs exist after delivery.
11. Can you show planting at year one and at maturity, and a walkthrough?	Yes, from the same model: honest young planting next to a mature version, clearly labelled.	Only mature planting, or a partner for motion.
12. What would you need from me to start this week?	A short list: the landscape plan, planting schedule, levels, site photographs, 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 SET

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE PORTFOLIO LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 11

Planting at maturity looks better and is easier to sell. Planting at year one is what the client will see on opening day. A studio that can show both from one model, and label them, protects you from that conversation later.



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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.

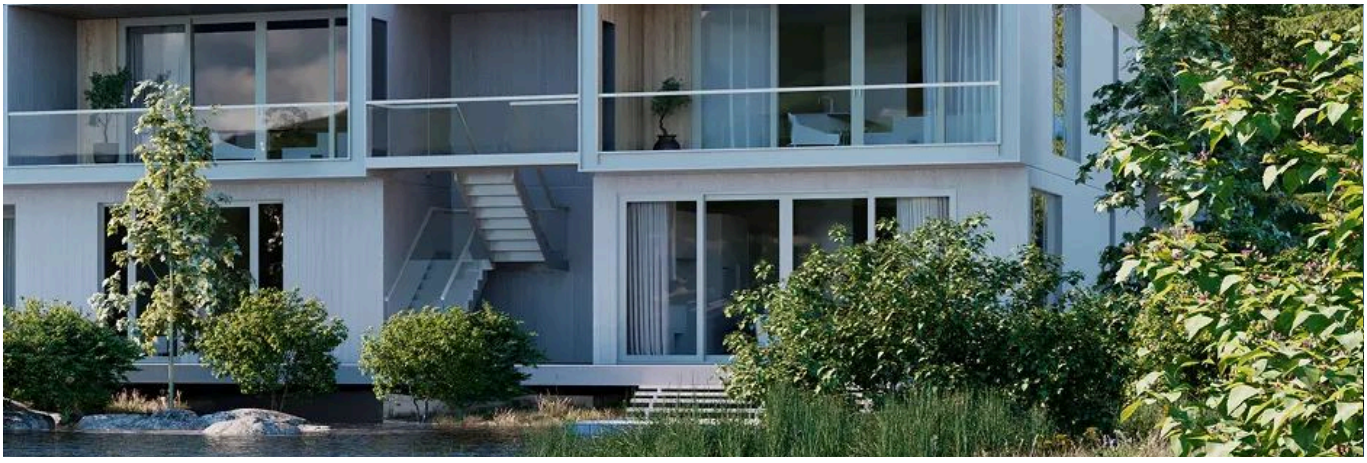
		THE EMAIL TO SEND
01	**Subject**	Landscape renders for [project], quote and twelve questions
02	**Line 1**	We need [number] views of [garden / park / public realm] in [city] for [planning / sales / competition] by [date].
03	**Line 2**	Attached: the landscape plan, planting schedule, levels and two references.
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 planting and seasons.

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/
Landscape work	maverickframe.com/services/landscape-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.