

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Fixtures Go in the Catalogue.

Ask them before you sign a lighting rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask how it makes the light itself look real.

START HERE

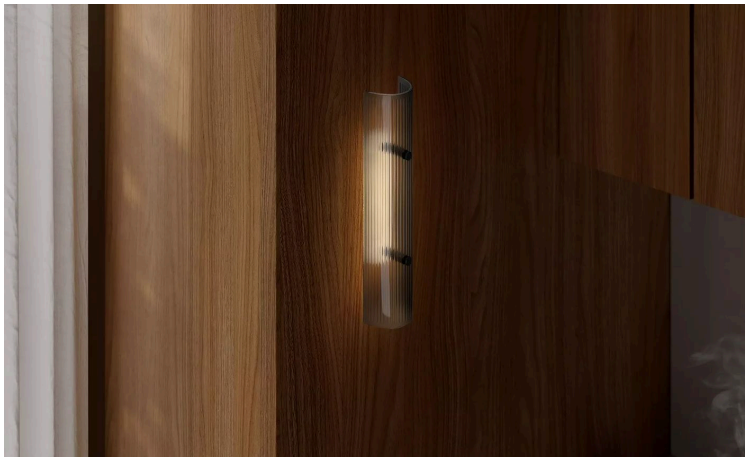
Every failure was visible before you signed

Lighting rendering projects rarely fail on the hero shot. A glowing pendant in a dark room 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 AT LAUNCH	
01	"Photoreal, of course"	The glass looks like plastic, the light is a flat white blob, and the brushed brass has no reflection. The distributor sees it first.	
02	"The light will look right"	The beam, the glow and the pattern on the wall have nothing to do with the real fixture, and the lighting designer notices at once.	
03	"Finishes are easy"	Every finish is quoted as a new view, the colours drift between images, and the collection looks like three brands.	
04	"We can animate it too"	The switch-on film comes from another vendor, rebuilt from scratch, with a shade and fixings that do not match the catalogue.	
05	"We'll have it ready"	The images arrive after the trade show, the catalogue print date or the pre-order 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 before a single image is rendered.



Maverick Frame production render.

THE TEST, PART ONE

Questions 1 to 6: the files, the light, the date

Send these as they are. You are not looking for enthusiasm; you are looking for file formats, working days and names. 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?	CAD or drawings with dimensions, samples or daylight photos of every finish and glass, and IES files if you have them.	"A product photo is enough."
2. How do you make the light itself look right?	The light source is built with its colour temperature and, where supplied, the IES file, so the beam and the pattern on the wall follow the real distribution.	"We add the glow in Photoshop."
3. How do you make glass, diffusers and metal look real?	Refraction, opal diffusion and reflections built into each material and checked against a photo or sample of the real finish.	"All glass looks the same."
4. Can you show the fixture lit and unlit?	Both states from the same scene and camera, so the catalogue shows the design and the room set shows the light.	"Lit only, the unlit one is boring."
5. Can you deliver Revit, BIM or STEP files from the same model?	Yes, built from the model used for the renders and checked against your drawings, so specifiers place the real dimensions.	"That is a different team, from scratch."
6. When would I see the first draft, counted from a complete brief?	A date in working days for the first view and for the full set, and a clear list of what "complete" means.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.

Why questions 2 and 3 matter most

A distributor, a lighting designer or a specifier judges the light before anyone reads the spec sheet. A flat glow or plastic glass sends the file back, and the trade show date does not move with it. Both are decided by what the studio asks for, and checks, before it starts.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: the collection, the film, the team

ASK THIS

A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE

WALK AWAY IF

7. How do you keep a whole collection identical across fixtures and finishes?

One master scene, one lighting set-up and one camera per angle; each finish is the same model with its own material.

"Each fixture is its own project."

8. What does the next finish or size cost once the first is built?

A price in hours per fixture on the existing model, far below the first one, stated in the quote.

Every finish quoted as a new project.

9. Can the switch-on film, the ads and the social cuts come from the same models?

Yes: the catalogue models are animated, so the film, 9:16 cuts and room sets match the stills.

"Animation is another team, from scratch."

10. Do you need a physical sample?

A sample if you can send one, otherwise close-up photos in daylight of every finish and glass, lit and unlit.

"No need, every brass looks the same."

11. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?

Two at draft and one on the final, with a round defined as one consolidated list of comments.

"Unlimited revisions."

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

Named roles on the studio's own team, or an honest "yes, the animation" with the reason.

"Our network", a pause, or silence.

10 - 12

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

7 - 9

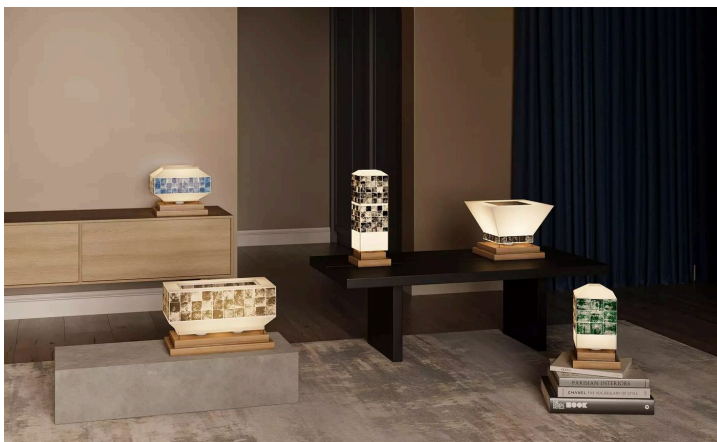
ASK FOR ONE PAID TEST VIEW BEFORE COMMITTING THE COLLECTION

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, because a collection rendered by three different hands is exactly how finishes and light start to drift. 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	Lighting renders for [fixture or collection], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [number] images of [number] fixtures, [pendants / wall lights / table lamps / architectural luminaires], for [our catalogue / our online store / a trade show / specifier presentations] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: CAD or drawings, photos of every finish and glass, and IES files if we have them.
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 finishes and the light.

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.



Maverick Frame production render.

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 the CAD and the finishes

CAD or drawings of the fixture, photos or samples of every finish and glass, IES files if you have them, and whatever brief you have, in whatever state it is 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/
Lighting work	maverickframe.com/solutions/lighting-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.