



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

# Why Rendered Sofas Look Like **Cardboard**

Six ways soft goods go wrong in product CGI, exactly what a furniture brand has to supply to prevent it, and a checklist for the day the files arrive.

## START HERE

# Hard goods are geometry. Soft goods are behaviour.

A table is a shape. Model the shape accurately, give it the right finish, light it properly and it is convincing. A sofa is not a shape. It is a structure wrapped in a material that sags, creases, compresses, stretches over the frame and pulls at every seam — and a viewer who has never thought about any of that will still know instantly when it is wrong.

That instinct is the problem. Nobody rejects a render by saying “the drape is too stiff.” They say it looks cheap, or fake, or like a drawing. The cause is almost always one of six things.

## Light goes in

Most textiles are slightly translucent. Light enters the fibre, scatters and comes back out softened. Treat a fabric as an opaque surface with a picture of cloth on it and you get plastic.

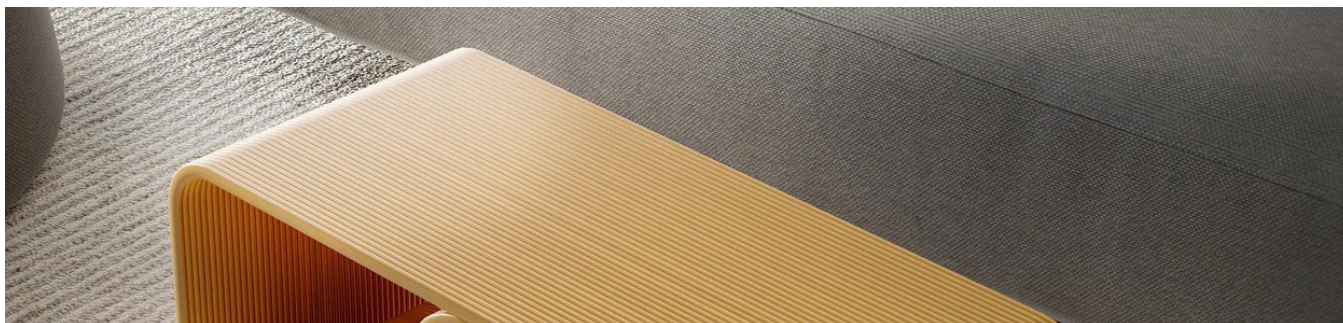
## Fibres have direction

Velvet, boucle, brushed linen change brightness with viewing angle. The same cushion is dark on one side and pale on the other. Without that, a velvet reads as felt.

## Weave has a size

A weave mapped at the wrong scale is the single most common error in furniture CGI. Slightly too large and a sofa becomes a doll's house prop. It is invisible in a thumbnail and fatal at zoom.

All three are fixable, and all three are fixed at the start — from physical material, measured. None of them can be corrected in retouching, which is why the supply list on page 04 matters more than the brief does.



Maverick Frame production render.

## DIAGNOSIS

## Six failures, and what each one actually is

Use the middle column as review language. Describing the cause rather than the feeling turns a vague rejection into a specific, fixable note.

| WHAT YOU SEE                     | WHAT IT REALLY IS                                                                                                                        | WHAT TO ASK FOR                                                                          |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Looks like cardboard</b>      | The upholstery was modelled as a shell over the frame with no thickness and no simulation. It has corners where cloth would have curves. | Simulated fabric with real thickness, settled under gravity onto the frame.              |
| <b>Too clean, too new</b>        | No compression. Real seat cushions carry the memory of being sat on: a shallow dish, a soft fold at the front edge.                      | One cushion styled as used, or a stated decision that the range is shown showroom-fresh. |
| <b>Seams look drawn on</b>       | The stitch is a line in a texture rather than geometry. No puckering, no thread, no shadow in the channel.                               | Modelled seams and piping, with the pucker the stitch pulls into the cloth.              |
| <b>Pattern floats</b>            | The weave or print does not follow the curve of the body, and does not break at the seam the way cut cloth does.                         | Mapping that follows the panel layout, not the whole object.                             |
| <b>Wrong colour at the edges</b> | No sheen or fibre direction, so the material has one flat value everywhere instead of shifting as it turns away from the light.          | A material built from the real sample under known light, checked against it.             |
| <b>Scale feels off</b>           | Weave size wrong against the real product. Everything else is correct and the object still reads as a miniature.                         | A macro photograph of the fabric with a ruler in frame. See page 04.                     |

### The review question that finds all six

Ask for one crop at 100 per cent of a seam where two panels meet over a curve. Every failure above is visible in that one crop, and none of them are visible in the full product shot you were sent to approve.

## YOUR SIDE OF IT

# What the brand has to supply

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Fabric cannot be invented from a supplier's web swatch. Everything below exists in your showroom or your sample room already. Sending it is a morning of work and it decides the outcome.

**01 Physical samples, couriered — every colourway that will be rendered**

Not a screenshot, not a PDF. Screens disagree about colour and none of them carry sheen. If a finish matters enough to sell, it matters enough to post.

**02 A macro photograph of each fabric with a ruler in the frame**

This one image sets weave scale, which is the error customers notice first. Flat light, straight on, ruler touching the cloth. Anyone with a phone can take it.

**03 The same fabric photographed at a raking angle**

Light almost parallel to the surface. This is what shows pile direction, sheen and the height of the weave — the things that separate velvet from suede from brushed cotton.

**04 Real product photographs under plain, even light**

Not the lifestyle campaign. A retouched hero shot is a poor reference because it has already been lied to. Daylight, white wall, no styling, four sides and one raking view.

**05 Construction information: panel layout, seam and piping detail, fill type**

Feather, foam and fibre settle into completely different shapes. The cutting pattern decides where the cloth breaks. Your technical team has all of this.

**06 The frame, in CAD if it exists**

Saves modelling hours and guarantees the proportions are yours rather than an approximation from photographs.

**07 One named person who owns colour approval**

With the physical sample in their hand, under daylight, on a calibrated screen if you have one. Colour signed off from a laptop in a meeting room is colour signed off twice.

If the samples cannot be sent, say so at the briefing stage rather than letting it be discovered late. **A material built from photographs can be made to look good; it cannot be guaranteed to match.** That distinction belongs in the conversation before the work, not in the argument after it.

## DELIVERY

# The checklist for the day the files arrive

Open the largest file at 100 per cent, on a proper screen, with the physical sample next to you. Work down the list in order.

- ☐ Weave scale matches the sample held against the screen at the same apparent size
- ☐ Colour matches the sample in daylight, not just under the render's own light
- ☐ Sheen changes as the surface turns away from the light
- ☐ Seams are geometry: thread visible, cloth puckering into the stitch line
- ☐ Piping holds a consistent diameter around curves and corners
- ☐ Pattern follows the panels and breaks correctly at every seam
- ☐ Seat cushions show compression, and back cushions show their own weight
- ☐ The gap where cushion meets frame is soft, not a clean geometric slot
- ☐ Contact shadow under the feet reads as weight, not as a floating object
- ☐ Fabric edges catch a little light through the material, not a hard silhouette
- ☐ Every colourway shot from the identical camera and light, so they compare
- ☐ Dimensions check out against the spec sheet, measured in the image
- ☐ Files at the sizes agreed, plus a transparent-background version
- ☐ Naming your site or PIM can read without anyone renaming anything

## The two-metre test

Put the render on a screen and stand back. At that distance you stop reading detail and start reading weight, softness and proportion — which is precisely how a customer sees it while scrolling. Most soft-goods failures are more obvious at two metres than at 100 per cent.

## Ask for the transparent version even if you do not need it yet

A cut-out of each piece over a separate background costs almost nothing while the scene is open and lets your team restage the product into new rooms, seasons and campaigns for years without commissioning anything new.

## WORKING WITH A STUDIO

# Cost, and how to brief it

Two things people ask us before anything else. Both answers are short.

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

Market ranges we are willing to publish. Turnaround and revision-round figures are deliberately not in this table: ours vary too much by project type to state as a benchmark, and an invented number here would be worse than none.

## How to brief it — shorter is better

This is the opposite of what most people assume. Four things:

- What you need — **how many images, and of what**
- The plans and elevations, as they are
- A few reference images for mood and light
- One clear line on what the images are *for*

Inflating a small job into a fifty-page specification backfires: taken literally it comes out ugly, and it misleads the people doing the work. Tell them the intent and let the team that does this daily handle the detail.

## The mistake that costs the most

The biggest failure we see is not choosing the wrong vendor. It is **timing**. People start looking only after the first supplier has already failed and the deadline is on fire, then choose in a panic.

Line up and vet rendering partners **before** you need one. One, ideally a few, briefed and ready to take work. It costs an afternoon now and saves a project later.

# 10+

YEARS RENDERING  
VISUAL STORYTELLING

# 350+

BRANDS & AGENCIES  
EMPOWERED GLOBALLY

# 95%

CLIENT  
SATISFACTION RATE

# 40%+

OF OUR COMMISSIONS NOW  
INCLUDE MOTION OR 360

# When the image has to hold up, **talk to us**

We are a CGI studio: architectural and product rendering, 3D modelling, animation, 360 tours and VR. Ten years, 350+ brands and agencies, and the kind of work that still looks right when somebody counts the windows.

Send us the plans and a line on what the images are for. You get a scope and a price, and no obligation to use either.

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START HERE

[maverickframe.com/contacts](https://maverickframe.com/contacts)

SEE THE WORK

[maverickframe.com/gallery](https://maverickframe.com/gallery)

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