



MAVERICK
FRAME
STUDIO

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

12 Ways a Portfolio **Lies** to You

Twelve tells that separate a studio that made the work from one that bought it — and the five questions that settle it in a single email.

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Every portfolio is a best-case edit

That is fair — ours is too. The problem is that a portfolio of twenty beautiful images tells you almost nothing about what happens on *your* project, and the images that would tell you are exactly the ones nobody publishes.

So you read it for tells instead. Six are visible in the images. Six are visible in how the portfolio is put together. None is fatal on its own; three or more in the same portfolio is a pattern.

What you are actually trying to find out

- Did this studio **make** these images, or resell them?
- Can it work from a real construction set, or only from clean concept geometry?
- Does it have a team, or one person and a template?
- Can it survive a client changing their mind in round three?

How to use this

Open three shortlisted portfolios side by side and run the twelve tells on each. It takes about fifteen minutes per studio.

Then send the five questions on page 05 to all three, in one email each. The replies will separate them faster than the images did.



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TELLS 01 – 06

What the images give away

01 The same light in every project

Identical sky, identical sun angle, identical warm glow across twelve unrelated buildings. That is one saved template applied repeatedly, not a team making lighting decisions per project. Ask to see a north-facing interior and an overcast exterior.

02 Only exteriors, or only interiors

These are different specialisms and often different people. A portfolio that is ninety percent one of them is telling you where the other one will be outsourced — by them, on your job.

03 Every image is a hero shot

No detail views, no context shots, no plain elevational views. Hero shots are the easiest images to make and the least useful for planning, sales floors or contractor coordination. A studio that only publishes them may only make them.

04 No people anywhere, in anything

People are among the hardest elements to place convincingly. Total absence across a whole portfolio usually means they cannot do it. If your images are for sales or hospitality, that matters a great deal.

05 The same furniture in unrelated projects

One distinctive sofa, one distinctive pendant, the same oak in six schemes. Asset libraries are normal and fine — but when the library is visible as the style, you are looking at dressing, not design interpretation.

06 No drawing-to-render pairs

Nowhere is there a plan, a section or an elevation shown next to the image it produced. It is the single most informative thing a rendering studio can publish, and the studios that have never worked from a real construction set never publish it.

TELLS 07 – 12

What the portfolio gives away

07 No project names, clients or locations — anywhere

NDAs are real and common, so some anonymity is expected. A portfolio where **nothing** is attributable, not one project, not one city, is a different signal.

08 Everything is web-resolution only

Ask for any single image at print resolution. A studio that made it can send the original in minutes. A studio that did not will need to check with someone.

09 Inconsistent style with no explanation

A studio with several artists has range, and will say so. A reseller has range because the images came from different places. The difference shows up in the answer to "who made this one".

10 The same project on three companies' websites

Reverse image search two or three pieces from each shortlisted portfolio. It takes four minutes and it is the single highest-yield check on this list.

11 Animation in the service list, none in the portfolio

Motion is where studios are most often stretching. If they sell animation, 360 tours or VR, there should be examples. If there are none, you would be their first — which is fine, but you should know it.

12 Nothing new in two years

Check dates, or the newest project's architectural style, or the copyright line. A portfolio frozen in time usually means the team that made it has moved on.

Scoring

Nought to two tells — normal, every portfolio has some. Three to five — ask the questions on the next page before you shortlist. **Six or more, or tell 10 on its own** — you are probably looking at a reseller, and the studio doing your work is one you have not met and cannot assess.

THE EMAIL

Five questions that settle it

Send these to each shortlisted studio. They are not aggressive and any real studio answers them the same day — which is itself the test.

Hi —

We are shortlisting studios for a project and I have a few questions about your portfolio before we go further.

1. Of the projects on your site, which did your own team model from scratch, and which arrived as a model from the client or another supplier?
2. Can you show one project alongside the drawings it was made from? Plan or section is fine, redacted if needed.
3. Who made the interior images specifically, and are they still with you?
4. Can you describe one project where the client changed a material or the geometry after the first round — what changed, and what it took to redo?
5. Could you send any one image from your site at full print resolution?

Thanks,

What good answers look like

Specific and unembarrassed. Real studios outsource sometimes and say so. They have drawings. They name their people. They have a revision story with a real cost attached, and they tell it without defensiveness, because every studio has one.

What bad answers look like

Warm, fast, and about something else. A new proposal instead of an answer. A discount. A promise to "send that over shortly" that does not arrive. Question 5 is the one that is hardest to deflect, which is why it is last.



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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.

START HERE

maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

maverickframe.com/gallery

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Maverick Frame production render. · Cost ranges are market ranges as of 2026 and are not a quotation.