

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

The Planting Is Where an Image Gives Itself Away

Why the landscape is the most dishonest part of most renders, how to show year one and a matured scheme from the same camera, and a planting brief to fill in.

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START HERE

Everyone checks the building. Nobody checks the trees.

A reviewer will count the storeys, measure the window head against the elevation and query the brick. Then they will accept, without a second look, a mature lime avenue that does not exist, a lawn with no irrigation, and hedges at a height they will reach in fifteen years. That is where architectural images are least honest, and it is also where a local eye spots them fastest.

The reason is structural rather than dishonest. Planting arrives late in a project, often after the images are commissioned, and a studio with no planting information reaches into an asset library. Libraries are built around whatever sells: broadleaf trees, temperate grass, tidy northern-European beds. Dropped onto a dry site, a coastal site or a hard-winter site, that one default makes the whole frame read as imported.

What the library gives you

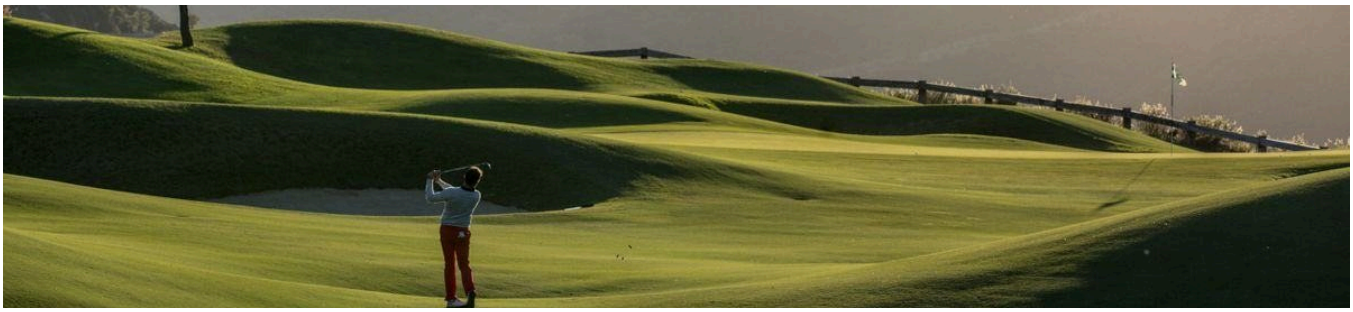
- Whatever species the vendor modelled, at whatever size it was modelled
- Full canopy, full leaf, high summer, no exceptions
- Grass at a uniform height with no wear, no edge, no join
- No drainage, no kerb upstand, no access for a mower

What a real landscape has

- Species chosen for that climate, soil, exposure and water
- A size on the day of handover, which is not the size in the image
- A season, chosen on purpose, with consequences
- Levels, retaining, steps, kerbs, gullies, bin routes, hardstanding
- Somebody who has to look after it, on a budget

> *AI assistance helps most where nature carries the frame — greenery, water, planting — and least on a bare urban block. That is about how an image is finished. It says nothing about whether the planting in it is the right planting.*
>
> DIM KUZMENKO, CO-FOUNDER, MAVERICK FRAME STUDIO

Which is the practical point of this guide: the part of the frame that is easiest to make look good is also the part with the least information behind it. **The fix is information, and it costs an email.**



Maverick Frame production render.

STEP 01

What the frame contains, and who supplies it

Nine things live in the landscape half of an image. For each one there is a person who already knows the answer, and the only failure is nobody asking them.

IN THE FRAME	WHAT DECIDES IT	WHO HAS THE ANSWER
Species palette	Climate, soil type, pH, exposure to wind, salt and frost. Native or adapted planting reads as belonging; the wrong genus reads as a stock photograph.	Landscape architect, or the planting schedule if one exists
Tree size at handover	Nursery stock size, not mature size. A tree planted at a given girth looks like a stick with a canopy, and that is the honest picture of opening day.	Landscape architect, or the contractor pricing it
Hedge and screen height	The height the screen is planted at, and the height it is expected to reach. These are different images and both are legitimate.	Landscape architect
Ground cover and grass	Turf, seed, meadow, gravel, mulch, bare soil. In year one it is very often mulch and bare soil between plants.	Landscape architect
Hardscape	Paving unit, module, laying pattern, kerb type and upstand, edging, thresholds. Wrong paving scale is as visible as wrong brick.	Architect and landscape architect
Level changes	Steps, ramps, retaining walls, banks, handrails. A slope drawn flat in a render is the error most often found on site.	Levels drawing, or the engineer
Drainage and water	Channels, gullies, permeable surfaces, basins, swales, attenuation features. If the scheme has them, they are in the view whether or not they are in the model.	Civil or drainage engineer
External lighting	Bollards, uplights, column heights, and whether a night view is wanted at all.	Lighting designer, or the landscape architect
Maintenance regime	Who cuts, prunes, waters and replaces, how often, and on what budget after handover.	The client, and nobody else

What a studio actually needs from the landscape architect

Not a full package. Four items: the planting plan or a species list with stock sizes; the levels or hardscape layout; six to ten photographs of comparable planting in that region, in the season you want; and one line saying which parts are fixed and which the studio may interpret. Ask for those four before the quote, not after the first draft.

STEP 02

Two honesty problems: time, and season

Both are solved the same way — not by refusing to show a matured scheme, but by showing it beside the truth, from the same camera, labelled.

01 The pair that settles the argument

One view at handover planting sizes and one at an assumed maturity, from the identical camera, at the identical hour, with the year stated on each. Nobody can accuse you of overselling a scheme when you have already published the unflattering version, and the pair is far more persuasive than either image alone.

02 Say which year the matured view assumes

A caption line is enough: the stated year, and that growth rates vary with species, soil and care. An unlabelled mature canopy is the single claim in an architectural image most likely to be challenged in a room.

03 Pick the season on purpose, and know what it hides

High summer hides a great deal: bare structure, the actual extent of a deciduous screen, how much of the neighbour you can see through it in February, wet ground, and the colour of a scheme without leaves. If the screening argument matters, the winter view is the one that carries it.

04 If the year matters commercially, choose the honest half

Sales imagery usually wants summer and maturity. A consultation pack usually needs winter and year one. Both can come from the same model and the same cameras, which is the cheapest thing in this guide — the expensive part is the model, and it is already built.

05 Do not plant what nobody will maintain

Clipped topiary, a wildflower meadow, dense herbaceous borders and mown banks all imply a maintenance contract. If the budget after handover is one visit a month, an image full of high-maintenance planting is a promise the site will break within two seasons, in front of the residents who bought it.

06 Watch the join between planting and building

Where the ground meets the wall is where a render usually cheats: no upstand, no drainage gap, plants pushed against render, soil at the same level as the threshold. It is a small area of pixels and it is the first thing a technical reviewer looks at.

The season question, asked properly

Not "make it look nice". Ask: which month is this image, why that month, and what would the same view show six months later? If nobody can answer the second half, the image is a mood board rather than a representation of a scheme.

Where the extra cost actually sits

Dense, varied, correctly scaled planting is heavy to build and slow to render, which is why libraries win by default. Budget for it as a line, name the species that matter, and accept generic filler in the far background where nobody is looking.

STEP 03

The planting brief, and the delivery check

Send the first before work starts. Run the second before you sign anything off.

```
SITE
  Location / climate  _____________  Aspect  _____________
  Soil, as tested or assumed  ___________________________
  Exposure:  wind ___  salt ___  frost ___  deep shade ___
  Irrigation after handover:  none / partial / full  ____

PLANTING SHOWN
  Planting plan or species list attached?  ___
  If not, what may the studio substitute?  _______________
  Tree stock size AT HANDOVER  ___________________________
  Hedge or screen height AT HANDOVER  ____________________
  Ground between plants:  turf / seed / mulch / bare  ___

TIME
  Year-one view required?  ___   Matured view required?  ___
  Year assumed for the matured view  ____
  Both from the same camera and hour?  ___
  Season required  ______________________________________

GROUND
  Paving type, module, laying pattern  ___________________
  Kerbs, edging, thresholds  _____________________________
  Level changes:  steps / ramps / retaining  _____________
  Drainage features visible in view  _____________________
  External lighting:  bollards / uplights / none  ________

MAINTENANCE
  Who maintains it, and how often  _______________________
  Anything in the image nobody will maintain  ____________
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Delivery check — run it on the draft, not the final

- [ ] Species are ones that grow there, and a local would name them
- [ ] Tree sizes match the stated stock size, not the mature size
- [ ] Ground between young planting is mulch or soil, not instant lawn
- [ ] Paving module and kerb upstand match the drawing
- [ ] Slopes, steps and retaining read as the levels drawing does
- [ ] Drainage and edges exist where the scheme has them
- [ ] Shadows agree with the stated month and hour
- [ ] Year assumed is written on any matured view
- [ ] Nothing in frame needs care the client will not pay for
- [ ] The same camera exists as a year-one version if it is needed later

The last line is worth insisting on even if you do not need the year-one view today. Rendering it while the scene is open is a small job. Rebuilding the scene in six months, when somebody asks what it looks like on opening day, is not.

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

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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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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.