



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

The Plate Decides the **Montage**

A photomontage is only as accurate as the photograph under it. The specification to hand your photographer, and what to check before they leave site.

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Everything downstream is decided at the tripod

A photomontage is a 3D model matched to a photograph so precisely that the two read as one image. The matching is done by reconstructing the camera that took the photograph. If nobody recorded what that camera was doing, the match becomes an estimate — and an estimate is exactly what a sceptical reviewer is looking for.

Fixable afterwards

- Colour balance and contrast
- Minor distortion and lens profile
- Removing a parked van or a pedestrian
- Sky replacement, if honesty about conditions is not at stake

Not fixable afterwards

- Standing in the wrong place
- An unrecorded lens, height or position
- A frame too low in resolution for the final print
- The wrong season — bare trees where you needed screening, or full canopy where you needed to show what is visible in winter
- Nothing measurable in frame to tie the model to

The asymmetry is the whole point. Everything in the left column costs minutes. Everything in the right column costs a return visit, and on a site an hour away in the wrong season it can cost a submission date.



Maverick Frame production render.

STEP 01

The plate specification, to hand to the photographer

Print this, fill in the top section, and give it to whoever is going to site. It works whether that is a professional, the architect, or you with a borrowed camera.

PROJECT _____ VIEWPOINT REF ____ DATE _____

POSITION

Grid coordinates or survey point _____

If none: photograph the tripod position, with landmarks, twice

Lens height above ground _____ mm (measure it)

Tripod levelled, both axes yes / no (use the bubble)

CAMERA

Body and sensor format _____

Lens, exact focal length _____ mm (prime preferred)

Zoom used? tape it, and record the number you taped it at

Aperture _____ ISO _____ Shutter _____

Shoot RAW plus JPEG. Bracket at least three exposures.

No polariser. No in-camera distortion correction. No crop.

RECORD, ON THE DAY

Time of each frame (camera clock checked against real time)

Weather and cloud cover _____

Foliage state: bare / coming into leaf / full / turning

Anything temporary in frame: scaffolding, hoarding, parked plant

IN FRAME, AT LEAST ONCE

A measurable object of known size, or a survey target, or a building corner that exists on the survey drawing

DELIVER

Every frame, unedited, original file names, with this sheet

The two lines people skip are lens height and the levelled tripod. Both are free on the day and both are unrecoverable afterwards, because a camera tilted by a couple of degrees throws the horizon and therefore every vertical in the match.



STEP 02

Why each line is on that sheet

WHAT IS RECORDED	WHAT THE STUDIO DOES WITH IT
Position	Places the virtual camera. An error here cannot be corrected by moving the building, which is what happens instead when it is not known.
Lens height	Sets the horizon line. Wrong height makes the proposal sit above or below the ground plane in a way viewers sense before they can name.
Focal length	Sets the field of view. Guessed focal length is the usual cause of a montage where the near context matches and the far context does not.
Level	Removes convergence the model would have to fake. Cheaper to hold a bubble level than to rebuild geometry around a tilt.
Date and time	Drives the sun position. Shadows falling the wrong way is the single most quoted objection to a submitted montage.
Survey tie	Gives the model something real to lock onto, so the scale of the proposal is demonstrable rather than asserted.
Weather and foliage	Lets the studio light the model to match, and lets you defend the choice of season if anyone asks why the trees look like that.
Resolution and RAW	Decides the largest print the montage survives, and how much latitude there is to match exposure at the join.

Before you commit to a viewpoint list

If these images may be submitted or shown at a hearing, ask your planning authority or adviser, in writing: is a verified or accurate visual representation method required; who nominates the viewpoints; must a methodology statement accompany the images; what survey evidence has to be supplied with them.

We cannot tell you what any authority requires, and it differs by place and changes. Get the answer first — the verified route is a different and more demanding job, and it cannot be applied to plates that were shot casually.

This is not an advertising plate. An advertising plate is chosen because it is dramatic. A montage plate is chosen because it can be proved. Where the two conflict, the proof wins, and the dramatic version becomes a second, clearly separate marketing image.



STEP 03

Check it before the photographer leaves

Ten minutes on site, against an hour's drive back in different weather. Run the left column standing at the tripod; run the right when the files arrive.

On site, before packing up

- ☐ Every nominated viewpoint shot, and photographed as a position
- ☐ Lens height measured and written down, not estimated
- ☐ Focal length recorded per frame; zoom taped if used
- ☐ Camera clock checked against a phone, and the offset noted
- ☐ A frame containing a measurable reference or survey target
- ☐ Brackets shot, RAW confirmed on the card
- ☐ One wider frame per viewpoint as insurance against a crop

On delivery, before you pay

- ☐ RAW files present, not only JPEGs
- ☐ EXIF intact — focal length, time and camera still in the file
- ☐ Nothing cropped, straightened or retouched
- ☐ Resolution sufficient for the largest planned output
- ☐ The completed specification sheet, returned with the files
- ☐ Studio has confirmed each plate is usable, in writing

The last tick is the one that matters

Send the plates to the studio and get confirmation that they can be matched **before the photographer is released and before the season changes**. A reshoot booked the same week is an inconvenience. The same reshoot three months later is a different site, different light, different foliage, and usually a different programme.

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



MAVERICK
FRAME
STUDIO

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

WRITTEN BY

Dim Kuzmenko

Co-Founder



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

