



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Drone Plate or Full CGI? The Same Aerial View Can Cost **\$7,100 More.**

Photomontage on a drone plate or a fully modelled site: how to tell which one your scheme needs, and why the context around the building is where the money goes.

START HERE

The building is cheap. The district is not.

Most aerial enquiries describe the building in detail and the surroundings in a single phrase: 'show it in context'. That phrase decides the price. The building is one model. The context can be a street, a neighbourhood or a coastline, and every metre of it has to come from somewhere.

There are two ways to get it. A photomontage places the modelled building onto a drone photograph of the real site, matched in camera, lens and light, so the surroundings arrive for the price of a flight. Full CGI builds the terrain, the neighbours, the roads and the trees in 3D, which frees the camera completely and costs accordingly. Neither is better. They answer different sites.

A DRONE PLATE IS THE RIGHT ANSWER WHEN

FULL CGI IS THE RIGHT ANSWER WHEN

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 01 | The site and its surroundings exist and will look the same at launch | The roads, the marina or the next phase are still drawings |
| 02 | A drone can legally fly there and the weather will cooperate | Flights are restricted, or the season is wrong for months |
| 03 | You need two or three fixed angles | You need many angles, a moving camera or a flyover |
| 04 | The real neighbours help the sale | The neighbours will change, or distract from the scheme |

The context is the bill, not the building.

In a fully modelled aerial the scheme itself is often the smaller half of the quote. Decide how much of the world around it the image must show before asking anyone for a price, and the four quotes you collect will finally be comparable.



Maverick Frame production render.

THE INVOICE

Four aerial views, priced two ways

Below is a composite of the aerial briefs we received this year, priced at mid-market studio rates: a residential scheme of around forty homes on a sloping site, four aerial views, surroundings 'fully modelled for realism'. Underneath it, the same four views composited onto drone plates of the site.

LINE ITEM	BASIS	AT STUDIO RATES
01 Hero aerial view of the scheme	1 x \$600	\$600
02 Three further aerial angles	3 x \$550	\$1,650
03 Neighbouring buildings modelled, 500 m radius	context	\$3,200
04 Terrain and levels built from the site survey	survey	\$900
05 Mature tree cover and planting across the context	context	\$1,400
06 Roads, markings, vehicles and street furniture	context	\$750
07 Distant landscape and horizon built in 3D	context	\$600
The four views themselves		\$2,250
The world built around them		+ \$6,850
Fully modelled aerial, four views		\$9,100
The same four views on drone plates		\$2,000

Drone plate version: four views at 4 x \$500, the scheme modelled and matched to each photograph. Plates supplied by you or your surveyor; a drone operator's fee is not included and varies by site.

\$7,100 is the price of building a neighbourhood nobody asked about.

It is not padding. Somebody has to model every roof in that 500 m radius, and the camera will show them all. If a photograph of those roofs already exists, or can be taken in an afternoon, the model is the expensive way to get the same pixels.

BEFORE ANYONE FLIES

Eight questions that choose the method

Answer these eight in the brief and the method usually chooses itself. Most of them take a sentence; together they decide whether the quote is closer to two thousand or to nine.

THE QUESTION	WHAT THE ANSWER DECIDES
01 Does the site exist yet?	If the ground is cleared and the surroundings are finished, a plate records reality. If the roads or the neighbouring phase are still on paper, there is nothing to photograph.
02 Can a drone fly there?	Airports, dense centres and some coastlines restrict flights. If the answer is no or not yet, the aerial is full CGI by default.
03 Will the surroundings change before you sell?	A plate freezes the site on the day of the flight. A new road or a demolished block can make it wrong within months.
04 How many angles, and does the camera move?	One plate gives one view. Each new angle is a new photograph or more model, and a flyover almost always means CGI.
05 How far should the context reach?	Name the radius that matters: the street, the district, the coast. Context is priced by area, and a kilometre costs many times a block.
06 Which neighbours must be recognisable?	Landmarks a buyer will look for are modelled accurately. Everything else can be simple massing or come from the photograph.
07 What light and season?	A plate carries one day's light. If you want dusk or summer, either fly then or choose CGI and set it freely.
08 Who will look at it?	If the image goes to a planning authority, say so at the start. Accuracy requirements change the method, not just the finish.

THE ONE PAGE

What developers actually send us

The clients whose logos sit on our service pages do not send specifications for an aerial. They send something close to this, usually in the body of an email, and it is enough to choose the method, quote and start work.

01	The site	An address or a pin, plus the site boundary. Say what is there today.
02	The scheme	Drawings or a model of the buildings. Say which is authoritative.
03	What it is for	Sales, planning, an investor deck, a hoarding. This decides the angles.
04	How many views	A number, or where each image will be published.
05	Any drone footage	Photographs or video you already have, and the date they were taken.
06	The context radius	The street, the district or the coastline. One word is enough.
07	The landmarks	Up to five places a buyer must recognise in the image.
08	Phase and season	What will be built at launch, and the time of year you sell in.
09	The date you need it	The real one, not the comfortable one.
10	The budget	A figure or a range. It tells us which method fits before we ask.

Send the photographs you already have

An old drone survey, a planning photo, even a video from a site visit. If it is recent and the angle is right, it can save the most expensive line on the invoice.

Mark landmarks, not a radius

Five named places tell us more than '1 km of context'. We model what a buyer looks for and keep the rest simple, and nobody looking at the image can tell.

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 what you already have

Plans, a model, photographs or a draft brief, in whatever state they are 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/
Aerial work	maverickframe.com/services/aerial-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.