

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Why Pool Renders Look Fake: Seven Specs Nobody Sends.

Finish, tile, waterline, lighting, water state, deck and surroundings: the seven decisions that make a pool look real, and the one-page sheet to fix them before rendering.

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START HERE

The water is not the hard part

When a pool render looks fake, people blame the water. It is almost never the water. It is the tile that repeats too perfectly, the waterline that sits on the wrong course, the coping with no thickness, the underwater lights in a colour nobody specified. Each of those is a decision the drawings leave open, and an open decision gets a guess.

Pool builders and designers know their finishes better than anyone. They simply do not write them down, because on site they are obvious. In a render nothing is obvious. The studio fills every gap with a sensible default, and seven sensible defaults in one frame add up to a pool that looks like every other pool in the catalogue.

	WHAT USUALLY ARRIVES	WHAT DECIDES WHETHER IT LOOKS REAL
01	**'Blue mosaic tiles'**	The range, the tile size and the grout colour
02	**A plan and a section**	Where the waterline sits and how the edge is detailed
03	**'Pool lights'**	How many, where, and the colour temperature
04	**'Crystal-clear water'**	Still or moving, the depth colour, and whether anyone is swimming

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SPECS THAT DECIDE REALISM

2

REVISION ROUNDS AT DRAFT, SPENT ON GUESSES IF THE SPECS ARRIVE LATE

$250 - 600

A STUDIO EXTERIOR STILL, THE USUAL PRICE OF ONE POOL VIEW



Maverick Frame production render.

THE SPEC SHEET

Seven specs, and what happens if you skip one

This is the page to fill in and send. Each spec has a short list of answers; pick one. The right-hand column is what a studio assumes when the line is blank, which is exactly why unbriefed pool renders look alike.

SPEC	CHOOSE ONE	IF YOU LEAVE IT BLANK
Finish	Tile, render or plaster, pebble, liner, natural stone	A generic blue mosaic
Tile	Range and colour, tile size, grout colour, a sample photo	A perfect repeating grid with white grout
Edge and waterline	Overflow, infinity, skimmer or deck-level; waterline tile course; coping stone and thickness	A thin skimmer edge with the water just below it
Lighting	Number and position of underwater lights, colour temperature, deck and garden lighting	Evenly lit water in daylight, cold blue at dusk
Water state	Still or rippled, depth colour, a swimmer or none, reflections wanted or not	Glass-flat, over-clear water
Deck and wet zone	Decking or paving, dry or splashed, furniture, towels, plants in pots	A clean, dry, empty deck
Surroundings	The house, the garden, the view beyond; time of day and season	A generic garden at noon

Late specs spend your revision rounds.

Our terms include two revision rounds at draft, each one consolidated list of comments. If the tile range or the lighting arrives after the first draft, those rounds go on replacing guesses instead of refining the image. Seven lines filled in before modelling keep them for what they are for.

Attach to the sheet, if you have them

- [ ] A daylight photograph of the tile, next to a coin for scale. It settles colour and size better than a product code.
- [ ] A photograph of the coping stone or its sample, showing the edge profile.
- [ ] The product sheet of the underwater lights, or at least their colour temperature.
- [ ] Photographs of a pool you have built with the same edge detail.
- [ ] Elevations or a model of the house the pool belongs to.

LINE BY LINE

Where the fake look actually comes from

These are the tell-tales a pool builder spots in a second and a client feels without knowing why. Every one of them traces back to a spec that was never sent.

	WHAT LOOKS FAKE	THE SPEC THAT FIXES IT
01	**Tile that repeats like wallpaper**	The tile range, size and grout colour. Real tile varies slightly in tone, and grout lines follow the pool's geometry.
02	**Water floating above the edge**	The edge type and the waterline course. An overflow edge and a skimmer pool hold the water at different heights.
03	**Coping with no thickness**	The coping stone, its thickness and its overhang. A sharp shadow line under the edge is what makes it read as stone.
04	**Water too clear to be believed**	The depth colour and water state. Real water darkens and shifts colour with depth, even when it is clean.
05	**Lights in the wrong colour**	The colour temperature of the underwater lights. Warm and cool fittings change the whole dusk image.
06	**A deck nobody has walked on**	Whether the deck is dry or splashed, and what lives on it. A towel and a wet footprint do more than a new sun lounger.
07	**A pool that belongs to no house**	The surroundings: the house facade, the garden and the view. A pool reads as real when the light around it is real.
08	**Noon light on everything**	The time of day. Pools look their best in low sun or at dusk, and the lighting scheme only shows then.

THE ONE PAGE

What pool builders actually send us

The clients whose logos sit on our service pages do not send long specifications for a pool. They send something close to this, usually in the body of an email with the drawings attached, and it is enough to quote from and to start work.

01	**The pool**	Plan and section, plus the house drawings or model if you have them.
02	**What it is for**	A client proposal, a brochure, a website, a show stand. This decides the angles.
03	**How many views**	A number. Name the hero view if there is one.
04	**The finish and tile**	The range, the size and the grout, with a sample photograph.
05	**The edge**	Overflow, infinity or skimmer, and the coping stone.
06	**The lighting**	Underwater lights and their colour, plus any deck or garden lighting.
07	**The water**	Still or moving, and whether a swimmer should be in it.
08	**Time of day**	Daylight, low sun or dusk. One per view.
09	**The date you need it**	The real one, not the comfortable one.
10	**The budget**	A figure or a range. It is the fastest way to a fitting scope.

Send photos of pools you have built

Your own finished work shows us your details better than any drawing: the coping you use, the way your edges meet the deck. We match the render to the pools you actually build.

Leave the water to us

Refraction, caustics and depth colour are the part we do every day. Tell us what the pool is made of and how it is lit, and the water will follow.

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/
Pool work	maverickframe.com/services/pool-3d-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.