



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

What We Look For in a **Freelance** Artist

A collaboration pack for 3D artists: what a studio reads in a portfolio, how to present one for studio work, what a paid test brief is, and the file habits that get you rehired.

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This one is not written for a client

Almost everything we publish is aimed at the person commissioning images. This is aimed at the person making them. It is a collaboration and freelance pack, not a sales document, and there is nothing in it we are trying to sell you.

What follows is simply what a studio looks at when an artist gets in touch, written out honestly. Some of it will be familiar. The parts that surprise people are usually the unglamorous ones.

What gets assessed, beyond whether the images are good

01 Consistency across a set

One brilliant frame proves you can make a brilliant frame. Six frames of the same space, at the same standard, with the same light and the same material treatment, proves you can finish a job. Sets are rarer in portfolios than hero images, and they are worth more.

02 Whether you can work from a real drawing set

Plans that contradict the elevations, a section that stops, a revision cloud nobody explained. Studio work is mostly this. An artist who can read a set, build accurately from it and come back with a short list of specific queries is immediately useful.

03 File hygiene

Named objects, named materials, real-world scale, a sane origin, textures that are linked rather than embedded in somebody's hard drive. Nobody sees this in a render and everybody feels it the moment your file is opened by a second person.

04 How you handle a revision

The client wants the whole kitchen a different colour after sign-off. The honest reactions are all fine; what is read here is whether the change is made cleanly, whether the previous version survives, and whether you say what the change will affect before making it.

05 Writing

Short, clear, answers the question, says when something is not possible and what the alternative is. A lot of coordination happens in text across time zones. An artist who writes clearly is easier to work with than one who is slightly better at lighting.

None of the five is about talent. All five are about being **easy to hand work to**, which is the thing a studio is actually deciding.

STEP 01

A portfolio for a studio is not a portfolio for a feed

Social platforms reward the single most arresting frame. A studio is reading for repeatability. The same work, arranged differently, says a completely different thing.

WHAT A FEED REWARDS

WHAT A STUDIO IS READING FOR

The single best frame

A complete set from one project, at one standard, shown together in order.

Heavy grade and atmosphere

At least one clean, well-lit, undramatic daylight frame. Atmosphere hides a lot, and everyone knows it.

Personal concepts

Work made to somebody else's constraints. If it is all self-directed, say so and add one piece built from a supplied drawing set.

Final images only

Evidence of process — a clay or wireframe pass beside the final, the drawing next to the frame built from it.

Volume

Ten to fifteen images you would defend line by line. Weak work in a portfolio is not neutral; it sets your ceiling.

Credit ambiguity

A plain line per project saying what you did — modelling, look development, lighting, post. Overclaiming is found out at the first test.

Three things worth adding

- One before-and-after pair from a revision, with a sentence on what was asked and what you changed
- One image you rebuilt because the first version was wrong, and why
- Which software you actually work in, and which you can open

Three things to remove

- Anything under NDA that you have not been cleared to show
- Frames where the good part was somebody else's
- Long autoplaying showreels in place of a still set — send both, lead with the stills



Maverick Frame production render.



STEP 02

The paid test, and how a job is actually scoped

A short paid test brief is normal, and it should always be paid. A portfolio shows finished work with the difficult parts already solved. A test shows how you behave while they are still unsolved, which is the only thing a studio cannot learn any other way.

What a fair test brief looks like

- Small and bounded — one view, or one object, not a project
- Real inputs: an actual drawing extract or model, with its real inconsistencies
- A written scope: what is delivered, at what size, in what format
- One deliberate ambiguity, to see whether you ask
- Paid, at an agreed figure, whatever the outcome

What is not a fair test

- Unpaid work on a live client project with a live deadline
- A brief so large it is indistinguishable from a commission
- No written scope, then commentary on what you should have known
- Delivery of usable final files before any agreement exists

The shape a scoped freelance job usually takes

01	Scope agreed in writing	Deliverables, resolutions, formats, what counts as a revision, the fee, and what happens if the brief changes mid-job.
02	Inputs handed over	Drawings, models, references, naming convention, the target scene units. Read them and send your queries as one list, not five messages.
03	Geometry or blockout check	Untextured views from agreed cameras. Getting this confirmed protects you more than it protects the studio.
04	Look development	Materials and lighting on one agreed frame, approved before the rest of the set is taken forward.
05	Draft set, then a consolidated revision	One batch of comments, one batch of changes, version numbers that go up and never sideways.
06	Handover	Finals plus the working scene, linked textures, and a short note on anything unusual you did.

That is a typical shape, not a promise and not a schedule. Real jobs reorder it, and any timing in your agreement should come from the specific job rather than from a template.



STEP 03

The habits that get an artist rehired

Mostly file discipline. It is unglamorous, it takes ten minutes a day, and it is the clearest difference between artists who get a second job and artists who get one.

SCENE FILES

project_area_stage_v03.max version up, never _final_final
keep every approved version, do not overwrite

INSIDE THE SCENE

real-world scale, stated units, sensible origin
layers by function: geo / context / lights / cameras / proxies
cameras named by what they show, not cam_01

OBJECTS + MATERIALS

door_front, worktop, handle, glazing_ext
no object_047, no Box012, no Material #28
one material per finish, named for the finish

TEXTURES

linked, never packed into someone else's drive
/textures next to the scene, relative paths
name the map: worktop_basecolor, worktop_rough

DELIVERY

project_view_v03_4000px.jpg + layered file if agreed
one folder, one README line: what changed, what to look at

And three behaviours

- Flag a problem while it is small, in writing, with the option you recommend
- Send one consolidated reply rather than a running commentary
- If something will not work, say so plainly and propose the alternative in the same message

Send us your work

If you recognise yourself in this pack, we would like to see what you make. Send a link to a set rather than a single frame, a line on what you did on each project, and what you work in. That is enough to start a conversation. We read everything that arrives with a set attached.

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

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

