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The Matrix Meets Interior Design

In Washington, D.C., view a film proposing that designers forget beauty and utility, and focus on stimulating the brain.

DAVE PLATTER
INTERIOR DESIGN -- 11/24/2003

The action and script have been panned, but the digitally created world of Zion in Hollywood's "The Matrix Revolutions" has been acclaimed for its meta-industrial realism.

Interior designers are finding they, too, can use digital animation. By creating virtual versions of a room, house or retail space, they can try out ideas before spending a penny on fabric, furniture or construction.

"We've worked with about 10 or 11 designers," said Nat Schwartz, Partner and Creative Director of Thinkspeed, an animation and multimedia production company, "a number of them with repeat business."

As more and more designers take advantage of digital animation, quality is improving. Today, photo-realistic, television quality computer animation is available for prices that range from $10,000 to $30,000 or more.

"Our primary focus is to create a full motion movie of the experience someone would have walking through a space," said Nat Schwartz, Creative Director of Thinkspeed. Besides architectural images, Schwartz's company animates television advertising for the NFL and NBC sports.

Schwartz recently created an animation of the future interior of a historic Washington school building, which is being converted to posh lofts.

"We spent a lot of time creating 3-D animation that makes you feel like you were immersed in a room," he said.

Schwartz added that, at first, many designers fail to understand the power of digital technology.

"The pitfall is the designers don't know we can make changes easily," he explained. "They think that it's hard to change things."

"The hard part is to start and build the room," in the computer, said Schwartz. Once that step is complete, experimenting with different fabrics, colors, textures and pieces of furniture is relatively easy.

"Its not perfect, but its really very close," to a real room, he said. "You can make some very good choices," about design.

Schwartz said his technology is a solution to difficulties designers may have communicating with their clients. "The designer has the ability to collect all the materials, but it's very hard to present to the layperson. We're offering that last mile."

Schwartz remembers that once, when he was a child, his grandmother bought a couch based on a two- or three-inch swatch with an interesting pattern. "When it arrived at home, it looked like

eyeballs all over the thing," he said.

When working with digital animation, designers pick out materials and color just as they normally would. Companies like Thinkspeed scan the swatches into the computer, enter in room and furniture dimensions, and create a virtual preview of the imagined space.
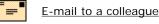
"We can put the camera where the designer wants it," Schwartz said, providing the best perspectives and lines of sight. Schwartz delivers the final product on a CD or an interactive web site.

At MacWorld in London last week, another interior design rendering software was unveiled for the mac loving designers. Microspot was met with a warm reception, and is reviewed here.

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