

Survey of Illustrators

by The Drawing Studio

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The following pages are part of The Drawing Studio's Survey of Illustrators written for the American Society of Architectural Illustrators (ASAI), formally known as the American Society of Architectural Perspectivists (ASAP).

ASAP Survey Overview

Part I of II parts

by Nick Buccalo, The Drawing Studio,
Editing: Jay Cardinal and Ann Webster

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We would like to thank all those who participated in our recent "members only" survey. The great response was very encouraging and is extremely useful to the ASAP as a means of identifying the priorities and interests of its members. Though not scientific the survey does, first and foremost, help ASAP members come to terms with the full implications of running a successful illustration business as well as providing a loose scale of their own strengths compared to other members. This "State of The Renderer Address" begins to satisfy a long awaited desire to define, as Tomatsu Yamamoto has often expressed, "who we are".

One of the most significant findings of the survey was that an estimated half of the projects illustrated were built. If used wisely, this information could be used as a powerful argument to clients for the necessity of a professional illustration. If architects knew this fact, it would certainly lead to better commissions and fees that could help us all secure the kind of insurance, equipment and assistance that many of you indicated as lacking.

Small Architectural Firms vs. Large Firms: I found that the responses offered much insight into what to expect when working with architectural firms of different sizes as the results were split almost equally into three groups:

35% prefer large firms, 35% prefer small firms and 30% had no preference. Negative factors associated with working for small firms included: smaller fees; too much client involvement; less notable architecture or "incoherent designs"; too much time investment per job; programmatic change from job to job (small firms usually don't specialize); and, the tour-de-force: "small firms have small jobs". For those who don't like working for large firms the comments included: too demanding; "decision making can be haphazard"; not personal; "deadline pressure, bureaucracy and 'BS'" (also stands for Big Shots); and, too many revisions within a fixed schedule. Also noted were slow payments and difficulty in tracking payment if late. For those 29% respondents who had no preference, the only reason given by one individual was that "both have pros and cons" which given the above, offers a discriminating 'perspective'. Late Payments: 92% of those who received their payment after one year don't use contracts. While the average late payment was 15 months (a seven year horror story threw the curve) the overwhelming response was two to nine months. Those who have received a payment one to three years after completion of an illustration (35% of the respondents including the 7 year itch) were also more likely not to use a contract. Lesson # 1: from those whose unfortunate circumstances can teach us all a lesson, if you want to get paid in a reasonable fashion use a contract.

Computer Use: 60% of the respondents say they use the computer at least sometimes for laying out perspectives. For the 40% who do not use a computer for perspectives, 60% indicated that it would be beneficial to their work if they had a computer and/or software. That leaves only 14% who prefer laying out a perspectives by hand.

20+ year illustrators: We were encouraged that 27% of the responses came from those who have been

illustrators for 20 years or more. This prompts a question for the next ASAP survey - what are you doing to secure your retirement? Of our more experienced ASAP illustrators, 80% render full-time and have some health insurance. 70% have fire/theft insurance, academic degrees in either architecture or fine arts, part-time help, and a Federal ID. number. 60% are registered architects; 50% of them do non-commissioned works for themselves (average of 4/year) and 50% have taken legal action to collect a commission, though we don't know how many times in their career. And, though only a handful of people noted that they carry Workman's Compensation, all of them should check into whether they are required to have it (varies by State).

Comments: Many comments referred to subjects for which information related to illustrators is generally hard to find. There were several comments on copyright, ownership, acknowledgment issues and compensation for use of an illustration beyond the initial agreed-to use (for publications, brochures, etc.).

Other comments included the need for more information relating to business, legal and general professionalism. There were two interesting comments on theoretical issues concerning: building type and its effect on the style of the resulting illustration; and, "do potential clients rate the quality of an illustration according to its subject matter (building type, architectural style and possibly, who the architect was), by its technique, style and virtuosity or by a combination of both thereof?"

An interesting comparison between the questions: "has this survey given you any insight into your own strengths and weaknesses" (51% yes, 38% no, 11% no response) and "how many years have you been an illustrator," yielded what one might expect. Negative responses to the "insight" question had the highest average of 17 years experience with the most no answers in the 15 to 30 year range (one individual with less than a year of experience pulled the average down). Those who felt the survey helped averaged 12 years and those who did not respond averaged only 9 years. The implications are important because it provides some sense of when an illustrator feels confident about all aspects of his or her own practice. In the end, if our profession is well informed and solidified as a group, the logical response would be 100% 'negative' to the ideal that this survey, in and of itself, could offer insight into anyones' practice. I should point out that I answered yes to the question.

Your response is an important factor in a reliable and useful analysis. We will be reviewing Parts C and D in the next issue, and incorporating results from additional surveys received (it's not too late). Analyzing Part D in particular should yield some interesting statistics regarding the type of work performed. If issues raised in this article inspire comment in the form of letters or articles submitted for Convergence, all the better.

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ASAP Survey Overview

Part II of II

by Nick Buccalo, The Drawing Studio

The second half of our survey touched on some important office and management topics that when implemented, reflect the kind of support, credibility and professionalism most clients expect. For instance, the computer and its recognizable professional standard echoed in the letters, contracts and faxes sent to clients; to perspective management; to efficiency of your accounting management; and, to marketing in general. With this in mind, let us get to it...

Business Equipment & Practices: 73% of illustrators use a CPA or accountant on a part-time basis for the benefits of tax deductions. 78% own a fax machine, 83% have a answering machine, 50% own a photocopy machine and, 40% have 2 or more telephone lines. A surprising result of the survey was how much collateral support there is amongst our profession. When ASAP illustrators get too busy, 27% will hire other renderers and up to 73% will recommend other renderers at an average of 8 times per year. 76% photograph their own work and 22% frame their own illustrations. 43% provide coordination for framing and photography and, 22% charge a service fee for coordination.

Computer Hardware: 60% of illustrators use computers in some capacity and of those, 54% use an Apple Macintosh™. Of those using Macs, 1/3 are using a PowerPC. ASAP illustrators noted that they have an average of 18 MB RAM, 15" average monitor size and a 450 MB average hard drive. Peripherals include CD-ROM (50%), modem (65%), scanner (38%), color printer (23%), B&W printer (88%), color monitor (81%) and removable media like a Syquest tape drive (30%).

Computer Software and Use: 84% of computer users layout perspectives on the computer while only 35% actually do color renderings with their equipment. Almost all use the computer for word processing (96%) and 69% use it for accounting. 54% have a mail database, 12% have a calendar program, 23% use online services and 42% do Graphic Design on the computer. An average of 30% do modeling and shadow casting studies on the computer.

Favorite programs for the Macintosh include MacPerspective™ (favorite), ArchiCAD and Atlantis™, Architrion™, Alias Upfront™ and Sketch™, Infini-D™, Strata Studio™, Electric Image™ and Modelshop™ (perspective and rendering programs); Claris Works™ and MacWrite™(word processing); Pagemaker™ and Quark™ (for page layouts); Illustrator™ and Canvas™ (illustration and typographic layout); Now Contacts™ and Touchbase Pro™ (mail database); and, Fetch™ (image catalogue filer). Favorite programs for the IBM compatible computer include: AutoCAD™ (favorite) and 3D Studio™, Accurender™, Upfront™, Drafix™, Hi-Res AFX™, and Micrografx Designer™ (perspective and rendering programs); Word Perfect™ (word processing); Corel Draw™ (illustration and typographic); and Microsoft Publisher™ (for page layouts). Favorite programs for both the Macintosh and IBM compatible computer include: Photoshop™; Quicken™ (accounting),

Microsoft Word™ and Excel™. Computer generated illustrations accounted for 73 orthographic drawings, 513 perspectives and 3 walk-throughs last year while another 1030 drawings were started on the computer and finished by conventional means.

Conventional Mediums: Watercolor and gouache accounted for about 275 illustrations each last year

which leads as the medium of choice but not without having close contenders like wax pencil (174), color pencil (143), ink (138), graphite (134), acrylic and markers (92 each), and tempera (72). Mixed-media accounted for part of the totals above and included such combinations as: wax color pencil with acrylics, markers, ink, or tempera; ink-line and markers; watercolor with graphite or ink; and, photograph and drawing montages.

Pricing: The average of all the low prices noted on the survey was \$1180. The average for all the high prices was \$3048. The lowest price charged for a commission was \$150 while the highest price in our survey that was charged was \$8000. For renderings, most people were in the \$2500 to \$6000 range.

Part D, General Survey Items: The building type breakdown is important because it provides insight into where one should strengthen one's portfolio and marketing efforts. The survey results yielded a fairly even split between housing-types (33.7%) and office/retail-types (43.1%) with another 23.2% being attributed to miscellaneous. Of the 33.7% devoted to housing, single family houses were illustrated 42% of the time, apartments/condos had 29%, housing complexes 22%, and elderly facilities 7%. Of the 43.1% devoted to office/retail building types, 42% were illustrations of commercial/retail developments while 21% were low-rise offices, 17% high-rise offices and 20% mixed-use complexes. The remaining 23.2% was spread amongst several types but was dominated by public buildings (8.2%). Other miscellaneous building types considered were sports and transportation facilities, academic buildings and museums, resorts, churches and landscapes. 55% of commissions last year were from Architects with another 20% directly from developers. 7% came from Interior Designers, 5% from builders, 4% came from private individuals and 9% miscellaneous. 71% of all illustrations were eye-level perspectives and 17% were aerial perspectives.

This survey touches on the kind of information large corporations compile in order to make wise business decisions; therefore, I would like to extend my thanks to all who participated for the benefit of every member.

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Itemized Results of Survey

"1995 ASAP Survey Results-Itemized", Part I of II "For and About Architectural Illustrators"

Also see "Survey" by Nick Buccalo (edited by Jay Cardinal and Ann Webster) in Convergence Newsletter, August 1995 published by the American Society of Architectural Perspectivists (ASAP) for further information.

The following was compiled by Nick Buccalo, The Drawing Studio-Brooklyn with assistance from Franca Giammarino and Debby Green and, editorial assistance from Elizabeth Day (ASAP editor).

Answers are listed as percentages of yes, no, or Not Applicable(NA) unless noted otherwise. In other words, 78/22/0 means (yes/no/na) 78% yes, 22% no and 0% NA.

The notation 1-left (for question 1) versus 1-right is how the original survey was itemized. This is so those who filled out the original survey can easily compare their answers with those of their peers as noted below.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS (yes/no/na)

1-left: How many years have you been an architectural illustrator? 13.5 years average

2-left: Do you live in the U.S.? 78/22/0

2-left: If not, where? Foreign countries represented in survey: Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Philippines, Portugal.

3-left: Do you belong to other rendering related organizations? 30/70/0

If so, please list. Other Organizations: NYSR(New York Society of Renderers), SAI, SAII(Society of Architectural & Industrial Illustrators, Great Britain), NWS(National Watercolor Society), SFSI(San Francisco Society of Illustrators), GNSI(Guild of Natural Science Illustrators)

5-left: Do you hold an academic degree(s)? 81/19/0, Please list degrees: See article in Convergence

6-left: Are you a registered architect? 49/51/0

7-left: Please list licenses: Other Licenses: IR-engineer, FAUSU-Brazil, AAP and USBON-Portugal, RA(Registered Architect)-USA

8-left: Do you render full-time? 70/27/3

8-left: What other services do you provide? Other Services: Animation, Architecture, Drafting, Design, Graphic Arts and Editing, Interior Design(ID), Non-Architectural Illustrations, Portraiture, Teaching.

9-left: What month of the year is the slowest? Aug

9-left: What month of the year is the busiest? Nov.-Dec.

10-left: What percentage of renderings completed would you classify as sketches? 26%

11-left: What percentage of projects you illustrated were actually built? 48.6%

12-left: What is the average amount of days you spend on completing one project? 6 days average

13-left: What was the maximum number of projects you handled during your busiest week last year? 4.48 average

14-left: What percentage of work was performed in your client's office? 17.9%

15-left: Do you specialize in one medium? 46/54/10

15-left: If yes, what is your medium? Specilized Mediums: 6% Acrylic, 17% Color Pencil, 17% Computer Generated, 11% Mixed Media, 6% Tempera, 38% Watercolor, 5% Wax-Base Pencil.

16-left: Do you use a computer for perspective layouts? 60/40/0

16-left: If no, do you think having a computer would be beneficial? 66/33/0

17-left: How many non-commissioned works did you do for yourself last year? 4 average

18-left: Do you prefer working for large firms or small firms? 35/35/29
19-left: For the size firm you least like working for, please explain why. see Convergence article.
20-left: Do you have the following insurance:
Business Insurance(liability) 30/59/11
Fire/theft 51/35/14
Shipping-loss/damage 11/78/11
Exhibition-loss/damage 5/81/14 24
Workman's Compensation 24/65/11
Health: group plan 62/30/8 26
Health: individual plan 27/65/8
Other: Life/Disability

1-right: Do you work out of your home? 56/41/3
2-right: Do you share space with someone else? 14/81/5
3-right: Do you work alone on every project? 43/51/0
4-right: If you have employees, are they part-time, full-time or both? 75% Part-time, 6% Full-time, 19% Both
5-right: Do you cover their insurance costs:? 20/70/10
6-right: If you have employees, how many? 2.25 average
7-right: On average, how many times do you actually meet your client, per project? 2.5 average
8-right: Do you think that a client's input helps the outcome of your renderings? 81/8/11
9-right: What percentage of jobs do you complete without meeting your client? 18%
10-right: On what percent of renderings did you do a substantial amount of design work? 23%
11-right: Do you charge extra for design work? 39/54/8
12-right: Does your billing invoice have a due date? 73/16/11
12-right: What is your grace period in days? 30 days
13-right: Do you use incentives and/or penalties (interest) to help you collect your commission on time? 32/57/11
14-right: What is the longest time it has taken you to collect a commission? 15 months Average
14-right: When you would like to be paid? 30 Days
15-right: Have you ever wanted to take legal action to collect a commission? 41/46/13
16-right: Have you ever taken legal action to collect a commission? 27/65/8
17-right: Do you require a deposit? 47/41/12
17-right: Do you charge sales tax? 38/47/15
17-right: Do you have a Federal ID Number? 46/38/16
18-right: Do you use a contract before you begin a rendering? 59/30/11
19-right: What percentage have you been published without acknowledgment? 59.8%
20-right: If you use a contract, does it contain an acknowledgment clause? 43/38/19
21-right: How do you market yourself: 59% response - resulting commissions:
Word of mouth (friends) 24%
Word of mouth (colleagues) 57%
Direct mailings 7%
Exhibitions 2%
Inclusion in publications 3%
Advertisements 1%
Competitions 2%
Initiate meeting with potential clients; 4%

Has this survey given you insight into some of your strengths and weaknesses? 51/38/11

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