

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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IGNACIO DURÁN



**e-on**  
Software

**Ignacio Duran** is Director of El Azul Estudio, an architecture firm in Mexico that provides fully integrated architectural, engineering, and technical services, supporting all project phases. His most recent projects include Disneyland Main Street Buildings, Game of Thrones King's Landing, and Rojo. Read more about Duran's experience's using VUE for creating 3D CG environments for architectural projects.

**e-on:** When did you start your career in architecture? What drew you towards visualization? What software did you start with?

**Ignacio Durán:** In 2000, I entered the University of Sonora to study architecture in my hometown.

I have always been a lover of everything visual—from video games to movies to Japanese animation. In 2005, I was an AutoCAD draftsman for healthcare projects for a local company, when I realized that architecture visualization was not a field well utilized in my city, Hermosillo, Sonora. On top of this, I realized that I enjoyed working in this field very much. At my next job, I started working with SketchUp and Artlantis and tried to use 3D software such as AutoCAD and 3dsMax, but they were not intuitive enough or easy enough for me.

**e-on:** From your perspective as an architect, how important is visual communication in communicating information about a project? Is it a competitive advantage?

**ID:** Yes, I do believe visual communication is a competitive advantage. There are many ways to communicate information about projects to clients, but I think that the most concise and appropriate way is through creating visual presentations. From freehand sketches to photorealistic renders, the more visual information and knowledge the client has, and the more s/he understands it, the more certain s/he will be about the best design choice.



**e:** How does data and knowledge transfer between architects, engineers, and the visualization studio typically work? Are there specific challenges in communication between the project partners?

**ID:** For myself and my colleagues here at El Azul Estudio, communication is fairly easy because we are a visualization firm and most of us have a degree in architecture and are thoroughly proficient in the techniques of the medium. In the conceptual phase of a project, we try to integrate it into the client's workflow, helping the client to visualize his idea. In the first meeting, we discuss the project intention and client expectations. Next, we work on sketches, add photographs, and finally the 3D rendering.

**e:** How long have you used VUE? What was the first project you worked on professionally and how did you use it? How has your use of VUE changed over the years? How do you integrate VUE into your workflow?

**ID:** I started working with VUE version 6, and I was immediately impressed by its rendering quality, its handling of instances, and its creation of terrain. However, I did not use it regularly in my work until four or five years ago with VUE version 10, when I learned to integrate SketchUp models to VUE format. The first project in which I worked professionally with VUE was a beach house in "Cabo San Lucas," a residential complex.

Today, we use it in almost all of our architectural and personal visualization projects, specifically for high resolution Stills. Vue is currently our base engine for rendering in the office, as it has the tools we need and is easy to learn and use, allowing everyone working in our office to use it without constraints.

Our process is that we model and texture in SketchUp, export to Obj, and we then import the model to VUE. In VUE we weld the model and we separate it by materials. We modify the materials and then begin to assemble the whole scene, usually with cars, vegetation, and human assets.

Over the years, I have learned a lot about materials, textures, and the use of light in VUE to create more realistic images as well as Render options.

**e:** Over the past decade, what has struck you most in terms of the evolution of visualization, i.e., hardware, software, various techniques etc.?

**ID:** A big leap in architecture visualization in recent years has come through real-time visualization software such as Lumion, Twinmotion, and LumenRT. Based on an engine similar to the latest generation of video games, Lumion is a watershed in terms of how the animation of virtual tours in architecture is conceived, where you can now render in FULL HD in a matter of hours from your personal computer instead of weeks or months on a render farm.

Lumion changed the game of architecture visualization, set a benchmark in ease of use and regarding its extensive integrated library of vegetation, automobiles, and visual effects. Twinmotion and LumenRT are following in the footsteps of Lumion and are continually being updated to create great competition and benefits users with ever better products.

Octane render and Keyshot are great advances in photo realism; I would like to see one of these engines integrated into VUE.



The role of architectural visualization from the initial conceptual phase of a project is to communicate visually with the client. If they are impressed with the project—if they "like what they see," they are more likely to move ahead with it.

**e:** What scale of project benefits most from animation in your opinion? Is there a minimum size to make the investment in rendering worthwhile?

**ID:** Megaprojects typically benefit the most from 3D rendering, especially in architecture. Rendering a project communicates and presents important information about the project in relation to the environment, and this is always an important consideration for megaprojects, adding value to the overall project. Animation is not always necessary to present a project, and, in fact, might not be a good idea if it is weak or otherwise not visually compelling animation. If you do not have the competency to create visually strong 3D models, it should not be undertaken.

**e: What has been your most important skill as an architect? What advice would you give someone who would like to start a career in the industry?**

**ID:** There are many important skills to have—understanding the environment in which I develop my skills; self-directed learning that takes place with each new project; familiarity with the proportion, rhythm, and harmony of geometry; knowledge of architecture and engineering techniques; and public relations.

My advice is never to stop learning, keep your skills continually updated, meet all the people you can, be honest and fulfill your commitments, and network with everyone you meet because you never know what doors a new relationship will open.

**e: Can you tell us a little bit about your process for hiring talent for your team? What are some of the “must haves,” as well as some of the warning signs?**

**ID:** If we receive a CV or portfolio that we like, we schedule a short interview in which discuss everything from technical subjects to simple questions about daily life. We like to get to know people as people.

“Must haves” include a good attitude, respect for others, commitment to the firm and projects, being proactive, punctuality, and the most important thing is knowing how to work as part of a team. Warning signs are the opposite characteristics of what I have just mentioned or qualities that undermine the functioning, capacity, and integrity of teamwork at our company.

We are very pleased when a new hire brings new technical knowledge in visualization or in any other relevant discipline to our firm.

**e: Where do you seek out help or advice when you come across an obstacle on a project? What are your thoughts on the various methods for learning? For instance, should architects seek out brick and mortar classrooms in a larger university, or focus on online training options? What are some drawbacks/benefits to both?**

**ID:** At our firm, online learning is our starting point. This includes self-directed learning and online research and learning to resolve specific issues, online tutorials, forums, articles, and videos. Although there are advantages to classroom instruction—an instructor can tell you exactly what to do to achieve a specific result, for example, which is efficient—it is still a single point of view and only one way to learn new information.

The beauty of online resources and learning is that you can find many ways to get the information you seek. Frequently, learning and new information is acquired through the trial and error of thousands of people, and this information can be readily shared online in forums, YouTube videos, or Facebook tutorials.

**e: What do you foresee in your future work in architectural visualization?**

**ID:** I may focus more on virtual reality (VR) since GPU-based rendering engines have taken a big leap in recent years. Both the software and hardware for the development of these engines is becoming more and more accessible to the general public.

**e: What is your favorite feature or features of VUE, and what other software do you typically use alongside VUE?**

**ID:** I have several favorite features including the ability to render in several channels for post-production in Photoshop, the creation of Instances with all its ecosystem methods, the import of animation files with their alpha channels in billboards, and the import of camera track files between others. Vue is a complete program and integrates perfectly with SketchUp, our main software for 3D modeling.

**e: What was the biggest challenge you faced in one of your most recent**

**projects? Of all the projects you've worked on, is there one that you're particularly proud of?**

**ID:** Probably the biggest challenge we face is when a client does not know what they want or does not have a well-established project. That is where delays often arise, and many modifications happen over the course of the project. It is our responsibility to establish timelines, checklists, and project goals so that we do not contribute to the “indecision” and delays of the client. When you do not have optimal communication, you lose time and money.

“Rojo” is one of the projects that I feel particularly proud of. It is an independent science fiction film project that our entire company is involved in including the creation of the story, script, characters, conceptual art design, and production. Vue has been a vital part of this project because it enabled us to set up our small production company in virtual sets through the Green screen—and make it look like a Hollywood blockbuster!

**e: How do you stay inspired?**

**ID:** My inspiration stays continual through the internet by simply observing and studying everything new that artists create from around the world including what is being created in the world of cinema, video games, comics, and Japanese animation studios. Looking at publications and content from concept and visualization artists that I follow on Facebook and Artstation is also inspiring.

**e: Would you recommend VUE to other architects? And finally, have you used or tested PlantFactory yet?**



Yes, I would strongly recommend VUE. It is fast-response software that is very intuitive, easy to use, and quick to learn. It has a high-quality render engine, can upload many geometry assets with no problems or issues, and has large object libraries, including vegetation and materials. It is perfect for any type and size of architectural firm. It is so flexible that it can run perfectly on a last-generation computer with as much functionality as on a computer from seven years ago.

I have not used PlantFactory yet. It seems easy to use and intuitive, but I have not needed to use it yet. I may instead purchase cornucopia3d new vegetation assets that have already been predesigned by artists who specialize in these assets. This will let me focus on creating architectural environments, which is my specialty. ↻

e-on software thanks Ignacio Duran for supporting VUE for so many years! We hope this inspired you! Learn more about Ignacio Duran and El Azul Estudio at

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