



Shrinking budgets, better productions

The Third Floor breaks new ground in previs and postvis with Adobe® Creative Suite® 4 Production Premium software



Previs has become an essential ingredient in almost any large-scale creative endeavor. Historically, creators have relied on storyboards, concept artwork, and physical models to help them plan their visions. Over the past several years, it has become increasingly common for veteran previs teams to complement and accelerate the traditional pre-production process by using digital video and animation tools to represent the filmmaker's choices in motion.



The expert previs artists at The Third Floor help filmmakers and other creative collaborators work out their projects in advance by creating an animated version before any live-action footage is shot. For most aspects of its previs work, The Third Floor relies on Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software.

“Thanks to Adobe, illustrators, filmmakers, and game developers are all using the same digital tools, and it’s ushering in a new era of empowered collaboration.”

Chris Edwards, CEO, The Third Floor

For The Third Floor—a previs company that works on films with leading directors such as James Cameron, video games with companies such as Blizzard Entertainment, and commercials for brands like BMW—a talented team of artists and Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software are the driving forces behind every project.

“From the time we design assets or paint backgrounds in Adobe Photoshop®, create rough cuts in Adobe Premiere® Pro, or composite layers in Adobe After Effects, our workflow begins and ends in Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium and Autodesk Maya for 3D,” says Chris Edwards, CEO and previs supervisor for The Third Floor. “Thanks to Adobe, illustrators, filmmakers, and game developers are all using the same digital tools, and it’s ushering in a new era of empowered collaboration.”

The ultimate test bed

The Third Floor emerged from the creative cauldron known as Skywalker Ranch, workplace of film director and producer George Lucas. In 2002, a handful of artists gathered in a Victorian mansion at the Ranch to create the third episode of the epic movie series, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. While Lucas continued to develop the story, the Lucasfilm art department was tasked with developing the visual style.

On the third floor of the mansion, a pioneering group of digital artists, dedicated to taking previs to the next level, collaborated with Lucas to bring his vision to life. While traditional artwork provided some glimpse into how the project might ultimately look, the previs team was able to go a step beyond and deliver an animated version of every shot in the film.

“We enabled Lucas and later other directors to explore creative ideas, plan technical solutions, and communicate a shared vision for efficient production; all in an advanced, 3D environment with elements composited in Adobe After Effects,” says Edwards.

Making a good idea better

When *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* was complete and it was time to leave Skywalker Ranch, Edwards and his coworkers knew that their experience would be of tremendous value to the industry. They founded The Third Floor to keep the original team together and continue working with inspired filmmakers around the world. “The process we forged at Skywalker Ranch led to other amazing opportunities, including working with Bryan Singer on *Valkyrie* and JJ Abrams on *Cloverfield* and *Star Trek*,” says Edwards.

Today, The Third Floor helps filmmakers and other creative collaborators work out their projects in advance by creating an animated version before any live-action footage is shot. The company creates rough mockups of each scene using the same digital tools—including Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software—that will be used to create the final imagery. With great attention to detail in terms of timing of events, camera composition, lighting, and effects, the previs files literally become the blueprint for the final project.

The Third Floor has continually made improvements, including expanding its 3D asset library, increasing detail and realism without slowing down the process, automating repetitive tasks, and delivering files that clients can use directly in the final piece. Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software has been pivotal in helping the company achieve all of these goals.



The talented previs team at The Third Floor originated from a pioneering group of digital artists who worked together on the third floor of a mansion at Skywalker Ranch, film director and producer George Lucas' workplace. The team collaborated with Lucas to bring his vision for the film *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* to life. Top row, left to right: Barry Howell, Chris Edwards, Eric Carney. Bottom row, left to right: Josh Wassung, Hiroshi Mori, Nick Markel.

"In many instances, we deliver files to clients that visual effects artists can use directly in production," explains Edwards. "This enables the finals team to upgrade or replace our previs assets until the final, polished look is achieved."

Adobe tools from start to finish

For its unique previs process, the artists at The Third Floor use virtually every tool in Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium. Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended software is used to create storyboards, concept art, background paintings, and textures for 3D objects. The previs artists create 3D assets using Autodesk Maya and then use After Effects CS4 software to composite the layers, add effects elements, and apply motion blur to make the previs cinematography look more realistic. Many repetitive processes such as scaling imagery and adding motion blur can be automated using the command-line scripting capabilities of After Effects, saving countless hours of manual labor.

For editing storyboards and previs sequences and adding shot information The Third Floor artists rely on Adobe Premiere Pro CS4 software. "With Adobe Premiere Pro CS4, we can put virtually any type of imagery on the timeline, whether it's digital video footage, After Effects elements, or a scene rendered out of a 3D application. This flexibility is crucial to our fast-paced workflow," says Edwards.

Work-in-progress is output to DVDs for review using Adobe Encore® CS4. According to Edwards, the combination of Adobe Premiere Pro and Encore make it fast and easy to deliver multiple rounds of revisions to clients. Throughout the process, previs artists use Adobe Illustrator® CS4 to create 2D vector artwork, as well as schematics and other diagrams that help illustrate camera placement and other critical information for reproducing previsualized shots on location.

"The integration among the tools in Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium and the ease of working with 3D files created in Autodesk Maya gives us a streamlined workflow that enables us to work quickly while maintaining a high level of quality," says Edwards.

The new era: postvis

After the previs sequences are approved, the live-action sequences can be shot more efficiently. However, before sending the live-action shots to the final post-production vendors, The Third Floor is often asked to quickly integrate the previs elements back into the live-action plates. This process, known as "postvis," helps ensure that the VFX house has clear direction about what is expected in the final piece.

"When we create postvis sequences, we are often on a tight deadline," explains Edwards. "Our postvis swat team leverages the improved integration among components of Adobe

The Third Floor

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Challenge

- Accelerate the previs process
- Enable directors and others to more effectively previsualize their creative visions
- Collaborate among multiple types of artists

Solution

- Go beyond traditional pre-production methods by enabling creative exploration inside an animated 3D environment
- Use Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium software to create mockups of projects with great attention to detail in terms of timing of events, camera shots, lighting, and computer graphics

Benefits

- Delivered 3D, animated mockups of movie, game, and commercial sequences with a heightened sense of realism
- Improved collaboration among storyboard artists, VFX artists, and others
- Accelerated previs and postvis process by leveraging integration among Adobe software applications
- Saved time and money throughout the creative process

Toolkit

- Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium. Components used include:
 - Adobe After Effects CS4
 - Adobe Encore CS4
 - Adobe Illustrator CS4
 - Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended
 - Adobe Premiere Pro CS4
- Autodesk Maya
- Mac and PC systems



For its unique previs process, the artists at The Third Floor use virtually every tool in Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium, including Adobe Premiere Pro CS4, After Effects CS4, Encore CS4, Illustrator CS4, and Photoshop CS4 Extended.

“With Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium and a talented crew of veteran artists, The Third Floor helps ensure that more of a creator’s budget ends up on screen, instead of on the cutting-room floor.”

Chris Edwards, CEO, The Third Floor

Creative Suite 4 Production Premium to create cohesive sequences that the director and the studio can really stand behind. It removes most of the guesswork for any creator, as well as making each sequence easier to bid on for the final VFX house.”

With shrinking budgets and increasing audience expectations for visual-effects-intensive projects, the need for previs and postvis grows stronger every day. “With Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium and a talented crew of veteran artists, The Third Floor helps ensure that more of a creator’s budget ends up on screen, instead of on the cutting-room floor,” says Edwards.

For The Third Floor, Adobe Creative Suite 4 Production Premium is the essential toolset for crafting cost-effective blueprints for films, games, and commercials. Says Edwards, “For us, there is really no difference among these types of projects; it is all about creating effective virtual sequences that result in stronger content. Our vision is for previs to help usher in a golden age of exploration and inspiration in which creators no longer wonder what’s possible, but can finally focus on discovering what’s worth creating.”



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