

SGP

Keeping up with the AI avalanche – AI and visualisation



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KEEPING UP WITH THE AI AVALANCHE

AI AND VISUALISATION

AI is a tool.
Human insight gives it meaning.

SGP DIGITAL
CGI

01

A TOOL, NOT A SUBSTITUTE



AI is a means to an end – excellent visualisations that honestly represent the proposed structure to the naked eye and human mind.

02

HUMAN DRIVEN FROM START TO FINISH



AI must be driven by human thoughts, knowledge and professional judgement. Evaluation, standards and the courage to say "No, that's not good enough" are irreplaceable.

03 PROVOCATIVE SOUNDING BOARD



AI can be an impartial partner that offers new perspectives, helps explore options and challenges assumptions. Sometimes literally.

04

THE POWER OF ALMOST RIGHT



AI is very good at getting things almost right. It takes a trained eye to spot subtle wrongness and ensure quality and accuracy.

05

FAST-MOVING, ALWAYS EVOLVING



New tools, models and capabilities emerge constantly. Staying curious, adaptable and open-minded is part of the journey.

06
WIELDED
WITH SKILL
AND CARE



AI must be used responsibly,
informed by context,
experience and collaboration.
When guided well, it enables
better ideas, better decisions
and better outcomes.

AI has found a foothold in architecture. Our role is to steer it with insight, creativity and responsibility to create visuals that are meaningful, honest and human.

AI is one of the principal challenges of the modern age. From the practicalities of building data centres to process huge amounts of data, through economic implications and job losses, to the moral and ethical questions of protecting what it is to be human, AI is a fast-moving technological avalanche of new possibilities and how to apply them to the real world.

Architecture is about humanity; it is designed by humans, for humans. So where does AI fit into the architectural environment, particularly in visualisations? Can we bring together the close collaboration of designer and client, the knowledge of context and regulations, the feeling of place and community with a technology that has no sense or feeling to create meaningful imagery?

For the last year to six months, I've been using some simple AI in my visualisation work. And perhaps not where you might think – not in the generation of images (although I have been known to ask the AI to help with some final finessing) but in the beginning, at the ideas stage, at the point where creativity and passion could be said to be at their most important and impactful. And they are. But AI can be a provocative sounding board. An impartial friend who can offer a new perspective – sometime literally.

AI is a tool. We should never forget that. It is a means to an end; excellent visualisations that honestly represent the proposed structure to the naked eye and human mind. AI has to be driven by human thoughts and knowledge and the professional ability to bring together the client needs with the feeling of place, with style and practicality. Human drivers like me learn how to negotiate prompts, positive (do this) and negative (do not do that), to bring the project to life. But everything is run through a human mind first and last. The results may prompt more questions or deliver what is required, but there must always be the human evaluation and adherence to standards – and willingness to say “No, that’s not good enough...”



AI does not mean relinquishing control. If anything, the use of AI demands more control, more preparation, more carefully checking. Because AI is very good at getting things almost right. And often it takes a human eye to spot the subtle wrongness.

AI is fascinating. It has learnt by assimilating data from an unknown number of data sources, without the bias of knowing what is “good” and what is “bad”. That leaves it responses open to every reaction from “I never thought of that...” to “What the heck is that?!?” Arguably AI comes with a bias to show you what you want to see or what is most pleasing, but when two people ask the same AI programme the same question with slightly different prompts, and get two different answers, the process still can add value to the result.

You'll notice in this article, I have not named any AI programmes. I use more than one, in collaboration with more established software. But the speed of change in the AI universe is so fast, and the appearance of new programmes so rapid and fragmented, that any programme named here may be redeveloped, overtaken or simply gone in the next few months – or weeks. Keeping up with the pace of change is a challenge in itself. Architecture is not known for wild jumping on technological trends, although at SGP we do have a strong track record of taking onboard new technology and applying it to develop better ways of working.

Still, as a profession, we are careful, our projects are meaningful and require seriousness and consideration. So to embrace a new technology that itself is still in its stormy early development is difficult. But we would be foolish to do anything other than embrace it and try to tame its wildness to our own creative needs. That may itself require a whole new discipline within architecture – and in many practices the beginnings of that development can be seen.

It is a potentially dangerous route. As architects, we have clients and other stakeholders, so it is not just our own views that need to be accounted for. Some clients abhor AI, and, if they perceive one AI element in a final visual, they assume the whole thing was done using AI as a short-cut, devaluing the creativity and skillsets that have employed it. Other clients are perfectly happy with the use of AI. It certainly helps scope options, crystallise ideas and deliver visualisations needed at short notice. And arguably AI may make high concept CGIs or photo realistic renders more accessible to a greater range of clients.

Love it, hate it or try to ignore it, AI has found a foothold in the architectural world. I've taken the view that AI is a responsive and useful tool, but I acknowledge it must be wielded with skill and an engaged professional mind to bring out the best it can do for the final image, render, sketch or walk-through.



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