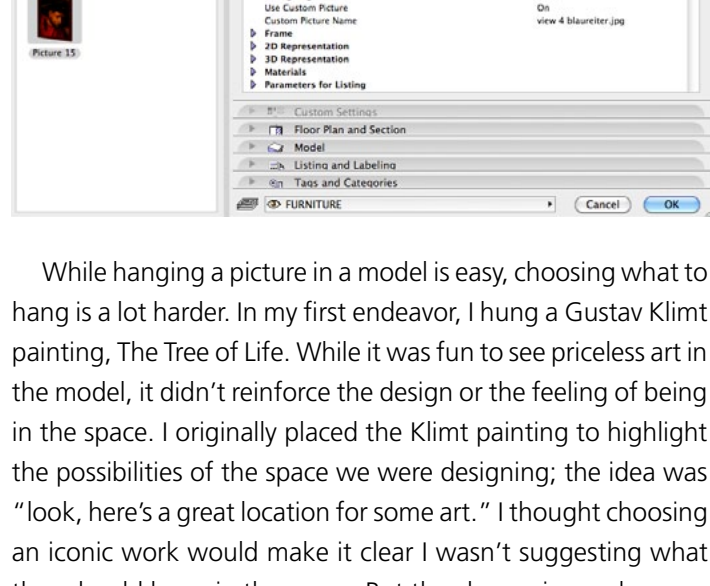


The Self-Referential Model

In the episode of *Baking with Julia* featuring Bread Machine Wizard Lora Brody of West Newton, Massachusetts, host and bread machine skeptic Julia Child had a beautiful quote: “You’re the boss of the machine.” This has become my mantra for digital production. ArchiCAD has incredible capabilities and tools, but those functions are just a means to an end. That goal might be creating great construction documents, facilitating IPD, or helping your client understand what it feels like to be in the building.

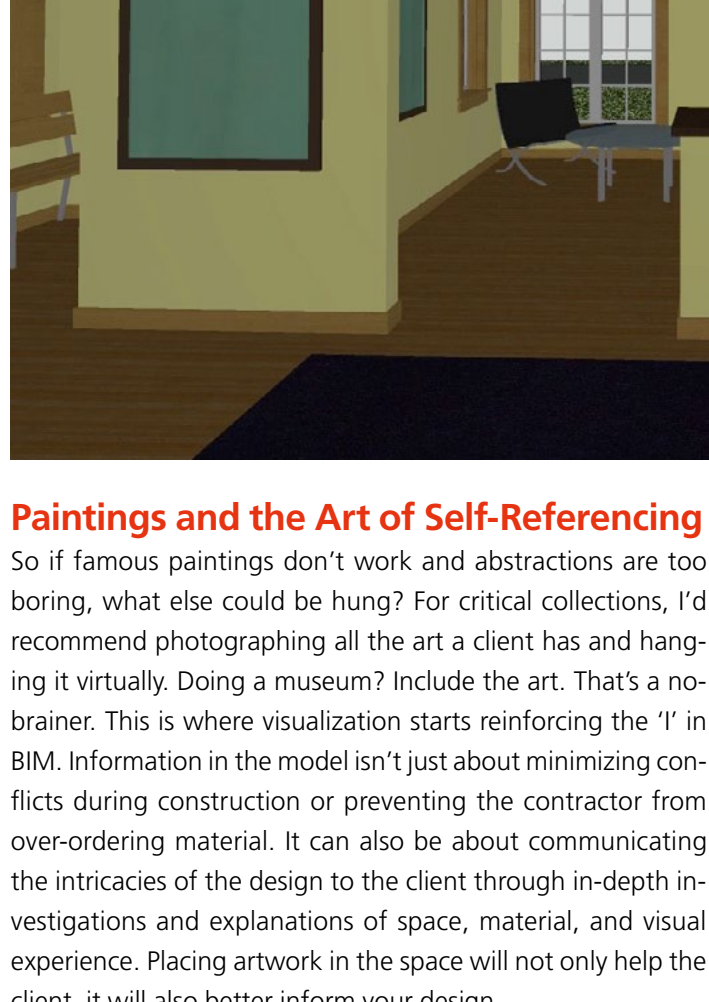
Adding a Different Kind of Information to Your Model

In January of 2011 I wrote a blog post about paintings and wall art in models. I recommended a trick using walls, niches, and aligning 3D textures. It’s a good technique, but I have to admit that I rarely use it for hanging pictures now that I finally got around to understanding the *Picture 15* object. Using the *Picture 15* object is quite simple. Add whatever image you want in your loaded library, choose custom picture in the object settings and then type in name of the image you want to use. You can turn on or off the frame and the object can be tilted if you don’t want the painting hanging vertically. If you want to avoid distortion of the image, you’ll need to know the proportions of the image you selected so that you can size the object properly; it won’t size itself automatically.



While hanging a picture in a model is easy, choosing what to hang is a lot harder. In my first endeavor, I hung a Gustav Klimt painting, *The Tree of Life*. While it was fun to see priceless art in the model, it didn’t reinforce the design or the feeling of being in the space. I originally placed the Klimt painting to highlight the possibilities of the space we were designing; the idea was “look, here’s a great location for some art.” I thought choosing an iconic work would make it clear I wasn’t suggesting what they should hang in the space. But the chosen image became a distraction. We never talked about the proposed experience, just the chosen art.

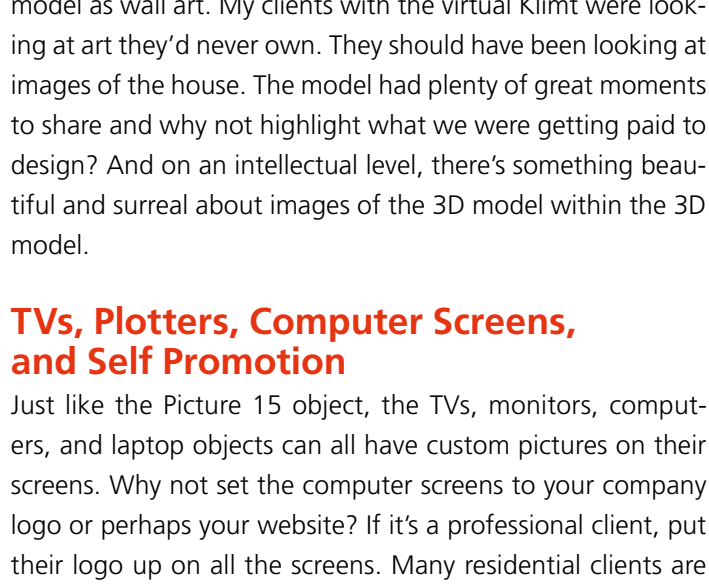
As a reaction to that experience I went more abstract in a subsequent project. I wanted to show the client all the spaces they had for hanging art, without calling attention to a specific piece. I used the *Aged Copper.jpg* from the default ArchiCAD Library for the ‘picture’. The result was clear, but rather dull.



Paintings and the Art of Self-Referencing

So if famous paintings don’t work and abstractions are too boring, what else could be hung? For critical collections, I’d recommend photographing all the art a client has and hanging it virtually. Doing a museum? Include the art. That’s a no-brainer. This is where visualization starts reinforcing the ‘I’ in BIM. Information in the model isn’t just about minimizing conflicts during construction or preventing the contractor from over-ordering material. It can also be about communicating the intricacies of the design to the client through in-depth investigations and explanations of space, material, and visual experience. Placing artwork in the space will not only help the client, it will also better inform your design.

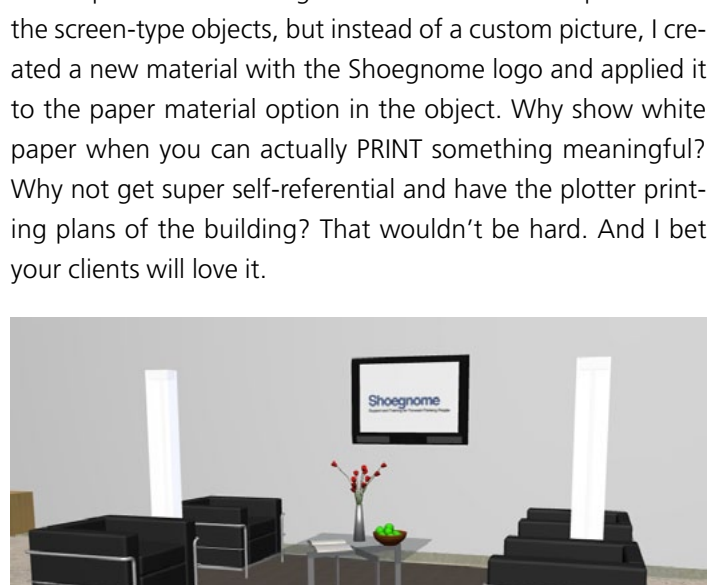
But what do you do if you have no art collection and don’t want to crib distracting masterpieces or use dull abstractions? Try using images of the project. I recently used this technique in an office building I was designing. I had a lobby space that needed something on the walls. I made sketch renderings of the exterior using the default *blautreiter* settings and hung them as art (using the *Picture 15* object). This gave the lobby more character and charm. And more importantly the client, as she explored the model within BIMx, was seeing more of what she hired me to create.



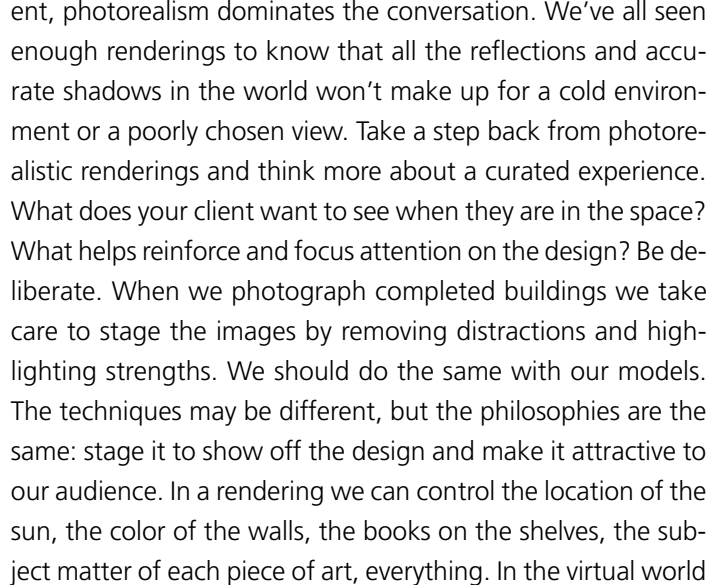
Using images of the project as art is also a great opportunity to highlight specific vignettes and moments that you love in the project. Images of the design placed within the model are great opportunities to share moments that might otherwise go missed. Think about those amazing 3D sectional views that you see while working on the project, but can’t find a reason to share with the client (other than to show off your ArchiCAD skills). Those types of drawings and views that are usually only shared with other architects can now appear naturally in the model as wall art. My clients with the virtual Klimt were looking at art they’d never own. They should have been looking at images of the house. The model had plenty of great moments to share and why not highlight what we were getting paid to design? And on an intellectual level, there’s something beautiful and surreal about images of the 3D model within the 3D model.

TVs, Plotters, Computer Screens, and Self Promotion

Just like the *Picture 15* object, the TVs, monitors, computers, and laptop sets can all have custom pictures on their screens. Why not set the computer screens to your company logo or perhaps your website? If it’s a professional client, put their logo up on all the screens. Many residential clients are also business owners – show those logos or their iconic products. If it’s a commercial or institutional client, don’t be shy about signage and banners. The model is a representation of the clients’ future building. Infuse it with images they love and care about. I recently saw renderings by an architect who was designing a new home for an NFL player. All the TVs in the renderings showed images of the client playing football. He loved it. A warning about this: I would recommend avoiding framed photos of your client’s kids and spouse, as that might go from cool to creepy, perhaps falling into the Uncanny valley.



The plotter in the image above uses the same premise as the screen-type objects, but instead of a custom picture, I created a new material with the Shoegnome logo and applied it to the paper material option in the object. Why show white paper when you can actually PRINT something meaningful? Why not get super self-referential and have the plotter printing plans of the building? That wouldn’t be hard. And I bet your clients will love it.



From Art History 101 to Photography 101

When we talk about making a project more real for the client, photorealism dominates the conversation. We’ve all seen enough renderings to know that all the reflections and accurate shadows in the world won’t make up for a cold environment or a poorly chosen view. Take a step back from photorealistic renderings and think more about a curated experience. What does your client want to see when they are in the space? What helps reinforce and focus attention on the design? Be deliberate. When we photograph completed buildings we take care to stage the images by removing distractions and highlighting strengths. We should do the same with our models. The techniques may be different, but the philosophies are the same: stage it to show off the design and make it attractive to our audience. In a rendering we can control the location of the sun, the color of the walls, the books on the shelves, the subject matter of each piece of art, everything. In the virtual world we can employ techniques that owe as much to M.C. Escher’s explorations of infinity as they do the architectural truths and humanity of photographs by Julius Shulman.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Learn more about why Jared has been called both an ArchiCAD Ninja and ArchiCAD Samurai by visiting his blog.



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