

ADDING A DIMENSION

Sister-sister team creates true-to-life architectural illustrations

BY MOLLY LOOMIS



Kathleen Hanson (left) and Meghan Hanson Powers bring two-dimensional architectural plans to life by introducing depth, environment, lighting, and more.



“Growing up, our parents were so into creative arts. It was crazy!” recalls Meghan Hanson Powers, laughing. “They refused to buy us coloring books or Hallmark cards. We had to make everything ourselves.”

But considering that Powers and her younger sister, Kathleen Hanson, are now professional artists and co-proprietors of Hanson Architectural Illustration in Victor, Idaho, it would seem that their parents weren't so crazy after all.

Born and raised in Victor, Montana, Hanson and Powers grew up spending

long hours at the kitchen table, drawing—a passion instilled in the girls by their parents and high school art teacher. “When we were little, we would spend the entire year getting our artworks ready for the county fair,” Powers says. “It was basically, ‘Well, I’ve already done a landscape drawing to enter, so now I have to do a person.’”

“That was like a full-time job from the age of five to seventeen,” adds Hanson. It was a pragmatic approach to finding inspiration that also provided the budding artists with practice at a variety

of drawing techniques.

Separated by two years, on graduation from high school each girl was awarded a Charles M. Russell Memorial Scholarship to the University of Montana in Missoula, for excellence in fine arts. After studying art for two years, Powers transferred to Montana State University in Bozeman to pursue a degree in architecture. Hanson switched from art to forest resource management, remaining in Missoula.

After a stint working in the field for

the Montana Department of Natural Resources, Hanson decided it was time for a change. She began brainstorming with her sister about jobs that might combine their passions for art, architecture, and the natural world. It was Hanson's boyfriend who suggested architectural rendering, aka architectural illustration.

Most commonly used by developers, marketing firms, architects, and landscape architects, renderings are illustrations that transform the two-dimensional blueprints of architectural plans into virtual three-dimensional drawings that not only allow viewers to get an accurate sense of what a building will look like, but also get a feel for its colors, the different textures of materials used, shadow lines, landscaping, and surroundings.

Many developers find rendering an invaluable tool in helping clients visualize a project's end result. "It's one of those things that's of immeasurable value," says Meagan Hill, development manager for Teton Land and Development Group, which utilized Hanson Architectural Illustration's services for a recent project. "Most people can't visualize what a project is going to look like just based on the plans. That includes the city, county— whoever is looking at [them]. It's really imperative in the overall process."

Having worked on both sides of the process, as an illustrator and architect, Powers agrees. "When something goes 3-D, it's entirely different," she says. "People are able to understand the building much better. They get really excited about it then."

At the end of 2006, the sisters officially launched Hanson Rendering. Hanson dove into the business, working out of a silo artfully converted into an office by Powers and her husband, contractor Aaron Powers. Powers worked with her sister on the side, as her full-time career as an architect allowed. The two renamed the business Hanson Architectural Illustration (website: www.hansonillustration.com) in 2007, after getting grief from friends and family about including the word "rendering" in their title. While rendering is the correct technical terminology for the type of drawings Hanson and Powers produce, it is also the word used to describe the