CHAOSGROUP

CG GARAGE PODCAST #274
MICHAEL GOLDEN
FOUNDER & VISUALIST, THREE MARKS

This podcast will change the way you create arch-viz. Three Marks' Michael Golden explains his philosophy behind great images that keep your client happy.

This week's podcast guest, Michael Golden, is full of sage-like wisdom on how to create great arch-viz. His more holistic approach to creating imagery makes it easy to get clients on board with projects while maintaining creative control. He also discusses why a bad photorealistic image is worse than no image, reveals the subtle details that breathe life into renders — and explains what we can all learn from Japanese comic books.

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Mike Golden   ... the digital to analog Polaroid is amazing.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. If you really think about it, it's kind of ridiculous that I'm basically taking ... there's a lens that's going through you, right?

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   That's the lens that's doing the video camera. Then, that's going through this screen and that's coming to me. Then, I'm taking a screen capture of that. Then, I'm going to transfer that to the cloud, to this phone, and I'm going to take this phone and place it onto a thing. The output is a Polaroid. Then, I take that Polaroid and I scan it with an Epson scanner, and that becomes ... it's so ridiculous.

Mike Golden   That's the story of like, Kodak's still alive but not doing amazingly.

Chris Nichols   There you go. It is kind of hilarious if you really think about it.

Mike Golden   Absolutely it is.

Chris Nichols   Well, cool, man. This is great. This is great. How are things for you?

Mike Golden   All in all, not bad. I got to be honest. I work from home, my wife works from home. We have the baby home now, so that's a change. Obviously, jobs are getting canceled or postponed or kind of like, "We'll get back to you in a month or two." That's not awesome. But, I got my girls at home. So, plenty of family time and just kind of trying to enjoy myself and stay productive. We'll get through this, you know? How about you?

Chris Nichols   Yeah. It's kind of cool actually. I've actually been able to work a lot from home, which is ... my job kind of enables that to happen. I have been saving two and a half hours a day of traffic, you know, LA traffic.

Mike Golden   That's a blessing to everyone in LA.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, I know. That's kind of nice. Kids doing school from home is a little bit more disruptive.

Mike Golden   How old are your kids?

Chris Nichols   10 and 13, almost 14.

Mike Golden   Yeah. So, are you teaching? Are you doing the homeschooling thing?

Chris Nichols   Yeah, they're doing the homeschooling thing. My wife's helping out with that. Unfortunately, my wife has been furloughed for now because of ... they can't technically move an entire Flame out to our house right now. That's not going to work. But we're figuring that out. She's helping out with that thing. I am actually recording this podcast from my kid's bedroom because it's actually the best soundproofing around because of the giant bunk bed that's in front of me.

Mike Golden   Bunk bed, lots of comforters.

Chris Nichols   Yep. Lots of comforters. Lots of stuffed animals and stuff like that. That's helpful. But yeah, that's basically where we are. So, it is what it is.

Mike Golden   Yeah. I feel like there's not much that we can do about it. My sympathies really go out to the people that are a little bit bigger than me studio wise. Like, small firms that have like four or five people and don't have the money to keep everybody on through this. I can't imagine what they're going through. For my part, I'm just trying to stay positive and make some artwork in the free time.

Chris Nichols   Hopefully, we'll learn something from this process at some point anyway.

Mike Golden   I am reconnecting with a lot of old friends that I haven't talked to in a long time because of this. Like, video chatting and having a beer digitally is kind of the norm. I moved so much growing up that my friends are scattered all over the country. So, friends that I talk to like once or twice a year, I've had like three beers in the past week. Each one of them.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, and the thing that was interesting is because as you know, I've been sort of reluctant to do the podcast remotely, but obviously it's like, well either we cancel the podcast for a while or we figure out a solution. So, I looked at this, which is SquadCast. There's two things I like about doing it in person. One, is I can control the audio quality because I get all the mics myself and everything is good.

Chris Nichols   And then, two, is that I can see the person and we can interact a little bit better. But then, I found this, which is pretty cool, this SquadCast system is awesome and what it does, and I'll explain it to you. I think it was explained in the email, but basically, while we're recording, this is basically like a Zoom or a Skype or whatever, but while we're recording, it's actually recording the uncompressed audio file of your channel and my channel separately on our local devices. It's live uploading data as we go so that I get clean audio and I was like, "That's good," right?

Mike Golden   And separate channels.

Chris Nichols   Separate channels, and I can mix it myself. I don't get the compression that you get from the horrible Skype calls. Yeah. That's a good thing. But otherwise, I mean obviously, it seems like you have a very good internet connection, your

video quality is superb and your audio is clean, and your latency is almost zero from what I can tell.

Mike Golden You jinxed us. I'm in Portland, Maine, so it's usually pretty good, but not amazing. It's not amazing.

Chris Nichols I am just glad ... it's been probably about five or six months ago that I upgraded my internet at home to be fiber, so, oh, it's amazing. Big difference. I'm just glad I got it in time.

Mike Golden When I left New York, we had Fios at New York. So like, at home, we had a like 100 up and 1000 down or whatever. In my office, I was in a WeWork, when I was there. We had something ridiculous like 1000 down and 500 up. It was instantaneous for gigabyte downloads. Then, here we're sitting at like, 10 up, 100 down. I'm like, "If I pay for two is there a way that we can double all of that?" They're like, "There's no way to do that." I'm like, "There's got to be a way to do that."

Chris Nichols Well, it's working. What I got, is I got AT&T Fiber and I think I'm paying like, $75 a month for it. I'm getting 300 up and 300 down.

Mike Golden That's awesome.

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Mike Golden I'm paying the same.

Chris Nichols And the only reason I didn't go to gigabit is because most of the devices in the house are on wifi, so they wouldn't take advantage of it. Wifi is not fast enough for gigabit.

Mike Golden My internet's faster than a wifi connection. 5G is not getting it done.

Chris Nichols Yeah. Anyway, that's enough geeking out about the internet. Let's talk about you, Mike. How are you doing besides that? Let's get a little bit of history. Let's let people know a little bit about yourself. You've done a lot of different things in your life.

Mike Golden I've been a little all over the place. It was not a straight direction at all.

Chris Nichols Right.

Mike Golden I was born in 19 ... no, we're not going to go that far back-

Chris Nichols But we can go with what's inspired you to do what you do.

Mike Golden   I mean, before I got into really any type of visual art in undergrad, I did philosophy and creative writing in Chicago.

Chris Nichols   Wow.

Mike Golden   From there, I fished on a boat for three years in Alaska.

Chris Nichols   Really?

Mike Golden   Yeah. Charter fishing boats, to be clear. Not the deadliest catch stuff, wasn't risking lives.

Chris Nichols   Oh, so you were doing charter fishing, like sports fishing?

Mike Golden   Yeah, sport fishing in Alaska for halibut and salmon for the most part.

Chris Nichols   Nice.

Mike Golden   After a couple of years of that, I'm like, I always liked architecture and I liked fine arts, and I don't want to be a fisherman for my entire life. So, I went to get a graduate degree in architecture. Within the first couple of weeks, I realized that I don't really enjoy designing and I don't think I'm that good at it, from an architectural standpoint. But image-making, I get really excited about. Like, all the design work is just a means to get to the point where I get to make an image of it.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   So, I finished my degree there but had no intention of any point going into actual design.

Chris Nichols   And so, you got into the CG part of it pretty quickly I'm assuming?

Mike Golden   Really, like I opened Photoshop and Rhino at the same exact time. It was before V-Ray 1.6.

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   I'm not sure which V-Ray it was.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   But we were learning Rhino and V-Ray and I was learning Photoshop at the same time in design school. Yeah, as soon as I got out of school, I applied to architectural visualization jobs which took me to DBOX, 3DS Max, and V-Ray. Learning 3ds Max was a struggle. It always is. That's really where my art career ... or my visualization or CG career began. I was at DBOX in New York. I spent two

years there and it was absolutely the eye opening experience. I credit a lot of what I've been able to do since then as a result of my time there at DBOX.

Chris Nichols   That's awesome. I'm actually going to do a podcast with Matthew Bannister.

Mike Golden   He actually mentioned that to me the other day.

Chris Nichols   Oh, good.

Mike Golden   I am looking forward to that conversation very, very much.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, me too.

Mike Golden   He's got some wisdom back here.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, absolutely. Well, that's cool. Okay, tell me a little bit more. You were at DBOX, how long were you there for?

Mike Golden   I was there for two years and I fortunately got to work very closely with Matthew, who's obviously the founder and I'm not sure what his title is now. CEO, CCO?

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   Matthew and Keith. So, I got to work on a lot of editorial stuff and kind of really started to develop an eye. I left there to start my own thing because I wanted to kind of have the freedom to play not so much with the creative style, but the client relationship, which obviously is a big studio, I can't just go in and do anything I want anytime, right? There'd be some implications to that.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   But I ended up working for a year for Thomas Juul-Hansen, the architect in New York City, helping him with presentation visuals, which wasn't really planned. I was going out on my own and in Godfather speak, he made me an offer I couldn't refuse. So, I did that for a year and a half and I made, I think, in the course of that time, like 300 or so images. Close to that. So, I made a lot of images. I had a lot of time to actually develop a process that worked for me, in efficiency, and I was doing a lot of freelance. At that point, I got a job that was big enough to warrant going out on my own in New York City. So, me and my friend, Mike Gloudeman, did that first project. It was like 30 some-odd images. It took about six and a half months. So, that was the beginning of Three Marks, which has been running ever since.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. So, what year was that about?

Mike Golden   That would have been 2014.

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   I'm always impressed by people like, "Oh, yeah. Back in '89," like how do you remember what year things happened? But yeah, so 2014 or '15. I think '14. So, that's been running ever since. I kind of paused that for two years and was working with KitBash as their head of 3D.

Chris Nichols   Okay, so how did that relationship happen? Because I know Max, he's a great guy. I met him actually through Keely believe it or not.

Mike Golden   Oh, it's a small-

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   Now, Keely and Ali are together, which is a fantastic thing.

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Working at KitBash3d

Mike Golden   Max, so we actually met ... I started my Droquis account, which is where I just kind of put my digital sketches. A couple of months before KitBash started, which was September of ... it'll be three years this year, so 2017 I think, I want to say-

Chris Nichols   Yeah, that sounds about right. That sounds about right, yeah.

Mike Golden   Roughly, give or take a year is about the accuracy I have in that kind of thing. So, I started it completely anonymously. My now-wife, then-girlfriend, was the only person that really knew I was doing it just because I kind of have like a perfectionist nature and I wanted something where I could make things and share them, but not actually be like, "This could be a little bit better, that could be a little bit better." I happened to be one of the first people to make an image for them.

Chris Nichols   Really?

Mike Golden   Yeah. I had finished work one day and I was looking through some design blog or a CG blog and there was like, KitBash gothic set, and I'm like, that looks like fun-

Chris Nichols   We should explain because I know you and I know what KitBash is, and some of our listeners may not have all that knowledge. So, give a little synopsis of what

KitBash is. Also, I'll let people know that you guys can go back and listen to the Max Burman podcast because he talks about it as well if you want more detail. But give a quick summary if you can.

Mike Golden   Yeah. So, KitBash is making kits of themed, mostly architectural models for people in the concept world, in-game design, or game production to use as ... to create whatever they want, really. If you want to create an art deco world, there's an art deco kit for that. Then, they consist, generally speaking, of about 30 buildings per kit that all kind of fit into a style, whether it be gothic, deco, modern. They've got to be up to like 40 kits by now I think.

Chris Nichols   They have a lot, yep.

Mike Golden   Yeah. A big catalog. So, they come textured and basically ready to roll. So, if you're creating a world and you don't want to model every building in that world because that would take ages and ages and ages, this will get you almost all the way there.

Chris Nichols   Right. It's really been very useful for concept artists to just throw in a bunch of buildings in the background, compose it the way they want and then they can use that to paint over or just render because like you said, they're texture ready, and shader ready as well. I know there are V-Ray shaders on all of them as well because I work with Max obviously and gave him all his V-Ray licenses.

Mike Golden   I was there for the development of all of that fun, of getting all that ready.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. It's a really cool thing that they've got going on.

Mike Golden   You can do in a night which would, from scratch, literally take a month and a half.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Right? So, especially for ideation, trying to come up with, "Maybe this could work, maybe this could work, what if we tweak this." You don't have to commit to any ideas beforehand, you can just try a whole bunch of things really, really quickly, which is why I ... literally, I saw that the night it came out, just completely by chance and I was like, yeah, I'll pour myself a whiskey and two hours later, I had an image. I posted it on Instagram and kind of forgot about it, to be honest. Like a month or two later, I got an email from Max and Bank saying, "We want to give you your free kit, how can we get in contact with you?" At that point, Droquis was still entirely anonymous and I'm like, "Oh, I guess this is the time I need to reveal who Droquis is." I actually didn't know I was in a competition at the time-

Chris Nichols   Oh, right.

Mike Golden   But I'm like, hey, a free kit's a free kit, why not? Everyone loves 3D models.

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   So yeah, I ended up doing a Kitmas Bash for them, it was kind of like a live-streamed real-time art competition, concept art competition, which was a lot of fun. Then, shortly after that, they're like, "Do you want to come in and help with the technical 3D supervision side of things?" So, it kind of grew naturally from there to the part where I was almost full-time. I was doing little bits of arch-viz still with Three Marks for a while. Now, I'm kind of back to making images again.

Chris Nichols   That's awesome. That's awesome.

Mike Golden   Yeah, it was a wonderful time. The KitBash guys are absolutely fantastic. So yeah, definitely listen to Max's episode and check out some free kits. They're always giving something away-

Chris Nichols   Yeah, for sure. For sure. Actually, you know, I would note that we ... before all of this pandemic hit us like an anvil in the head, we were actually going to have ... you were actually going to be part of Total Chaos and we were going to work with you to do a bunch of stuff with KitBash. So that specific idea has been put on hold, but the concept is still well alive. So, you and I are probably going to figure out some really cool stuff to do with KitBash in the near future. So, you and I will talk about it after we finish the podcast.

Chris Nichols   But I still love the idea of what KitBash is and I still love the idea of how Max and Banks and all the team that you guys have over there are thinking about it. I think it's an important part of really kind of a cool idea in terms of what it is. You know, KitBash is not a new idea. In terms of the physical world, that's how the Millennium Falcon got built, right? They built a rough shape and then they took all these kits from different model shops and just stuck them on to give it a little bit more nurnies and detail. That's really what it's all about. It looks great. That's the kind of cool stuff. Actually, Max comes from the practical world too, so he knows that very well.

Mike Golden   Yeah. I mean, he has a lineage in it, right?

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   The coolest thing is that it's serving the same exact purpose, right? Like, to do all of those ... you sound like a nurnies man, I'm a greebles guy. But nonetheless, to do all of those little details would just take forever if you were trying to do them all bespoke for each and every one, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   They need to be there, especially in a digital image which has a tendency to lack those types of details. So, they actually ... I teach like a weekend workshop at

MADI in Venice every year, MADI is Italian for master of architectural design and visualization of some sort. So, it's for architectural visualization; specifically it's a post-professional degree and it's one year long. When I go out there, KitBash provides all of the students with kits and I actually teach them that if you want to get better at image-making and architectural visualization, whether that's film, VR, or stills, you need to find a way to practice that is not just modeling, right? If you want to make a cityscape from scratch, most of your time's going to be spent modeling. That's not going to make a better image, or tell a better story. So, you need to find a way to practice efficiently, which is the thing that I've always personally been most drawn to with the kits, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Is that you can create something you're proud of while focusing on the more artistic and less technical sides of the craft.

Chris Nichols   Right. Yeah, there's a lot ... I mean, making an image involves a lot more, right? Imagine if you were doing an interior and you modeled every chair and every plant. It would not make any sense, right?

Mike Golden   You'd make like one image a year.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   It'd be a bit hard to get by on that.

Chris Nichols   So, it'd be better to have a library of chairs and plants that you can use to populate your interior space if you're going to do that and focus on what's important to do, right?

Mike Golden   Yes, making it beautiful.

Chris Nichols   Right. There's a lot to be said about that as well, and composition and lighting and shading, and all those things are things that you can still focus on in terms of the idea. Modeling is fun if you just want to put your headphones on and not think too much.

Mike Golden   Absolutely. Absolutely. At least furniture. I hate modeling buildings. I'm an architectural visualization artist that hates modeling architecture. Give me a chair all day long.

Chris Nichols   You know it's funny because my first ... at Gensler, I was working there, and then my first job in visual effects was modeling buildings. So, I was modeling it for *The Day After Tomorrow* and my very next job was lighting lead for *I, Robot* and I haven't modeled since. I have not touched-

Mike Golden   No one can see this, but I'm applauding you.

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   It's a necessary evil in CG and some people really, really love it. But for me, the lighting, composing the mood and atmosphere of an image is the thing that really gets me excited and in love with what I get to do every day.

Chris Nichols   That's awesome. Actually, let's go back to that. So, you are head of 3D at KitBash. Is that what your title is, is that what you said you were?

Mike Golden   Was. Yeah.

Chris Nichols   You were.

Mike Golden   Yes. We split ways back in November.

Chris Nichols   Oh, okay.

Mike Golden   So yeah, I was head of 3D there for two years thereabouts, roughly speaking. Again, we've already established I'm not great with timelines. But yeah, their team is growing rapidly. I like making art essentially. So like, what they needed and what I wanted to be doing all day kind of ... those paths started to diverge.

Chris Nichols   Okay. So, you focused back on your architecture visualization group, right?

Mike Golden   Architectural visualization and I'm still making lots of sketches on Droquis and back to more pushing pixels, let's say.

Chris Nichols   Right. Okay, cool. Well then, let's talk a little bit about that. What are some of the pushing pixels things that you're actually involved in right now?

Mike Golden   So, I can't talk about any of the things that I'm currently working on, as per normal in arch-viz. In about a year and a half, they'll all be out. Most of my work tends to be in the kind of luxury residential world. I think probably because I came from DBOX, which tends to be in that niche. The vast majority of my work's there. So, usually big projects. A lot of towers in New York City. Projects that generally are looking at like 30 to 50 images per project to market it and to sell it before it actually gets built.

Chris Nichols   Got it.

Mike Golden   Yeah, and so, my whole focus, the thing that I kind of get most excited about from the business side of making art is how can we refine that client relationship such that I'm loving every minute of making images and you guys are super happy with what I make at the end, which was kind of that initial impetus to leave DBOX when I did, was how can we figure out that relationship such that I'm not frustrated because I'm making changes that I think are making the images worse,

and you're not frustrated because you feel like you're not getting the images that you thought you needed, which I think as a young artist you think that if you make great art, if you make beautiful imagery, that will be solved just by making great images. I think that the truth of that is that that's a client relationship and communication and process question more than anything else.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. But there is something I remember ... we should tell people, the first time that you and I met in person was actually at the ASAI conference here in LA, right?

Mike Golden   Yes. Yeah. Back in November or the fall anyways.

Mike's approach to arch-viz

Chris Nichols   Something like that, yeah. We are both bad at timelines right now. But yeah, it was around that time. You gave a really interesting talk about how to think about images and how to charge people for what work you're doing. I thought it was a really great idea for people to understand the difference. Because so much of the architectural visualization world, and I'm talking about even before digital, was all based on it costing you x-amount of dollars per image, right? You need a rendering, it's this many. You need five renderings, it's this many, and this many times five, right? So, it was always the same thing. There was a thing that you said, that basically said, "No, I'm going to not pretend that the second image of the same space shouldn't cost as much as the first image, and I'm going to look at it very differently, and I'm going to offer something that's going to be more valuable to the customer."

Chris Nichols   You did it in a way that didn't make it seem that you were basically going to undercut everyone, but you were just giving the reality to the customer. Can you just give me the ... because you had a really great pitch. I know I'm paraphrasing, but I was thinking about it for a long time. So, just give me that pitch. Because we have a ton of people that do architectural visualization that listen to it. A lot of people that are sitting in their basement churning out renderings for people and your philosophy was really interesting. So, go ahead and tell that story because that was really good.

Mike Golden   I will, and I'm so happy to hear that it resonated.

Chris Nichols   Oh, yeah.

Mike Golden   Yeah, so the traditional model, if we look where it came from, the traditional model of CG had so much work done in post and like all of these ... every little

flower was added and adjusted in Photoshop. So, you really had to lock in a camera at the very beginning and say the camera's not going to move now so as to not have to redo work down the line. But render engines have gotten, in the last three years, let alone the last 10 or 15 years, have gotten so much more powerful that the raw output from these things is pretty close to finished, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   At least for my workflow. I should probably caveat the whole thing that this works for me.

Chris Nichols   And there's also enough content out there that you can get a bunch of models of flowers or buildings, of people and furniture, everything, right?

Mike Golden   I mean, I've never modeled a flower and on these projects, there are flowers ... at least one in like, every single shot, right?

Chris Nichols   Right, exactly.

Mike Golden   So, the whole prioritizing the entire process around like, "We don't want to change the camera," says, "Well, what if I need to change the couch and that means that the composition changes," right? Or, "We changed the lighting and I want to make it wider." Well now, we've kind of set these things into place where we can't do that. Then, you get the other side of that from the developer standpoint or the architect standpoint is, I'm paying you x-thousand dollars to make this image of the living room, let's say. I want to see all of it. I want to see from edge to edge as much as possible, which means that if you show them three cameras, which generally, in the traditional process, you show three cameras, usually in like a white box kind of format of like, "Camera A, B, or C: Which one do you want?"

Mike Golden   Usually, at least in my experience, when I was doing that process, you'd show one cool camera looking one direction, another cool camera showing another direction, and then another camera that's kind of like merging the two and it's not that it's taking the best of both worlds, it's just losing the best of each image. Then, without fail, the client's like, "Oh, those first two are really cool, but the third one, we can see everything. Let's go with that and maybe we make the camera a little bit wider and show even more." So then, of the three images, they pick the worst one and want to make it worse. So then, you're spending your entire time trying to make what's fundamentally a bad composition and a bad image good, which is ... you're working uphill the entire time. Whereas, if you had a good composition from the beginning, every little detail doesn't need to be perfect for it to still be a very strong image.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   So, my philosophy with my clients is like, "Listen, I'm not going to give you camera options to choose from. I'm going to charge you for the space that you want to

show," and sometimes that's one image for that space and sometimes that's three images for that space. But I take the power of them getting to decide away, and I say, "But I'm going to give you more images." They're going to be easier for me to make because they're stronger images, right? Together, they're going to show the space without me doing the one camera that's trying to pack it all into one core-

Chris Nichols   That's the thing, right? It becomes a practical problem because they're like, "Well, we're only paying for one image. So I've got to show everything in that one image."

Mike Golden   Exactly. Everything's riding on it and that's why they're like, "What if the sky was just a little bluer and that chair was turned just a little bit," because they're trying to squeeze every last thing out of it. Whereas if they say to me like, "We can't quite see this detail," I'm like, "Well, maybe I'll just do a little vignette shot." If you look at architectural visualization forums, it's filled with vignettes, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   These small little cool beautiful moments inside of pieces of architecture that clients do not pay for. Once in a blue moon, if it's a very special thing, clients are like, "Let's do that but wider. Let's show more," right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Because they're paying for the same thing. But you already have the chair in the corner next to the window modeled and everything else. Making that's fun. Then, you can use the fact that you're making more to leverage. Like, we're not going to change every little thing. We're not going to go through four rounds of review. I give my clients one round of review, which is to say, if you don't like the cameras I've given, I'll find one that works for you. But we're not going to go through and nitpick every little pixel because that doesn't really matter, but if it's missing something and it's easier just to give you another image than to try to squeeze it into this one, I'd much rather make two strong images than one mediocre one. Like, I enjoy that more. So, you can leverage it within your relationship with the client as well.

Chris Nichols   Like you were saying, especially now that things have gotten so much faster and better and your assets and your library of content has gotten richer, it's really ... let's not lie, it is actually not that hard to do that second image.

Mike Golden   No. If you can do the first one well, you can do the second one probably quickly-

Chris Nichols   And if you can solve all of your problems by doing a second image as opposed to tweaking the crap out of the first one and making it worse ...

Mike Golden   That's exactly the impetus of the entire exercise of what I've been trying to figure out, right?

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   You know, we had an interesting conversation about that singular architectural image when we were at Gnomon and we were talking about, is the single image dead? I don't think that the single image of like, this is the iconic photograph that captures the building, that's not dead at all. But the client wants to see that, only with a lens that's 10 millimeters wider, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   So, if you want to make all of the cool shots too, you're either doing them in your free time, or you're figuring out a way to leverage that. So, listen, I'll make the image you want and the image that I want, and together they'll be better and we'll all be happy. But I can't do four rounds of like, taking out clouds one-by-one.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. We should actually explain to people what that was because it was ... besides your talk, you and I, and several other people were on a panel to talk specifically about what the world of visualization has become today, especially in the digital world, and whether a static image is still a valid thing for architecture. Obviously, the days of a shiny brochure are not as big as they used to be. The days of a website are definitely still around. So, there's a website and there's going to be images on that website. But there are a lot more kinds of content being developed out there. You know, moving images and interactive content and stuff of that nature. What is your impression of that world and what that means?

Mike Golden   You know, I'm all for it, right? I don't actually do ... I've never done anything in VR, as far as creating it. There's a lot of people that are kind of in my shoes that are like, making stills or maybe even animations or films, however they want to call them, that are very worried about this movement. I think it's an amazing tool that does a lot of things that I don't want to try and do in still images anyways.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Right? It's one more tool for a developer to describe a project and its effect on the still image, I think, is that it takes away the explanatory role. That's the part that it's chipping away at. So, the aerial image that kind of shows how it sits on the block and that takes forever to make and is never usually that much fun, that's better done in VR or AR. You can give a better client experience-

Chris Nichols   Interesting, yeah.

Mike Golden   ... of describing and understanding that space and the relationship to the buildings itself if someone can look around. Or, even like the VR where you look

down at a flat map and through a phone or tablet, you can actually walk around the map and actually kind of look at it from like a god's eye view. Those are amazing, amazing tools. I think that the pressure that it's going to put on the still side of things, because like, my love is for the still image.

Chris Nichols   Okay, yeah. Of course. That's not going away.

Mike Golden   No, right? Like, photography still exists. But think of what's happened with photography. I think that CG, especially architectural visualization is going through a very, very analogous time, which is that whereas 25 years ago if you have the equipment to do professional photography, your level of competence or artistic merit was less important than it is now, right?

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   Because now everyone has that equipment. So, the only thing differentiating you is kind of the soft skills of how you're using it.

Chris Nichols   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Golden   Right? And you can go back 100 years, literally, you had to be a chemist to be a photographer, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   It was more of a scientific than an artistic job. But now, we have what would have counted 20 years ago as a professional-quality camera on our phone. So, it's really said, like, "Your unique take and your voice through that medium is what is separating architectural photographers and all photographers." I think that with CG, especially with the advent of VR and AR becoming more and more predominant as a means to explain projects, but also the fact that like, render engines are really good now.

Chris Nichols   Yes.

Mike Golden   Right? It's not hard just to make a photorealistic image.

Chris Nichols   Nope.

Mike Golden   It just doesn't take a lot of technical know-how. So now, if anybody can do that, what separates an average architectural visualization render from a not-particularly gifted studio versus one that's actually worth paying money for.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. I agree. Now, tell me if you agree with this because I'm sure you will. But I work for Chaos Group, we make V-Ray, right?

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   The fact is, you do not need ... you shouldn't be spending most of your time learning V-Ray. In fact, if you're spending a lot of time learning V-Ray, then you're not necessarily using V-Ray correctly because V-Ray out of the box should work pretty well. You shouldn't be tweaking a bunch of settings, right? Default settings are way better than anything else. So, instead of spending your time learning how to use V-Ray, spend your time learning how to compose an image or how to ... these are skills that are much harder to master, and take a lot more practice than it should be done and should be learned in that way, you know?

Mike Golden   I couldn't possibly agree with that more. Because 10 years ago, you had to kind of understand irradiance map results-

Chris Nichols   Yeah. Yep, and you need to know how to tweak it for every image and every condition. Now, if you're using an irradiance map, I'm going to come by your house and I'm going to slap your hand.

Mike Golden   The difference in ... the settings that I change is like sample count, is about the amount of tweaking that I do and usually-

Chris Nichols   You're not using irradiance maps are you still?

Mike Golden   No, no, no, no.

Chris Nichols   Okay, good.

Mike Golden   Oh, yeah. Negative four, negative two-

Chris Nichols   Oh, no. I'm coming over. I'm slapping your hand. I don't care about this virus.

Mike Golden   Right? Like, really, at the end of the day, I change the resolution and I let it render a little bit longer from draft to final, right?

Chris Nichols   Yep.

Mike Golden   At the same time, even if you knew all of those settings backwards and forwards as much as your best developer did as far as understanding them, the results that you can get now blow anything that was even close to it, like a straight out of the frame buffer 10 years ago couldn't touch a bad test rendering now as far as quality goes.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, and the fact is, I mean, especially in things like V-Ray, these are systems that are based on physics, right? So, real systems. So, really your camera is way closer to a physical camera than reality, right? So, if you just use the materials the way they are and put them on there and they represent things, they will react like they would in any kind of physical condition. So therefore, it's really like taking a photograph at which point you have control of everything that a photographer

has; what it looks like, what depth of field are you going to use; what f-stop are you going to use; what kind of lighting; do you want a cloudy day. You know what, you have the power to move the sun, which a photographer does not have-

Mike Golden   You get to play god.

Chris Nichols   You can play god, right. So, there are definitely a lot of things that you can do out there to create a great image and it comes from art.

Mike Golden   And those are the hard things to learn, right? I can still kick off some irradiance map numbers if someone wants to try V-Ray 1.6 and it wouldn't take that long to understand them. But as far as, "Why is this composition better than that composition, or why did you move the light to 110 degrees askew from the camera as opposed to 45 degrees, right?"

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Those are ... every case is different, right?

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   It just takes a lot of time and practice and I think struggle basically of like, fighting with "Why doesn't this look good? Does this look better, does that look better? Oh, this time, that looks better."

Chris Nichols   I think it's because people want to have a way to quantify what's good and what's bad, right? If I tell them this setting is bad, then it's easy to quantify that.

Mike Golden   Yeah, and if you say backlighting an image is bad, they take that into their head, they'll never backlight an image-

Chris Nichols   Which is wrong.

Mike Golden   ... which sometimes that's the best way to do things, right?

Chris Nichols   Right. That's the thing that frustrated me in VR because there were so many "rules" to VR, it's like, how can you have all these rules? It's such a new medium. Like, never move a camera. It's like, really? Okay, I understand the whole nausea thing, so maybe there are some things that we can follow there, but I actually saw a bunch of VR where people are moving the camera where I didn't get nauseous, right?

Mike Golden   Yeah.

Chris Nichols   I get in a car every day, I don't get nauseous and it moves.

Mike Golden   It moves and I'm fine. I'm on a plane, which I can't even see outside on and I'm fine on that too.

Architecture schools of thought

Chris Nichols   Right, yeah. It's something called relative motion, right? And so, there's acceleration and then there are all these different things. So anyway, it's just one of those things, like people need something quantifiable to make it easier for them to understand or to learn from. It's really, really hard. I remember, man, when I started in architecture school, and I loved art. So, I was a double major in math and fine arts.

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative), which is an amazing combo.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. I went to architecture school, which seemed way more analytical in some ways compared to fine arts. So, we started, "Here's your problem," right? Because architecture's presented as a problem. Art is not presented as a problem. But-

Mike Golden   A design degree is providing solutions that other people wouldn't think of.

Chris Nichols   Right. So, here's a problem and I'm like, great, this is a math problem. I'm like, no, because the result is subjective. I'm like, but there's got to be a solution, you know? It was so hard for me to come up with that grasp of like ... I mean, you gotta have that ... I mean, it's the same thing when you're doing the images. Here's your problem, you have the problem it is, you have the space, and you've got to make it look good. Your result is subjective in the end. You can achieve the goal, but it's a subjective result. So, that's got to be fascinating, right?

Mike Golden   Excuse me. It's such a hard thing to wrap your head around because you have to say ... you can work forever on these problems, right?

Chris Nichols   You don't know when to stop.

Mike Golden   There's no like, "I've got it. This is the answer." It can't get any better. It can always get better, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   When I was at architecture school, which was the first time that I, like you, was dealing with this issue of like, I'm solving a problem that doesn't have a set

solution. There are multiple solutions and whenever I come up with could always, always be better. I went nuts. During architecture school, I lost like 40 pounds.

Chris Nichols Really?

Mike Golden I didn't sleep. I slept like a couple of hours a night at most. When I don't sleep, I lose my appetite. It wasn't like an eating problem or anything else, it was just two days would go by and I'd realize I hadn't eaten anything besides three gallons of coffee.

Chris Nichols Yep.

Mike Golden So, you have to start learning like, okay, I need to find pace for myself where I'm saying like, I think this will read better. Then, you have to continue refining that because if you're doing this as a job, your opinion is not the most important opinion at the end of the day.

Chris Nichols Right. Yeah.

Mike Golden If we all just made the images that we wanted to make, no one would ever get paid.

Chris Nichols True. Yeah. It's true.

Mike Golden You know?

Chris Nichols Well, what's the ... I mean, there are several ways to look at that. It's not the best, it's not the best. What's the George Clooney method about making movies?

Mike Golden I don't know if I know that.

Chris Nichols Two for them, one for me.

Mike Golden You basically kind of just summed up my process that we were talking about before, right?

Chris Nichols Right.

Mike Golden I'm going to make sure they get the images they want, and the more experience you have, the more you have a better sense of that. But like, you need to get something out of it, otherwise, you can make more money doing something else in a lot less time.

Chris Nichols Yeah.

Mike Golden You know?

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   But the VR thing, to go back to the VR thing because in the conversation that we had at Gnomon I thought it was really fascinating to see how architecture is using VR to interface directly with their clients, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   I'm a big fan of not showing my clients any work that doesn't look good, and they're showing them buildings that are white box modeled.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   And having great success with it, because it almost starts to bring back ... I feel like it's so far back in the not-polished stage, that it gets almost to the old sketch, right? In the sense of, if you look at a bad photorealistic rendering, it just looks bad and you're going to assume that what it's portraying is bad. You're not going to separate the bad image from bad architecture or design.

Chris Nichols   Sure.

Mike Golden   Right? And that's one of the things that Thomas Juul-Hansen was really big on and why he hired me. He found that when he used to show things in just 2D drawings and material samples so that the client had to imagine what the space was going to look like-

Chris Nichols   They couldn't make the jump.

Mike Golden   No, no. That he didn't have any problem with.

Chris Nichols   Oh, okay.

Mike Golden   Here's an elevation and maybe like a perspective line drawing, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Even toon shader and here's the beautiful marble that's going to be here and the beautiful wood and all that. The client can make the jump. But as soon as he had some of his junior architects that knew a little bit of rendering make a bad attempt at photorealism, that's what stopped them dead in the tracks.

Chris Nichols   Interesting. So, they could imagine it with the physical materials-

Mike Golden   Actual samples.

Chris Nichols   ... and then a rough representation of the space?

Mike Golden   Like, literally a line drawing of an elevation or-

Chris Nichols   Got it.

Mike Golden   ... so that there's nothing photorealistic for them to kind of feed off of, it's entirely imagined, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   As opposed to giving them just enough to be like, "Oh, that doesn't look good." Yeah, but it's not a good rendering, you have to imagine it. Well, if you show them a little bit, they get stuck there. I feel like with the VR, they get the chance to be like, this is what the space is, but it's clearly not finished because it's all white.

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   So like, I don't show white images ever to my clients because I'm not selling a design, I'm selling my portrayal of that design.

Chris Nichols   So, because I like to relate everything to everything, would you say that what the semi-realistic images that the junior architects were doing was kind of like the uncanny valley of arch-viz?

Mike Golden   That's exactly what I would call it.

Chris Nichols   Really?

Mike Golden   That's exactly ... because it's too close to being photorealistic-

Chris Nichols   That it confuses them as to what the realism is, right?

Mike Golden   Exactly. Like, a sketch is a sketch. You know that ... like, it's literally drawn.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   You know that it's not a photograph.

Chris Nichols   So, you can fill in all the blanks in your mind. But if someone is too close to filling in the blanks, you can't make the jump to what it's going to be, right?

Mike Golden   Yep.

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   Have you read Scott McCloud's "Understanding Comics?"

Chris Nichols   No, but I've heard of it. Is it about the space between the comic book lines?

Mike Golden   That's one of my favorite parts of the book, yes.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, I haven't read it. But yeah, my friend Dan Thron, he mentions that a lot. He's like, "It's the anticipation to the punch and then the after the punch, and then in between, there is the punch, but somehow you filled it in in your mind that something got punched." But in the actual drawing-

Mike Golden   In the gutter, it happens in everyone's mind. We're all complicit.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   The same thing ... he has the chart, like the ultimate abstraction is a word, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Filling in the blanks

Mike Golden   Then, you have like a stick figure. We can draw a smiley face and everyone is happy to imagine that as a human. Like, two dots and an arc; a smiling human. Depending on how you're telling the story, they can place themselves, they can personify themselves into those three little marks. But as you get closer and closer to a photograph of a human or something that actually resembles them, your attachment and closeness to that get further and further away. He looks at a lot of Japanese comics, which are rendered. Some of them are rendered almost photorealistically in the background, right?

Chris Nichols   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Golden   Still drawn, but like through a very realist nature. Then, you get to the faces, like manga faces. Again, a couple of lines, keep it simple because if you get too close, even in a comic, which is supposed to be drawn, that uncanny valley still exists, not just in film, in CG.

Chris Nichols   Yep. I totally get it. Somehow, over the years, I've found so many things that are become the uncanny valley of some kind. I even saw a joke at one point that said

that Canada is the uncanny valley of the United States. It's kind of close to American, but not quite, so when you get there you're a little confused.

Mike Golden   That doesn't sound right.

Chris Nichols   I love Canadians, so don't ... they're just too polite, you know just a little bit too ... it confuses you.

Mike Golden   Especially if you were expecting New Yorkers.

Chris Nichols   Oh, yeah. I know, I know. Anyway, so yeah, I totally agree. I totally agree that that's the case. Then, there is so much that you can do to fill in the blanks in your mind and your imagination is so much more powerful than something that's being represented in some kind. And unless you're going to go all the way and represent it 100% real, it's just never going to be there and it's just going to confuse people in the end. So yeah, totally makes sense.

Mike Golden   And you know, there's an interesting correlation to that, or at least that I think is a correlation that's not so much an uncanny valley, but it's like where you're putting focus, especially in a still image. You know the architect Corbusier-

Chris Nichols   Oh, of course.

Mike Golden   Right? He actually did a lot of architectural photography as a hobby while he was designing and kind of defining modernism. He has this one picture, I want to say it's in Villa Savoye, but it doesn't really matter. It's in a kitchen and it's a one-point perspective, it's a very clean well-composed photograph. But there's a half-eaten sliced loaf of bread sitting on the table, the door is ajar, and one of the cabinets is pulled open just a little bit.

Chris Nichols   Okay.

Mike Golden   When you look at that image, you obviously see the architecture, the space is assumed because what you're trying to figure out is why is the thing open and the door open, and where are the ... either something just happened or something's about to happen.

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Right? And so, in your brain, as opposed to focusing on just the architecture, you just put yourself into the architecture to try to figure out story, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   As a result, you can't help but imagine the space, which is like, I think the most successful images, whether it's concept art, drawings, or anything else, gets a

viewer to have it live in their own minds. It's the issue with why the old *Alien* and *Predator* were so good, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   You had to pretty much imagine them, so you could make it as terrifying as possible for you.

Chris Nichols   Right, exactly.

Mike Golden   So, anything-

Chris Nichols   Don't show the monster.

Mike Golden   Don't show the monster, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   No matter how good the CGI is, don't show the monster.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, it's way scarier in your mind.

Mike Golden   Yeah. So like, one of the other tricks, I think that the same things that get you stuck in the uncanny valley are also the techniques that you can potentially get out of it isn't just a technical exercise. It's also a creative storytelling one.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, I agree. You know, I remember this, and I'm actually curious to hear your thoughts because this has got to be in the very late 90s, early 2000s that I remember this. I was obviously coming out of architecture school, everyone said they wanted to do an architecture walkthrough animation, right?

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   It was the worst exercise. We've obviously since graduated from that, creatively speaking. But it was literally people moving a camera forward, there's a thousand frames through a space, and it was like a Hitchcock nightmare going through the architecture space-

Mike Golden   And as unsettling.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. The way Lon described it is let me sit you down in a wheelbarrow and walk you through a space and tell me how that feels.

Mike Golden   That's an amazing description. My hats off to Lon on it. That is so good.

Chris Nichols   That's really good. So, I was thinking like, there's got to be a better way and obviously filmmaking has a history of how to show spaces and how to make it

work. But around that time, there was a TV show that came out which was related to Dwell magazine. Do you remember Dwell magazine? It's still around I think-

Mike Golden   I remember the magazine, I'm not sure if I-

Chris Nichols   So they made a TV show that was basically like, hey, we're going to show you some cool architecture spaces. But it was like, they'll show three cool architects that are around Austin or whatever it was, right?

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   And they would film it ... they had a guy filming it, or a girl filming it, whoever, and it was filmed mostly static shots, maybe a little bit of a pan, but they also had like one of the residents just in the background, just walking down the steps, right?

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   It was just like that Villa Savoye image or the Corbusier image you were talking about, it was just something that gave like, oh well, that's the normal life situation, right?

Mike Golden   There's a thing-

Chris Nichols   You can imagine what that person is-

Mike Golden   ... for me to imagine.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, you can imagine that person is going upstairs to check on the laundry or whatever it was. Your imagination could think about that and it just felt ... suddenly, because if you look at all these old Architecture Digest magazines, everything looks so sterile and cold because there's no one in the images, there's no life in the images. Just because things were just a little bit moving, a little bit of life, especially human life in that thing. Sometimes it wasn't human life, sometimes it was literally a thing and then there would be like a cat in the window, right? Perfect.

Mike Golden   Did you see ... I mean, I'm sure you saw Alex Roman's "The Third and Seventh?"

Chris Nichols   Of course.

Mike Golden   Right?

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   Which is an absolutely beautiful-

Chris Nichols   That redefined arch-vis forever.

Mike Golden   It still is. Like, there are-

Chris Nichols   It still does.

Mike Golden   It is at least 10 years old now, right?

Chris Nichols   Oh, at least. At least.

Mike Golden   Probably. At least, right? Because it's not relying on any type of technical tricks it's like beautifully lit, beautifully choreographed. The cinematography is stunning, everything has a little bit of movement, whether it's the leaves or him there as a photographer, or the shifting of the light. There's just enough. It's beautiful. I don't think that anyone's ... with all of the technology we've had since then, I've never seen an architectural film that I'd say is better than that.

Chris Nichols   No, and at the very least, that's their aspiration.

Mike Golden   Oh, yeah. You see it being copied-

Chris Nichols   Everyone is ripping them off, right? Oh, I don't want to say ... everyone is inspired by it. I won't say rip them off. But everyone's inspired by it and it was really sort of, like I said, it was the defining moment where arch-viz sort of rethought everything. It wasn't just arch-viz by the way. It was highly, highly regarded. I don't know if you know this or not, but we all saw it when I was ... I was at DD at the time when it came out and everyone was like, "What the hell was that-"

Mike Golden   Who is this?

Chris Nichols   ... these are like some of the top visual effects artists in the world and they're like, I don't ... and it's like, oh, I know exactly and it's like, this was done and this is what killed them all. This was done with Macs and V-Ray and they're like, no, I refuse, refuse to believe that. This involved a team of people. Nope. This was probably one guy in his basement and he was just very talented and he used real lighting and real photography concepts to make this happen. But one of the people for example, that this sort of like got someone's attention, was actually David Fincher, I don't know if you know that. David Fincher-

Mike Golden   No.

Chris Nichols   ... reached out to him, yeah. So, Alex Roman, we actually ended up working with him on a few shots that David gave him for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

Mike Golden   I had no idea.

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   He doesn't have much of an online presence-

Chris Nichols   No.

Mike Golden   ... he's producing a new film about, I think, dance or ballerinas or something.

Chris Nichols   I've been wanting to have him on the podcast and talk to him. Apparently he's very hard to get a hold of or nail down, but yeah. It's a big part. He's very important. But I do see it. You know, if you look at most arch-vis today, or at the very least, anyone that's doing, like what you're saying, the personal work, right-

Mike Golden   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Nichols   ... you're not going to sell "The Third and Seventh" to a client as a style because it's not going to work for them for the marketing department.

Mike Golden   Maybe for an architect that's pitching the design for a competition. Maybe.

Chris Nichols   Okay. Right.

Mike Golden   But not for, let's sell-

Chris Nichols   Let's sell some condos.

Mike Golden   ... Million dollar condos. That's not happening.

Chris Nichols   Right. I don't understand. Where's my picture of the sauna.

Mike Golden   You know, I'm curious actually, I love how much much we have in common, but obviously you have so much experience in the film and VFX world that I'd be curious to know your thoughts on another thing that he does really well in "The Third and Seventh," and Scott McCloud talks about at length in "Understanding Comics," which is that Japanese comics tend to start, as opposed to like ... you can think of a movie opening where they show the wide shot of the city, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Which is saying, "This is LA, and this is where our story will unfold."

Chris Nichols   Right. Establishing shots. That's called an establishing shot-

Mike Golden   Establishing shots, right?

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Like, most American comics, that's the first bar is like, here's the house that something's going to take place in or whatever it might be. He argues for the Japanese style, which I tend to agree with which is that they generally will start with little vignettes. So, if it's a house on a big yard with like beautiful trees and it's a beautiful day, they'll show like a closeup of the leaves, they'll show maybe a bird or grass or like a closeup of clouds moving, maybe a detail of the house, right-

Chris Nichols   Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mike Golden   ... all of these things that kind of together form the whole house or city, and then they, after you've already kind of imagined it for yourself, then they say, "Yes, this is the house."

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   It's like that same idea of imagination, which is getting the viewer involved.

Chris Nichols   Right. Well, I think that's a great idea, honestly speaking, because I think it sort of sets a mood rather than a reference overall, right? So, you set the mood of the thing. I sort of equate it to waking up, right? When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I see because I don't have my glasses on is a blurry something. So, then I can see my phone at the edge and then I realize this is open and then I see how much light's coming through the window, and so then, that's my day kind of starts. Then, after I've gone through all those things and I put my glasses on and I walk out. Then, I see the whole living room and then I see the coffee maker. That's the process of which me waking up happens. So, it starts off really detailed like this, I'm putting my hand in front of my face. Like, here's the thing that's like four inches from my face. That's how I wake up.

Mike Golden   And slowly the whole picture comes together-

Chris Nichols   And slowly the whole picture reveals. But you know, what that looks like when you wake up in the morning, when I wake up, I don't see all of Burbank, you know?

Mike Golden   Thank god.

Chris Nichols   Thank god. That would be really scary.

Mike Golden   That's not the first thing you want to see right thing in the morning-

Chris Nichols   Nope.

Mike Golden   ... you want to get coffee in you first.

Chris Nichols   Yep.

Mike Golden   Get that full picture of a black cup of coffee.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, exactly.

Mike Golden   Yeah, I think that this idea of ... because it's also saying that, "I'm not just showing you a thing," right? I think that effective films do this really well too, which is saying like, "We're going on this ride or journey together."

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   Right? And we're going to figure things out together as opposed to, "Here's the thing."

Chris Nichols   Right.

Mike Golden   That's all soft skills. I think that all of the things we're talking about is why "The Third and Seventh" still holds up. Why do we still talk about Hitchcock, right? Because that wheelbarrow ride is really unsettling and he was going for unsettling.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. Yeah, when you're wandering around the house in *Psycho* and that was disturbing.

Mike Golden   Yeah, or when you see little bits of things happen in *Rear Window*, and you don't see all of it. Like, that's ... you want to know what happened behind the wall that's not in front of the window.

Chris Nichols   Yep.

Mike Golden   It's terrifying.

Chris Nichols   Yeah.

Mike Golden   It's such a wonderful thing.

Chris Nichols   Perfect. Well Mike, this has been great. I think we're definitely going to have to have you back and we have a lot more to discuss. But it's been an hour and this has been a fantastic discussion. I really appreciate you coming on, man.

Mike Golden   Thank you for having me, it's been a pleasure, and I'm so happy that we finally got to sit down.

Chris Nichols   I know. I love this idea. You know, the thing that we were talking about at the beginning, that we don't always have those opportunities and I think it's great that it's like, I've been sitting here waiting, it's like, "Well, when are we going to see Mike again when he comes to LA," or something like that. It's like, you know what,

screw it. We can just do it like this. This has been working out great. So, I really hope that we'll keep this going for sure.

Mike Golden   Well, thank you again for having me. I very much appreciate it. I wish you the best of luck with the Chaos team and dealing with everything we got going on. Can't wait to see what you guys are doing next because I've seen a little bit of it and it's exciting.

Chris Nichols   Thank you.