

Productivity Galore (Part 1)

In our last installment in the Design Visualization for Architects Webcast Series we talked about enhancing your productivity with some simple tricks to get you there quicker and give you more design options. Armed with suggestions from Louis Marcoux and Gary Davis, I talked about Project Folders, AssetTracking and setting the Start material set. From there, we explored the benefits of creating a maxstart file to set your environment for the word go. After that, a quick tour of using 3ds Max Design's new container function to create a better X-ref. To turbocharge our rendering workflow, Gary's test render sequencing was next and we finished up with Louis's use of scene states and animations states to determine the organization and layout of our scenes. As always, the Tips from the Experts webcast is the fastest 60 minutes on the internet.

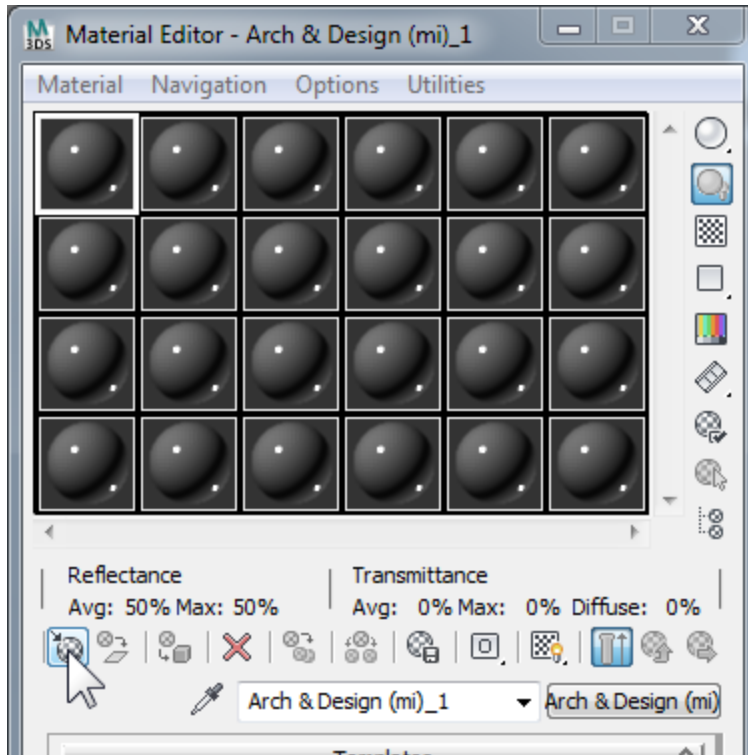
Project Folders

Project Folders are used by 3ds Max Design to organize and maintain project files. By establishing unique Project Folders, we are creating a unique environment for each to live. The Project Folder will simplify the default search parameters, storage and location criteria. To create a new project folder, click Project Folder on the Quick Access toolbar or choose the application menu > Manage > Set Project Folder. Then choose a path from the browser and click OK to set your project folder. Automatically, by creating the project folder you will create all of the Sub-folders within. By using the created structure, opening files, importing data, etc. will be shortened to just a few clicks instead of the constant drill down and yes, the Project folder can be loaded on the Network. I think the best aspect of the Project Folder is not only it's organizational properties, but it's portability as well. Knowing all of the files for a Project are now contained, entire directories can be archived or moved easily.

With the Project Folder defined, the Asset Tracking system becomes even more powerful. Access the Asset Tracker by choosing the Application menu > Manage > Asset Tracking. Here you can find or relocate a number of different files. By default the Asset Tracking System takes advantage of Autodesk's Vault. Vault provides another level of security. Not ready for Vaulting? Disable it by navigating to the install directory->stdplugs->AssetTracking and renaming the two .dlls here. Mine looked like this, C:\Program Files\Autodesk\3ds Max Design 2010\stdplugs\AssetTracking. Don't delete them. You may discover the value of Vault in the near future.

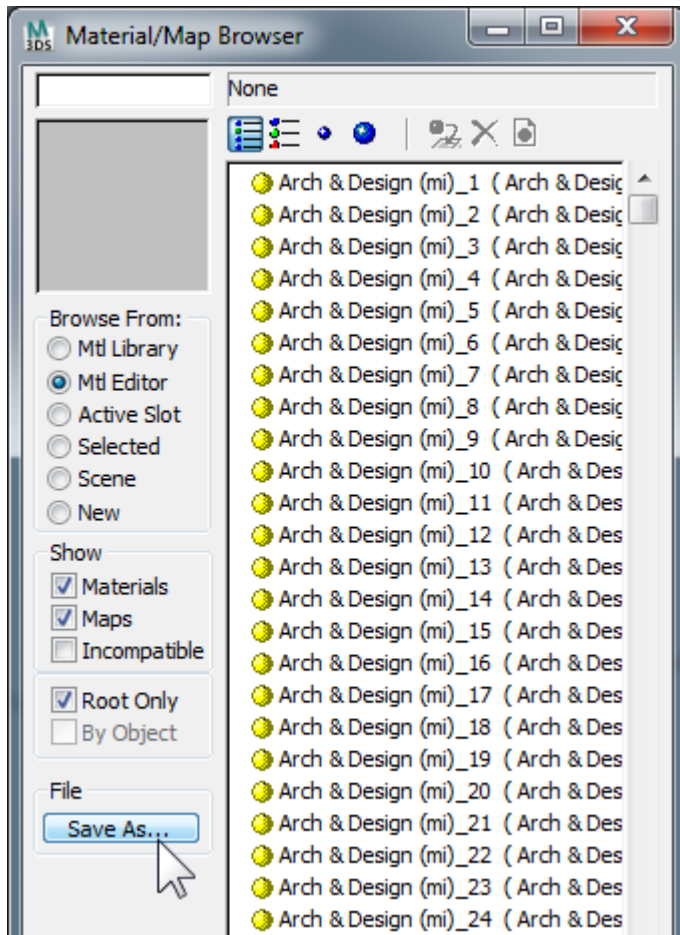
While in the Asset Tracking dialog box, great power comes to the right click function. Here are the tools to browse to files and set the files relative to the project folder. If you do this to your file locations, it will never matter where the Project Folder is, Network, Hard Drive, Flashdrive or optical drive, the scenes within will always open and render flawlessly.

Setting the Start Material configuration is a bit trickier. It will require you to access hidden files. Don't be afraid, just be cautious. Of course this varies depending on your version of Windows. To enable the visibility of hidden files, search "hidden files" in Windows help. Now that the Hidden Folders are visible, jump into Max Design. In the Material Editor, set up the materials you wish to appear.



Select Get Material button.

In the Material/Map browser, Move the Browse From: button to the Mtl Editor option.

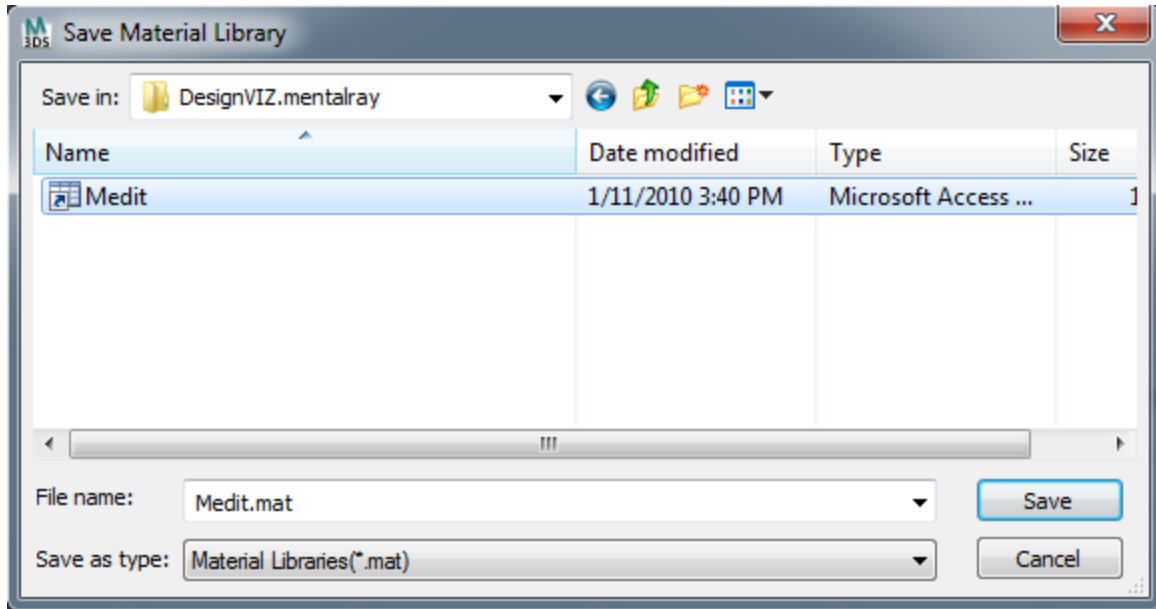


Select Save As...

Tricky part:

Navigate to the default settings folder. Here's where mine was in Windows 7, C:\Users\Eddie\AppData\Local\Autodesk\3dsMaxDesign\2010 - 64bit\enu\defaults\DesignVIZ.mentalray. For Windows XP, substitute "Documents and Settings" for "User" and "Application Data" for "AppData". I think Vista has combinations of both.

Replace the Medit.mat



From now on, your new scenes will open with your material list.

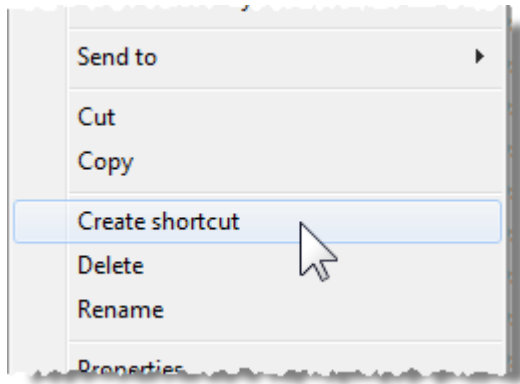
I recommend hiding your Hidden Folders and Files again, less to navigate through.

Start Up Scene.

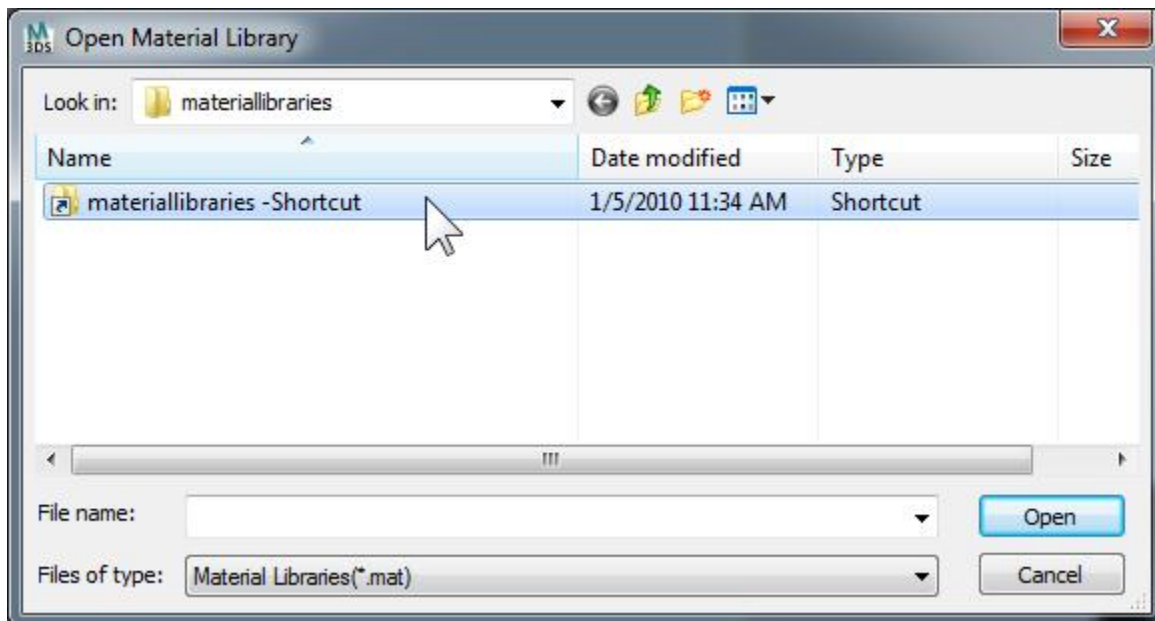
Wouldn't you love to have to stop going through the chore of setting Scene light as the default or turning on Ambient Occlusion in the Viewport? Perhaps you would like every new scene to start with a Ground Plane, Daylight System, Units set to Architectural and Exposure set to Photographic Exposure Control. All of this can be accomplished with the maxstart.max file. Simply open a new scene. Make all of the changes you desire. Add all of the objects you need at New or Reset and SaveAs to the Scenes directory of your Project Folder. Now, every time you start a New file or reset, The maxstart file will come up. You may be wondering if you can simply save the Material Editor settings with your maxstart file. Sorry, 3ds Max Design looks to that Medit.mat for New Scenes and Resets.

Windows Shortcuts

Looking to make Navigating to Studio standard locations a bit easier? Simply put a Windows shortcut file in the Project Folder directory location. For example, you would like to access the material libraries that ship with 3ds Max Design as well as the custom ones created for the specific project. In Windows Explorer, navigate to the install location of 3ds Max Design; mine was C:\Program Files\Autodesk\3ds Max Design 2010\. Right click over the "materiallibraries" folder and select Create Shortcut.



This creates a Shortcut file in this directory. Cut, Paste and Rename it to your liking in the Project Folder's "materiallibraries" folder. Now, whenever you're in a scene and want to access the installed material libraries, you can access them directly from the Project's default location.



This works for all Project Folder Subfolders, Scenes, Images, etc.

More to come....

In the meantime, be sure to sign up for the Webcast in the series [here](#).