

Interview with Dan Ablan

autor About all things 3D and some things beyond, by Erizo
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Dan Ablan is a well known author and writer of books and electronic guides for Lightwave 3D.

His new project is a book for Modo, a 3D application from Luxology.
You will know Modo as the software used in a popular TV ad for Citroen C4.

He was kind enough to grant us the following interview.

1- First of all, we would like to know what is your current professional dedication...

Dan Ablan – 3D Animator / Author

President, AGA Digital Studios, Inc.

2- Are you working right now on an Apple computer?

All text documents, office paperwork, email, Apple Motion, Shake, and light 3D.

3- What is your opinion about Apple's OS X as a platform for professional 3D work?

A few years ago, we added the first release of OS X to one of our G4s. It was “ok” at best.

The new Tiger OS is rock solid, powerful and great to work with. We’re looking to replace a main Pentium 4 machine with a new dual G5 because of Tiger.

4- What do you like most of the OSX?

Stability.

5- What do you think Apple has to do to reactivate the use of Mac computers in the 3D field?

The Mac still is not as fast as many PCs. The OpenGL support is finally getting up to speed, but while the Mac OS is far more advanced than WinXP, the PC machine's graphic video support exceeds the Mac. It has always been this way, but the field is leveling.

6- What is your opinion about the mac users?

Some are a little off their rocker. :)

Seriously, each system (Mac and PC) have their place. We have each here at the studio.

7- What kind of software do you use in your 3D work?

LightWave, Modo, XSI.

8- What do you think about the move of Apple to the Intel processor?

Ok by me – I don't care what processor they use – just make it faster :)

9- You are now writing a book about Modo... do you think that Luxology and Modo, when Luxology releases the animation and render module, will be able to gain market share from others applications like Lightwave, Maya and 3dStudio Max?

That's hard to say. You never know what the other manufacturers have planned.

But I can tell you that the Modo camp is growing fast and the software is brilliant. And, it's only getting better.

10- Which render engine do you think is the best?

I'm still a fan of LW's native renderer. Brazil always had a nice look too. But, let's see what the Luxology team has.

11- Nowadays it is possible to make combinations of modeler and render modules at a price cheaper than the price of a complete software. Is it worth the trouble?

That's the way the world works. Cheaper, better, faster, more! A few years ago, we paid (at a discount) \$8000 for XSI 2.0. Now you can get into it for what, \$495? C'mon! I'm glad I'm on the user end of the software loop. The manufacturers always have to consider what else is out there, support, costs, and so on. It's a tough game, one I wouldn't want to be in.

12- in the future, will we be able to see a book from Dan Ablan translated to spanish language?

Well, I've written 8 books so far, and quite a few of those have been translated into Spanish.

This is up to the publisher really, if they feel there is a market to translate the rest. I think there's a huge market, so we'll see what happens!

13- In your opinion, what is better: learn using books or using videos?

Frankly, a combination of both, if done properly. I think we did it right with Inside LightWave 8.

The book's tutorials are not too long, but informative enough. From

there, the video tutorials on the DVD that comes with the book are from 3D Garage.com, and take the reader to the next level. They are not just "video versions" of the chapters, which many books have done.

Some things are better explained in videos, and there's no comparison to seeing and hearing

someone work. Although, many video tutorials out there are nothing more than the artist just working, not explaining much. It's important to understand what's happening and have that explained carefully.

Books are great because you can get away from the computer. My reference library is continually growing. I pick up books all the time on all kinds of software applications.

14- Which one of your books or videos are you most proud of it?

For books, I'm happiest with Inside LightWave 8. It is a very comprehensive book, and good for both beginners and intermediate users. I created something called a "QuickStart" chapter. This chapter will help a complete newbie learn how to model, texture, light, animate and render in 30 pages. It is a way for the user to get excited about the software and more importantly, understand what the software workflow is all about. From there, I'm proud of our 3D Garage LightWave 8 Signature Courseware. We've created a complete 18 hour course that takes a user from the ground up, through LightWave Modeler and Layout. We cover just about everything and within a few days, anyone can be modeling and animating. We have people in the US Air Force, NASA, large corporations, and everyday 3D users learning and using LightWave because of our course. We've trained hundreds upon hundreds of people around the world. I wish I had this course when I was learning LightWave!

15- Which is the most strange feedback or e-mail you have received about your educational work (books and videos) ?

Wow, where should I begin? In the 10 years I've been writing books and doing videos, I've heard a lot.

For the most part, everything is very positive. But, of course, you can please all the people all of the time. I think one response that stands out is from a guy who couldn't get his DVD-ROM to work. So, I get the email about it. Now, I just write the books - I don't print or burn the discs, nor do I have extras to just send out to people. This is the publishers responsibility. I of course replied to him, then later sent him a link to the book's project files I put online on my own site. Well, I guess that wasn't good enough, and consequently he posts on a

nasty review of my book on Amazon.com and calls me a Mac hater, that I don't support users, that the book has no flow, that it's missing information, and even expects a new book to be printed to update one piece of information. The funny thing is, his problems were not because of the tutorial in the book, but because he didn't install LightWave properly. In the end, I do what I can, but people will still go out and attack you no matter what. You can try to help, reply to emails, but people will believe what they want to.

16- Is it easy to share your real life with your 3D life? How do you do it?

Yes. First, my wife is great about my work, so that's the biggest hurdle right there. I've missed many functions and family events because of certain projects, either for work or for a book. What helps though is working remotely from my laptop. This way, I'm at least there with the family, rather than at my office.

16- Any advice for the people starting out in the 3D world?

Create anything you can think of. Get as much information as you can, and mostly, develop your own style. Look around you and model whatever you see. Match the lighting in the room you're in. Take a photo of your office or yard and recreate it. Practice and enjoy it!

17- Thank you very much for your time and patience. We wish you all the luck in your projects and life.

Thank you for the opportunity! Wishing you the same as well.