



Chapter 3 - Advanced mental ray Shaders (3ds Max 2010 Architectural Visualization (Advanced to Expert))

Joep van der Steen

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3ds Max has a history of keeping old features in future releases so that features used in older scenes continue to work properly in the newer releases of the program. This is good but also a bit confusing, especially when the old functionality is still there but has actually been overtaken by new and improved features. For example, the newest optimizing modifier is ProOptimizer, but you can still find the Optimize modifier in the modifier list as well.

A new user might struggle to figure out which one to use since some do basically the same things. Most of the time the newest version of a feature is preferred by veteran users as it uses the latest algorithms and technology and does an overall better job than the older ones. In other words, it's helpful to know some of the feature history of 3ds Max in order to know what NOT to use anymore because it has become rather redundant.

Mental ray has been available as a native render engine since 3ds Max 6, but at that time it was somewhat confusing to users because the way the materials and mapping worked was completely different than what users were used to. Now we are at 3ds Max 2010 and, of course, mental ray has gone through some enormous changes and improvements.

In this chapter, I begin by pointing out some of the older material and giving you advice on what not to use anymore for both materials and shaders. This will help you understand what you should be focusing on. After this short introduction, I will provide a number of exercises that are based on real world support questions I received over the years from users of all skill levels.

Keep in mind that mental ray is still making big steps forward with every release as rendering technology is very much a dynamic technology. Please don't assume you know it all from previous releases; there might be fundamental differences in how and what to use as mental ray moves to the next release in 3ds Max. Things such as modeling to real life scale, physically correct lights, and materials are still important, but elements such as Exposure Control and Gamma have gained in importance as the rendering technology used by mental ray has evolved. Working with mental ray is an ongoing learning process, and that is what makes it challenging and fun.

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