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About the Author

Aidan Chopra has always had a thing for computers — his parents thoughtfully sent him to Apple camp instead of hockey lessons like every other eight-year-old in Montreal — but he learned to draft and build physical models the old-fashioned way, working for his architect father. These days, Aidan is a Product Evangelist at Google, where he's been since that company bought SketchUp in the first part of 2006. In the three years since he graduated with a Master of Architecture degree from Rice University, he's done a lot of writing and lecturing about the way software is used in design. Aidan writes the *SketchUpdate*, a monthly e-mail newsletter that reaches a half million SketchUp users worldwide. He has taught architecture at the university level and, at Google, works on ways to mediate between power and usability; he believes the best software in the world isn't worth a darn if nobody can figure out how it works. Aidan is based in Boulder, Colorado, even though he is what many would consider to be the diametric opposite of a world-class endurance athlete.

Dedication

For my parents, Jenny and Shab, and my brother, Quincy, because I love them very much.

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part I: Getting Started with SketchUp</i>	7
Chapter 1: Meeting Google SketchUp	9
Chapter 2: Establishing the Modeling Mind-set.....	21
Chapter 3: Getting Off to a Running Start.....	55
<i>Part II: Modeling in SketchUp</i>	71
Chapter 4: Building Buildings	73
Chapter 5: Keeping Your Model Organized	119
Chapter 6: Going Beyond Buildings	145
Chapter 7: Modeling with Photographs.....	169
<i>Part III: Viewing Your Model in Different Ways</i>	195
Chapter 8: Changing Your Model's Appearance with Styles	197
Chapter 9: Working with Light and Shadow.....	227
Chapter 10: Presenting Your Model Inside SketchUp	245
<i>Part IV: Sharing What You've Made</i>	271
Chapter 11: Working with Google Earth and the 3D Warehouse	273
Chapter 12: Printing Your Work.....	291
Chapter 13: Exporting Images and Animations	307
Chapter 14: Exporting to CAD, Illustration, and Other Modeling Software	327
Chapter 15: Creating Presentation Documents with LayOut	351
<i>Part V: The Part of Tens</i>	379
Chapter 16: Ten SketchUp Traps and Their Work-arounds	381
Chapter 17: Ten Plugins, Extensions, and Resources Worth Getting.....	387
Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Discover Even More.....	393
<i>Index</i>	397

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
About This Book.....	1
Foolish Assumptions	3
How This Book Is Organized.....	4
Part I: Getting Started with SketchUp.....	4
Part II: Modeling in SketchUp	5
Part III: Viewing Your Model in Different Ways	5
Part IV: Sharing What You've Made.....	5
Part V: The Part of Tens.....	6
Icons Used in This Book.....	6
<i>Part 1: Getting Started with SketchUp</i>	7
Chapter 1: Meeting Google SketchUp	9
Things You Ought to Know Right Away	10
Where SketchUp Fits in Google's World	10
Comparing SketchUp to Other 3D Modeling Programs.....	11
Cruising up the shallow learning curve.....	11
Understanding the difference between paper and clay	12
What You Should (and Shouldn't) Expect SketchUp to Do.....	13
Taking the Ten-Minute SketchUp Tour	15
Hanging out at the menu bar	17
Checking the status bar.....	18
Taking a peek at the dialog boxes	18
Chapter 2: Establishing the Modeling Mind-set	21
It's All about Edges and Faces	22
Living on (with, actually) the edge	22
Facing the facts about faces.....	23
Understanding the relationship between edges and faces	25
Drawing in 3D on a 2D Screen.....	27
Giving instructions with the drawing axes.....	28
Keeping an eye out for inferences.....	29
Using inferences to help you model.....	30



- Warming Up Your SketchUp Muscles32
 - Getting the best view of what you're doing32
 - Drawing edges with ease35
 - Injecting accuracy into your model36
 - Selecting what you mean to select41
 - Moving and copying like a champ43
 - Making and using guides49
 - Painting your faces with color and texture52

Chapter 3: Getting Off to a Running Start55

- Setting Things Up55
- Making a Quick Model58
- Slapping On Some Paint64
- Giving Your Model Some Style67
- Switching On the Sun68
- Sharing Your Masterpiece70

Part II: Modeling in SketchUp71

Chapter 4: Building Buildings73

- Drawing Floors and Walls74
 - Starting out in 2D75
 - Coming up with a simple plan80
 - Going from 2D to 3D86
 - Adding doors and windows89
- Staring Down Stairs94
 - The Subdivided Rectangles method95
 - The Copied Profile method98
 - The Treads Are Components method100
- Raising the Roof102
 - Building flat roofs with parapets105
 - Creating eaves for buildings with pitched roofs105
 - Constructing gabled roofs107
 - Making hip roofs111
 - Sticking your roof together113

Chapter 5: Keeping Your Model Organized119

- Taking Stock of Your Organization Options120
- Grouping Things Together121
- Working with Components122
 - What makes components so great?122
 - Exploring the Components dialog box124
 - Creating your own components130

Falling in Love with the Outliner	135
Taking a good look at the Outliner	135
Making good use of the Outliner	137
Discovering the Ins and Outs of Layers	137
What layers are — and what they're not.....	138
Using layers in SketchUp.....	139
Staying out of trouble	140
Putting It All Together	141
Chapter 6: Going Beyond Buildings	145
Modeling Symmetrically: Good News for Lazy People.....	146
Working smarter by only building half	147
The coolest things since radially sliced bread.....	150
Extruding with Purpose: Follow Me.....	153
Using Follow Me.....	154
Making lathed forms like spheres and bottles.....	156
Creating extruded shapes like gutters and handrails.....	158
Subtracting from a model with Follow Me	163
Chapter 7: Modeling with Photographs	169
Painting Faces with Photos.....	170
Adding photos to faces.....	170
Editing your textures	173
Modeling on top of photo textures	180
Modeling Directly from a Photo: Introducing Photo Match	184
Looking at all the pretty colors	184
Creating a new Photo Match.....	186
Modeling with Photo Match.....	189
<i>Part III: Viewing Your Model in Different Ways</i>	<i>195</i>
Chapter 8: Changing Your Model's Appearance with Styles	197
Choosing How and Where to Apply Styles	197
Applying Styles to Your Models	198
Making Changes to Styles	202
Tweaking edge settings.....	203
Changing the way faces look.....	209
Setting up the background	213
Working with watermarks	214
Tweaking modeling settings.....	218
Mixing styles to create new ones	218

Saving and Sharing Styles You Make	221
Saving the styles you've made.....	221
Working with Style Library options	223
Creating and sharing a library for the styles you make	224
Sharing styles with other models.....	225
Chapter 9: Working with Light and Shadow	227
Discovering SketchUp's Shadow Settings	228
Turning on the sun.....	228
Setting a shadow's time and date.....	229
Choosing where shadows are displayed.....	230
Using Shadows to Add Depth and Realism.....	231
Lighting indoor spaces	231
Making 3D objects "pop"	235
Conveying depth in 2D views.....	236
Creating Accurate Shadow Studies.....	237
Telling SketchUp where you are	237
Displaying accurate shadows for a given time and place	239
Animating a shadow study.....	240
Chapter 10: Presenting Your Model Inside SketchUp	245
Exploring Your Creation on Foot.....	246
These tools were made for walking	246
Stopping to look around	248
Setting your field of view.....	249
Taking the Scenic Route	250
Creating scenes.....	251
Moving from scene to scene	252
Modifying scenes after you've made 'em	255
Mastering the Sectional Approach.....	260
Cutting plans and sections.....	261
Creating section animations with scenes.....	268
 Part IV: Sharing What You've Made	271
 Chapter 11: Working with Google Earth and the 3D Warehouse ..	273
Getting the Big (3D) Picture.....	274
Taking the Ten-Minute Tour of Google Earth.....	274
Getting Google Earth.....	275
Getting your first dose.....	276
Building Models for Google Earth.....	278
Understanding the process	278
Finding a site and bringing it into SketchUp.....	279

Modeling on a Google Earth snapshot.....	280
Viewing your model in Google Earth	286
Becoming a SketchUp All-Star with the 3D Warehouse.....	288
Getting to the Google 3D Warehouse	288
Uploading your models	289
Chapter 12: Printing Your Work	291
Printing from a Windows Computer	291
Making a basic print (Windows).....	292
Decoding the Windows Print dialog box.....	293
Printing from a Mac	298
Making a basic print (Mac)	298
Deciphering the Mac printing dialog boxes.....	299
Printing to a Particular Scale.....	302
Preparing to print to scale	302
Printing to scale (Windows and Mac).....	303
Chapter 13: Exporting Images and Animations	307
Exporting 2D Images of Your Model	307
Exporting a raster image from SketchUp	308
Looking at SketchUp's raster formats.....	312
Making sure that you're exporting enough pixels.....	316
Making Movies with Animation Export	320
Getting ready for prime time	320
Exporting a movie	321
Figuring out the Animation Export options settings	324
Chapter 14: Exporting to CAD, Illustration, and Other Modeling Software	327
Exporting Drawings in 2D.....	328
Sizing up the export formats.....	328
Exporting a 2D drawing	329
Getting to know PDF and EPS	329
Coming to terms with DXF and DWG (in 2D).....	335
Peeking at EPIX.....	338
Exporting 3D Data for Other Software.....	340
Gathering your marbles (so that you don't lose them later)	341
Getting a handle on OBJ, FBX, XSI, and DAE (Collada).....	343
Wrapping your head around 3DS	345
Dealing with VRML.....	347
Handling DWG and DXF (in 3D)	349

Chapter 15: Creating Presentation Documents with LayOut 351

Getting Your Bearings.....	352
Some menu bar minutiae.....	352
A dialog box discourse	354
Setting up LayOut preferences	356
Tooling around.....	357
Getting Set Up.....	359
Starting out with templates.....	360
Creating a new, blank document	362
Adding pages to your document	364
Moving around your document	364
Simplifying Layout with Layers and Master Layers.....	364
Bringing In Everything You Need	367
Inserting images and model views	367
Working with inserted model views.....	369
Inserting text.....	370
Presentation-Perfect Images.....	371
Cropping with clipping masks	371
Drawing something from scratch.....	373
Life after LayOut.....	376
Printing your work	376
Exporting a PDF file.....	376
Going full-screen.....	377

Part V: The Part of Tens 379**Chapter 16: Ten SketchUp Traps and Their Work-arounds 381**

SketchUp Won't Create a Face Where I Want It To.....	381
My Faces Are Two Different Colors.....	382
Edges on a Face Won't Sink In	382
SketchUp Crashed, and I Lost My Model	383
SketchUp Is Sooooo Sloooooooooow	383
I Can't Get a Good View of the Inside of My Model.....	384
A Face Flashes When I Orbit.....	385
I Can't Move My Component the Way I Want	385
Every Time I Use the Eraser, Bad Stuff Happens.....	385
All My Edges and Faces Are on Different Layers.....	386

Chapter 17: Ten Plugins, Extensions, and Resources Worth Getting 387

Components.....	387
Form Fonts	388
Sketchupmodels.com.....	388

Ruby Scripts.....	388
Renderers	390
Hardware.....	391
Chapter 18: Ten Ways to Discover Even More	393
Put Away Your Wallet.....	393
Now Get Out Your Wallet.....	395
<i>Index</i>.....	397

Introduction

A little while ago, I was teaching a workshop on advanced SketchUp techniques to a group of extremely bright middle and high school (or so I thought) students in Hot Springs, Arkansas. As subject matter went, I wasn't pulling any punches — we were breezing through material I wouldn't think of introducing to most groups of adults. At one point, a boy raised his hand to ask a question, and I noticed he looked younger than most of the others. Squinting, I read a logo on his T-shirt that told me he was in elementary school. "You're in sixth grade?" I asked, a little stunned. These kids were *motoring*, after all. The boy didn't even look up. He shook his head, double-clicked something, and mumbled, "Third." He was 8 years old.

SketchUp was invented back in 1999 by a couple of 3D industry veterans (or refugees, depending on your perspective) to make it easier for people to see their ideas in three dimensions. That was it, really — they just wanted to make a piece of software that anyone could use to build 3D models. What I saw in Arkansas makes me think they were successful.

Before it was acquired in 2006 by Google, SketchUp cost \$495 a copy, and it was already a mainstay of architects' and other designers' software toolkits. No other 3D modeler was as easy to understand as SketchUp, meaning that even senior folks (many of whom thought their CD/DVD trays were cup holders) started picking it up. These days, SketchUp is being used at home, in school, and at work by anyone with a need to represent 3D information the way it's meant to be represented: in 3D. Google SketchUp (as it's now called) is available as a free download in six languages, and is just as popular internationally as it is in North America.

About This Book

The thing I like least about software is figuring out how it works. I once saw a movie where the main character acquired knowledge by plugging a cable (a rather fat cable, actually) into a hole in the back of his head. A computer then uploaded new capabilities — languages, martial arts, fashion sense (apparently) — directly into his brain. Afterward, the character ate a snack and took a nap. *That's* how I wish I could get to know new software.

This book, on the other hand, is a fairly analog affair. In it, I do my best to guide you through the process of building 3D models with SketchUp. I wrote this book for people who are new to 3D modeling, so I don't assume you know anything about polygons, vertices, or linear arrays. The nice thing is