

Creating planet panoramas

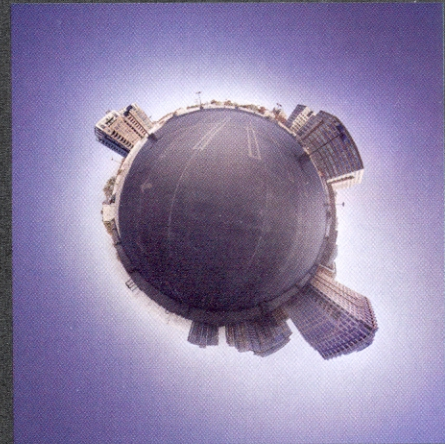
We show you how to create shots that will get your head in a spin...



Lee Frost: One of the most exciting panoramic techniques is the creation of 'planet' panoramas where it appears you are floating above the earth's surface with a fisheye lens on your camera and looking down. They're weird, wonderful, eye-catching and arresting, and best of all you only need Photoshop to create them. Planet panoramas start life as simple 360° panoramas, but it's what you do to them afterwards that makes all the difference. Here's a quick guide so you can have a go.

Working with existing images

You don't have to shoot 360° panoramas to create planet pans – you can work from existing pans that don't have such extensive coverage. What you need to ensure is that the horizon is perfectly level, so open the image, go to **View>Show>Grid** to put a grid over the image then use **Image>Image Rotation** to rotate the image and get the horizon level. You can then crop the image accordingly, ideally with the horizon in the center of the frame. The left- and right-hand edges also need to meet perfectly, so make sure you have an empty horizon at either end of the shot or the features are the same height so they match up. Once you've done that, repeat steps six to eight below and transform your conventional image into an amazing planet panorama! Urban views with buildings breaking into the sky work particularly well.



STOCK PHOTO



1 Pick your location Choose a scene where the bottom 20-25% of each image is fairly plain – grass, water, sand on a beach and paving are ideal. This area forms the center of the planet pan and also gets distorted more than any other area, so it works better if it's plain.



2 Wait for a plain sky The scene should also be relatively plain in the top 20-25% – cloudless sky is ideal – as this area will form the outside edge of the planet pan. If it's complicated it will look odd. Wait for a sunny day when the sky is blue for the best results.



3 Center the horizon The horizon must be in the center of the frame. Why? Because the left-hand and right-hand edges of the 360° pan will meet when you create the planet pan, so if the horizon isn't central, it won't meet and you'll have a big crack in your planet!

4 Setup Having found the right scene, set up your camera as explained on the previous page and prepare to shoot a conventional 360° panorama. As the coverage is so great, it's crucial that the camera is set up level, so be sure to use a spirit level.



5 Stitch images

Download the source images to your computer then stitch them together using whatever stitching software you use. Once the stitch is complete, crop the top and bottom edges as required, flatten the layers and save.



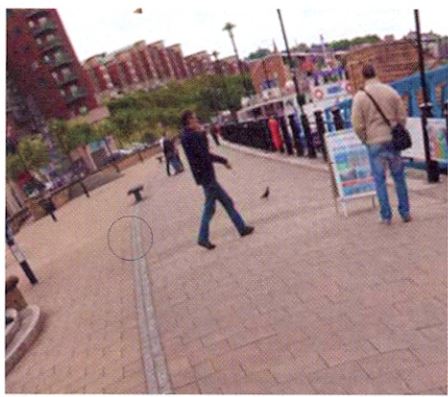
6 Set height and width In Photoshop, go to **Image>Image Size** and uncheck **Constrain Proportions**. Next, set the height of the image to the same size as the width to distort it, then go to **Image>Image Rotation** and rotate 180°.

Final image

Planet pans can make an ordinary scene extraordinary – and it's really very simple to do.



7 Create your planet pan Go to *Filter>Distort>Polar Coordinates* and in the dialog box choose *Rectangular to Polar*. This will transform the image and create the striking planet effect you're after. Cool or what?



8 Rotate and clean up Rotate the planet until you're happy using *Image>Image Rotation>Arbitrary*. If the join between the two ends isn't perfect, clean it up with the *Clone Stamp Tool*, then adjust color and contrast.

Handheld panoramas

Although we've advised you to mount your camera on a tripod, with care it's possible to shoot handheld if you'd prefer to. The key is to ensure that you keep the camera level as you pan it from left to right, so the images stitch together well and you don't have to crop the top and bottom too much. If your camera has a grid, use it as a guide to make sure each shot is level. If you don't have that, we recommend you shoot the images at a slightly wider focal length than you really need, so that if you do need to crop the final pan you won't lose important subject matter or end up with a really skinny pano! You also need to make sure the shutter speed you use is high enough to prevent camera shake and that you take your time shooting the sequence so you don't fudge a shot in the middle of it then find you can't stitch the images together.