



field  
of  
vision

*Robert C Fisher is a California-based photographer and cameraman who specialises in producing breathtaking widescreen pictures using Apple's Quicktime digital format. His work challenges traditional models of selling but also viewing images. We wanted to find out more...*



Firstly, there's inevitably the very practical question for a print publication. Print is still the first base for photography, so how do you see your images working in that format?

I like seeing panoramas in print, magazines have limitations due to size but as a coffee table book odd sizes and aspect ratios are easier to accommodate. Imagine a book of panoramas that is 24 inches wide by 8 inches tall.

It's still a key outlet for work, limited as it inevitably must be.

I have done quite a few images that have ended up as prints only. I like the warped perspectives created when a cylindrical image is flattened onto paper.

How did you first get into this kind of photography?

I started out as a news photographer in my Charlotte, NC high school. Later I worked as a newsfilm cameraman in local television while

still working as a freelance photographer. I shot magazine photos for a local Pro Wrestling promoter and catalogues for local industry. I later opened my own television commercial production company and then moved on to work in lighting feature films in Los Angeles. After a period I was searching for a creative outlet when a friend, who had tried to start a company producing QTVR that went bust, so he sold me a camera and rotator. I found I liked the ultra wide format images I shot since they didn't look like others photos and offered unique photographic opportunities.

What attracted you to Quicktime (QT)?

QT is the Swiss Army knife of media players. It will play just about any audio/video format just by adding plugins to accommodate the codec. I also have had nonlinear video editing on my Mac desktop, with various forms of hardware, since 1996. The hardware and software changes but they all still run on Quicktime. No other media player today will run interactive panoramas or object photography at the same quality level. There are a lot of Java based players but the quality of playback is not anywhere near as good as QT.

When did you first become aware of its potential?

# robert c fisher



I am still discovering the potential for QTVR. There are so many opportunities to utilize it today, but making it go as a business is very hard. Most customers aren't willing to pay what it costs to produce quality VR, which I don't fully understand since it really *is* unique. Erik Goetze is experimenting with micropayments as a way to fund his site virtualparks.org. This may work as a funding source in the future for a lot of artistic endeavors. The money goes right to the artist whose work you enjoy.

How do you tend to work - by commission or on spec?

A little of both, I have done images on spec for a few production designers on TV shows which they ended up buying to use in their book. I have also been working selling QTVR's as a way to preserve sets of TV shows for web promotion and video games. I have also been promoting QTVR as an excellent way for hotels and resorts to present themselves through interactive CD's and on the web.

What are the available markets and outlets for your work?

QTVR can be used for almost any application, the only limit is the imagination. I am currently working with a producer shooting object VR's for furniture manufacturers. I have also been working with several hotels on tours marketing their convention facilities to be delivered on CD. Other potential markets are TV and movie producers, travel, architectural and corporate clients. For corporations they can make hi resolution tours for use by safety and security departments, this is a growing concern since September 11, 2001 here in the States. Being able to go in and look at spaces that have very limited access can be priceless in emergencies and training.

How do you choose your subjects apart from the obvious spatial considerations?

For my personal work I look for images that will look interesting flattened. Sometimes it maybe to just to present an environment that may be disappearing, like buildings to be torn down which happens alot here in Los Angeles.

It's often difficult to visualize exactly what a place will look like printed flat, so there's always



# stills audio motion

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that element of surprise when something turns out really interesting. Most technical considerations can be overcome these days with enough post processing and work, Photoshop really has changed the way photos are handled. I came from photography in the 1960s & 70s where the darkroom is the place magic happens.

At a practical level, how do you assess a scene and begin to light it for a shoot?

When shooting a practical location I look at the natural lighting and use that as a base and add to it to bring out things that are important to the scene. When I was working lighting movies most of the cameramen I worked with used the natural lighting of the space and then added to that for dramatic effect. I shoot my photos much the same way.

What are the procedures for shooting panoramas of this sort? How do they differ from conventional photography?

A lot of my images I shoot like crashing a party, I just show up. I have been thrown out of a few places since 9/11, it seems that if you have a camera you are a terrorist. There is also this perception that if you have a tripod you are a professional even if you are doing non-commercial photography. If I am shooting for commercial clients then it's the usual permissions and fees.

What's the impact on compositional sense?

You have to remember you see everything, 360 degrees, if you are shooting for a QTVR. Sometimes limiting the image to less than 360 is more interesting compositionally. Limiting what you see also can create a sense of mystery and intrigue.

How do you process an panorama?

I start by shooting 10 images in a circle about a central point. They overlap 30-50 percent, I then take these images and use an application from

RealViz called Stitcher to stitch the images together to form the final composite. This image I output as an equirectangular image and loaded into Photoshop for colour and tonal correction. This image can then be printed or transformed into a QTVR by processing it through CubicConverter or MakeCubic.

You come to this work from a varied background in all kinds of photography...how does it compare in terms of methodology next to your other work behind the lens?

One of the reasons I started shooting panoramas is I needed a creative outlet that I could do without a lot of other people involved. Commercials and movies involve so many other people it becomes more about prep and logistics than photography, I also have more control shooting this kind of thing. There aren't a lot of people looking over your shoulder so that is liberating. I can grab my camera and tripod and go out to shoot whatever suites me at the time. The problem becomes what will look good in 180-360 degrees, some you just can't tell until the composite is done. There is still the joy of discovery when you finish the image and it is something interesting.

What's the long-term potential of this kind of work? In website design, 3D animation scenarios or incorporated into other media productions? Where do you see what you do fitting into the media landscape? Through direct sales from your website? What's the role of the website in your marketing?

Panoramas can be used in a lot of different environments. They can be used as a basis for modeling 3D photorealistic backgrounds for games and movies. Travel and real estate can also benefit from high resolution QTVR either online or for interactive presentations. Object VRs are already being used extensively in the automobile industry but just about anything can use the technology for creative marketing.

My website now is used as a way to market my photographic abilities to clients for their projects. A friend of mine is developing a site to market fine arts

so I am going to market my personal work there since it is a much better environment for that kind of thing. Since a lot of artists will have their work in the space there is a much better opportunity to get the traffic to support fine arts work.

Do you in any sense see your work as supplying raw material or stock photography for incorporation in other productions - such as interactive websites?

I don't see why not. The problem right now is there isn't an agency to handle this kind of work but there are a lot of photographers shooting VR's so there are a lot great images available. I am a member of

QTVR photography is a very specialized form of photography which most people don't fully appreciate. As a result it's very hard to get paid fairly for the work since a lot of it goes to the web and companies and organizations just consider it fluff. They are willing to pay many times more for conventional photography which is not interactive and requires a lot less postproduction. There are a lot of very talented photographers shooting VR's that really deserve the attention. But this specialty is very young so there is quite a bit of room to grow.

[rcfisher.com](http://rcfisher.com)



the IQTVRA, International Quicktime VR Association. The association is working to promote interactive photography since at this point it is underutilized. There are several high profile projects, that if promoted properly, should bring the possibilities for this work to the publics attention.

Any examples that can be seen now?

Two projects that deserve attention are the QTVR Project at the new Udvar-Hazy Center at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC. The museum will make their entire collection available via interactive kiosks on the museum floor and online. Dennis Biela and David Palermo have been working since April 2003 documenting the collection despite spotty funding and the physical challenges of shooting at a construction site.

Another is the World Heritage Tour being shot by Tito Dupre. His goal is to shoot every site on the UNESCO World Heritage List in QTVR. Right now that's over 740 sites and he has shot 7 percent of them mostly funding the work himself, he has received a few donations but really needs more. He started the project in July 2001 with just \$12 a day to travel and photograph the sites. For more information about his project go to [world-heritage-tour.org](http://world-heritage-tour.org).

Does it challenge the very concept of stock photography or is it in an entirely separate category?

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