



## Shooting Vertical Panoramics

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I have enjoyed using the Hasselblad X-pan for just over a year now, most especially its ability to provide me with a different perspective when shooting locations that I'd covered many times before on both traditional 35mm and medium formats. However, it wasn't long before I discovered that using the camera vertically could often give me yet another take on many of the same scenes.

Obviously your subject matter will, to some extent, dictate whether a vertical panoramic image will work, or be appropriate. Foreground interest is absolutely essential, and needs to lead the eye well into the frame to provide the image with sufficient depth. Your foreground is likely to begin quite close to your shooting position so depth of field will always be at a premium and most vertical images will be taken at minimum aperture in order to achieve sufficient depth of field. Fortunately the depth of field scales on X-pan lenses are very accurate and can be relied upon.

The unusual nature of this picture format takes some getting used to, but I quickly found myself seeing compositions in this vertical letterbox shape that, previously, I would never have considered. Centred horizons and symmetrical compositions can often work, especially when photographing reflections in lakes. My choice of composition seems to rely far more upon the lines and forms of the landscape than it does when shooting horizontal panoramic compositions - a format that is very similar to that seen by the human eye and where general landscape scenes can be more easily accepted.

A level horizon is, of course, essential in landscape photography, especially when shooting in panoramic format. When shooting vertical panoramic images, however, perfect levelling of the horizon becomes all the more important and for this a spirit level is a necessity. Fortunately the X-pan comes supplied with a hot shoe level, which is perfect for the job.

Most of my vertical panoramic images are shot using the X-pan's 45mm lens, as this optic seems to provide the best field of view for vertical compositions and can achieve the necessary depth of field. It is essential to use the dedicated centre-spot neutral density filter at all times with this lens.

Some may grumble about the X-pan's off-centre tripod socket but, depending on the tripod head you use, it becomes a true bonus when you position the camera vertically. If it were centred it would be impossible (when dropping the camera into the notch on some ball heads) to align the camera at 90 degrees as it would come into contact with the tripod's top plate.

Using neutral density graduated filters can be problematic when shooting landscapes with a panoramic camera, as all are of a rangefinder design. Some medium format models allow you to view the image on a ground glass screen, which can help, but unfortunately the X-pan doesn't have this facility. I have managed to figure a way of accurately positioning ND grads when shooting horizontal images (by marking out a rough scale on the filter holder after testing the filter in various positions), but I've found it impossible to draw up such a scale to use when shooting vertically. This is unfortunate, as almost all the vertical shots I have taken required the use of a 3-stop soft edged ND grad due to the considerable brightness range from sky to foreground that occurs in this type of image – especially when shooting into the light around dawn and dusk. I often find it necessary to use an additional 1 or 2 stop hard edge ND grad to hold back the exposure of any sky included in the frame. After much experimentation I have found it possible to handhold the filters for my own work, although I would suggest that attaching them with blue-tac might produce more consistent results.

For those who own a panoramic camera and haven't yet experimented with vertical shooting, I strongly suggest that you give it a try. You may only come across a suitable scene once in a while, but the resulting images will certainly add to the diversity of your portfolio.

Guy Edwardes - NPN 330

*Editor's note* - Guy Edwardes is a professional nature photographer based in the U.K. His work has been published widely in the U.K. and abroad with clients that include: *Outdoor Photography*, *Practical Photography*, *Dorset*, *Dorset Life*, and *Devon Life* magazines, *Telegraph* magazine, *The Reader's Digest*, *John Hinde*, *J. Salmon*, *Browntrout Publishers* and *Ordnance Survey*. In 2000, Guy was highly commended in the Wild Places category of the BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition.

Be sure to visit Guy's website located at [www.guyedwardes.com](http://www.guyedwardes.com).

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