Stitching a Panorama

Shooting Considerations: Though there’s no need to become too compulsive about it there are a few things to bear in mind when shooting frames for panoramic panels that are going to be stitched together.

1. Keep it Level: Place your camera on a tripod and level it. In addition to producing a better looking image you will find that you'll be able to maximize the amount of vertical space in the frame. Sloppy shooting leads to very narrow panels.

2. Shoot Vertically: Though it appears counterintuitive to shot vertically when shooting for panoramic images, it is a real benefit. You'll end up with more frames to stitch, but also less perspective distortion.

3. Overlap: When taking each successive frame overlap with the previous frame by about 25%—30%. This may seem wasteful, but you need the margin when lining up the frames in Photoshop.

4. Lock Focus & Exposure: Turn autoexposure off. Take a representative exposure reading and don't change it for any of the frames. Also, except in special situations, turn off autofocus and leave the focus setting uncharged between frames. Image size actually changes with focus shift and you'll have a devil of a time trying to get alignment, in addition to other problems.

4. If your digital camera has auto-white balance, turn this off and set the white balance manually.

5. Don't Use a Polarizer: Anything wider than the coverage of a 28mm lens and the use of a polarizer will produce an uneven sky. If you use one on frames intended to be stitched, even if the angle of coverage is narrow, you'll end up with visible banding.

6. Identification: It's a good idea to identify the frames that are intended for a panoramic panel or other form of stitching at the time of shooting. What I do is to hold up my hand with fingers spread in front of the camera and take a frame. When I see an out-of-focus hand on-screen or among my slides I know that the frames that precede it are intended for a stitched panel. Otherwise after a long and productive shoot consisting of hundreds, if not a thousand or more frames, you may overlook what you originally intended.