

A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF EARTH



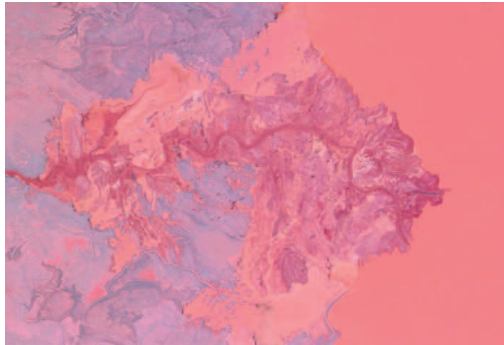
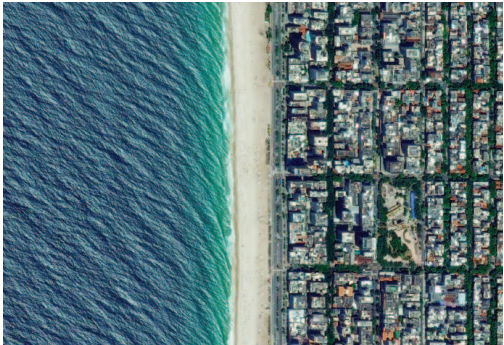
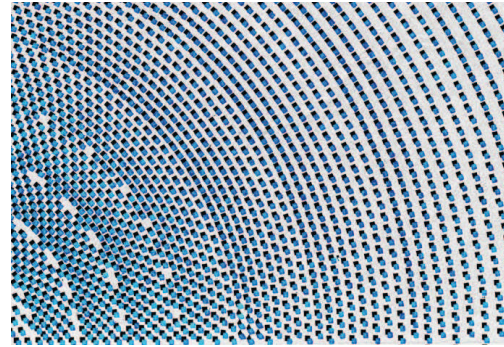
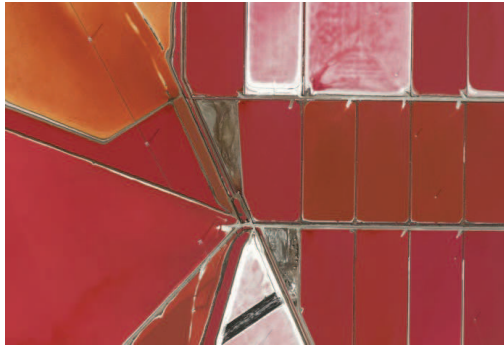
EARTHRISE
Photograph by Bill Anders
24 December 1968
Courtesy of NASA

It is Christmas Eve, 1968. The Apollo 8 spacecraft is sweeping round the dark side of the Moon to begin its journey home. As Earth climbs above the Moon's horizon, astronaut Bill Anders points his customised Hasselblad 500 EL camera out the window and takes one of the most important photographs of all time – *Earthrise*.

'It's ironic,' Anders remarked later. 'We came to discover the Moon and we actually discovered Earth.'

Until now, slightly more than 550 humans have made the journey into space where they could gaze down in wonder at our small blue planet, floating in the infinite vastness of the cosmos. The experience has given them a new perspective, allowing them to appreciate the true extent to which everything on Earth is connected and interdependent. The anecdotes and descriptions provided by these astronauts led science writer Frank White to coin a term for this profound psychological shift. He called it the 'Overview Effect'.

Cameras, either in the hands of our astronauts or attached to satellites suspended in orbit, show us that which we cannot see from Earth's surface. Recent advances in technology have yielded extraordinarily detailed images of the entire Earth, and this book contains a purposeful selection and composition of such views. By engaging with these far-flung perspectives, we can not only share in the sensation described by astronauts such as Bill Anders, but also discover a new way to appreciate and evaluate the condition of our planet.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
11

WHERE WE

HARVEST
24

EXTRACT
54

POWER
80

LIVE
108

MOVE
138

DESIGN
172

PLAY
202

WASTE
226

ARE NOT
254

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
282

INDEX
284

A few months before I discovered Earth in Texas, a friend shared a short film with me called *Overview*. The film introduced me to the idea of the 'Overview Effect' – an idea that changed the way I see our planet and its place in the universe. Coined by Frank White in 1987, the 'Overview Effect' refers to the profound emotional sensation that astronauts experience when given the opportunity to look down at Earth from space.

From a distant vantage point, one has the chance to appreciate our home as a whole, to reflect on its beauty and its fragility all at once.

The anecdotes of the astronauts in the film inspired the map search for 'Earth' that fortuitously led me astray a few months later. They also helped me realise that there needs to be a dramatic shift in the way our species views our planet before we can truly understand the full extent of our impact. As inspirational as this idea was, I had no clue how I, or anyone for that matter, could make that shift happen. For me, everything changed once I saw those crop circles.

CIUDAD NEZAHUALCÓYOTL

19°40'55.72" -99°0'13.551"

Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, a municipality of Mexico City, Mexico, is characterised by its long, straight, and gridded streets. With a population of more than 1 million people (the entirety of Mexico City contains approximately 9 million residents), the area is home to many of the capital's citizens who have migrated there from other parts of the country.









'The single greatest lesson the garden teaches is that our relationship to the planet need not be zero-sum, and that as long as the sun still shines and people still can plan and plant, think and do, we can, if we bother to try, find ways to provide for ourselves without diminishing the world.'

Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006)

WHERE WE HARVEST

Civilisation arose only after agriculture was developed. Our ability to stay in one place and devote time to pursuits other than searching for and gathering sustenance was dependent on the production of a reliable food supply. What you will see in this chapter are the latest manifestations of this ancient pursuit; a collection of images presenting particularly stunning examples of humans harnessing the landscape of the planet to cultivate plants and raise animals.

From above, the places where we harvest often have a textile-like appearance. Repetitive patterns illuminate techniques that have enabled us to utilise the landscape for our needs, with precision and on a massive scale. The patterns that emerge are largely a product of what is being grown and the technology that is used to do so. These tessellations show us that our need to feed ourselves has a far-reaching impact on the surface of the planet – be it on land or in the sea.

It has been estimated that approximately 40% of land on Earth is devoted to agricultural purposes. As our population numbers have exploded, the way we harvest has already been forced to adapt significantly. Technological advances, such as widespread adoption of advanced farming equipment and powerful chemicals, have dramatically increased crop yields and the size of our livestock. Furthermore, catastrophic issues such as the depletion of water resources or overfishing of aquatic life require our attention and should force us to consider where our foods of the future will come from. As we look to feed ourselves in the midst of these crises, we must be cautious not to starve our planet first.

PREVIOUS PAGE

RICE

23°12'62.62", 102°7'51.08"

Terraced rice paddies cover the mountainsides of Yuanyang County, China. Cultivated by the Hani people for the last 1,300 years, the slope of the terraces varies from 15 to 75 degrees, with some having as many as 1,000 steps. Approximately 4 square kilometres (1.5 square miles) of paddies are seen here surrounding the small village of Tuguozhai.

LEFT

TULIPS

52°27'6.355", 4°55'7.080"

Every year, tulip fields in Lisse, Netherlands begin to bloom in March and are in peak bloom by late April. The Dutch produce a total of 4.3 billion tulip bulbs each year, of which 53% (2.3 billion) is grown into cut flowers. Of these, 1.3 billion are sold in the Netherlands as cut flowers and the remainder is exported: 630 million bulbs to Europe and 370 million elsewhere.



WHERE WE EXTRACT