

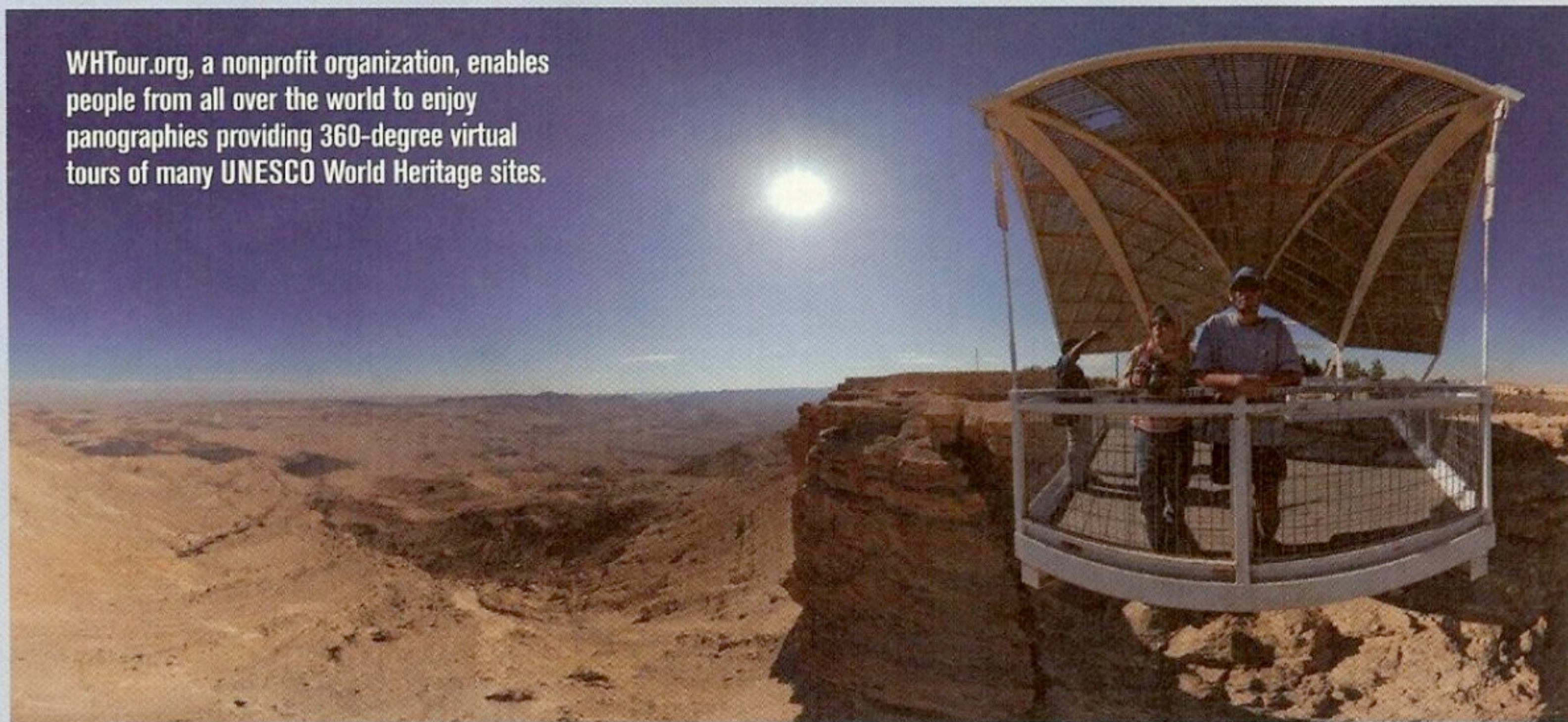
Preserving the Past

Around the world, there are certain places or structures—natural or manmade—of overwhelming cultural or aesthetic value to the common heritage of humanity. The Great Wall of China. The Statue of Liberty. The Taj Mahal. The Historic Centre of St. Petersburg. Chichen Itza. The Persepolis. The Pyramids of Giza. Those are but a few of the more than 850 designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites, international locales designated for preservation so they can be appreciated by future generations.

interest, and 300 of them are available on the WHTour.org Web site at www.world-heritage-tour.org. The majority of locations featured on the Web site are designated World Heritage Sites, while a small percentage are listed on the World Monuments Fund Watch List. Several dozen other locales were included by WHTour.org because of their historic, natural, or national value.

During the seven years already committed to this valuable project, Dupret has helped produce some of the most impressive panoramographies ever seen of some of the most

WHTour.org, a nonprofit organization, enables people from all over the world to enjoy panoramographies providing 360-degree virtual tours of many UNESCO World Heritage sites.



Despite being named to this list and receiving the attention of some of the world's foremost scientists and archaeologists, some of these World Heritage Sites are in danger of disappearing forever. Other sites are located in far-off lands, making it virtually impossible for the majority of people to ever drink in their mystique and wonder. Of late, photographers have been documenting these territories and structures, preserving their beauty for all to enjoy, whether for this generation or those to come.

One photo or a series of photos offer but a small look at one of these structures or areas. With that in mind, Belgian photographer Tito Dupret, along with Bijuan Chen, founded WHTour.org, an independent nonprofit organization that has been documenting the UNESCO World Heritage List with a series of panoramographies that provide a stunning 360-degree virtual tour of these remarkable sites, made possible through the use of computer software.

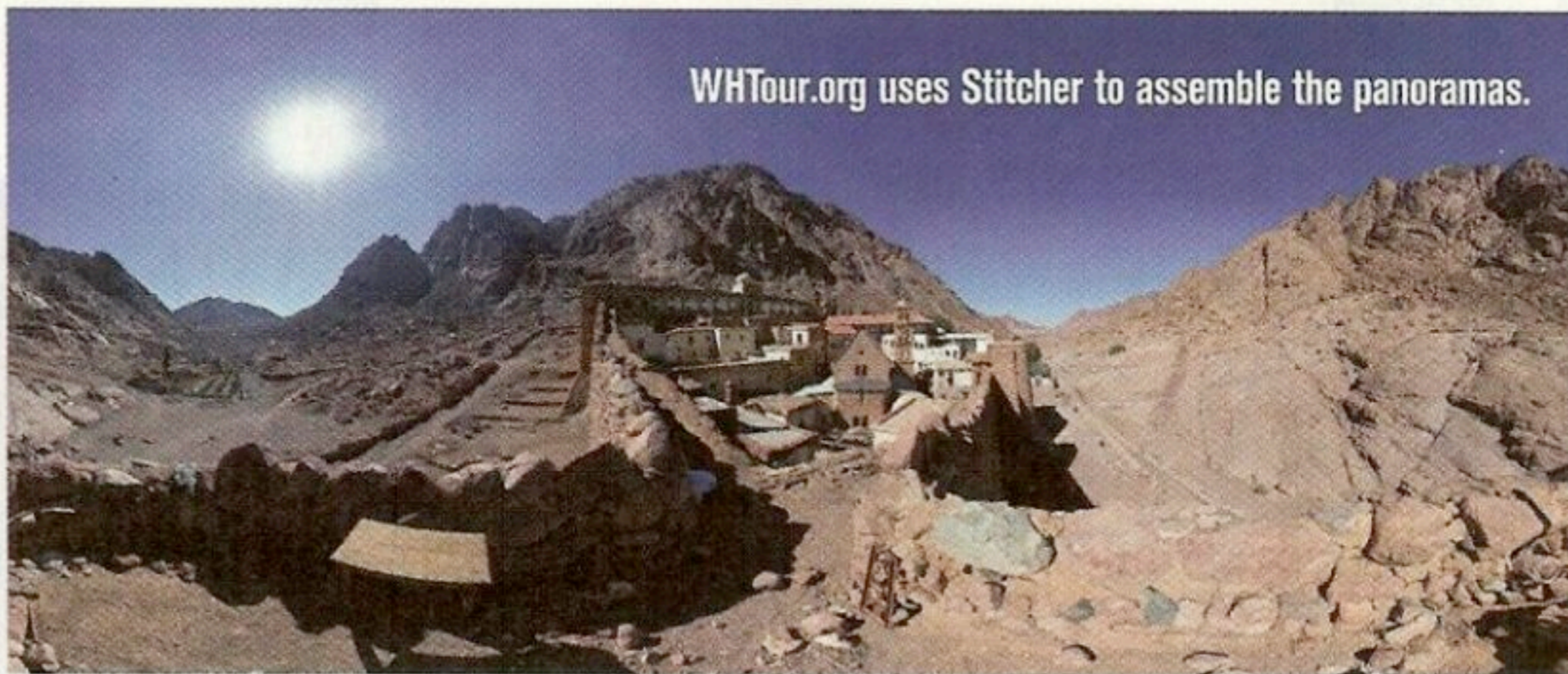
Currently, the group has visited a majority of the areas of

historic, rare, and often unreachable sites from across the planet—in full-color, full-screen splendor. From China, Tanzania, Indonesia, Iran, and India to Egypt and most recently the Middle East, each of Dupret's panoramographies is produced with the aid of Stitcher Unlimited, panorama assembling software originally from RealViz (which was recently acquired by Autodesk).

Stitcher is a photo-stitching and image assembling software for the creation of professional-level panoramas and 360-degree virtual tours. Starting from digital images, the software's automatic stitching engine enables users to create high-quality panoramas, large-format prints, matte paintings, reflection maps, and textures for film and television, as well as dynamic virtual tours for the real estate and tourism industries.

"For the past 15 months, I have not published a single image," explains Dupret. That's because approximately eight of those months were spent shooting 80 new World Heritage Sites, while an additional seven months were needed to build the organization's new site and to post-

WHTour.org uses Stitcher to assemble the panoramas.



produce the panoramic 360-degree imaging. The site now includes significant new areas, such as the Middle East and East Africa. "These are regions that currently attract a lot of interest in the news, but, unfortunately, often not for the right reasons," he adds. "What we want to present is a peaceful message on the rich heritage and natural beauty of these regions."

Dupret has been using Stitcher since 2001, when he began this project. With each new version of the software, he has been able to reduce the time spent in post during the production of his panoramas. "I can capture as many locations as possible within a limited timeframe, and maximize our documentation of the World Heritage Sites," he says. Recognizing the social importance of Dupret's work, RealViz became an official sponsor of the

World Heritage Tour project. "We have seen the site grow gradually over the past seven years, and are proud to be part of such an important contribution to the documentation of such rare and significant sites," says Dominique Pouliquen, CEO of RealViz prior to the acquisition.

The site is now available in French and English. It also contains a new search engine that utilizes various viewing formats, including QuickTime and Adobe Flash Player, plus a Print mode. There are also cubes that visitors can print, cut, fold, and construct by themselves or with their children. "This is a fabulous way to help them learn about what World Heritage is," Dupret says. ■

USER FOCUS: PANORAMAS



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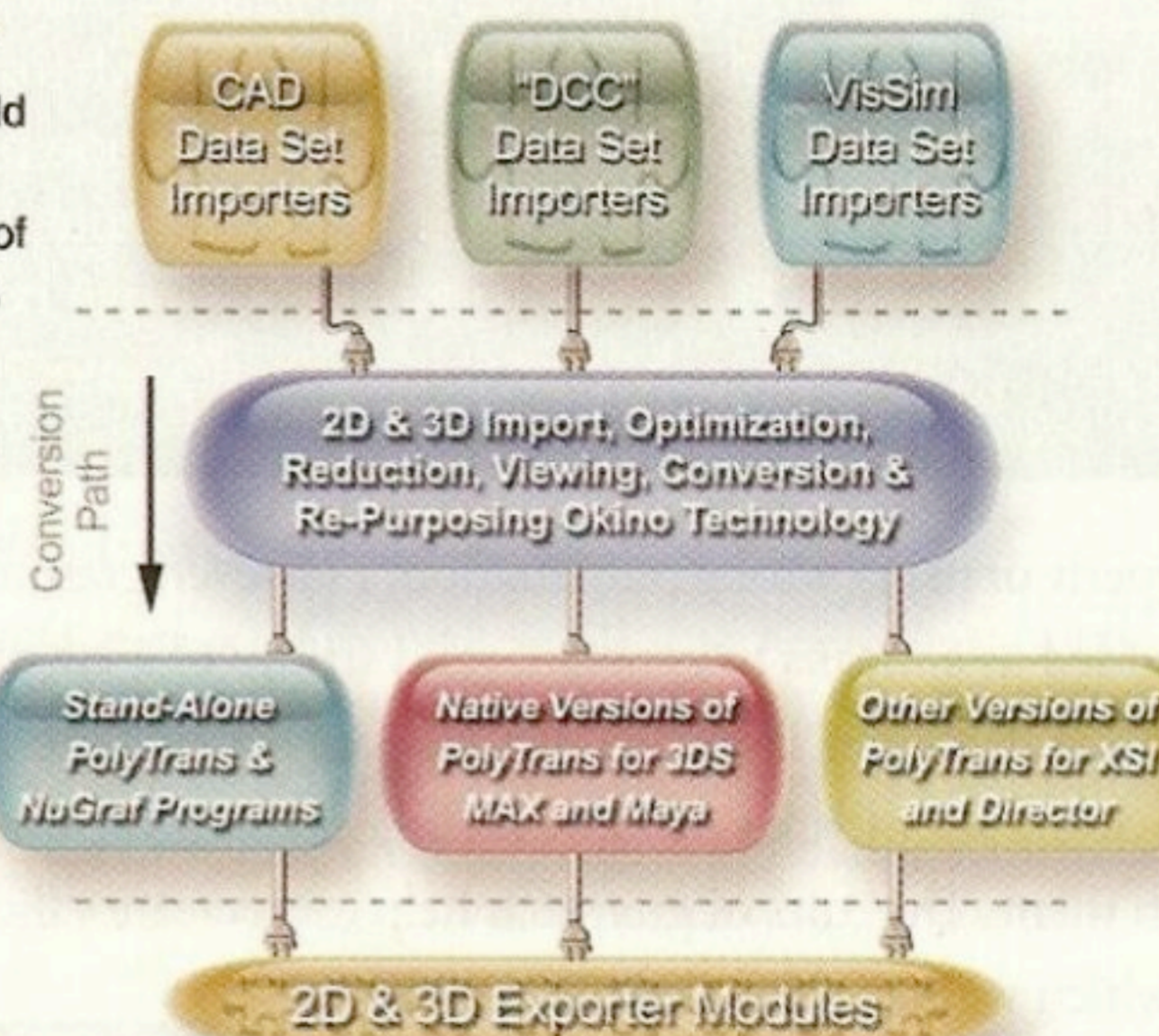
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