

This book stands at an intersection of science and art. From its origins, NASA has studied our planet in novel ways, using ingenious tools to study physical processes at work—from beneath the crust to the edge of the atmosphere. We look at it in macrocosm and microcosm, from the flow of one mountain stream to the flow of jet streams. Most of all, we look at Earth as a system, examining the cycles and processes—the water cycle, the carbon cycle, ocean circulation, the movement of heat—that interact and influence each other in a complex, dynamic dance across seasons and decades.

We measure particles, gases, energy, and fluids moving in, on, and around Earth. And like artists, we study the light—how it bounces, reflects, refracts, and gets absorbed and changed. Understanding the light and the pictures it composes is no small feat, given the rivers of air and gas moving between our satellite eyes and the planet below.

For all of the dynamism and detail we can observe from orbit, sometimes it is worth stepping back and simply admiring Earth. It is a beautiful, awe-inspiring place, and it is the only world most of us will ever know.

NASA has a unique vantage point for observing the beauty and wonder of Earth and for making sense of it. Looking back from space, astronaut Edgar Mitchell once called Earth “a sparkling blue and white jewel,” and it does dazzle the eye. The planet’s palette of colors and textures and shapes—far more than just blues and whites—are spread across the pages of this book.

We chose these images because they inspire. They tell a story of a 4.5-billion-year-old planet where there is always something new to see. They tell a story of land, wind, water, ice, and air as they can only be viewed from above. They show us that no matter what the human mind can imagine, no matter what the artist can conceive, there are few things more fantastic and inspiring than the world as it already is. The truth of our planet is just as compelling as any fiction.

We hope you enjoy this satellite view of Earth.
It is your planet. It is NASA’s mission.

Michael Carlowicz