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The Lens That Squeezes the Picture Sideways: The Anamorphic Lens

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When you watch a scene spread across a huge cinema screen, you can tell it is much wider than a television. In night-street scenes, car headlights sometimes smear into blue streaks of light that cut across the frame. Yet this wide picture often was not recorded wide in the first place; it is the result of squeezing the image sideways during shooting and stretching it back out during projection. The device that pulls off this bit of magic is the “anamorphic lens.” Put simply, an anamorphic lens is a special lens that compresses a wide scene only in the horizontal direction to fit it onto narrow