Science illustrator David Fierstein cuts to the core of one of the world's most unusual volcanoes in his illustration of Mount Etna. The image merges the latest scientific data with state-of-the-art 3D modeling software to give a comprehensive view of the volcano's rich and violent history.

Located on the east coast of Sicily, Mount Etna is Europe's largest volcano and one of the most productive in the world. Eruptions in the past 3 years alone have destroyed tourist complexes and threatened nearby towns. New evidence suggests that Mount Etna is growing increasingly violent and may someday rival Mount St. Helens and Pinatubo in ferocity.

Fierstein's graphic documents the changing nature of the volcano by combining this new evidence with prior research. The insets at the upper left illustrate how the unique geological location of the volcano allows it to produce large volumes of magma, and the panel at the lower right provides details about recent lava flows and eruptions. The central image chronicles the evolution of Mount Etna from a relatively flat shield volcano to the mountainous cone that looms over the countryside today. Fierstein says the large, glowing magma pools in this image are the most salient part of the graphic, in that they highlight Mount Etna's hypothesized "dual plumbing system," which may give clues to the volcano's future activity.

"This image is a great example of how to illustrate a complex set of relationships," says panel of judges member Thomas Lucas. Fellow panellist Boyce Rensberger agrees: “It shows you everything you’d want to know,” he says, “except, perhaps, for the people screaming down below.”
Informational Graphics
David Grimm

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