

COLOUR TO MONO

Using Adobe Photoshop CS3

The following result is achieved using Adobe Photoshop CS3, but it can also be done using the greyscale sliders on Adobe Lightroom V 2 and 2.5

There are various steps along the way to the end result, and here I stress that not every image requires every step. It's a bit like photography itself. Subjective to the viewer.

Part one.

Choosing your image.

It is important to think WHY you are converting to mono. Is it to add ambience and atmosphere, to make an image pack more of a punch to the eye, to make it more emotionally evocative, or to give the viewer more of an "aged" feeling when they view the photo?

There has to be a reason as not every image makes a good black and white image. This is where learning to "see" with the mind's eye in black and white really helps. It then becomes almost instinctive as to which image will work and which one doesn't. And even experience doesn't stop us getting it wrong occasionally!

Part 2

What makes a good mono image?

In a colour image there are lots of colours to work with, some will say it's harder some will say it's easier, it doesn't matter. What does matter is that as the word mono implies, when working in mono we have ONE colour but lots of tones. And the best images to convert to mono are the ones where we can have as wide a tonal range as possible. Covering the full 255 tones is not as difficult as it seems to be honest; we start off with having a true white in the image, and end it having a true black, covering the tones in between then falls naturally. Green by the way is the one colour that has the least amount of tones so very green landscapes are very difficult to convert into great mono images (not impossible just difficult!).

The subject is also as important as the tonal range old things. Images of old things do well as the mind automatically puts an old item into an old photo so having a photo of a vintage car for example doing a conversion to mono then adding a sepia tint really helps transport the viewer back to the time when the car was new!

A lot of buildings do well in mono as there is usually a history that evokes an emotion, and lots of contrasts in brick work where you can really pull out tones.

Certain people work well if they have a powerful evocative face or expression.

Try to go for images that have a sky which contains some nicely textured clouds as well as a fair bit of blue, this means you can bring the blue down to add to the atmosphere if necessary.

All these things have to be taken into account when choosing your image to work on, and still we can't get it right ALL the time!

So that's the theory now to the practical.....

STEP ONE..... Choose your image.

Process the image in the normal way that you would do if you were leaving it as a colour image. I.E crop, clone, sharpen, tweak curves and levels, just your normal processing.

STEP TWO

Duplicate the layer so that we are working on the top layer and not the original, that way if we change our mind or basically make a mess of it (yes it happens..... often!) we can just drop the top layer in the bucket, and duplicate the bottom layer again so we don't touch the original layer until we are happy with the conversion.

STEP THREE

Now we are going to do the first part of the mono conversion, there are two ways you can get to the black and white sliders, you can go to **IMAGE > ADJUSTMENT > BLACK AND WHITE** (see screen shot on presentation) or you can click on the half white half black circle on the layers palette which will give you an adjustment layer, either way you end up with the menu for mono conversion with 6 colour sliders on it. This is where the fun begins.....

STEP FOUR

The sliders represent the 6 main colours in the image. Moving the sliders on each colour you are basically altering the tones in each of the colours. There is no set rule that I use, I go by what is pleasing to the eye. But an example is where there is a lot of blue in the sky and you want to create more atmosphere then bring the blue and the cyan sliders down..... Not necessarily all the way but until u have got a sky you are happy with, the same with the rest of the sliders. Don't be scared of going back and starting again!

STEP FIVE

Once you have an image you are happy with click ok, then go to **IMAGE > LEVELS**, this will bring up the histogram which basically tells you the amount of tones you have..... The very basic idea of this is that the white arrow needs to be right where the graph finishes and the black arrow needs to be where it starts. If they are not, you can pull them along to meet the start and finish of the graph. The middle arrow needs to be approx in the middle.

The black arrow represents shadows, the middle represents mid tones and the white represents highlights.

You can tweak this and watch your image while you do this; you want the image to start jumping out at you and not look flat and grey all over.

At this stage I duplicate the top layer so that the top two layer are mono and the background layer is still colour.

STEP SIX

This is where I add that little bit extra

I use a plug in filter called LUCISART. Available at www.lucisart.com

I usually use the exposure setting..... On the third button, and bring the strength down to about a third of the slider bar. That's my start off point and I adjust accordingly to how I like the image.

Depending on the image, I will sometimes do an USM (Unsharp Mask) and sometimes go to brightness and contrast if I think it needs a little extra punch.

Once happy go to LAYER > FLATTEN IMAGE

STEP SEVEN

Press X or D until the lower of the small boxes on the tool bar turns black; this means the background colour will be black.

Then press CTRL and A to select the entire image, then press CTRL and SHIFT and J together..... This then separates the image from the background and adds a separate background layer. Make sure that the background layer is highlighted, then go to IMAGE > CANVAS SIZE

Change the size to inches and make sure that there is a tick in the relative box. Then type in .25 on both the height and width field. This adds a black border round the image by making the background canvas.25 of an inch larger than the image.

Highlight the image layer then click the f symbol at the bottom of the layers palette, then click on stroke.

On the menu that appears, first click on the colour box and set the colour to white.

Then on the POSITION field change it to inside. This will ensure that the corners are nice and sharp and not rounded. Then put in 9 in the size field, it doesn't have to be 9 but start off there and see how you like the result.

Flatten image.

And there you have the finished product.