

Black and White Photography

Black and white photography has always been powerful and it has stood the test of time, even against its contemporary color counterpart. When working with black and white, you must incorporate a different set of rules and techniques. With the lack of color the balances of shape and contrast are made to work harder in order to convey the story or set the mood. However, once this is achieved it is striking.

Many digital cameras come equipped with a black and white mode. If yours does not, you can still achieve the black and white look through editing techniques. Photoshop has made this process possible with a vast selection of methods to convert a color photograph into what Photoshop refers to as grayscale, or to us, black and white. Most photographers would agree that it is actually easier while behind the lens to shoot in color and to convert to black and white at another step. The level in control of effects throughout the Photoshop program are much greater than what could be achieved through the actual shot.

The most simplistic method of converting color to black and white is to simply change the mode to grayscale (Image > Mode > Grayscale). While this will work, there are other methods. Lets take a look at three other methods that will convert color to grayscale (black and white):

Desaturation is the first method.. This is the elimination the observable color information while keeping the RGB status of the file. This would permit you to add a tint at a later time without having to change color mode again. Follow Steps: Image > Adjustments > Desaturate (or press Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + U).

One effect of desaturation is a potentially a flat, uninspiring version of the original picture. This can be improved on however by looking at the picture in parts. You can increase textures in one area by darkening the shadows and midtones, or increase contrast in another to remove haziness. To do this, take a feathered section to work with and press Ctrl/Cmd + J to copy and paste the selection to a new layer. Add a 'Levels Adjustment Layer' to it, combining the two layers as a clipping mask. Drag the Black and Gray point markers toward the right to bring out texture or to the left to decrease. If you see a dividing line alter making the Levels adjustment, remove by adding a layer mask to the newly made level (set to Reveal All) and paint on the mask in black until the edge disappears using a soft brush at a low opacity setting.

While a Levels adjustment layer would add contrast, a different method would be: Follow Steps: Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves This will add a Curves adjustment layer to the background layer. Apply the curve shown to increase midtone contrast, but at slight decrease to the highlights and shadows, however this lessens the haziness effect.

Imagine a photo of the blue ocean. Going to the Layers palette, click the Channels tab and click on the Red channel. The image seen be the darkening of the blue-tinted areas the same result that a red filter over the lens would have created. For a comparison, click on the Green channel for a result similar to the Red channel but less drastic. Finally, the Blue channel, it will be lighter, since most of the image is blue. Without changing anything, you have three different ready-made black-and-white effects.

After choosing the filter effect you desire, use this keyboard shortcut sequence to make it into a new document: Ctrl/Cmd + A (selects all) Ctrl/Cmd + C (copies the selection to the clipboard) Ctrl/Cmd + N (creates a new document of the same proportions as whatever we have on the clipboard. The document will also be a grayscale as we only have one channel selected) Enter/Return (to confirm the settings. No changes are necessary) Ctrl/Cmd + V (to paste the contents of the clipboard to a new layer) You can then use Levels and Curves to fine-tune the result.

Use this method to custom set the levels in each color channel is the preset configuration effects are not what you are looking for in the change of tones or strength of color effects. Pick the channel that works best and keep it active. Go to Image > Calculations. If the Blue channel was active, the Blue channel will be in the Calculations dialog box. Source 1 and 2 are set to the same document, layer, and Blue channel, meaning they will all be combined for the calculation to take place. Set the blending drop-down to Multiply, working in the same way as the normal layer blend methods. Multiply will darken the image, but based on the blue channel. As a result red elements or elements with a red cast will become darker than other elements. Set the Result drop-down box to New Document to create a new multichannel file based on the calculated result.

About the Author

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