

Black & white The basics

The biggest challenge when shooting with black & white in mind is anticipating how the colours will look in greyscale...

ABOVE Go for a tight crop in black & white, and you'll get an image with impact

ABOVE RIGHT Although we usually associate travel with colour, black & white holiday shots can work well

BELOW RIGHT Shooting black & white makes eyes appear more expressive

To a certain extent that's a skill you only develop with experience, but you can accelerate the learning process by sitting at your computer for an hour or two and seeing what happens when you convert existing RGB images to mono.

The first thing you'll discover is that parts of the picture that contrasted strongly in colour have the same tonality in black & white. Someone wearing a red jumper would stand out vividly in front of a green landscape in colour. But in black & white they'd both appear dark grey and seem to merge into one another. And in scenic work, foliage, which is clearly different in colour, can have a similar tonality in mono.

To a degree, as we'll see later, it's possible to separate tones out when converting an image from colour to mono, but if you think about the tones in the scene as you take the picture, you can save yourself some time and trouble later.

While black & white can be used with any subject – and with digital it costs nothing to experiment – it seems to work better with some subjects than others.

One area where it certainly excels is in pictures of people. Whether you want a punchy character study or a subtle environmental portrait, a minimal treatment in mono is often more successful than lashings of colour. This is especially true when photographing groups, who may be wearing clothes that clash.

Landscapes, too, can look fantastic in black & white – especially wild, desolate parts of the countryside, with clouds filling the heavens. All you have to do is darken

the blue and boost the contrast to produce an image that captures more of the majesty of being there than colour ever could. Or you might prefer a softer approach – photographing the undulating curves of a sand dune or rocks in the hills.

Buildings can come alive when reduced to varying tones of grey. This is particularly true of modern structures that often feature graphic-design elements –



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enabling you to create fascinating abstracts by isolating just a part of them. Older buildings such as cathedrals and castles can work well, too, – especially if you plan to get into some sepia toning.

Black & white documentary and reportage photography has a long and distinguished tradition, and should be the first choice for anyone who wants to record what's happening on the streets or cover a



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Documentary and reportage photography in particular lend themselves to black & white. Shoot close in with a wide-angle lens to produce gritty and realistic images

Whatever the subject, black & white photos have an enduring, timeless quality – and that's why the medium is so fascinating

specific event. If you get in close and shoot with a wide-angle lens you'll produce gritty, realistic images. This can be emphasised by adding a little grain in the computer, to simulate the use of fast film.

Any subject where the focus is on shape and texture looks good in monochrome. Parts of the human body, such as the knee or elbow, can be made to resemble the natural landscape when converted to black & white. And most of the great nude studies were shot in mono.

That's also the case with still life. Gather a few interesting items together on a table and record them in colour, and they can look nothing much. Desaturate the image to greyscale and you may find you have something a lot more interesting.

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Toning and tinting

Paradoxically, monochromatic images don't have to be just black & white. There's a long history in photography of toning pictures – of dipping a print in chemicals that are generally smelly and sometimes toxic, in order to give them a second colour. Best known is sepia toning, which produces a range of brown tones from rich orange to deep chocolate, but there are many

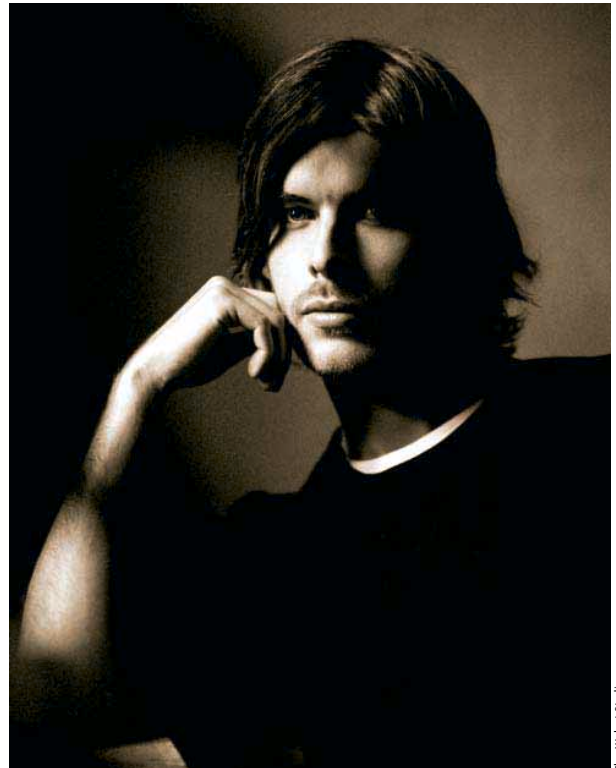
more besides. Most image-editing programs offer a number of ways of toning a picture.

The easiest way to produce a toned image is to use the Colorize command. As a starting point, convert the picture to mono and bring it back to RGB colour mode. Then simply go to Hue/Saturation (Enhance→Colour→Hue/Saturation in Elements 2), click the Colorize box, and move the Hue slider across. Et voilà! You have a toned mono image. It really is as easy as that. Using the Saturation slider in the same box you can vary how vivid the effect is.

Another option, which gives you more control, is to employ the Colour Balance settings available in many programs (Image→Adjustments→Colour Balance in Photoshop). Use the Cyan/Red, Magenta/Green and Yellow/Blue sliders to select any toning colour you like.

For a more subtle effect, try the Duotone option in Photoshop, which enables you to allocate different colours to different parts of the tonal range. Here the image has to be in Greyscale. You normally use black for the shadows and another colour for the midtones and highlights. There are also Tritones and Quadtones, which as the names suggest, enable you to specify three or four different colours.

For this atmospheric shot the subject was sat next to a window and natural daylight was the only light source



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Monochrome magic

Images where the focus is on shape or texture are particularly strong in black & white



Abstract images reminiscent of the natural landscape can be achieved by creatively shooting parts of the human body

