

# **Learning to See in Black & White**

**Greg Holden**

## **1) Agenda**

- a. Why choose Black & White?
- b. What things look better in B&W than in color
  - i. Portraits
  - ii. Emphasis on Light
  - iii. Emphasis on Shape or Structure
  - iv. Removing Distractions
  - v. Setting a Mood
- c. Options for converting to B&W
- d. Advanced Processing Options
- e. Demonstration of workflow in Adobe Lightroom 6 and Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro (plug-in to Adobe LR)

## **2) Why Choose B&W?**

- a. People are used to seeing B&W images in newspapers and magazine photos
- b. B&W photos are "timeless"
- c. Some photos can look good in either color or B&W
- d.

## **3) Practice "seeing" in B&W**

- a. Use your iPhone to capture everyday scenes in B&W
- b. Hipstamatic app for smartphone allows you to capture images in monochrome. Greg recommends: Black Keys films (Extra Fine and Super Grain) and Blanko BL4 (some color, but mostly B&W)

## **4) Portraits**

- a. Monochrome photos even out skin tones and hide mixed light (white balance) issues
- b. Without color, viewer focuses on bright areas (eyes, teeth, etc)
- c. Classic look (i.e. wedding photos and newspaper photos)
- d. LOOK FOR Photos with: simple scenes (close-ups), good facial expressions, photos where you want to emphasize emotions

## **5) Emphasis on Light**

- a. By taking away color, viewers must look at the different levels of light (tonal range) in an image
- b. Images with high contrast (called “high key”) or silhouettes
- c. LOOK FOR Photos with: single light source (think ‘spot light’), high contrast or dynamic lighting

#### **6) Emphasis on Shape or Structure**

- a. By taking away color, viewers must focus on shapes and structures within a photo to define the image. Textures also look good in B&W.
- b. Reason many architectural photos look good in B&W (also hides colors reflected in shiny surfaces which may be distracting)
- c. LOOK FOR Photos with: sharp edges, strong lines, images where color doesn’t add anything to the image or images is mostly one color already (i.e. some landscape scenes, cityscapes)

#### **7) Removing Distractions**

- a. Declutter “busy” photos
- b. Remove distracting colors (e.g. colorful clothing or party decorations)
- c. LOOK FOR Photos: when your eyes are drawn more towards colors or background in the photo instead of the intended subject

#### **8) Setting a Mood**

- a. Spooky or scary subjects – B&W photos reminiscent of old Hitchcock movies and film noir crime shows
- b. B&W can convey a melancholy feeling

#### **9) Advanced Monochrome Options**

- a. High/Low Key
- b. Other Monochromes: Sepia, single color
- c. Infrared film
- d. Selective coloring or split toning

#### **10) Processing Tips for Monochrome conversions**

- a. Adobe Lightroom
  - i. Perform normal ‘color photo’ edits in the Basic tab of the Develop Module before converting to monochrome
  - ii. Use HSL/Color/B&W panel in the Develop module. Select B&W tab to convert to monochrome and move color channel sliders

- iii. For adding color to B&W conversions, instead of selecting the B&W tab, use the HSL tab and reduce saturation of all color channels to create a B&W image, and then bring back color of choice
- iv. After converting to monochrome, may need to go back to Basic tab and play with contrast and clarity sliders to get desired look
- b. Nik Software's Silver Efex Pro (plug-in to Lightroom or Photoshop)
  - i. Perform normal 'color photo' edits in the Basic tab of the Develop Module before converting to monochrome
  - ii. Export from Adobe as "Edit a Copy with Adjustments"
  - iii. Scroll through presets on left column to get a starting point
  - iv. Customize image using sliders in right panel
  - v. Use Control Points to make targeted adjustments of specific areas in photo
    - 1. Also use this to bring back color using "Selective Color" option in control point option list
  - vi. Saving photo will return you to Adobe as a new TIFF file
    - 1. Can use Smart object option in Photoshop to maintain adjustment history