Monochrome Magic

Monochrome Images can often have that something special

We have recorded 8 vidoes running in total for 3:40mins

This is Adobe Camera Raw and image editing at its best

Mono Magic Content

This set of videos contains what I call real life videos and projects, but perhaps that needs a little explanation. I could have made a number of videos demonstrating different ways you can create a monochrome image, but I wonder how many people actually find that interesting. I would have to demonstrate many techniques that I don't use myself and that leads to the obvious question. Why don't you use them?

Because they don't all lead to the quality results I am looking for myself. For me, those results come from images shot in Raw mode and if I have done that, then I need to create the monochrome images directly from those raw images. When I say real projects I mean that the videos are like you sitting beside me as I go through the manipulations start to finish.

I rely on my extensive collection of [Flickr images](#) and I encourage you to look at those first. Only if you feel the images you see there are the sort of images you would like to produce yourself, should you consider a purchase of this product.

In the videos, we take you through the entire manipulations, step by step and with nothing left out. The final images you will see are those created as the videos were recorded. I think it's more interesting for those watching when the manipulation is honest and typical of my work-flow. That sometimes includes the times when the manipulation doesn't go according to plan.

Sure, it's easy to test the settings before each recorded section and it would make me look a genius, always knowing exactly what settings to apply and with what tools, but that would not be a true reflection of what happens in a creative manipulation. I certainly don't make the right choice all the time and often have to change tack as I go along as the image comes together on screen.

What I present here are 8 videos which run for 3 hours 40 minutes in total. I have been asked to go back to my old practice of including the original file, as many people do like to follow along with the same image as I used. The finished images in high resolution allow you to view them on your own PC and there is no better way than that, to view images.

To help keep your original video download as light as I can, those who would like to use or view our final images, can downloaded them from our web site. The links to the images will be available with your download. Please remember that these images are available for following our tutorials and evaluation only, Beckham Digital does retain copyright. On a moderate broadband (ADSL) the finished images took less then a minute to download, the originals took under 5 minutes.

[Monochrome Magic Video tutorials](#)

001 Seeing Past your Thumbnails – 36:45

One of the skills we have to learn when looking at Raw images is to look past the thumbnail as it is and try to see it as it could be.

Now, that is a little easier said than done, but it gets a lot easier the more you do it. While looking at a thumbnail, ask yourself, what does the image lack or need first and then use the tools of Photoshop to deal with that aspect of the manipulation.

With this image the potential is there for a good shot, but, you can see yourself what was recorded on our sensor as a Raw file. It's not hard to see how we could easily slip past an image like this putting it down as one of our failures.

In this video, our aim is to create the impact and appeal and the first thing to mention is how little the colour is adding to the image.

However, the content and composition is there, so we are not starting with a complete basket case. What is needed is some aggressive manipulation that adds the power, drama and impact of the image. We use Camera Raw, Smart Objects, Layers, Layer Masks and many more tools to achieve our aims.

[Monochrome Magic Video tutorials](#)

002 The Sally B – 30:00

Light is everything in photography, but we always have light of course or how would we ever capture an image. We want sufficient light for our subject to give us that sparkling contrast and vibrant colour, if colour is important in the shot.

We want the highlights just reaching white and the shadows just touching black, so that the image jumps from the screen from sheer photographic quality before we even consider the content. We don't want any burnt out highlights, or blocked up shadows.

How many times do we achieve that for every 1000 images taken. If you are using more than the fingers of one hand to count the images you shoot that fall into this category, then you're are doing pretty well and certainly better than me.

Image editing is part and parcel of the art of photography. It's where we balance the light to achieve what nature and our state of the art digital camera can't always deliver. Here we have another perfect example in a B17 Flying Fortress shot at Duxford in the East of England on a less than perfect day.

Let's use Adobe Camera Raw to to take this shot most of the way to a dramatic monochrome image. Let's enhance the good parts and either subdue or eradicate the bad parts and make the image fly off the screen. Here it's both the subject matter and the lack of colour that pushes us

towards a monochrome image

003 The Angel of the North – 33:38

Here we have another image where the content and the general lack of colour tends to push my thoughts towards a monochrome image.

The picture here has a fair degree of contrast and sparkle, but then it was shot straight into the light, albeit that the sun was hidden behind the angel.

However, one of the issues I always find myself grappling with is how to make my photograph of a common and well photographed subject stand out from the crowd.

Those in the UK will recognize the Angel of the North, but perhaps it's not so well known to our friends in Australia. It's an enormous piece of art that stands beside the A1 in the North East of the UK. The people give you the scale nicely. In this instance I created my monochrome first and then experimented with derivatives and one appealed to me. The icing on the cake is use of the Flaming Pear Flood Filter.

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004 Mr T in London – 42:00

Here is a shot that many will be familiar with, or something very similar. Those living statues that you see all over the world and what a way to earn a living. I have had some success with using these figures before, but rarely do I use them as they are. This guy was on the South Bank of the Thames in London, close to the London Eye. I shot a few images of him and actually used them in an audio visual called London Calling, but here I wanted to remove him from that fussy background.

I had some other shots of the structure of a London Bridge, but didn't think either of the images had enough going for them on their own, but perhaps they do together and with that monochrome impact.

The cut-out is where we need to start, but perhaps we can use Camera Raw to help our selection.

Working with Smart Objects gives us enormous control and that is just what you need when trying to find a manipulative route through to a good image

005 Variations and Alternatives – 5:39

A short section where we take a look back at alternative options for a couple of the images we have created

006 The Scottish Loch – 32:56

I am sure many of you who view this video may have heard the term expose to the right and what we are looking at in this start thumbnail fits that description, but what I am seeing tells me that I have optimum exposure here for any manipulation I care to make.

Expose to the right refers to the fact that we are not driven to get the thumbnail picture looking perfect on the LCD screen, but to squeeze as much light into our capture as we can. Expose to the right, capture an image that is better for manipulation.

The reason exposing to the right is beneficial is that we can always darken and reduce tone in our images, but we cannot go the other way quite so well. So those digital photographers who deliberately under-expose a little to avoid losing highlights, may not may not be following the best course. One false move and you go too far and struggle with photographic quality

007 The Camera Raw Filter – 11:50

A brief look at where the Camera Raw Filter may fit into Monochrome convertions of images already created in colour

008 Monochrome Landscape – 25:40
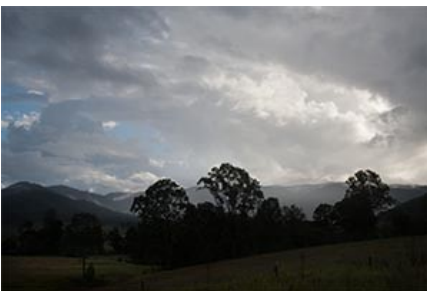
Here once again we have an image that has most of the ingredients within it make a good shot, but in colour?

Probably not, but as usual and always, it's a personal choice.

We have a good composition here, an interesting sky but less than perfect lighting conditions, but then this is typical of the sort of image we will shoot in these conditions.

A landscape where we have no water to reflect light and add interest into the foreground, so let's take a look at taking this image to a sparkling monochrome end result.

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Here are a few tips to producing Monochrome images.

Shoot Raw Images

Shoot your original images in RAW because it offers the most control in the post production phase of converting your color images into black and white. Shooting JPEG images will not prevent you converting to monochrome, but it will limit your options because JPEG images do not have the same latitude as Raw.

Avoid Harsh Lighting conditions

Generally speaking we should avoid overly harsh lighting conditions, those times when the contrast is too high for us to capture, but you will notice we said "generally". There are always some exceptions where those very conditions can create that Wow effect. Shooting digital pictures costs you nothing, so shoot plenty and take some risks.

Composition

Good composition is vital for black and white photography because if we are going to simplify the image by removing colour, we can lose the option to direct the viewers attention into our picture by using the colour.

Exposure

Exposure must be spot on, we don't want to make any exposure mistakes or we can easily push our image beyond what our image editors can cope with. In our own photography, we try to ensure that we capture as much light as we possibly can.

There was a saying back in film days with black and white photography. It said that you should expose for the shadows and allow the highlights to take care of themselves. We still do that because we feel it provides us with the best digital negative to manipulate. We have to watch those highlights, or they can get out of control and burn out. However, we do have an LCD screen and a histogram to view and keep us on track.

We use both the LCD and especially the histogram to tell us when we have the maximum amount of light captured, but without doing damage to the highlights.

Image Contrast
Our black and white images need good contrast to have the appeal that we look for. We call it that vital black and white sparkle and feel that many authors leave their monochrome images looking weak because the contrast is lacking. This is where shooting Raw will help, because we have a much greater latitude to bring out that contrast without blocking up shadows or blowing out highlights.

Landscapes
Black and white landscapes generally need a powerful sky and a bald white sky is just not going to cut it in monochrome photography. There are some things we can do about this in our image editors and we should keep that word "generally" in mind all the time. If in doubt, shoot it anyway.

The strongest quality which grabs the viewer's attention with a monochrome picture is its emotional power. Even if the picture is just of a vintage car or an old barn , there is an emotional charm which is hard to break down in words but universal to us all. In other words, we know it when we see it.

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