Seeing Silver

an introduction to black and white

Daniel j Gregory

Seeing Silver: an introduction to black and white by Dainel j Gregory

Silly Dog Studios LLC
Daniel J Gregory Photography
PO Box 435
Lanley, Wa 98260
www.sillydogstudios.art
www.danieljgregory.com

daniel@danieljgregory.com
info@sillydogstudios.art

rights

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"THE CAMERA IS MUCH MORE THAN A RECORDING APPARATUS, IT IS A MEDIUM VIA WHICH MESSAGES REACH US FROM ANOTHER WORLD."

ORSON WELLES

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INTRODUCTION

BLACK AND WHITE ARE THE COLORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY. TO ME THEY SYMBOLIZE THE ALTERNATIVES OF HOPE AND DESPAIR TO WHICH MANKIND IS FOREVER SUBJECTED”

– ROBERT FRANK

I started my photography back in the film days shooting both color and black and white. However, my first roll of black and white film created a new world unlike anything I'd ever seen. Seeing those negatives on the light table, I knew I was forever hooked. Black and white photography has such a power to weave simplicity and complexity together in the same image, creating something magical.

Why seeing silver? The beauty of the black and white image is not just in the blacks and whites. Some of my favorite black and white photos don't have a real black or real white, and they aren't even monochrome. So what is it that I love if it isn't the black and white? In the analog darkroom, silver halides are suspended in gelatin floating just above the paper surface. This silver, when exposed to light, is what makes the black and white image. When everything is done right, a silver tone and glow appears in the print. It truly is magical.

Even in digital, where the pigment inks have no real silver in them, prints can still create that magic. It isn't silver reflecting from the paper, but that magical glow still finds its way into a black and white print. It's the dimensionality in a rich black shadow, the silvery reflection in the wet concrete, or a silvery glow at the tops of a cloud. There is nothing like it.

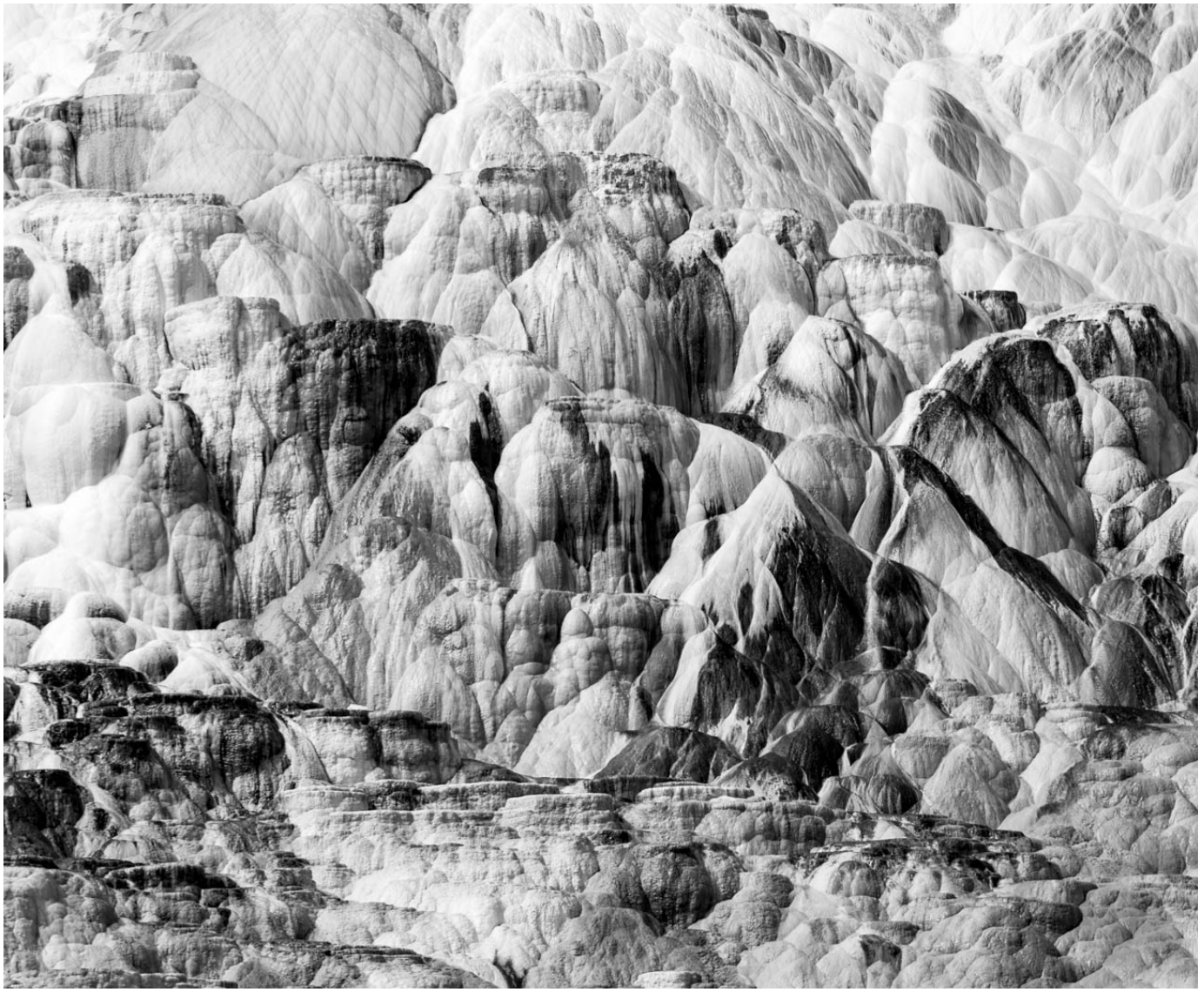
Some people ask me how I can say that there is silver in those digital prints when they lack the silver of analog material. Analog printing and digital printing are completely different. They're each their own process, own method, and have their own look. I wouldn't want them to be the same. I love each of them for what they are. Yet, I see the same magical tones show up in digital mono-

chromes, duotones, and dozens of other black and white digital prints. In the world of black and white, that silver wants to exist. So the short answer to how I know it's there is that I've learned to trust my eyes, and they see silver.

I continue to shoot in both color and black and white, amazed by the ability of the camera to capture the world in front of me. So I find myself chasing both color and black and white images. Yet deep down, I'm always drawn back to the world of black and white. I love the power and flexibility of digital workflows (and analog), which allow photographers to push, extend, and expand on the rich history of black and white photography. The software, cameras, and printers are all powerful tools that enable us to find our digital silver.

It doesn't matter if you're attempting to create a neutral black and white, split tone, duotone, or hand painting your photographs, there is something in black and white photography for everyone. I've learned that there is nothing secret about creating an excellent black and white photo. Sure, there are approaches and methods to help us create more compelling photos, but it's as much about learning to see tones as it is anything else.

This e-book was created to help you gain an understanding of the foundations of black and white photography. Not how to create a black and white photograph, but how to see, approach, and appreciate the black and white image, focusing on the subtle, nuanced tones, values, and forms in the image.



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WORKING IN BLACK AND WHITE

SEEING SILVER

ALL THAT I HAVE ACHIEVED ARE THESE DREAMS LOCKED IN SILVER.

PAUL CAPONIGRO

Seeing in black and white is different than seeing in color. The removal of color changes how we look at, respond to, and feel about our photographs. The intersections of line, tone, shape, and form become something new when color is removed. This removal of color creates a new world: something unlike the real world. In my own experience, these changes in seeing create an extraordinary experience with the camera that is different than when working in color.

Some people find it easier to work in color because they see in color. To them, color is so integrated into the composition, it is the only way they see. Others see better in black and white. They relate to the abstraction of tones more than the color. One isn't better than the other. They are just different ways to see and narrate. When I work in black and white, I find my seeing drifts in new and exciting directions. I find my sense of seeing wanders into abstraction, minimalism, contemplative places, and interpretive ideas outside the qualities of color and the real world. I get to make something new.

Photography has always been about capturing light. Ever since that first image by Niépce, which was captured in black and white, our definition of what makes a black and white image has evolved and changed. At first, we might think of black and white images as monochromatic. However, the more you work in black and white, the more you see. And at some point, you will start to see that black and white photography is full of color. Black and white's history is full of the rich blues of cyanotype, the warm depth of a platinum print, the browns of Van Dyke or Kallitypes, split toned images, duotones (images printed with two contrasting inks), and countless op-

Photography is humbling, it really is, and it really allows for me to atone for some of the missteps I've made throughout the course of my life.

Jamel Shabazz

tions for toning. Images toned in sepia, selenium, tea, and coffee all create a different look to expand and reflect the vision of the photographer. This flexibility empowers us to push the bounds of what defines a black and white image. The creative worlds of black and white images are truly unbounded.

I've been asked by clients, students, and other photographers if I see in black and white when making a black and white photograph. I do not. I would love to have that ability. What photographer wouldn't want to be able to turn that feature on and off in their brain? Until that magic button develops in my brain, I have had to learn and anticipate some of the ways that colors will change to tones when converted to black and white. That practice helps me know what some of the possibilities are with an image. It is part of the visualization of what is possible.

Although the early history of photography was dominated by black and white, color photography was finding its footings in the mid-1880s. In 1936, Kodak Corporate released the first tricolor film, Kodachrome in 35mm format, making color photography accessible to most photographers. Yet, even with the development of Kodachrome, and countless other color films since, and the billions of color photographs taken, photographers continue to embrace and work in black and white.

When I am teaching black and white photography, I sometimes get asked what I think of color photography. I love color. I love color photography. As I said, it is just different. I think there are some images in color that won't work or have the same impact in black and white. There are images by William Albert Allard, Jay Maisel,

Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman, Jamel Shabazz, and countless other photographers who work in color that have images I feel wouldn't have the same impact in black and white. The images that pull at our hearts and make us feel something do so because they are a reflection of the photographer's clarity of vision and imagination more so than the processing method.

I hear from a lot of digital photographers that covert to black and white only when the color is bad or doesn't work in an image. Black and white is not a consolation prize that is the result of trying to convert a lousy color photograph into something interesting. When I am out photographing, I make every effort to make a great photograph. Sometimes that is color and other times it is black and white. I try to decide if I am going to make a color or black and white photograph. In some cases, like portraits or some landscapes, I might want both

BLACK AND WHITE IS NOT A CONSOLATION PRIZE THAT IS THE RESULT OF TRYING TO CONVERT A LOUSY COLOR PHOTOGRAPH INTO SOMETHING INTERESTING.

color and black and white. In those cases, I try to make every effort to make sure I get the best capture possible to allow me to get the best image possible regardless of chromatic process.

Although our tendency might be to accept the reality and realism of color photography, the response and emotions evoked by a black and white image might make it more real to you than color. As you start to approach your own black and white photography, I hope you think about how to narrate your stories, how you feel, and how you want us to feel when we look at your images. The wonder of black and white photography isn't necessarily in the extremes of black and white. The magic might be in learning to see the power of subtle difference of grays, tones, shapes, forms, and values. It is in the smallest shifts of tones that make magic in a print. When we do our jobs, we might find that rather than working in the extremes, we see the real story and power of the image is in the glow and richness of the hidden silver.

THERE'S SOMETHING STRAN
AND-WHITE IMAGERY."

STEFAN KANFER

NGE AND POWERFUL ABOUT BLACK-

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ZONE SYSTEM

DODGING AND BURNING ARE STEPS TO TAKE CARE OF MISTAKES GOD MADE IN ESTABLISHING TONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

ANSEL ADAMS

What is the Zone System? If you work in black and white at some point, you will hear or read about the Zone System. The Zone System is a method for understanding how to create and understand black and white photos. The system was developed around 1940 by Fred Archer and Ansel Adams when they were working at the Art Center School in Los Angeles. The earliest foundations of the system were based on the sensitometry work of Huter and Driffield in the late 1800s. We won't dive too deeply into all of the Zone System here as the film development doesn't apply to digital, but the system is still a handy tool for working in black and white.

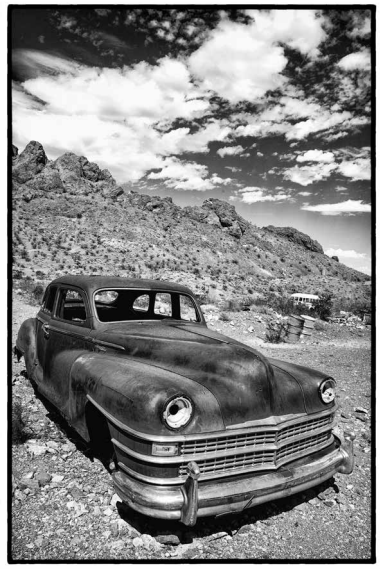
At the core of the Zone System is a precise methodology for understanding how the various tones in a given scene are translated in a black and white print. It specifically looks at how tones are defined and work in relationship with one another. Because of the way that the Zone System has been discussed, documented, and used over the years, there is a wide range of opinions about the value and use of the system as a method for creating black and white photographs.

Some people feel that this system is too restrictive. Others feel it is more complicated than needed for everyday shooting. There were/are some photographers who say that some great photographs are made without the Zone System so why use it? Others criticize the value of previsualization as a technique in making a picture. I often hear people talk about how old the system is and that it was developed for film and not digital, so it doesn't apply any longer. All of these are legitimate objections to the Zone System, and I completely understand why someone might have them. However, I think there is value in understanding the Zone System.

When I am teaching the Zone System, it doesn't matter if I am working with students shooting film or digitally, I break down the system into four central themes (the actual content of the topics might change between film and digital but the core concepts are the same):

1. Visualization (Pre- and Post-)
2. The Zones
3. Exposure
4. View prints

VISUALIZATION



Visualization is about anticipating what is possible. Based on the scene and camera settings, what sort of tones exist and what sort of print could you make? What are the shadows and highlights going to look like? How high-key or dark is the image? How are the tones in the image going to separate or collapse into each other? Pre-visualization is standing there in front of the scene or subject matter and asking: what do I think is possible in the final image? And then imagining that. It's that simple. The art is in trying to figure out what is possible before you click the shutter so that you make better choices behind the camera. Imagining what is possible doesn't mean that it has to be that way in the final image. It is just an option. The goal of this step is to make sure we make decisions behind the camera that provide the flexibility in the RAW file so that we can get the final image the way we imagine.

What is at the core of my work is, in essence, a mediation on being a human being.

Eli Reed

When shooting black and white film (or monochromatic digital camera), these decisions about contrast and tone are set at the moment the shutter clicks. A camera's meter wants to make everything neutral gray (18% or 12% gray) or Zone V. As you meter, it reads all the values against that average. Digital camera meters are really, really smart and read several points in the frame to get a good exposure, but they are still working off the average or middle gray.

The contrast in a scene is set by how far apart those tones are from middle gray. The contrast is made by differences in luminosity values or by changing the contrast with filters that block up parts of the light spectrum. With film, if you want to adjust contrast, you have to put fil-

ters in front of the camera and understand exposure and development decisions all before the click of the shutter. Yes, there are some things we can do in the darkroom to help after the fact, but all of the essential ingredients are baked into the negative at the moment of capture.

In my mind's eye, I visualize how a particular... sight and feeling will appear on a print. If it excites me, there is a good chance it will make a good photograph. It is an intuitive sense, an ability that comes from a lot of practice.

Ansel Adams

When working with digital images, we make some of those tonal decisions after the fact (assuming you are shooting in color and converting to black and white). We're able to use the digital darkroom to adjust the relationship of the tones after capture. Some decisions like the point of view, exposure, framing, saturation of colors, etc. are still done before the shutter click, but the core conversion of tones into black and white happens in post-production. Our color file in digital is our negative. We want to try to get the best negative possible.

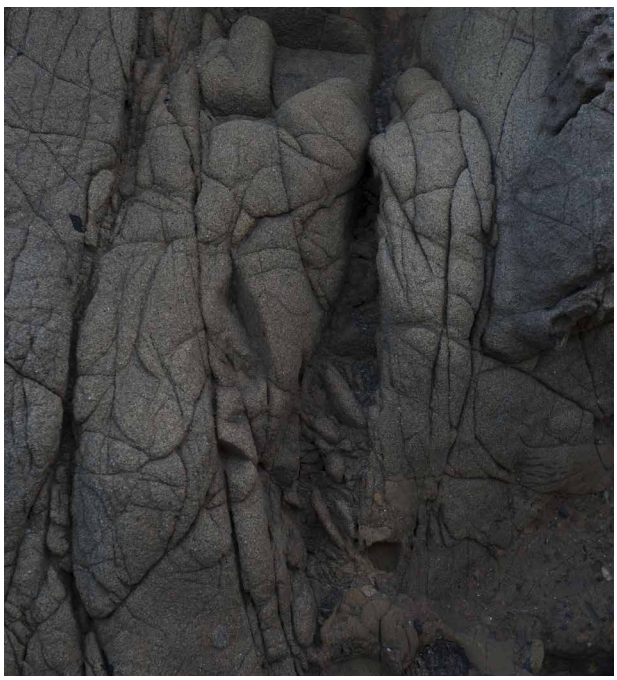
So, given this post-click flexibility, does this mean that we no longer need to previsualize? Taking the time to think about how an image might look when you photograph it will slow you down and help you make better choices behind the camera. Take the extra time to wonder—when converted, how will the tones look? What sort of exposure will give me the image that I imagine? Should it be darker exposure for more mood or lighter and more high key? Thinking about how the image should look will help you get the settings in the camera right.

POST VISUALIZATION

So what is post visualization? Post visualization is imagining the final image once you have the negative in hand. This is the visualization that happens at the monitor and in your editing software. In Lightroom, Capture One, or

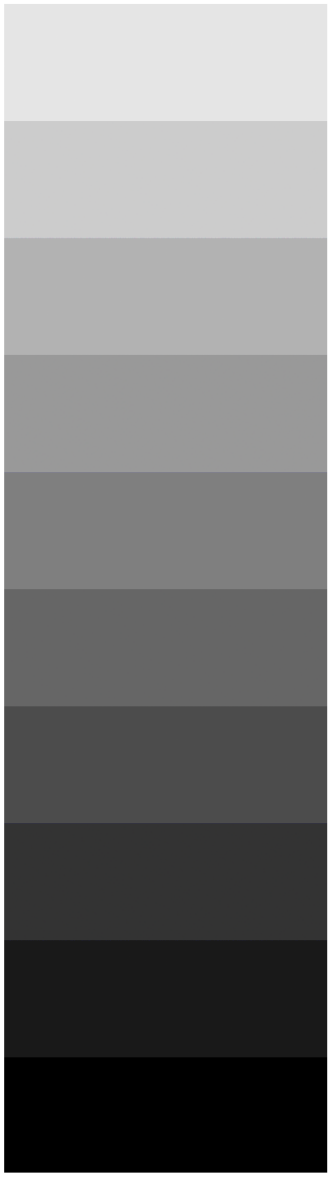
Photoshop, given what you see on screen, how do you edit the image?

One of the misconceptions in the Zone System is that it focuses a single myopic vision from camera to print. Visualization is about getting a RAW file that gives you



flexibility. Did you create a RAW file that pins you into only one interpretation, or can you manipulate the RAW file to make something more to your liking?

Visualization is all about trying to get the most out of every pixel that you created to get the image. This might be what you thought before the shutter clicked, or it might be something new that shows up on the screen. The combination of both pre and post visualization allows us to see in black and white, understand what is possible in black and white, and create what we love in



Zone X Paper White

Zone IX Tone only, near white

Zone VIII Bright white, light texture bright snow in sun

Zone VII Highlight with full texture

Zone VI Clear sky, lighter skin tones bright ojbects in shade

Zone V Middle gray

Zone IV dark foliage, avergage object in shade, darker skin tones

Zone III Shadow with full texture

Zone II first apperance of texture

Zone I Near pure black, slight tone shift

Zone 0 Pure black

black and white. Even if you don't visualize at the time of capture, at some point, you have to visualize the tones to come up with a finished image.

THE ZONES

All the tones and gradations between pure black and paper white are in the Zone System. The tones are divided into 11 distinct steps: each step represents a level of gray tone that will appear in a print.

So, what is so special about these eleven steps? Each zone in the Zone System is equal to one stop of exposure. A change in a single zone is equivalent to changing one stop of light. Moving from zone V up to zone VI means that there is now twice as much light. Moving from zone V down to zone IV is half the light. This is the same as if you moved an f/stop from f/8 to f/11 or f/5.6. Because these zones are directly related to exposure, it's easy to look at the exposure and gray values in a print and judge their relationship to the in-camera exposure.

The previous image is a zone ruler that shows all the zones and their corresponding values of grayscale that would appear in print. A wedding dress usually would appear in mid-high Zone VII and VIII. A fern under a tree in the forest might be in Zone III.

Each zone is important to the print, but there are zones that are specific to where full details and textures appear in the image. Zone III is the first zone to display full shadow detail. Zones 0 and I don't show texture, only tone, and Zone II shows tone with slight texture. Zone VII is the last zone to show full highlight detail. Zone VIII shows slight texture while IX and X are tone only

Going outside and meeting the challenge of taking what is and making it yours, that's what photography does for me. It's not the subject that interests me as much as my perception of the subject.

Roy DeCarava

A great photograph is one that fully expresses what one feels, in the deepest sense, about what is being photographed.

Ansel Adams

or paper white. When looking at an image, fully textured zones are III, IV, V, VI, and VII.

Zone 0 and I are often collapsed into a single zone because our eye is unable to distinguish the change in blacks at that level of luminosity. Zone X is paper white, and it's usually only shown in specular highlights. When Zone X is a large part of the image or at the edge of the frame, the viewer's eye can more easily leave the frame. For large bright areas, the lightest tone (high Zone IX) helps finish the print.

You make the decision about where the initial tone (the most important tone) will be placed in an image based on what and how you meter. After you decide on a tonal placement, the rest of the tones in the scene fall into place with respect to that initial tone placement.

With film, we expose for the shadows and develop for the highlights. In film, shadow detail is controlled by the exposure and highlights are controlled by the length of time in the developer. If we no longer have to expose for shadows and develop for highlights, how does this impact digital exposures and post-processing? When I think about my approach to shooting and printing, I still deal with those eleven zones. Those eleven zones are all the tones from black to white. I am still dealing with tonal relationships. I am still dealing with stops of light. I will be looking at a print that holds those 11 zones. We are still creating black, mid-tones, and white. The difference of a stop is still a stop. Deciding if something is light enough or dark enough is based on the relative tones that exist within the image. So even without film, I still find significant value in thinking about tones this way.

I get asked if we can do a direct translation of the Zone

System to digital. I do think that is possible, but it's not as simple as taking our zones from 0 to 255 and dividing them by 11 in saying that a zone is just 23 steps of the RGB tonal value. The advances and what digital printers can do today makes the rendering of textures and tones in shadows and highlights even higher and lower than they were five years ago. This could impact where zone III and VII render. Each camera has a dynamic range

that can impact the results.

We can, with some testing, figure out how to really split the RGB luminosity levels into those 11 zones. If you set up a simple test with your camera using a black, gray, and white card on a neutral background, and use a spot meter, you can see the range of your camera and its ability to separate tones. In many digital cameras, you can still render a little texture with four stops less light and details in 4-6 stops brighter. Each camera, like each film, will be a little different. Knowing the metered difference in the range of light tells you a lot about the tones in an image, what will be blown out highlights and shadows, and how to bracket if needed. The lower level and detail calibration for this level of conversion is not covered in this eBook, because it requires more space and is a different topic than the focus of this eBook.

It's easy to photograph light reflecting from a surface, the truly hard part is capturing the light in the air.

Walker Evans

The Zone System is all about getting the tones right in the image. For the digital photographer, thinking about how tones get created in the camera, manipulated in Lightroom and Photoshop, and translated to print will allow you to have more control and create more impactful images by understanding how to place and build those tonal relationships.

JUDGING THE PRINT

Probably the most significant place where the digital photographer can employ the Zone System is in evaluating their prints. When looking at one of your prints or at an image on the screen, think about how the tones relate to one another. What is their relationship to each other? Are the tones in the correct place? Should skin tones be

lighter or dark? Should the clouds be in a Zone VII for detail or VIII for a more wispy feeling?

If an image feels flat or lacks appropriate contrast, is it the entire image or part of the image? Do you need more contrast in the mid-tones or in shadow? Knowing where and how much of a change you need allows you to select better tools to perform the edit. Depending on the image, you might need a Curves luminosity adjustment, or maybe you need a Shadow/Highlight adjustment. Viewing the print and looking at how tones shift and change makes it easier to understand the level of editing you need to do.

The Zone System also gives us a vocabulary and language for judging prints. This language provides us with the ability to look at a print and say "This deep shadow lacks texture and should be a Zone III, not II." That means that the edit needs the equivalent of one stop of exposure change. Or, does it need to move a half stop, two stops, or three stops? The more detailed your language, the more precise and helpful your critique can be.

At first glance a photograph can inform us. At second glance it can reach us.
Minor White

The beauty of the Zone System's core is that it is about how tonal values in the world can translate onto a piece of paper. By thinking about tones, how they relate to one another, and how to edit them, we can use this approach to better understand what's possible and what works in a black and white image.

4

THE BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE

Okay, you made me sit through the Zone System when really what I want to do is create cool black and white images. So what sort of things do I need to look for when I'm out there that can make for a magical black and white photograph?

I can't tell you exactly what you'll need to create your magical photograph, but there are some elements to keep at the top of your mind that do tend to help most photographers create great black and white prints.

A photograph is neither taken nor seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you. One must not take photos.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Just because you've chosen to remove color in favor of black and white doesn't remove the responsibility to pay attention to all the other elements that make a good photograph. Gestures, framing, the point of view, and other compositional elements are all still critical to the image. You still need to think about the foreground and background. You still need to think about the depth of field, shutter speeds, and all the other in-camera requirements. The removal of color often makes the other elements even more critical in the composition.

Personally, I don't think there is anything that can't be successfully photographed in black and white. As I mentioned earlier, I do believe some images require color or work better in color, but that doesn't mean you can't photograph any subject or subject matter in black and white. When I'm focusing on my black and white work, some things jump out as being stronger elements to put into the frame to make it more interesting. Sometimes it's a subtle awareness of these elements that make the image happen. As you begin to explore your own black and white work, I'm sure that you will find certain elements, objects, and compositions that really work in black and white.

SHAPES

Most photographs are a collection of shapes. Even simple photographs harboring geometric designs of triangles, circles, and squares often draw our eyes and attention. When these shapes are properly placed or repeated in the frame, they can create an even more pleasing photograph. When looking at black and white photographs, we can often combine the use of the shapes and their total values to help a viewer understand the depth and how to read and interpret the composition. It's not about finding the right shape or that there is a correct shape: instead, it's about seeing both the shape and the size of the shape in relation to the other forms that appear in the photograph that make it interesting.

> I AM. . .INTERESTED IN THE FORMAL LANGUAGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY: HOW COLOR, SHAPE, SCALE, PLACEMENT, AND JUXTAPOSITION BECOME THE ELEMENTS THROUGH WHICH MEANING ITSELF TAKES FORM." SARAH CHARLESWORTH

One of the most critical aspects of using shape and form in your photographs is making sure that each shape can a hold the space that it is occupying in the composition. As objects touch one another, if their luminosity values are too close to each other they will merge and become a single object. In some cases, this might be of visual interest. However, in another image, this could cause the image to fall apart because the various elements appear

Photography helps people to see.

Berenice Abbott

as one. As these objects build relationships, it is essential to make sure that you focus on how a viewer will move from one object to the next object within the frame. You should use these shapes as a method for moving and

keeping the viewer in the frame.

It's often easier for me to see abstract shapes and forms, but I find that I enjoy photographing and working with the more geometric repetitions. As you begin to work with shape in black and white, you will find that some natural shapes and designs easily come to your sense of seeing. Something that I keep in mind is that there is interest in all shapes and forms, and I try not to overly rely on one or two shapes out of habit.

PATTERNS

Similar to shapes are patterns. I define patterns as shapes that repeat in the frame. In some cases, these might be obvious, like a series of rectangular widows in a building. Other times the patterns might be more subtle, like triangles in a landscape formed by both man-made and natural elements. If you're going to use the pattern as part of the frame, don't be afraid to put it foremost and center. Use the repetition of the lines, shapes, and forms to really drive the viewing experience.

LIGHT

Light is the great giver and taker away in photography. Without light, there is no photograph. Seeing the light is probably the most important skill a photographer can develop. Luckily, the skills you already have to see light are 100% applicable to black and white work.

When thinking about light in black and white, I tell my students to be particularly aware of how the light moves across objects, textures, and shapes. Does the light move and lead our eye into or out of the frame? Does the light

build textures or take them away? Does the light create soft shadows or hard, deep black recesses? Does the light beam across the sky or fall flat like a blanket over the scene?

How you respond to the light, capture the light, and edit the light will dictate how the tones appear in the final image. I don't think there is better or worse light. Every type of light presents a set of challenges, interpretations, and set of emotions it can envoke. The focus should ulti-

mately be on how you want that light to make the image feel. Hard light will be more dramatic with sharper, jagged shadow lines, deeper black, and more contrast. Soft light will be smoother and have very little contrast. Be mindful of the light and the impact on the subject matter and subject of the frame. Appreciating what the light gives you will allow you to make the right decisions behind the camera.

LINES

Lines are one of the most common elements in a photograph for leading the viewer's eye. A line can lead

the eye through the frame, create energy by its length, shape, and position, or stop the viewer at a given point within the frame. In some cases, a line can inadvertently lead the viewer out of the frame. On the surface lines seem like an easy and simple compositional tool; however, they're actually complex compositional elements that further our experience and movement within an image.

Lines that have strong, hard, or jagged edges, sharp turns, or that appear as multiple short lines create higher energy and tension. Lines that are softer, wider, or that have gentle turns and bends create a quieter response. It's not just about leading the viewer through the image with a line, but it is also about how we want them to feel and what they should see when they follow the line.

We use lines in conjunction with contrast to help the viewer experience more within the frame. I find when looking at black and white images there is a compounding effect of a high contrast tonal value used on a strong leading line that really draws the eye. For a more nuanced approach, I would encourage you to sometimes consider splitting those two elements. Use contrast and your leading lines as two different and distinct approaches in the composition. Using the relationship of space, form, and tone in conjunction with but distinct from a strong line can give the viewer multiple ways to experience all aspects of the photograph.

I felt that the camera grew an extension of my eyes and moved with me.
Ilse Bing

As you think about lines in the image, it's not just the one line back to a vantage point like we often see in an example in a textbook. Lines are about how every line works and intersects with every other line or shape. If you look at your black and white picture and follow only one line, never looking at anything else, then you've missed the majority of the photograph.

NEGATIVE SPACE

Negative space is the area in an image that is empty of subject matter. Although it is empty, it still has shape, form, tone, and geometry in the image. Negative space can be used to create or disrupt the balance in a photograph. The negative space can create balance when there is something of similar or even different size in the frame. Negative space can help us focus on the subject matter

But I have learned over the years that all I can do is reach for something difficult - try to get the colors right and the negative space, the angle of the light. And if a few people can see it, that has to be enough.

Molly Gloss

by removing distractions. Negative space isn't just dark spaces: it can also be light areas as well. Sometimes a wide open empty sky acts as negative space just like a deep shadow of an alleyway can be negative space. Some of the most interesting black and white photographs play with large volumes of negative space and high contrast processing. These images work because the absence of detail allows us to focus in on specific elements within the frame, or at times, to focus on nothing but the negative space.

CONTRAST

Contrast is one of the first things we respond to when looking at a black and white photograph. Many people are initially drawn into a higher contrast black and white

image. We love those rich, deep blacks and popping whites.

Contrast is the spread or difference of tones from the blackest black to whitest white. A high contrast image has mostly deep blacks and bright whites. A normal contrast has elements that are black, white, and middle gray tones. A low contrast image has fewer and often mostly middle gray tones.

. . .the subject of the picture is always more important than the picture. . .

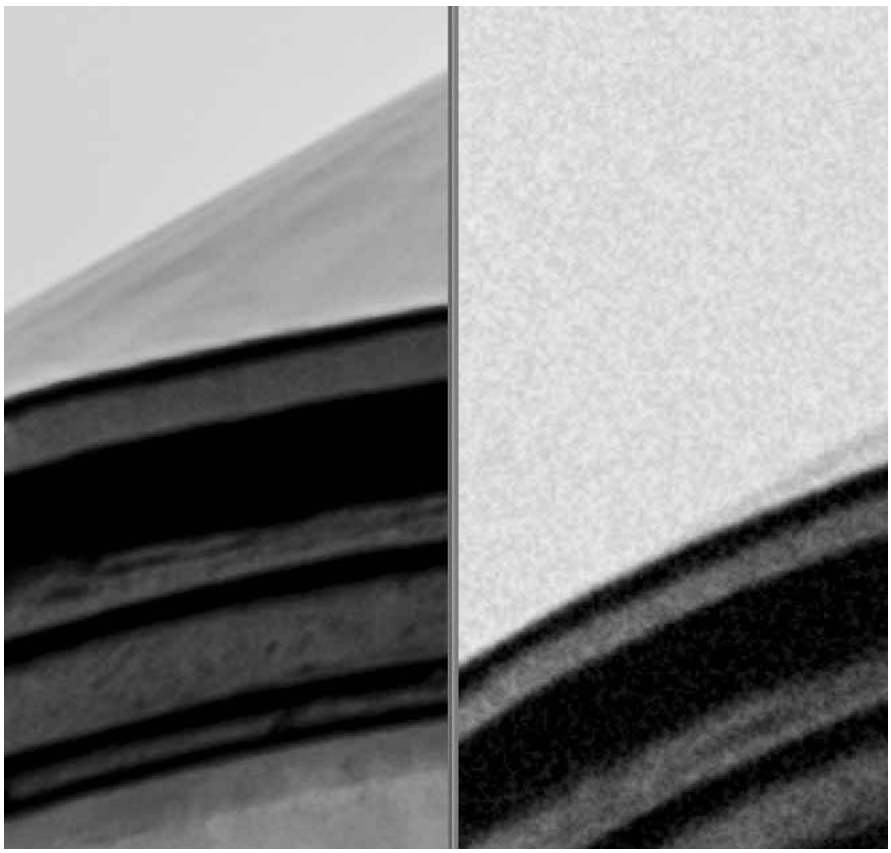
Diane Arbus

The biggest mistake I see people make who are just starting to work in black and white is that they attempt to make everything high contrast. Higher contrast creates tension and energy in the frame. The higher the contrast, the more tension. The softer the contrast, the more relaxed and easy the image becomes. The challenge for the black and white photographer is to figure out how to use the total contrast in the image to convey the emotional and feeling elements of the composition and not fall into a habit. If you want an image to feel quiet and meditative, you might use a softer contrast. If you are photographing something with a lot of energy, such as sports or action shots, you might lean toward higher contrast to give us a sense of what it was like to be in the action. The thing I try to avoid is when all of the tones will appear exactly the same, which can make for a muddy and flat image. Learning to see those tones will allow you to make some decisions behind the camera to ensure that you get the contrast and emotional impact you want in the final image.

GRAIN

When we look at older black and white images, often we can see the grain from the film in the print. Grain is

the silver halide that captured the light in the negative. When enlarged, the grain from the negative will start to appear in the print. To a digital photographer, it might look sort of like a dimensional type of luminous noise.



Digital grain simulating Ilford 3200 film from 35mm camera with non accutate developer

I think it is important to consider grain in editing. We have spent decades looking at black and white prints with grain in them. Our current visual IQ has trained us to see grain as normal in the black and white image.

As I mentioned, when working digitally, grain is analogous to noise. Although different, they can look similar. This means you can often shoot at higher ISOs generating noise and using some of the noise as part of the print.

In high ISO images where I like the appearance of grain in the image, I might edit out around 60-70% of the noise and then add in digital grain using a tool like RealNoise or the Grain slider in Lightroom. The combination of a little noise and grain makes the prints look closer to a high-grain silver gelatin print. This technique also helps mask some of the impacts of noise in the shadows, adds perceived sharpness, and balances the appearance of the grains in the highlights of the print.

TEXTURE

Texture is one of the first things that draws my eye when shooting black and white. The rusted metal car on the side of a road, the peeling paint and weathered wood on an old barn, or the soft cotton-candy puffs of a cumulus cloud all draw me in.

The things that are close to you are the things you can photograph the best. Unless you photograph what you love, you are not going to make good art.

Sally Mann

The textures of a scene are heavily impacted by the type of light. Flat light can eliminate the texture on an object, and hard side light can make it appear too contrast-y and strong. So part of working with texture is also understanding how to use the light to get the level of structure and tone appropriate for the texture that you're seeing.

Although some black and white images work as nothing more than a study of texture, in other cases texture works to help us understand other elements such as time and distance. In many cases, I like to think of texture as a character actor. Texture has an essential role but isn't the star; however, without texture, the image lacks the support necessary to be interesting.

If you love texture, focusing solely on textures can make for amazing images. The shifts of light, subtle variations in depth, changes from hard to soft edges, and shifts in tone can make for a stunning black and white image.

TONAL VALUES

At the heart of the black and white photograph are the tones in the image. Creating a great black and white photograph is not about having all the tones but about having the right tones in the right place for the image. When learning to shoot in black and white and process black and white prints, it can be hard to understand how to see and edit these tones. Your mind will repeatedly ask you things like: "How can a red apple and a green apple both be the exact same gray tone?"

When working digitally, it's easier in some ways, because we can adjust those tones after the fact in the digital darkroom, but understanding what works and

doesn't work in capture can make editing easier to do. As a general rule of thumb, the more saturation a color has, the more control you have to adjust the tonal values in post-production. Also, the variation of luminosity on the image will give you some added control. Using a combination of luminosity masking, saturation masking, and color ranges in post-production will provide you with a better level of control to edit the tones to make them appear exactly has you want them to appear.

You can also shift tonal values by adding tints and tones to the image. Using duotones, split toning, color grading or ohther colorizing method in a monochrome image can produce amazing results which can shift how we respond to the tones in an image.

5

DIGITAL TIPS AND IDEAS

WHILE THERE IS PERHAPS A PROVINCE IN WHICH THE PHOTOGRAPH CAN TELL US NOTHING MORE THAN WHAT WE SEE WITH OUR OWN EYES, THERE IS ANOTHER IN WHICH IT PROVES TO US HOW LITTLE OUR EYES PERMIT US TO SEE.

DOROTHEA LANGE

This eBook focuses on approaching and and thinking in black and white as it relates to both photographing an image and viewing the final print. However, I do want to spend a little time talking about some of the digital tools and techniques that I use in my black and white images. We won't cover a full black and white workflow, but I hope that these tips and ideas will give you some ways to enhance your editing of the black and white image.

WHITE BALANCE

When I'm teaching my Introduction to Black and White digital classes, I'm amazed how nearly every student ignores the white balance tool when they convert to black and white. When I ask about it, they all have the same response. "I am working in black and white. Why does the white balance matter when there is no color?"

If a good color image with good color white balance was required for converting to black and white, then it would matter. However, it's actually not necessary to set the right white balance for color when converting. If you edit the white balance for black and white and then covert back to color, it looks horrible.

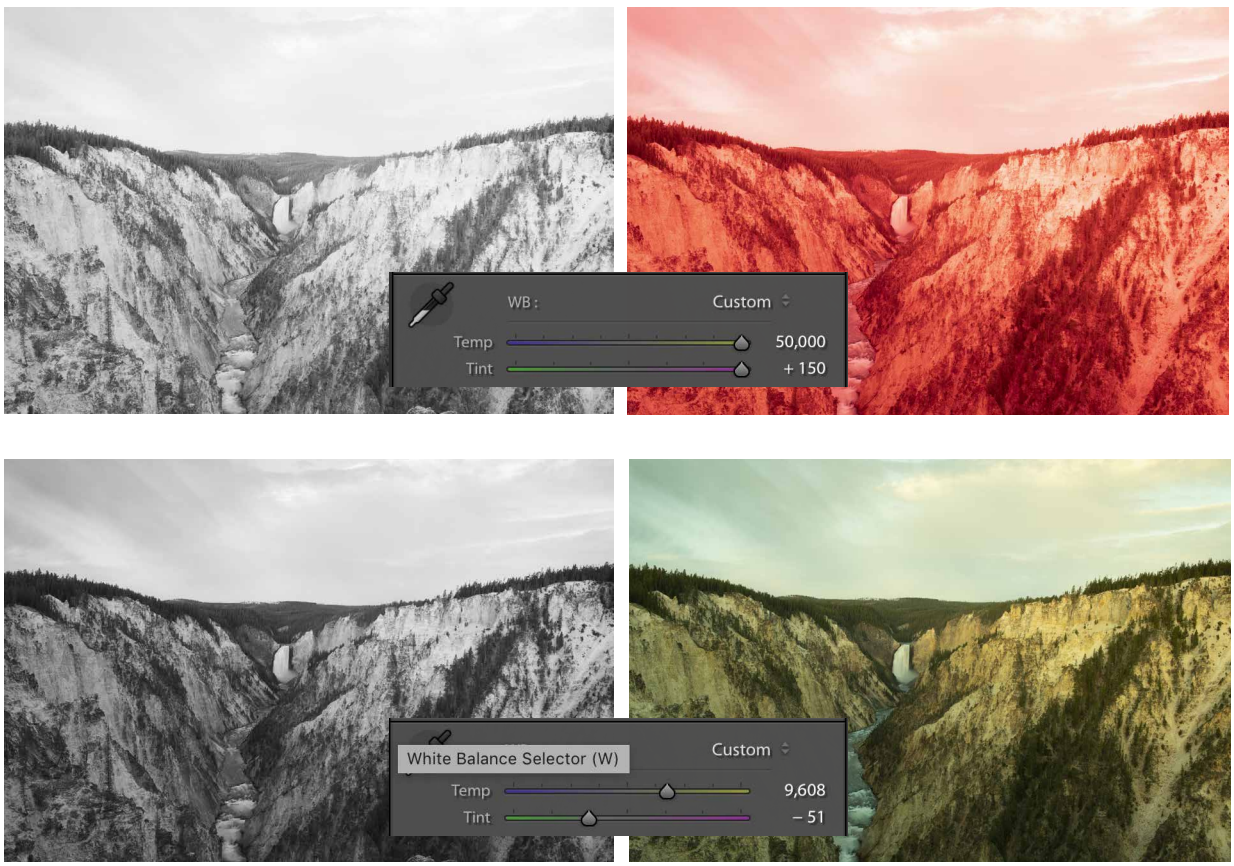
A photograph is neither taken nor seized by force. It offers itself up. It is the photo that takes you. One must not take photos.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Working with black and white is about getting tonal separation. When you adjust the white balance, you are changing how those colors shift, develop cast, drift in saturation, and expand or contract in luminosity. Those changes dramatically impact the conversion to black and white. I will often make a quick conversion in Lightroom or Camera RAW into black and white and then adjust the white balance sliders. All I'm looking for is the best starting point: the point where I have the best separation

White Balance Impact on Images converted to black and white.

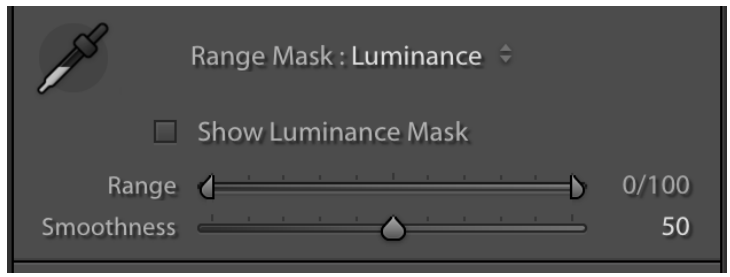
of tones to my vision. Where the skin tones look good, mid tones separate, and I feel like I have the most flexible edit possible. In the following example, you can see how different the same image appears with the different white balance settings.



RANGE MASK AND LUMINOSITY MASK

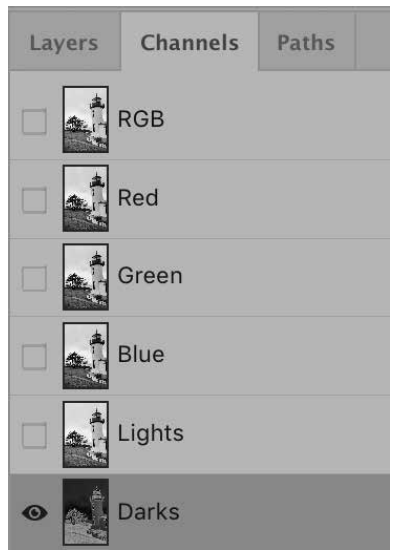
As we've been discussing, black and white photography is all about tones and tonal ranges. When we return to the Zone System, knowing that something is in one zone and we want to put it in a higher or lower zone makes the editing easier. The challenge is knowing which tool works the best for the desired result. For me, I usual-

ly start off my edits for an image by thinking about adjusting the luminosity range. I like to use the Luminosity Range Mask in Lightroom/CR or a luminosity mask in Photoshop to make selective edits to specific tonal values in the image. By focusing the edits based on luminosity values, I'm able to make edits to a given tone range and not worry about impacting the rest of the tones. .



In Lightroom, create a mask with a gradient or brush tool. Once the mask is created, at the bottom of the tool panel, the Range Mask option will be active. Select the Luminance option and check theShow Luminance Mask.

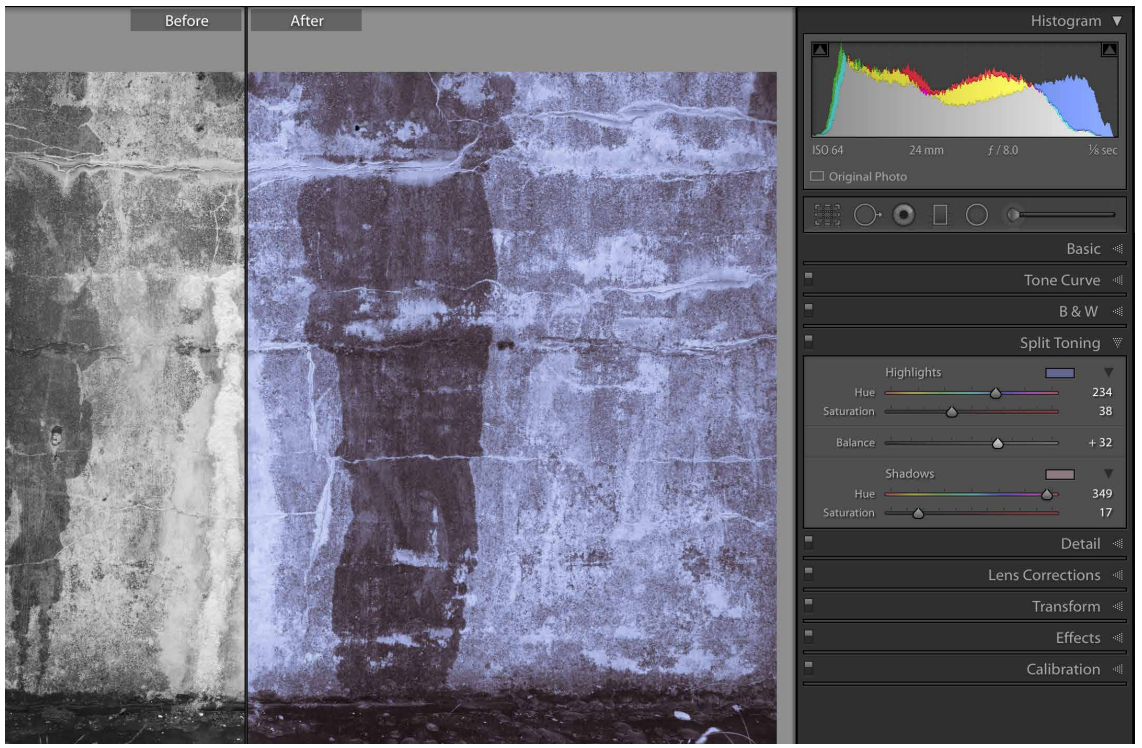
Using the Range slider adjust the tones being included in your mask. The left slider is the shadow value, and the right is the highlight. For example, to select only the mid-tones, you would move shadow slider to 30 and the highlight slider to 70. The smoothness slider varies the transition between the selected and non selected tones. Uncheck Show Luminace Mask and make your edits.



In Photoshop, you can use a luminosity mask in conjunction with any adjustment. To create a luminosity mask, in the Channels palette, Command (Mac) or Ctrl (PC) click on the thumbnail of the channel. This will generate a luminosity selection. You can now use that selection on a new mask or save that selection as a channel for use later. You can then continue to refine your selection by restricting the selection using Command+Shift (Mac) or Ctrl+Shift (PC). You can also invert a Luminosity mask to reverse the selected range of tones.

SPLIT TONE

If you want to tint or tone your photograph, you need to add color back in to either the entire image or specific tonal ranges of the image. Split toning is putting two or more tones into a print in different luminosity levels. The most common way to split tone is to tint the highlights one color and the shadows a different color. You



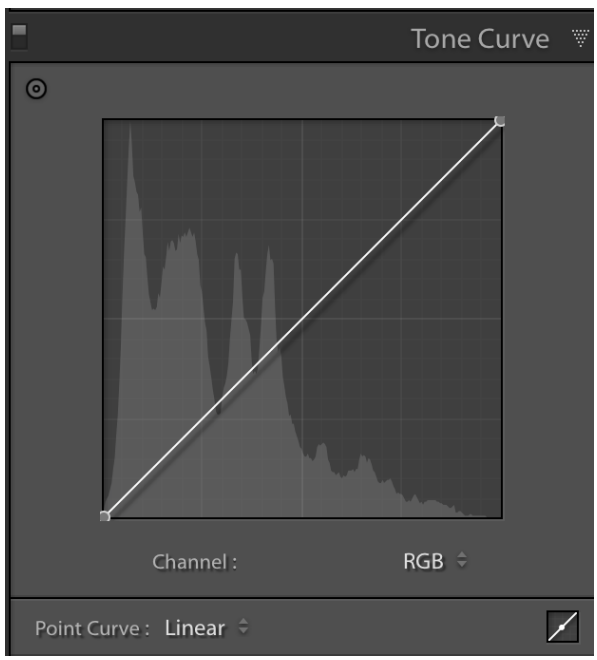
can then work to set the strength and balance of the effect. You can also use split toning to just add in a tint on a specific tonal range in the photograph. You might, for example, want to warm the highlights because you are printing on a cooler, more natural paper.

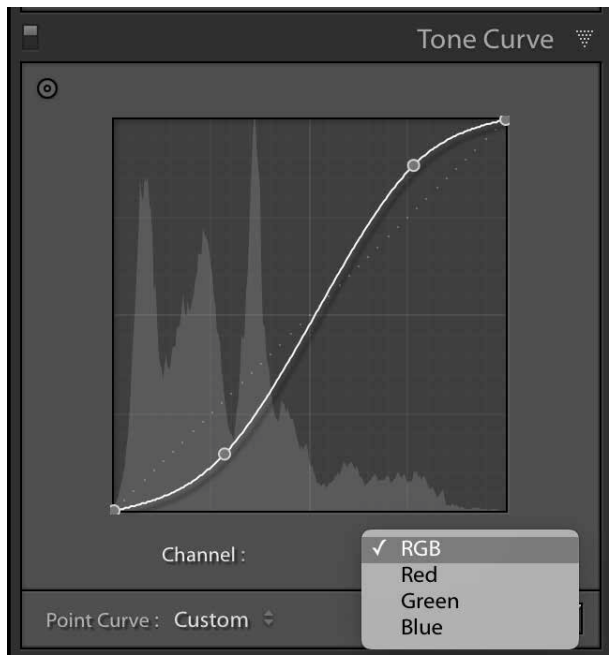
You can easily split tone in Lightroom using the Split Toning panel. In Photoshop a Color Balance adjustment

layer or duotone are easy options for split toning.

TONE CURVE

Curves are heavily used by most Photoshop users, but I'm surprised by how many Lightroom users avoid the Tone Curve panel. The curve panel allows you to have incredibly finessed control over the luminosity in the image. Curve adjustments will enable you to focus the adjustment into a small range of luminosity, where the sliders or Levels impact a larger part of the image or even the entire image.

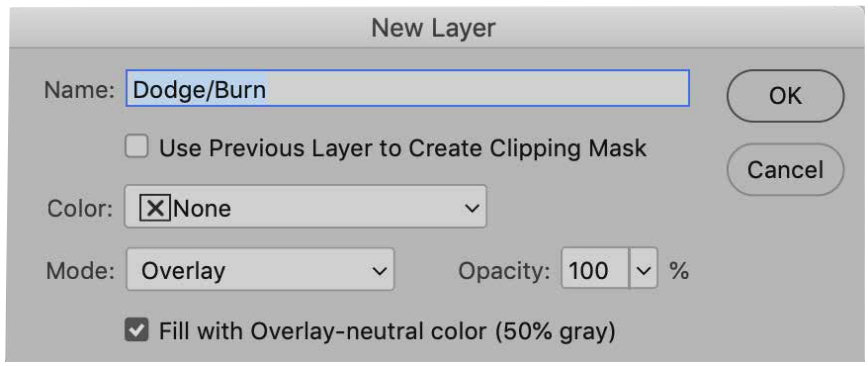




When you work with the RGB curve, you're able to adjust the various tones in the print. When you switch to the RED, GREEN or BLUE channel, you can use the tone curve to apply a tint or tone into the overall image or a tiny tonal area of the image.

OVERLAY DODGE AND BURN

In Photoshop, one of my favorite techniques to lighten or darken part of an image is to use a 50% gray fill layer with an Overlay or SoftLight blend mode. You can then use a brush with either black or white to paint onto the layer to lighten or darken parts of the image. If you want to adjust the strength of the effect, you can use the Fade Brush Tool from the **Edit** menu to adjust the last brush stroke after you paint it.

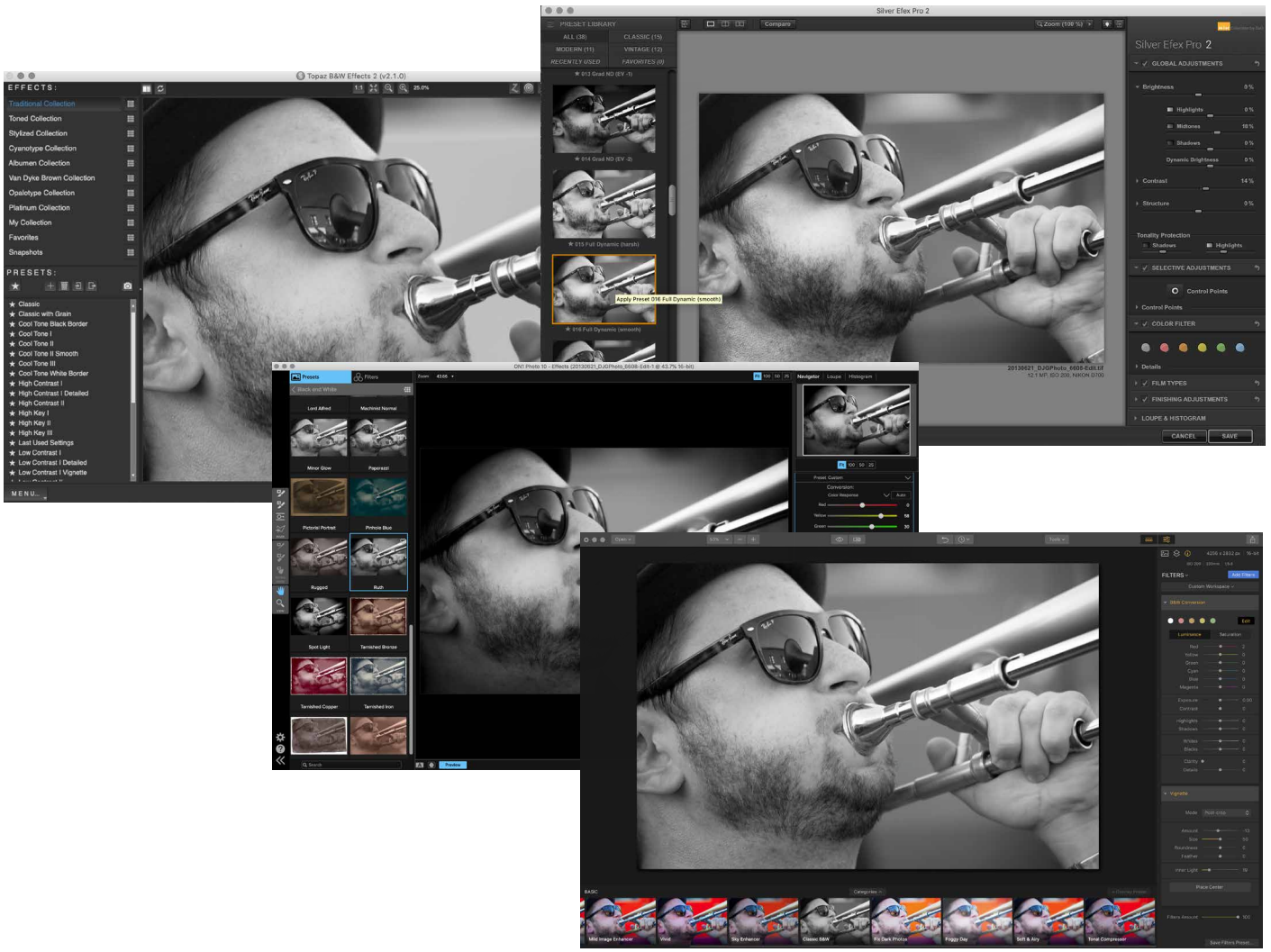


MULTIPLE CONVERSIONS AND THRID-PARTY TOOLS

In the digital darkroom, there are dozens of ways to make a black and white photograph. Each way offers a subtle difference in tones based on how the conversion is made. It's often worth the extra few minutes to make more than one conversion and see which technique provides the best starting point. If you try camera RAW/Lightroom and aren't happy, don't be afraid to try BW adjustment layers, Channel mixing, or a third-party plugin to convert the image.

Other programs such as DxO's Silver Efex, Topaz's BW Effects, Skylum's Luminar are all places to start your black and white conversion process. Each has their own look and feel so you might find one work better than the other.

I do caution people about overly relying on plugins for your work if the plugin becomes unavailable or stops working in the future you might be stuck with images that no longer can be appropriately edited. So consider all the consequences when you adopt just a plugin workflow.



6

PRINTING

FINE ART PRINTS CREATED BY THE ARTIST, OR THE ARTIST'S COLLABORATOR, ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEY BEST REPRESENT THE ARTIST'S VISION. IMAGES DISPLAYED ON DIGITAL DEVICES ARE SUBJECT TO THE NON-UNIFORM NATURE OF DIFFERENT DISPLAYS AND THEY MAY APPEAR RADICALLY DIFFERENT THEN THE ARTIST INTENDED.

MAC HOLBERT

Many modern-day pigment ink and dye printers will produce wonderfully rendered black and white prints. Still, I often hear from photographers when they first start printing in black and white that the images just don't look right or as they expect. They think the images look flat, or have a strange color cast to them, or just don't match what they see on the screen.

In this section, we're going to focus on some high-level concepts, decisions, and steps you can take in your workflow to get better prints from your own printer or from a printing service. Printing in black and white has enough content to be its own book, so here we'll cover just some of the basics to get you started.

COLOR MANAGEMENT

You still need to work with a color managed workflow even when working in black and white. We are working with color to produce the black and white, so managing that translation is still critical. You should always calibrate your monitor. It doesn't matter if you use a Datacolor or X-Rite device. They both produce great results.

You still need good ICC profiles, and you need to work in a suitable color space. While black and white photos all have essentially the same luminosity values in the various color spaces, I recommend that you work in ProPhoto or AdobeRGB (1998). Because we are working with colors that become tones, having the most color available in the process just makes the most sense to me. I also try to work with 16-bit files over 8-bit as much as possible. I want the full benefit of the 65,536 tones of the larger bit space. You need a good printer ICC profile

to make sure that if you are toning, duotone printing, or other color-based black and white method that you are able to get reliable and repeatable results.

PAPER CHOICE

The choice of paper can have one of the most significant impacts on how we experience viewing a print. There are so many papers on the market that claim to be great for black and white prints. In my years of testing papers, I've found dozens of papers that I feel work for black and white images and other leave something to be desired.

When I'm working on my final prints, I work with fine-art papers, which I define as alpha-cellulose or rag-based

papers. I recommend that most photographers who are printing work with both a matte paper and some variation of a luster (glossy) paper. Some images will work better on a matte paper, and others will benefit from the contrast of a luster surface.

When thinking about how my images will appear, I'm focusing on a number of critical elements. It doesn't really matter what the specifications are when picking the paper. What matters is this: after printing your images on the paper, does the paper render the image properly?

I consider and compare the following things when looking at papers:

Texture. What does the paper feel like? Some papers have more tooth and texture than other papers. This texture can shift how the eye experiences the edges, colors, and contrast of the image. A smoother texture can help hold subtle gradients versus a toothy paper. Does the texture enhance or detract from the viewing experience?

Archivability. How long the paper will last is an essential aspect of fine art prints. Most modern pigment-based printers have inks that will last 100 to 200 years when printed on archival papers. You want to make sure that your prints will last and not fade. You can learn about the archival quality of most papers from the manufacturer's website or from the Wilhelm-Research website.

Thickness. Paper thickness is also an indicator of the quality of the paper. Matte and fine art papers will often be heavier than glossy papers. The construction of the paper and how the surfaces are prepared to accept the ink will determine the thickness. Most papers are

Some of my photographs have always been a mystery to me in terms of how I arrived at them. Even with the technical ability to produce fine prints, I am hard put to know how it happens, yet unless technique and materials are seriously investigated and experienced, I see that moving statements are seldom made.

Paul Caponigro

measured in grams per square meter (GSM, also seen as g/m2) or bond weight. The larger the GSM or bond number, the heavier the paper. Most fine art papers are between 200 and 300 GSM. However, there are some beautiful art papers (Japanese rice paper, for example) that are extremely thin. So don't just use thickness as the sole indicator of quality. Thickness is also a critical factor in opacity or how see-through the paper is.

When you make a print, you are making an art object. You can't hang a scan on the wall.

George Tice

Contrast. The maximum black in a print is known as D-max, and the brightest point is the D-min. The difference between these values is the contrast range. Most papers have a contrast range between 50:1 and 200:1.

Surface. The surface of the paper is one of the more common options people consider. Do you want a glossy, luster, or matte surface? The glossier the surface, the deeper the blacks and the steeper the contrast curve. However, matte papers offer a richness that is different in quality and nuance from glossy. Most people end up with both a glossy and a matte paper or two. Being familiar with both gives you more options for what you ultimately want the print to look like.

D-Max. D-max is the maximum value of black. The higher the number, the deeper the black. In the analog darkroom we saw blacks in the 2.3-2.35 range, and with recent papers and inks, we see value in the 2.5-2.6 range. This doesn't mean that the digital paper combinations are better: they're just different than analog. The shift is giving us some added flexibility in our printing.

Brightness. How bright is the paper? Is it super white and bright or is it a little dull? Most good papers are +90 in their brightness values. You can also look for papers with and without optical brightener agents (OBAs).

OBAs are added to papers to make them brighter than the paper base. Some people don't like them in their prints and express concern about the effect on the archival quality of the prints with OBAs. For others, the archival testing results have made this a non-issue. OBAs tend to have a slight blue cast to them that can affect the quality of the cool and warm tones in print.

> PHOTOGRAPH LIKE A DOCUMENTARIAN BUT PRINT LIKE A PAINTER.
> TODD HIDO

Paper Color. Some papers are bright white and other have a warm cream base. When looking at the print, how does the warmth of the paper impact the expression? Should it be starker and have more contrast or be softer and warmer?

I have used many papers over the years printing in black and white. I personally use a number of the Hahnemuhle Photo Rag, Photo Rag Baryta, and Photo Rag Ultrasmooth papers, Canons Rag Photographic, and the Epson Legacy line of papers. If I were going to give you one piece of advice, it would be to try out several and then really settle on one or two papers. Get to know what that paper is capable of and what it can and can't do with your images. Having a deep understanding of the papers you use will make you a better photographer. Knowing your gear is key behind the camera. This is no different.

THE FINE PRINT IS MUCH MORE THAN A
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IS THE CLEAREST, MOST DIRECT AND POW
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CHRISTOPHER BURKETT

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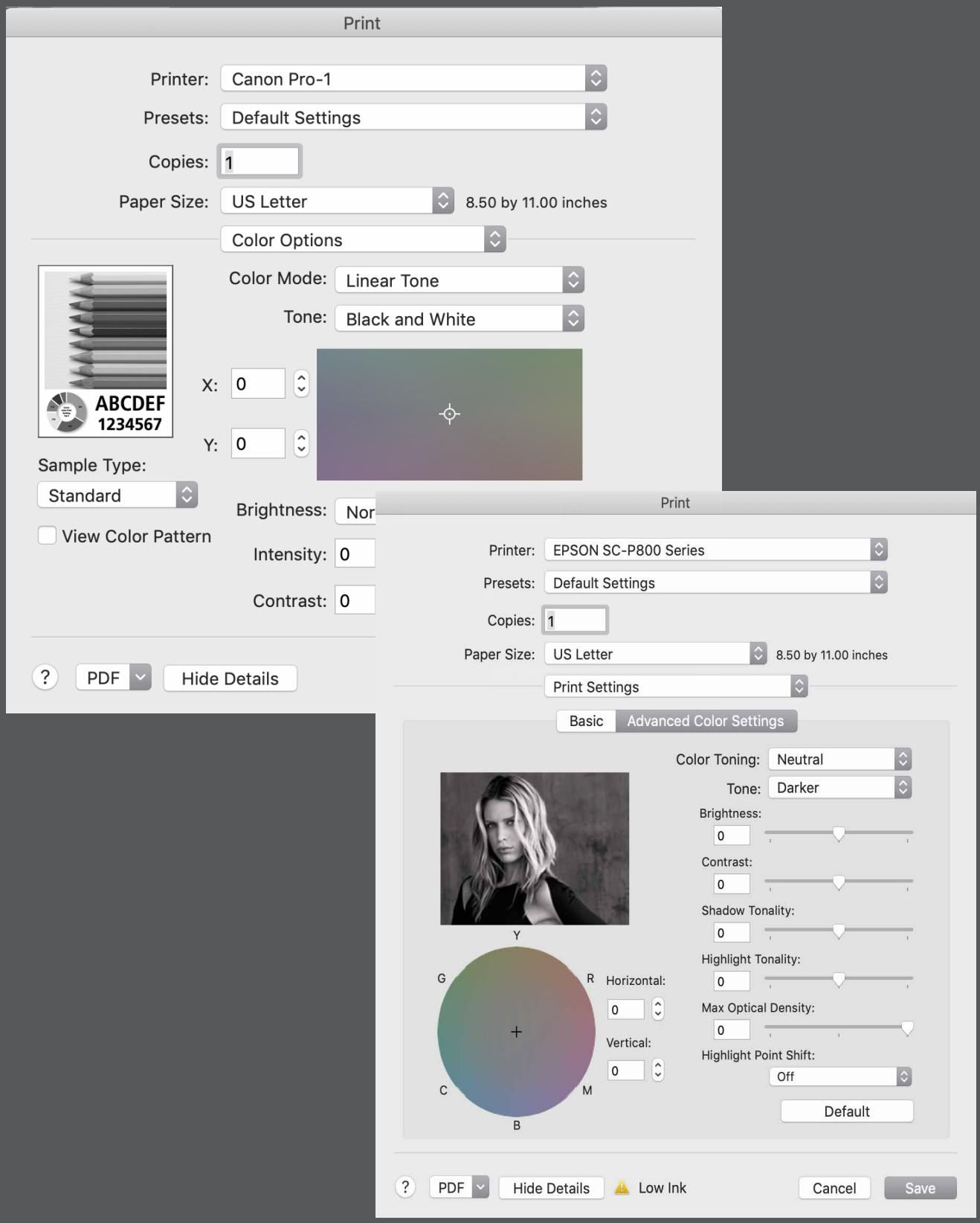
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Color Options
Color Mode: Linear Tone
Tone: Black and White
ABCDEF
1234567
X: 0
Y: 0
Sample Type:
Standard
View Color Pattern
Brightness: Nor
Intensity: 0
Contrast: 0
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Hide Details
Print
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Presets: Default Settings
Copies: 1
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Tone: Darker
Brightness: 0
Contrast: 0
Shadow Tonality: 0
Highlight Tonality: 0
Max Optical Density: 0
Highlight Point Shift:
Off
Y
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R
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Horizontal: 0
Vertical: 0
Default
PDF
Hide Details
Low Ink
Cancel
Save

Knowing what your printer and paper combination will produce makes it that much easier to get that perfect image onto the wall.

PRINTER SETTINGS

When I'm working with a neutral black and white print—meaning no tinting, duotone, split toning, or coloring—I have the printer manage the color. I think both Epson and Canon have done amazing work engineering into the driver the ability to print great black and white images. Both have spent tons of money and time engineering into their print drivers a monochrome printing engine. This printing engine handles the translation and printing of the black and white tones outside the use of an ICC profile. When working with an ICC profile, a neutral print will often have a slight color cast. This is caused by the fact that the ICC profile is all about creating a color image and not neutral gray images. As such, it attempts to make the gray tones out of gray and color ink.

This monochrome option means that the print driver is going to utilize the blacks and grays in the printer and map the tonal values accordingly. The print based on the print driver settings is able to vary the volume and inks used to generate the gray tones. In my experience, you get a more vibrant natural black and white print. While not the same, the black and white option in the print driver sort of acts like a monochrome RIP print driver.

It's the last 5% in quality that separates the good prints from the great prints.

John Paul Caponigro

Both Canon and Epson have some features in the monochrome mode that allow you to edit the look of the image. You can tint the image and adjust the contrast curves and black and white values. These work well for adjusting a natural image and can give you a range of subtle to extreme adjustments. With some printer models, you can use the Epson or Canon print plugin, which will give you even more control of the printing options.

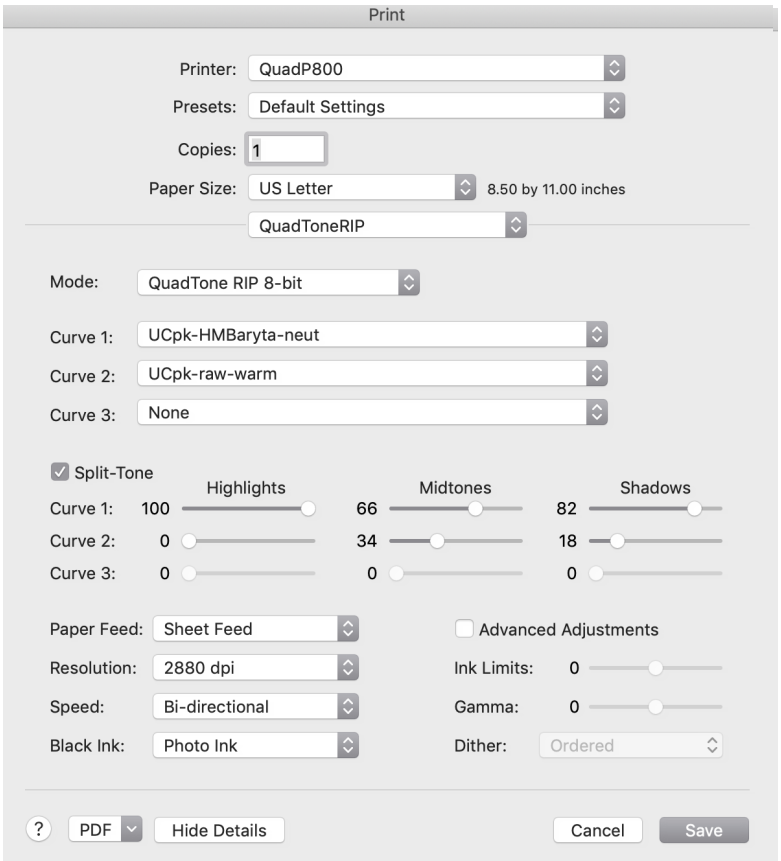
If you're working with a split toned, duotone, or tinted image that you have done in post-production, you'll want to print with the ICC profile to help ensure that you're able to keep the color tinting as edited. As great as the monochrome modes are in the print drivers, they won't preserve your color tinting.

THIRD PARTY OPTIONS

When digital printers first hit the market, black and white printing left a lot to be desired. The printers didn't do a great job of making black and white prints. Several third-party options were developed to help black and white printers make better prints. And several of these methods are still available today, and they offer some interesting possibilities and opportunities for the black and white photographer.

QUAD-TONE RIP

The first third-party option that I want to talk about is the Quad-tone RIP developed by Roy V Harrington (www.quadtonerip.com). This is a print driver that is installed on either a Mac or Windows machine, and it takes over as the print driver. It only works with Epson printers. Roy has made the installation and use relative-



ly easy, but this is not a quick install and print tool. You will need to read about how to use the software to get the most out of the RIP. Roy's site has excellent documentation and instructions.

You can use the Quad-tone RIP software package to apply up to three customized curves for contrast control, split-toning, or varying the look of the print. The real power of this software is that you can apply a curve, especially into the highlights, mid-tones, or shadows in various opacities. Being able to vary the strength of the curve to your own taste, favoring one tonal range over another has a huge impact on the control of the image. This level of control gives you a unique way to edit and

manage tones and change the look of the print.

The question when looking at third-party software always comes down to "Is it worth the added cost and time and effort to learn?" Like with just about anything, the answer is it depends. The ability to blend the curves and get a level of control that you don't have with the native driver might be worth it to someone who is often making tinted images or wants a different level of control over the look of the image. You can get similar looking prints out of Lightroom or Photoshop with the native driver and an appropriately matched ICC profile. But, using a Quad-tone RIP will produce a different look. Not better or worse. You just have some different options for working with the image. You can get a copy of the software as a free trial. You can then decide for yourself if you think the Quad-tone solution is worth it.

PIEZOGRAPHY SYSTEM

If you start printing a lot in black and white, you will eventually come across John Cone's Piezography inks. I have seen some amazing prints from John's system. This is not a method or process for the faint of heart, because it requires a significant commitment of time, hardware, and money. To use John's ink system, you need to dedicate an Epson printer to the process. His system replaces all the standard inks in the printer with his ink system that is fully dedicated to black and white. The printer will no longer be able to print full-color images.

When you use his carbon-pigment inks, you get access to 3-6 more levels of gray ink. This increase in the number of inks means that black and white prints from this system have a distinct look from traditional drivers.

For some photographers, John's ink set produces a look and aesthetic that can't be matched, and for others, it is beautiful but not worth the cost and effort. You can learn more about John's amazing process and inks at his website https://piezography.com. John's system can also be used with the standard print drivers, with the Quadtone RIP driver, and it has custom ICC profiles for several papers.

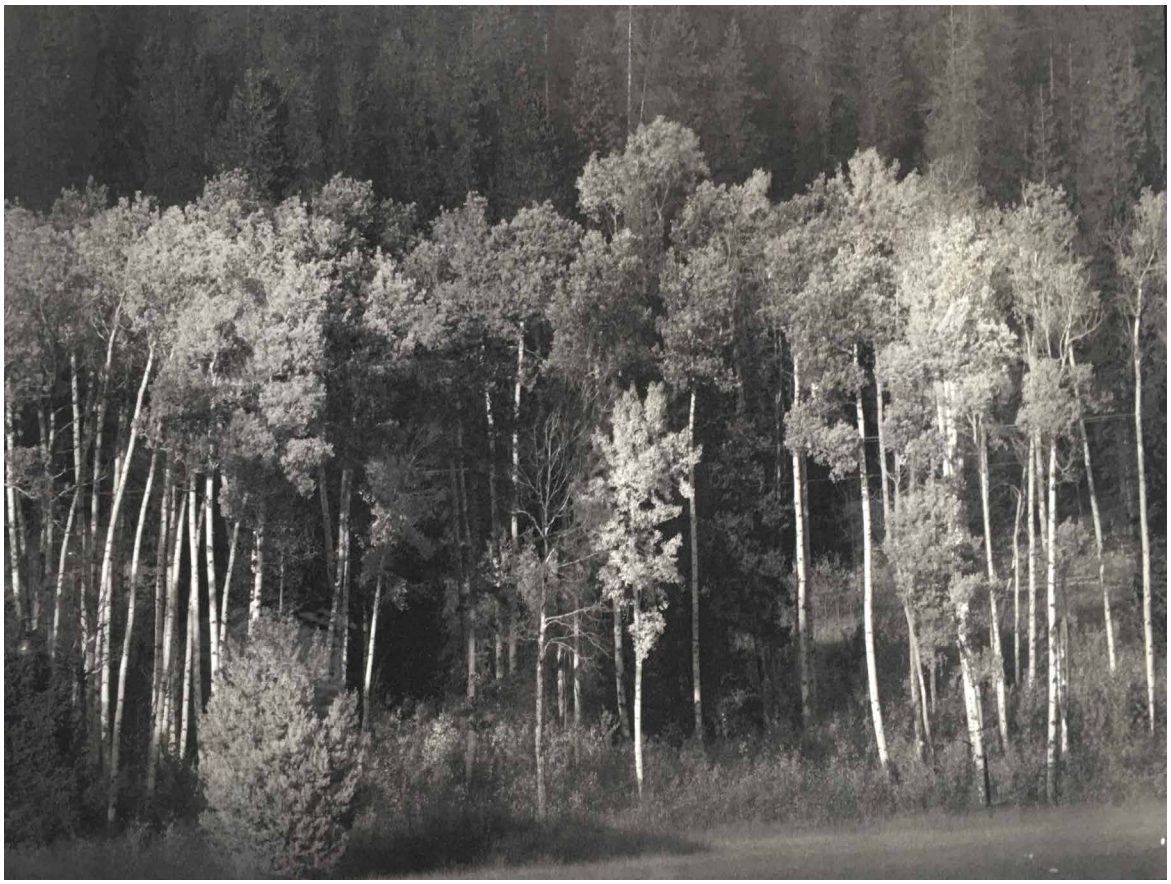
ALTERNATIVE PROCESSING

Finally, I want to just briefly mention two other options for working in black and white printing. One is the digital negative. Digital negatives are digital images that are processed in Photoshop and then converted into negatives that can be used as contact prints with an alternative or silver-gelatin print. The negative is customized for each process, but the image can be easily reprinted into various processes such as cyanotype, kallitype, VanDyke, or platinum/palladium.

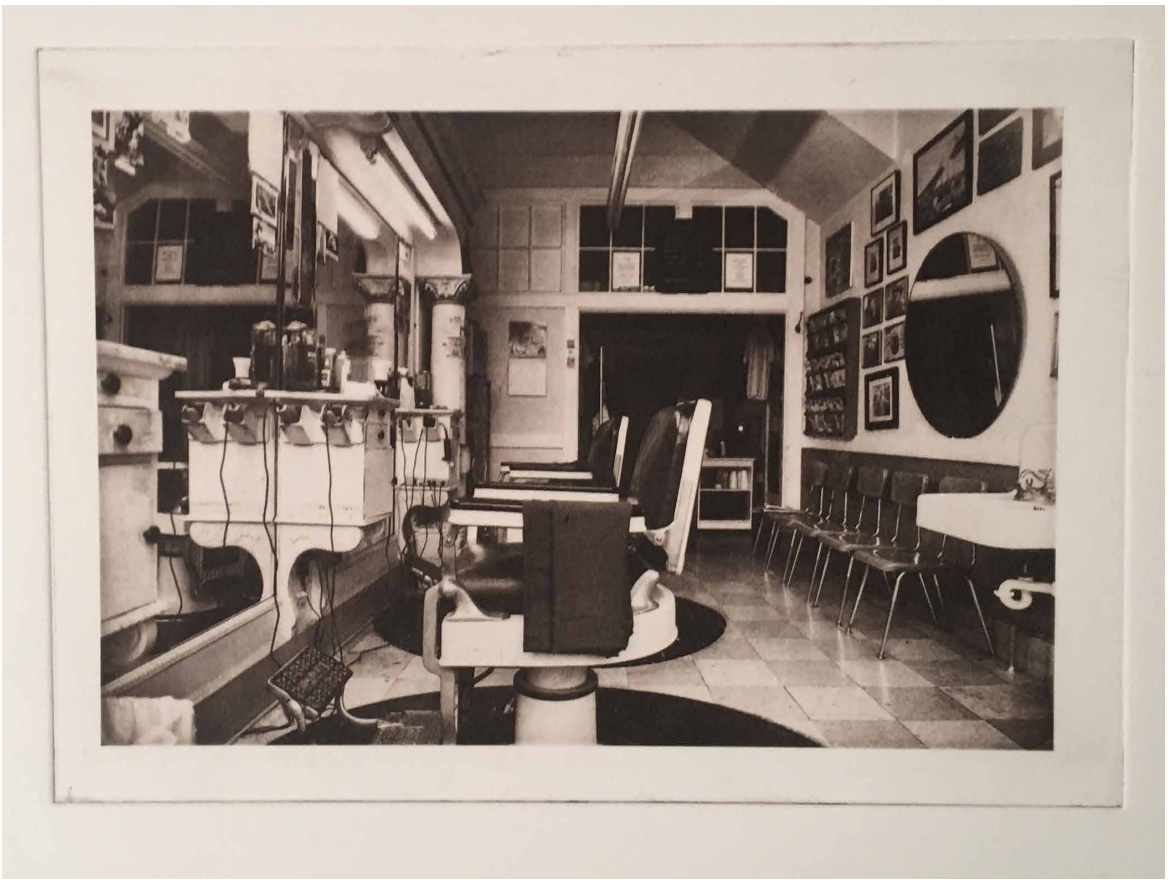
The second option is to get silver gelatin prints from your digital files by using Digital Silver Imaging's DSI Service. You can get more information from their website at https://digitalsilverimaging.com.

A painting that is well composed is half finished.

Pierre Bonnard



Palladium print from digital negative



Photogravure print from digital negative


Daniel | Gregory
Energy, 2019
Palladium/Platinum Print
8X10 framed

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PRESENTATION AND DISPLAY

One of the best parts of photography is getting to share our work. A black and white photograph is a beautiful gift or expression to put on a wall. I always try to encourage people to get their images printed, so they get a chance to really admire their work. Even if you don't print, finishing your images and electronically sharing them with family and friends or on social media is a great way to celebrate your vision.

SIGNING THE PRINT

Always sign your prints. You put your heart and soul into the image. You can sign either the front (en recto) or the back of the print (en verso). Where to sign a print is a personal choice. I sign mine in the front right corner, and I put any edition or print numbers in the lower left corner. I also recommend that you include some optional information on the back of the print or in any supporting documentation. This might consist of the name of the image, the number of print or print number within a series, date taken, date printed, paper and ink combination, title, your printed name, signature, warranty info (if any), and anything else you think a buyer or collector might find relevant.

Photography, alone of the arts, seems perfected to serve the desire humans have for a moment - this very moment - to stay.

Sam Abell

PRINTS SIZES

We talked a little about some of the considerations when printing in the previous section. However, picking a paper and getting the most out of the printer doesn't answer one of the biggest questions of printing: how big should this print be? There's a tired old adage that if you can't print well, print big. I feel too many people take that to heart. It really should be the other way around.

A bad small print makes for a really bad big print. Any issue with the print is just that much bigger when printed larger. So always try to make the best print possible.

When picking a print size, it's essential to think about how you want to have the viewer experience the photo. That experience is often dictated by viewing distance. How close should they stand to the print? The average viewing distance of a photograph or piece of art is about two or two and half times the diagonal of the work. So an eight by ten inch print's viewing distance is about two feet. A 16x20 inch print's viewing distance is four to five feet, and a 30x40 inch print's viewing distance is 15-18 feet. As we stand closer to a photograph, it can feel more intimate and personal. It's almost like we are the only

ones who get to see the image. Whereas with a larger print, we might have several people standing next to us as we look at the photograph. However we print larger, we also give the tones in the print more room to breathe. The small details, textures, and subtle tonal shifts all get more space to shine. So a larger image can help us experience more of the little details and aspects of the image. You have to experiment a little and find what works for you, the image, and the amount of wall space and viewing distance available.

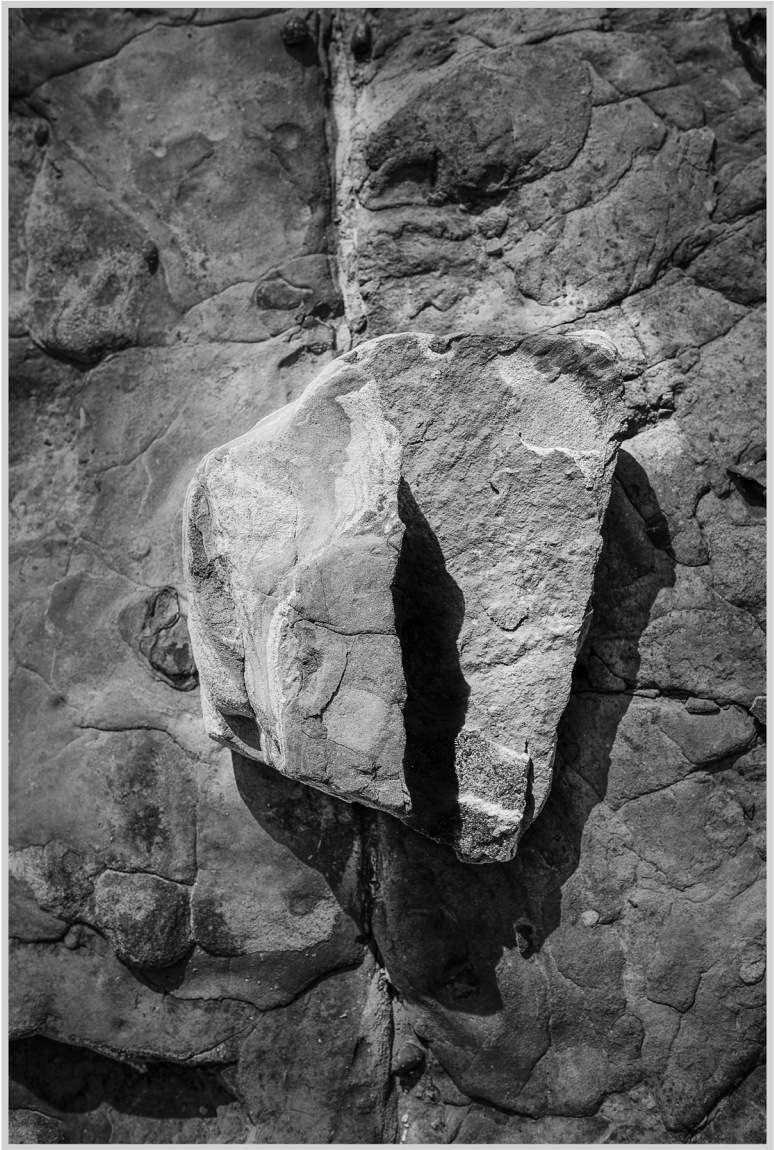
If you haven't viewed a photograph for at least 30 minutes, you haven't really seen it.

Minor White

I do try to standardize as much as possible on my print sizes. In my film days, I shot everything in the 4x5 aspect ratio, but much of my digital work is 2x3. Depending on what I'm printing, I might crop or not. However, I do try to crop to the same aspect ratio and final size when possible. Some people I've worked with worry about not being able to fill the entire paper when printing. The paper and aspect ratios may not match, and when that happens, I always default to the image ratio and trim the paper.

I am a working artist and I don't have unlimited funds, so I try to keep my images consistent as much as possible. Being able to reuse frames, boards, and mats is a significant cost and time saver. So if you go with 8x10, 12x16, and 16x22 or with 4x6, 8x12, and 24x36—the standard sizes you pick doesn't really matter for cost and savings. Keeping it consistent is what helps with cost and time. Whatever you do, for the sake of the image, don't force an image into defined sizes if it needs its own size or ratio. If the pano needs to be 10x80, don't force it into 1x10, so it fits your standard paper size.

In the end, there is no one correct size. I've worked with a lot of photographers whose prints are the size they are because that is the size paper the photographer could



afford at the time they printed. I've sometimes found myself in this same position. But when I have a choice, I like to really think about how I want the image to be felt and experienced by the people who look at it. That thinking process ultimately guides my choice.

MATTING

After you have your print and you want to take the next step, you can mat and frame the image. Matting involves putting the image on a backboard and then putting an over mat on top of the image with a picture window cut out of it, so the image shows through the mat. I joked about how printing larger to fix a bad image doesn't work. However, matting will help an imperfect print look more finished. There is something about matting an image that kicks it up a notch.

A typical overlay mat uses a beveled edge rather than a straight edge. This helps transition our eye into the image and has a more polished look than a non-beveled edge. A mat normally overlaps the image about 1/8-inch around the entire image to hide the paper it is printed

on. Sometimes you might want to show that edge or you are showing a signature, in which case you would cut (or have somebody else cut) a larger opening, as needed. You can buy precut mats at most art supply and hobby stores, which can save you on framing and matting costs from a custom frame shop.

You know, artists are influenced by other artists. We're all deeply influenced by what's around us; we don't make anything cold.

Sometimes we think that we do. But within that, the most important part is that even though we're influenced, what are the levels of invention that we carry forth even as we've been influenced by something that's come before?

Carrie Mae Weems

You might also notice that most mats have a slightly larger bottom border than the top border. That is to reduce a visual perception issue where we see images as being lower than center when they are actually centered in a frame.

So how big of mat and frame should you use? There are no hard rules, but generally, you see many framed pieces with the following mat sizes.

Total Framed Size, including mat

8x10 = 1 to 1 1/2 inches

11x14 = 1 1/2 to 2 inches

16x20 = 2 to 2 1/2 inches

20x24 = 3 to 3 1/2 inches

24x36 = 4 to 4 1/2 inches

48x72 = 5+

The color of the mat will impact the perception of contrast in the image. A black mat can make the blacks feel heavier and more pronounced in an image, and a gray mat can make an image feel flatter. I prefer to use a white mat or slightly warm white mat with my warmer toned images. I think these give the best overall look to black and white images. If you're going to use a color mat,

make sure you account for how we will see the tones in relationship to the mat color. Often less is more. I would say that 95% of my photos get bright white mats, but a few are in black for aesthetics of the image.

Frames come in a variety of materials. You can also spend a lot of money or almost nothing on frames. Much like with mats, I like to keep it simple: black, white, or soft silver or pewter frames. I feel these colors help the image without the distraction of color, and they help with the contrast in the image. I often get wooden frames or metal frames. Although they are significantly cheaper, I try to avoid plastic frames, because they can easily crack, peel color, and split when exposed to sunlight for long periods of time even through a window. To save cost and be able to rotate my art, I try to take really good care of my frames so that I can reuse them over and over again. I keep the unused frames wrapped and boxed when not in use.

SHARING ONLINE

When sharing online, there is a vibrant and supportive community of black and white photographers. You can find black and white photographers on Instagram, 500px, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and other social sharing sites. Remember to export your images as sRGB when sharing online so that you don't have significant and unwanted tonal shifts and black point shifts. Also hashtagging your images is critcal to people finding your amazing black and white images.

Some common hashtags include:

#blackandwhite
#igblackandwhite
#instagrambnw
#blackandwhiteimage
#bw_society
#bw #blackandwhiteonly
#monochromatic
#photographicfilm
#monotone
#instablackandwhite
#blackandwhitephoto
#blackandwhitenow
#digitalphotography
#blackandwhiteshot
#blackandwhitetoday
#monochrome
#blackandwhite
#blackandwhitephotography
#bw_photooftheday
#blackandwhiteart
#bnwphotographer
#blackandwhitecamera
#instablackandwhite
#bnw
#instabnw

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CONCLUSION

Seeing silver is all about finding your own voice in the magical world of black and white. Focusing on what makes your imagination work and how that drives the stories you tell behind the camera isn't about just black and white. It is about finding the magic that comes from seeing something new and exciting in the subtle tones life gives us.

I would rather die of passion than of boredom.

Vincent van Gogh

It doesn't matter if you're just getting started or have been working in black and white for a long time, you can always spend time appreciating the tonal richness of black and white. I encourage you to head to the library or look online and spend time with other black and white photographers. You can learn so much by looking at other images, finding inspiration, techniques, and ways of seeing that will open up new doors for you. Also, spend time appreciating your own work. Learning how you see and respond to your black and white work will give you clarity on your style and voice as a black and white photographer.

Thank you for taking the time to read this eBook Seeing Silver: an introduction to black and white photography. I hope that you learned something new or thought about something differently when it comes to working in black and white. There really is something magical about getting to create a world of abstract tone that is unlike anything else in photography.

I wish you the best behind the camera and finding introspection and awe in the wonderful world of black and white.

Future eBooks will cover black and white workflows, black and white portfolios, and in-depth printing.

Thanks