

7/2/18 – Monochrome tips (Silver Efex Pro)

Even if your camera has a “Monochrome” filter that you can select, I’d recommend giving that a miss and do the conversion in Photoshop. It will give you much more flexibility.

Aside – If Photoshop doesn’t recognise your camera’s RAW format, you’ll need to convert it to one that Photoshop recognises – ie DNG. (Use Adobe’s free converter to do this.)

Initially, perform all the basic adjustments that you would normally do to any picture. Note that Adobe’s free “Camera Raw” s/w (which is very similar to Lightroom’s “Develop” module) can also be used to edit JPG files if you so choose.

You may now want to save the file (as a JPG or TIFF) before starting the monochrome conversion.

Within Photoshop there is the “Black and White” adjustment layer, (with a number of presets to explore,) and also the “Channel Mixer” adjustment layer to play with, but neither of these holds a candle to the “Silver Efex Pro” filter that comes with Google’s free “Nik Collection”, so that’s what we’ll get into.

The Preset Library.

There are 38 presets in total in various libraries. Clicking a preset will show you a new look for your image. Work down the list and see what takes your fancy. (Clicking the small star below a preset will include it in your own “favourites” library which will then become a smaller subset of the whole 38.)

Global Adjustments.

Brightness and Contrast are self explanatory and work as expected, however Structure is something of a novelty. It can have a quite a dramatic effect, and should be experimented with in conjunction with the other two sliders. The Shadows and Highlights “Tonality Protection” sliders work in a much more subtle way, but taken all together, these global adjustments will often be sufficient on their own, for many images.

Selective Adjustments.

This works by way of circular “control points” that apply almost the same “Brightness/Contrast/Structure” adjustments as before, but to local areas of the image. The small arrow below the control point’s mast will show/hide additional adjustments that can be made to the point, (including the bleed through of underlying colour).

Colour Filters

Simply by clicking the appropriate coloured dot, there are half a dozen Colour Filter “presets” available. These are the Digital equivalents to real coloured filters that were screwed on the front of the camera lenses back in the “good old days” of black and white film. The “details” tab allows for the digital simulation of literally any colour filter (ie. in between the presets) and of any strength (ie colour density).

Film Types

This set of adjustments allows for the simulation of many different black and white films that used to be popular “back in the day”. It’s quite illuminating how different they were to one another and some interesting effects are on offer.

Finishing Adjustments

Toning, Vignetting, Burn edges and Image borders

Toning used to be a classic treatment given to black and white prints back in the days before colour. This was often achieved with the use of some very obnoxious chemicals that are probably under lock and key today. There are a couple of dozen “presets”, any of which can be further tweaked, in both silver and paper hues, leading to an almost limitless set of toning possibilities.

The Vignetting controls are somewhat similar to those in Camera Raw, except for an interesting ability to place the centre of the vignette anywhere in the frame.

The Burn edges control acts like a graduated filter to darken the edge(s) of the frame and I find it has little use.

The Image Borders control has a dozen or so presets that can be used to produce a range of effects, some of which can be quite interesting if used sparingly as they can quickly become “hackneyed”. Also note that the border will encroach on your image - not fit itself around the outside.

Clicking OK will now save your masterpiece to a new layer (unless you’ve specified otherwise via the Settings tab).