

## Notes on the Forum on Black and White Conversion on November 22, 2010

Here are some techniques that I use to optimize monochrome conversions. I convert using the **Black & White** adjustment layer in Photoshop. That's my preference, but not the only way. If you are using an older version of Photoshop, the **Channel Mixer** adjustment layer will get you to the same place. Of course I use sliders, but they don't solve everything. I don't convert "in camera" although that is a good way to preview the result. In camera conversion, gray scale and Hue/Saturation layer discard the information in two of the 3 color channels, so I don't use those methods. Also, I always shoot in Raw.

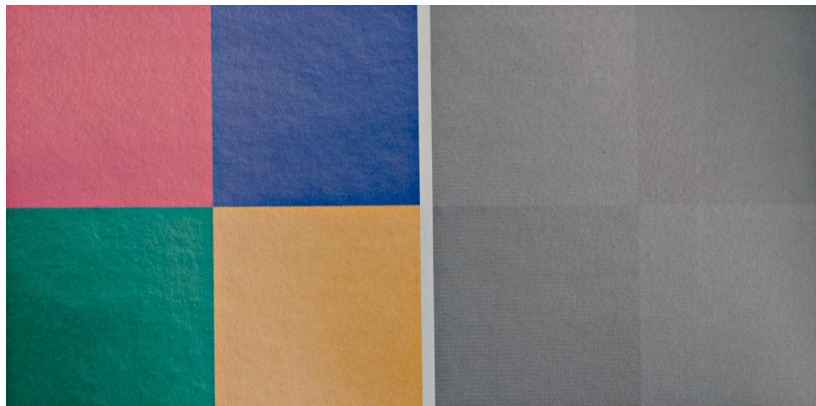
For me the hardest part of black and white was learning to recognize a good Black and White image. I found it helpful to look at pictures in magazines and books and subscribe to Lenswork Magazine. It is a monochrome magazine, no advertising, with the most gorgeous printing. You can get a trial issue very reasonably at:

**<http://www.lenswork.com>**

Often, monochrome images lack contrast because there are two kinds of contrast:

**Color**

**dark/light (brightness, luminance)**



This illustrates why an image that has nice contrast in color, sometimes has very little detail or contrast in monochrome.

In order to improve black and white conversions, increasing the contrast is very important

### **Ways to increase contrast in Raw:**

1. In raw conversion in Photoshop, set default located at the very bottom of the screen centered below the image to **16 bit and Prophoto RGB**. This provides the most range of tones.

2. Also in Raw, try to get the “widest” histogram you can by increasing exposure and blacks as necessary without clipping either end. Adjust fill light to open up blocked shadows but try not to go above 20.

## Photoshop techniques that increase contrast

### 1. Unsharp Mask for Contrast (this works in color too)

On a new pixel layer, go to **Filter—Sharpen—Unsharp Mask** and set the following values:

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| amount    | 15 to 30  |
| radius    | 30 to 50  |
| threshold | 0         |
| press     | <b>OK</b> |

This will increase the contrast but does **not** sharpen the image. This does not change or replace your normal sharpening routine.

### 2.. Midtone contrast

Create a **pixel layer** at the top of the layer stack  
Change the **blend mode** of the new layer to **overlay**  
**Reduce the Opacity** of the new layer to 20%  
Go to **Filters-Other-High Pass**  
set the **radius to 50**  
press **OK**

Double click on this layer (or go to Layer—Layer Style—Blending Options) to open the dialog called “**Layer Style**”  
Toward the bottom of this screen is “**Blend If**”  
Using the upper of the 2 sliders (the one labeled “This Layer”),  
move the left arrow to about 55, then, holding the alt key,  
move the right half of the left slider to about 75  
Then, move the right arrow to 205 and holding the alt key, move  
the left half of the arrow to 185, press **OK**  
Adjust opacity if necessary.

This is very similar to the Midtone contrast method on p.55 of August 2010 issue of Outdoor Photographer. It really brings out the fine detail that is often lost in a monochrome conversion.

This procedure is worth the effort, and with an “action” it only takes a few seconds. So if you would like the action, please e-mail me at [willa.f@verizon.net](mailto:willa.f@verizon.net).

### 3. Contrast Curve

Create a curve adjustment layer

Anchor the center point by clicking on it, then  
move the cursor up the sloping line and click again.

Then enter Input-195 and Output about 205

Click again on the line below the center and set the Input at about 50, and  
the output at about 45.

This will darken the darks and lighten the lights, thereby increasing contrast.

(This may be saved as a preset.) You'll probably want to tweak it.

### 4. Dodge and Burn:

Click on the second icon from the right on the layers palette to **create a new layer**, go to **Edit—Fill--50% gray—OK**

A solid gray layer will appear at the top of your layer stack

Change the **blend mode** from normal to **overlay**

Select a soft brush, change the opacity to something very low—  
start at 10 to 20%, and paint white to lighten and black to darken as necessary.

This can be used to open up shadows and bring out detail.

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