

# Gill Moon Photography Photo Club



## November 2023 Challenge 9 Black and White Photography

*Hello*

and welcome to my new monthly photo club challenges.

Each month I will be setting a new challenge for club members to work with. The challenges are not designed to be competitive but they are designed to be fun and inspiring and help you grow as a photographer.

Every other month we will be looking at the work of different photographers who are 'masters' in their chosen field of photography. We will examine how they make their images and discuss how you can use their techniques in your own work. I hope these will be inspiring sessions.

Every monthly challenge will be followed by a 1.5 hour Zoom session (which is entirely optional) on the last Wednesday of every month where we will discuss some of the submitted images and talk about what worked and what didn't. I hope this feedback will be useful.

Thank you very much for being part of the Photo Club and I hope you will find it a fun and rewarding challenge.

Gill.

# Shooting in Black and White



This month's Challenge has been inspired by a YouTube video I was watching by an American photographer Jack Curran (who has sadly passed away but his work is still out there to see. We will discuss some of this later in the notes.

I love colour so black and white photography is not something that I have spent much time doing and I am certainly not an expert, but occasionally I like to experiment and that was how my 'Grounded' project was born.

Working on Grounded allowed me to experiment with different shots and lighting and to practice shooting at various times of the day. You still need good light to take atmospheric black and white images and it is a mistake to think that you don't have to worry about it if you are shooting in this format. You

can however shoot in weather that wouldn't lend itself to colour photography. So grey days, mist and drizzle are all great for creating atmospheric shots.

Shooting in black and white is really good practice for improving your photography on a general level. It forces you to look at all the physical attributes of the landscape beyond the colour which can often be the first thing we notice out in the field. To create a compelling image in black and white you will need to learn to see the landscape in shades of grey. You will also need to familiarise yourself with the building blocks of an image which are the lines, shapes, textures and areas of dark and light that make up a landscape.

## Why Black and White?

You need to have a reason to shoot in black and white so ask yourself why before you hit the black and white conversion. The removal of colour won't turn a poor photograph into a better one and conversely not all colour images convert well to black and white.



These two images show the same photograph but with very different post processing treatment. The first image is how I would have naturally processed this shot - making the most of the early morning light. The second shot is all about the light and the shadows and the graphical elements of the image.

## Black and white or monochrome?

A monochrome image isn't necessarily black and white. A black and white image has all its colour removed and consists of black, grey and white. A monochrome image has a colour tint for example a sepia image is monochrome and has a yellow tint.

This is the same image with a sepia conversion applied. You will see that it has a very different mood to the straight black and white image.



Similarly a split toned image where the shadows have been coloured blue and the highlights yellow will give a different feel again to the same image.



All these treatments create a different mood and feel to the image. So when you are thinking about what conversion to apply it is a good idea to think about what mood or story you are trying to convey.

## Shoot in RAW

To take good black and white images it is best to go out with the intention of shooting in black and white rather than shooting generally and hoping something might work in black and white when you get home. Always shoot in RAW as this will give you the greatest dynamic range to play with in post processing. Some cameras have a monochrome setting in the menu which allows you to see the world in black and white in the live view option. This can be a good way of visualising the landscape and gives you an immediate idea of what works and what doesn't. The monochrome setting will capture the image in black and white but if you are shooting in RAW all the colour information will be retained, giving you the option to process the final image in a variety of ways.

## Composition

Good composition is something that you will need regardless of whether you are shooting in colour or black and white. However you may find yourself making different decisions about your composition when shooting specifically for black and white.

Stripping away all the colour from an image will leave you with the basic building blocks of an image - shapes, lines, shadows, contrast, tones and texture and you will need to see these as the prominent features instead of seeing the colour in a landscape.

The following image was taken on the Isle of Harris and the first photograph shows how I processed this as a colour image.



For me the attraction was the colour and the subtle beauty of the landscape in the early evening light.

When I thought about converting this image to black and white I looked at it more closely in terms of light and shade. I actually used a shot taken a few minutes before the colour shot from a slightly different angle but essentially the light was the same for both images.

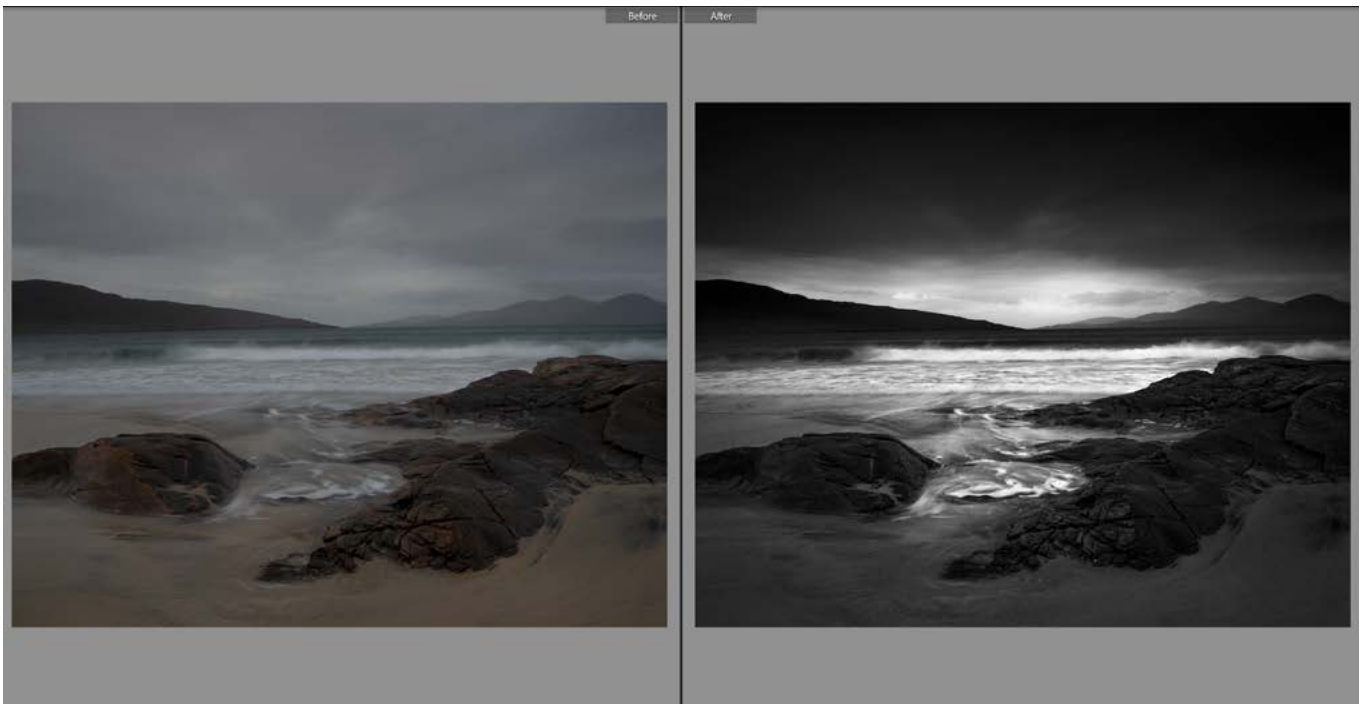


The two images on the next page show how I have interpreted the colour shot to make my black and white image.

Instead of using the subtle tones that I have brought out in the colour version I wanted to highlight the contrasts within the image.

I initially made the image darker across the whole frame and then brought out the whites in various areas - one the sea where the waves are breaking and in the sky where there is a small patch of light between the mountains. I worked on all these areas individually using masking tools in Lightroom.





### Shadow and contrast and tone

Shadows have a much greater importance in black and white photography than they do in colour. They are no longer just a darker area of the photograph, but instead can be a major part of the composition. They can be completely black or can contain some detail. Contrast is the key to creating a moody image

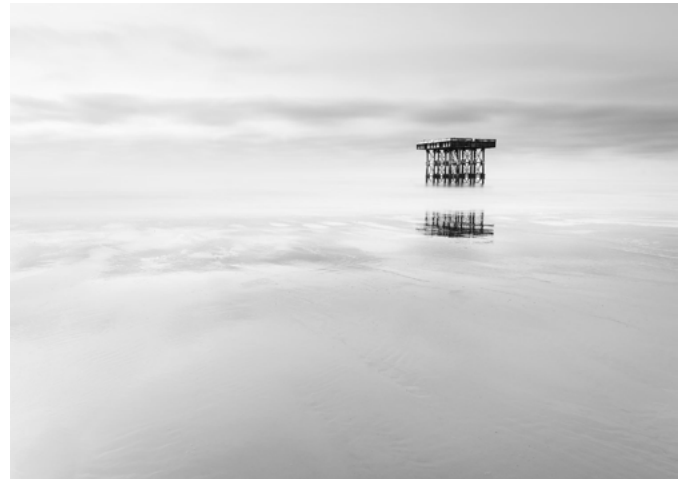
that really stands out. The success of this comes down to the proximity between the areas of contrast - ie the dark and light areas.

In the picture below of Felixstowe docks the bright white of the lights sit against the black of the night sky creating a striking visual contrast. It is this that draws the eye into the image.



Low contrast images are much more subtle and work with much softer shades of grey. However despite their understated appearance they can evoke just as much mood and emotion.

This image taken at Thurne mill on a misty morning has a very soft subtle feel to it. It is completely different to the previous contrasty moody images. In this shot there are no true blacks only shades of grey. The tones in this shot stretch from light grey to white where as in the first shots the range is from true black to white.



### High key versus low key

High key refers to images that are bright and contain very little shadow. They tend to have a soft dreamy feel to them. Low key images are ones that are darker and have a lot of shadow. They tend to be more dramatic and moody.

The following image shows a high key shot taken at Landguard Point. Again this was taken on a misty day which helped to soften all the tones. There are no true blacks on this image, just mid grey to white.



Mist tends to help with high key images but it is not a requirement. Another way to achieve the same results is to choose a subject which is quite dark and then over expose the image by 1 or 2 stops. The rigs at Sizewell work well for this type of image.

Low key images are much more moody, have more dark areas, more shadow areas as well as some pure white areas. This makes them more contrasty.



When photographing textures the lighting plays an important part in their prominence. Try to avoid harsh midday sun as this illuminates everything from above and minimises shadows. Shooting when the sun is low in the sky will accentuate the shadows and the tonal contrast and make the texture appear more prominent.

When incorporating textures in your images try to get as close to the texture as possible so that it is prominent in your frame. You want your viewer to feel what it was like to be there. Shooting from a lower viewpoint will also accentuate the appearance of texture.



### Using patterns and texture

Patterns and textures are fantastic for adding interest in black and white photography and work really well in the foreground of a shot. They add tonal contrast and detail to specific areas of the frame and can be used as compositional elements in their own right.

Textures are everywhere in the landscape, you just need to look for them. They often involve some kind of repeating pattern and can be found in rocks, sand, grasses, tree bark, timber, leaves or building materials.

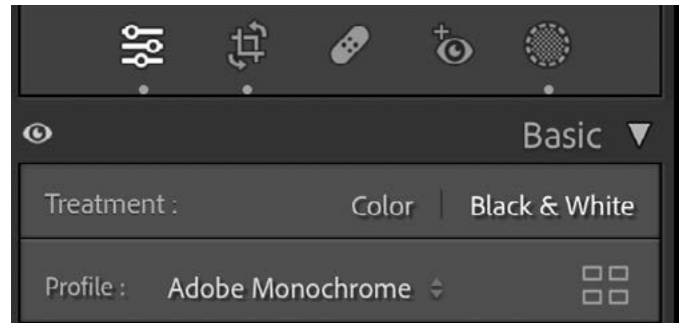
## Tips for good black and white images.

1. Shoot in RAW but set your camera to monochrome to make seeing in black and white much easier.
2. Concentrate on your composition, with the absence of colour strong compositions are essential.
3. Look for lines, shapes, patterns and textures and work hard to incorporate these into your images.
4. Dull, misty and drizzly days are perfect for black and white so don't be put off by the weather.
5. Don't miss out on the golden hours. Even though you are not shooting in colour the low angle of the light at the beginning and end of the day is perfect for black and white photography.
6. Using filters will make a massive difference to your photography. A graduated filter will help retain the detail in the sky which is so important for black and white landscapes. Using a 10 stop ND filter at the coast or by a river will allow you to create a contrast between the texture and tones in your image by blurring the water.
7. Know what you want your final image to look like and learn how to process accordingly.

## Post Processing

There are a couple of ways of converting your images into black and white in post production. I will talk about Lightroom here as that is what I use but Photoshop is a good alternative. There are also other specialist conversion programmes such as Silver Efex Pro which are worth looking into if you want to do a lot of black and white photography. In Lightroom just under the histogram on the right hand side is a treatment panel showing colour or black and white. Clicking

this will take your photo from colour to black and white. However it will not be a very impressive conversion and will probably look very flat.



The image above shows the result of applying the black and white conversion in the treatment panel. Once you have done this open the HSL / Colour / B & W panel and click the B&W tab. This opens a set of sliders which control how bright the conversion renders each underlying colour.





You will find as you move the sliders around they have dramatic effects on certain areas of the image. Once you have done this you can then go back to the highlights, shadows, blacks, whites, contrast and clarity and fine tune your image. The key to doing this is to have a feel for what you want your final image to look like - which areas you want to emphasise etc.



In this image above I wanted to emphasise the contrast between the dark sky in the top right with the light coming through on the horizon. I also wanted to make the wet part of the pavement stand out from the dry areas. To do this I darkened all the rock and then increased the exposure and the whites in the wet areas. I also increased the contrast in the water, made the areas of light much brighter and the areas of shadow much darker.

### Inspiration

**Jack Curran** was a black and white landscape photographer and YouTuber. His work is very striking and moody and his videos are interesting as an insight into how he processed his images.

<https://jackcurranphotography.store>

**Adrian Vila** describes himself as a nomadic photographer. His landscape images are beautiful and his You Tube channel is also worth watching for an insight into his photographic process. He seems to favour

long exposures for many of his images.

<https://aows.co>

### Steve Gosling

Steve is a professional photographer who specialises in producing creative and contemporary landscape images. His signature style is moody, atmospheric and minimalist black & white photographs.

[www.stevegoslingphotography.co.uk](http://www.stevegoslingphotography.co.uk)

### Greg Bottle

Greg is a multi-genre photographer based in Kent. He has a diverse portfolio of black and white images on his website including some lovely landscapes from Iceland. He also has a collection of images featuring Antony Gormley's "Another Time" sculptures which are black and white with a hit of colour.

[www.gregbottle.com](http://www.gregbottle.com)

## November's Photo Challenge

This month's photo challenge is to produce two photos:

1. a dark and moody low key black and white or monochrome image
2. a bright high key black and white or monochrome image.

The Zoom session for this challenge will take place on Wednesday 29th November.

The final image in these notes features an image from Luskentyre beach on the Isle of Harris. This image was taken looking into the sun so it was already quite contrasty. I really wanted to make the areas of light stand out from their surroundings so I darkened the image overall and then applied selective masks to the centre area to bring out the light on the wet sand and the light rays in the sky. I have deliberately darkened the sky and the foreground beach to make a frame around the area of interest in the centre of the image.

