Droitwich ARTS Network

Mono Photography

Rhys Jones – 17 June 2020

Mono Photography

- What is it?
- Why do it?
- How to do it? The easy ways
- How to do it? Advanced ways
- Some technical stuff along the way

What is Mono Photography?

- A Mono (Monochrome) image comprises many shades of a single colour
- A black and white image consists of many shades of grey
- A sepia image consists of shades of brown
- Other colours can be used, but less common.

Black and White

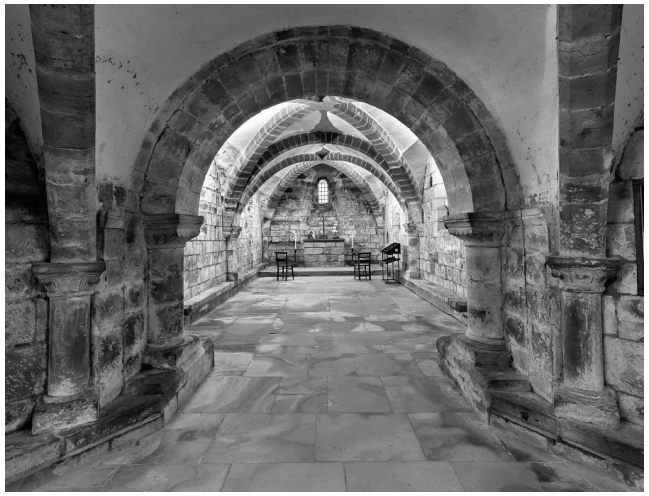
- A black and white image consists of shades of grey from very dark grey (black) to very clear grey (white)

- But not just 50 shades of grey!

Why Produce Mono Images?

- Sometimes mono produces a “better” image
- Colour can be distracting
- Mono often emphasise form, contrast and texture
- Mono works well for people or strong graphic shapes
- Pure blacks and whites often create drama
- Mid tones can create a pastel look
- Mono (especially sepia) gives a sense of timelessness

Examples



Low Key Images

- A low-key image contains predominantly dark tones
- Conveys atmosphere and mood which is usually dramatic and full of mystery
- Creates striking contrasts where shadows are the primary element of the composition

High Key Images

- A high key image is one that is mostly bright, with a range of light tones and whites and not very many blacks or mid-tones
- A high key image tends to be upbeat, optimistic or youthful

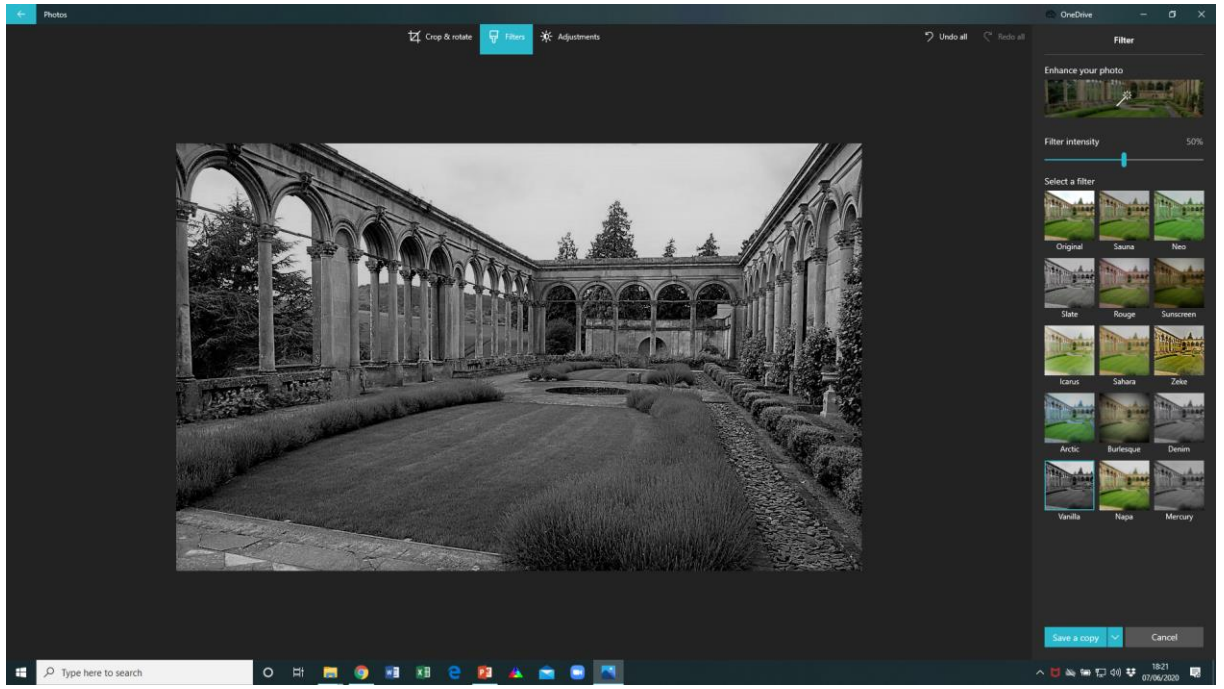
Mono Photography
Two Easy Ways

- Some cameras offer a Mono Mode. The photo is taken in black and white. Simple but unsophisticated, and there's no going back.
- Some cameras (particularly phones) offer Mono "filters" that modify the photo after it has been taken. You can influence the result and it can often be reversed. But still unsophisticated.

Mono Photography

An easy way using your computer

- MS Windows PCs include free software called “Photos”



- Other computers (Apple MACs, iPads) offer similar utilities.
- Provides more control, but you can do much better!

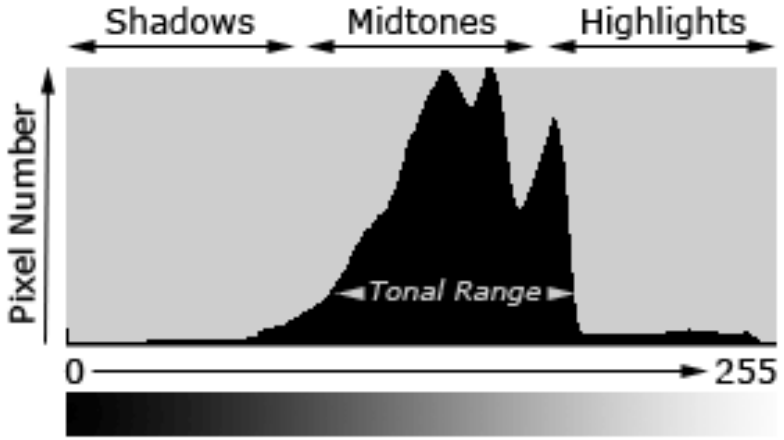
Some Technical Stuff

- All digital cameras are computers, capturing the photo as a set of pixels.
- Your camera captures many pixels (perhaps 20 million pixels for each photo)
- Each pixel records the amount of a few colours (Red, Green, Blue).
- The “mix” produces the colour we see.

Some Technical Stuff

(Not essential but might aid understanding)

- To simplify matters, let's assume each pixel only records the amount of grey.
- Many cameras show this on a histogram.
- Normally use full tonal range from pure blacks to whites
- Sometimes a soft pastel approach works well
- For a black and white image, it's about managing the tonal range.



- But remember, pixels record the amount of a number of colours (Red, Green, Blue).

More Technical Stuff

- Most of us are familiar with JPG (JPEG) files (Joint Photographic Experts Group) as a standard for image files.
- But all cameras (even phones) record the initial photo in RAW format. But RAW is proprietary, not a universal standard.

Easy Route

Software in the camera converts the RAW file to JPG

JPG File

Software such as "Photos" converts to Mono

Mono Image

You have almost no control over the process. Irreversible.

Advanced Route

RAW File

You control the process and decide on how to edit

RAW File with edits

You control the conversion to Mono

Mono Image

You have total control over the process. Reversible.

JPG v RAW

JPG Files

- Contain less data with loss of detail
- Enable limited processing
- Edits change and degrade the file
- Can use sophisticated or simple software tools
- Tools are cheap or free, and easy
- Adequate images most of the time
- Files are smaller
- Need less computer power
- Everyone can view with ease.

RAW Files

- Contain a massive amount of data
- Enable sophisticated processing
- Never change. Edits are kept separate
- Require software tools such as Photoshop or Lightroom
- Cost of tools and time to learn
- Potential for outstanding images
- Files are very large
- Need a gutsy computer to process
- No guarantee that others can view.

Advanced Way – Desaturation

- Start with a RAW or JPG file
- Can use most free software or sophisticated tools
- Desaturate the whole photo
- Can result in a “muddy” unsatisfactory result
- Desaturation can change colours to uninspiring tones of grey

Advanced Way
Adjust the “Colours”

- A RAW file contains information about all the colours
- Start with a RAW file
- Use a sophisticated software tool such as Photoshop or Lightroom
- Adjust the original colour image to what you think looks best

- Convert to mono, gaining better tonal variation
- Adjust the luminance (“brightness”) of each colour
- I use Luminar 4, but Photoshop and Lightroom have similar controls
- Experiment. All changes are reversible. The RAW file never changes.

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Hope you found it interesting

Rhys