

Leave colour behind and rediscover the magic of black and white. We show you how to start seeing the world in mono and uncover those subjects that are crying out to be converted from colour

Black & white

It wasn't so long ago that photographers didn't have the option of choosing whether to print their images in anything but mono. Even now, those with the skill and resources to develop and print their own negatives tend to favour a black and white result.

With the ever-increasing popularity of digital cameras and so much emphasis placed on their colour capabilities, it can sometimes be difficult to bring ourselves back down to the basic, rudimentary methods of monochromatic photography. You can be so concerned with problems of colour cast and saturation that core practices and skills are forgotten.

Colourful distractions

The colour information we see through a camera lens or in a photo can be very distracting, leading us to overlook important elements of a scene. However, you don't have to get bogged down by colour. By visualising your images in monochrome you can make more from the raw qualities of a scene and achieve a very different

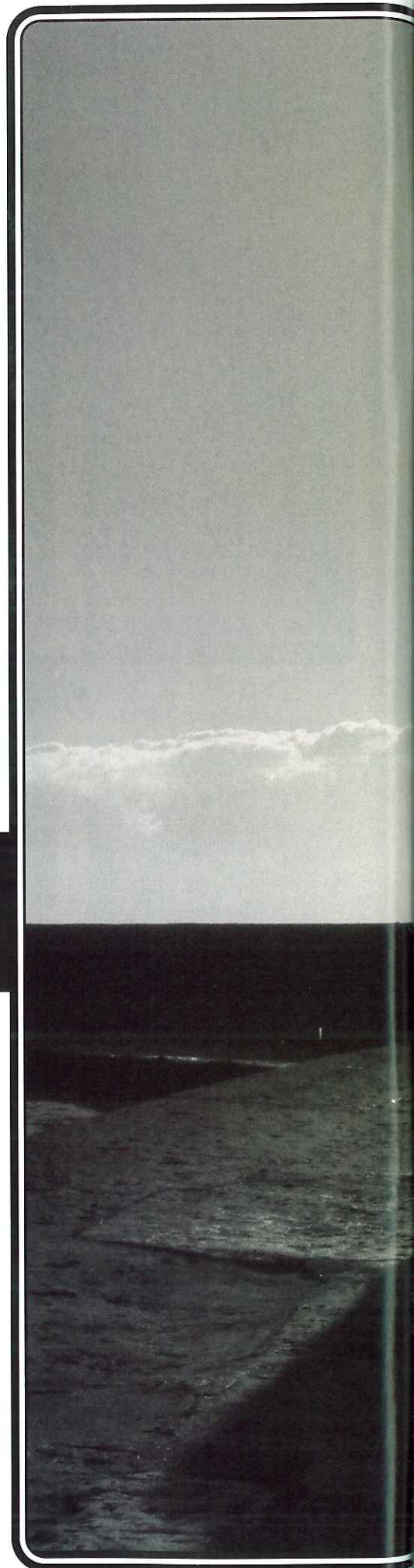
result to that of a colour image. Converting your images to black and white can give surprising results. Losing colour information and desaturating your photograph is a very good exercise for making you aware of hidden detail like shadows and textures.

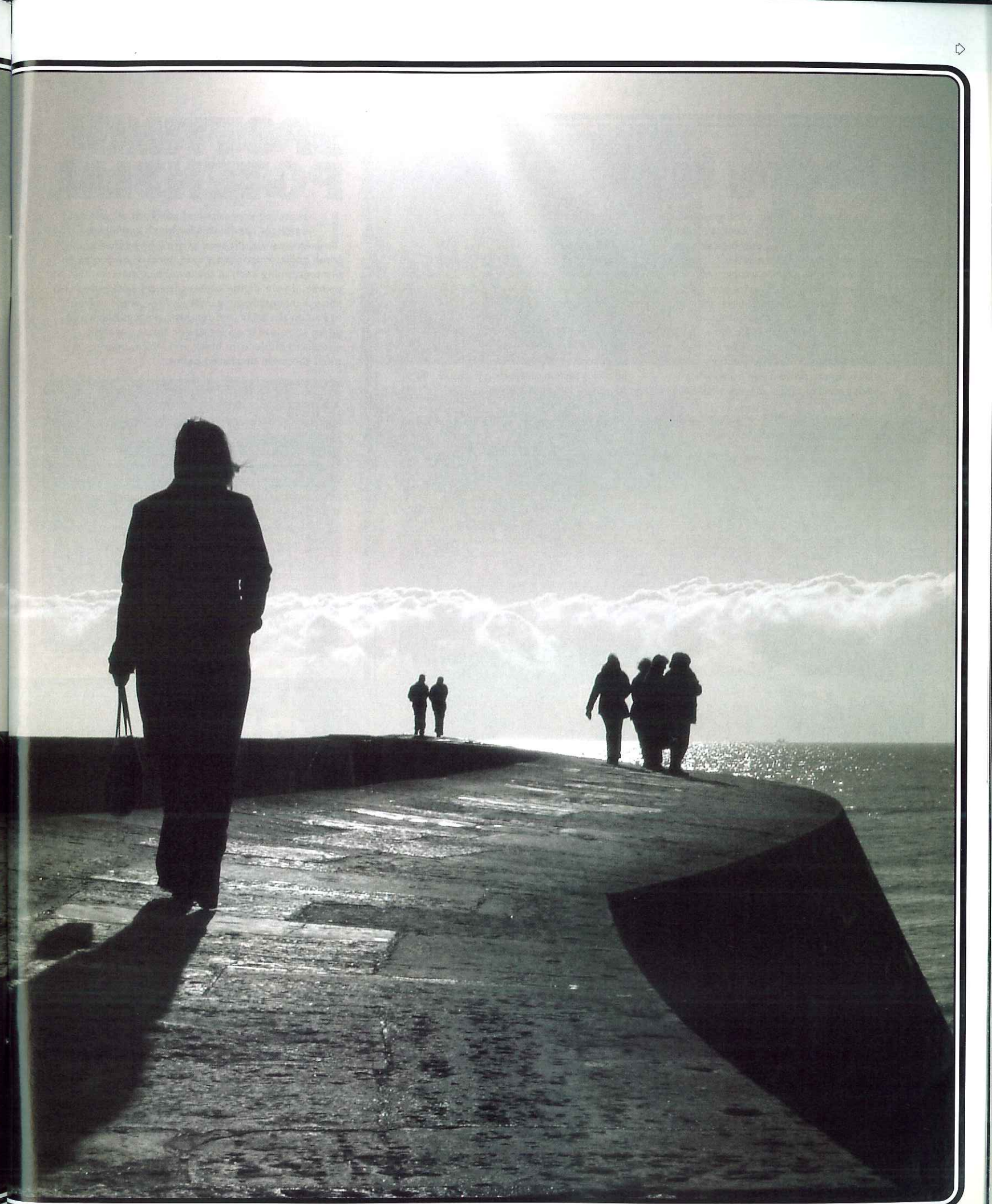
Similarly, photographs you once dismissed as unusable can be given a new lease of life if converted to black and white. The skill is in knowing when a mono effect will be of benefit to an image and when it's better to go for colour.

The magic of mono

A perfectly exposed black and white photograph will feature a full tonal range – the deepest black, the purest white and all the grey-tones in between. Without these extremes of light and dark, an image can be dull and uninspiring.

Over the next few pages we'll take a look at some of the best ways to use black and white in your images. Not only will we explore how to spot the potential for magnificent mono subjects, we'll also explore some of the ways you can enhance your black and white photographs using basic image-editing techniques.





Seeing in mono

Take a look at these two photographs below. Although they are exactly identical, apart from the colour mode used, they have very different photographic qualities.

When photographing a subject it's important to try and visualise how a real-life colour scene will look as a black and white photograph. You can actually train your eye to do this, and although it takes some practice, it's not as difficult as you might assume. What's more, it's worth attempting, as doing this is sure to prevent you from ending up with a mass of black and white duds. When

you are visualising a scene in mono there are lots of considerations to make.

Most important is the fact that colour will be redundant in a mono image, meaning you'll need to select a scene not on the basis of this, but by looking at the textures, tonal range and whether the photographic subject lends itself well to black and white. Mono images come across as much moodier than colour images do, so it's important to choose subjects and scenes that tie in well with the genre. The following section on spotting potential offers some tips on how to do this.



By converting colour photographs to monochrome, components such as shadows and textures become more important

Contrast & tonal range

Contrast is the difference between extremes – black and white, dark and light. The greater the difference between them, the higher the contrast. The number of shades of grey in between indicates the tonal range. The higher the contrast, the fewer grey shades there are.

SPOTTING POTENTIAL

Landscapes, macros and portraits all make excellent candidates for black and white images. In this section we'll be exploring some points worth bearing in mind when you're photographing each of these subject matters. Of course, if your digital camera has the facility to show a monochrome preview of the scene in front of you on the LCD, shooting the perfect black and white shot is made a lot easier. If not, practise visualising subjects in black and white, bearing in mind the main tips listed below.

There are some key points to consider when on a shoot. The boat example indicates what these are:

1. Dark shadows will appear as pure black.
2. Indistinct colours will appear as various tones of grey; these tones will make up the majority of your mono image.
3. Light areas, such as the sun-drenched wood of the boat, will appear as white or off-white.
4. Areas with contrasting patterns, such as footprints in sand, will transpose well in black and white.
5. Vibrant colours will have to be disregarded; they won't have any effect on your image and will only be displayed as a grey tone.

Convert it

There are a few ways you can convert a colour photograph to mono in your image-editing software. One of the most accurate, but more complicated ways is to use the channel mixer to add a new tint to a photo. A quicker way is to use the preset mono filters. In Paint Shop Pro 8 apply the alteration by clicking Image > Grey Scale. In Photoshop choose Image > Mode > Grayscale, although doing this means the effect is irreversible.

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Lessons in landscape

Mono can completely alter the ambience of a landscape photograph to give it a melancholic edge. It's important that you study the scenery in front of you and measure up the best composition.

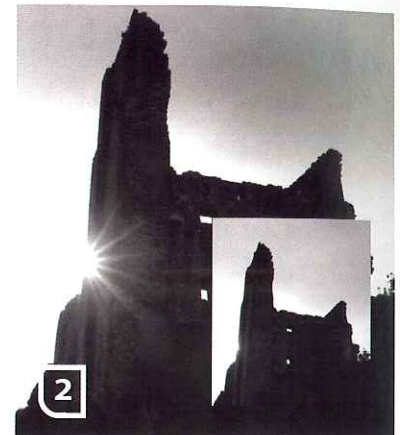
1 Murky moments

Even on a murky day you can achieve a well-exposed and effective black and white image. Water can balance a photograph by contrasting with darker elements in the image, such as foliage.



2 Get in position

Don't underestimate the power of positioning. The castle offers itself excellently against the backdrop of a bright sky, and by taking a couple of steps to the left, the sun provides a striking effect when converted to mono.



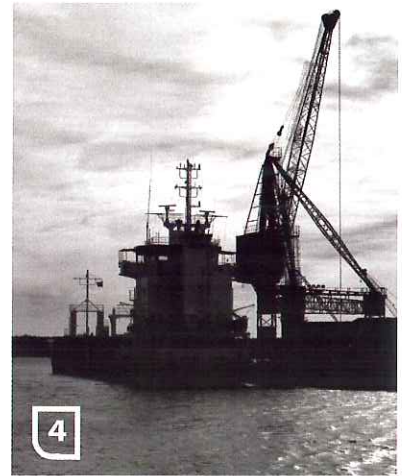
3 Capture the castle

Old buildings are often subjected to a battering from nature, such as this mossy wall. This will transfer well to monochrome and present you with fascinating detail.



4 Metering matters

For a dramatic result opt for centre-spot metering. A multi-spot setting should result in a more balanced exposure. Positioning your lens so the meter locks onto the brightest part of a scene will make your lens throw darker elements into shadow, giving high contrast. Locking onto the darkest part will make your lens overcompensate, leaving you with a low-contrast image.



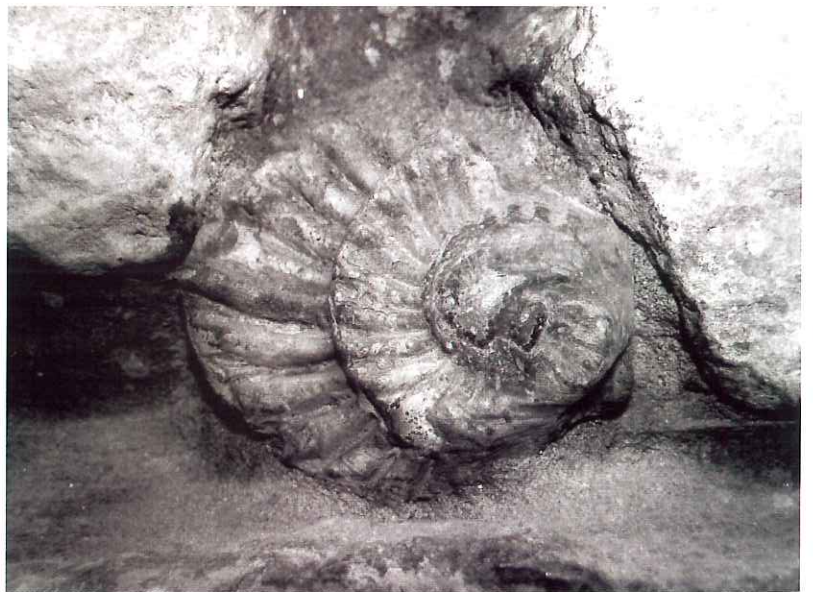
Portraits

Using black and white in portraits can transform a shot. Here, a close-up of an old man's eye is benefited by using monochrome. The deep lines and wrinkles are emphasised by the high-contrast grey tones, and the lack of colour enhances the dramatics of the crow's feet as the deep black is set against the backdrop of a mid-grey under eye. Black and white can also add a moody effect to portraits by simplifying lighting; this is also a very quick way to achieve a flattering result, as the monochrome will favour skin tones.



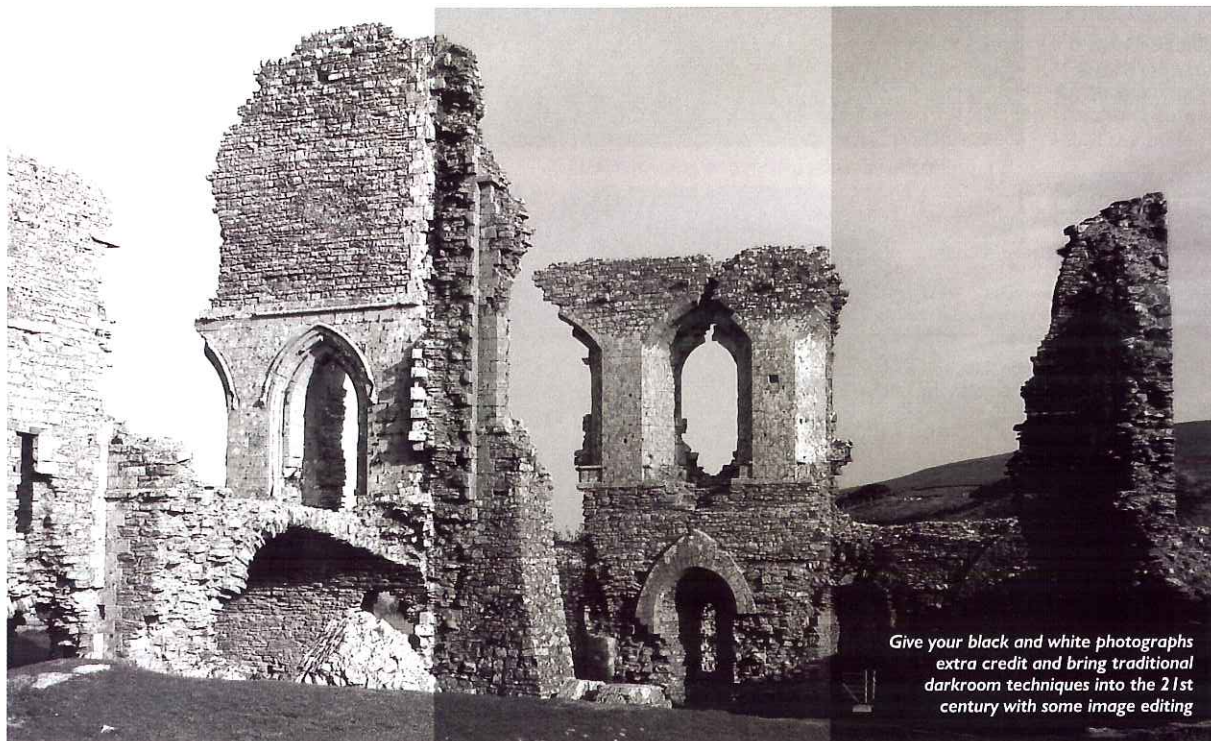
Macro perfection

Keep your eye open for textures and patterns as these will transpose well when converted to black and white. When shooting close-ups, remember to think about focusing to keep the details as sharp as possible. Using your camera's macro setting will help to ensure that the tiny details that will make your black and white macro image so interesting are kept crisp. Composition is also a key consideration for achieving great macro black and whites.



Recreate the darkroom

You wouldn't dream of committing yourself to using a whole sheet of paper when you're in the darkroom without first making a test sheet. Test sheets enable you to see exposure variations from which you can choose the best print. Printer paper is expensive and you don't want to waste huge reams of it creating images that are over or underexposed. Although you can see your results on-screen, what's on your computer's monitor and what comes out of your printer can sometimes vary dramatically. So, it's a good idea to make your own test strips in your image-editing program. By using the Marquee tool to make a selection of your image and altering the Brightness and Contrast, you can produce a number of exposure variations to apply to your image. Make sure you make a note of the Brightness and Contrast settings, you could even type the settings onto the image.



Give your black and white photographs extra credit and bring traditional darkroom techniques into the 21st century with some image editing

Processing techniques

Using techniques and filters in your image editor, you can apply darkroom effects.



Photoshop Elements 2.0

Filter > Stylize > Solarize

Paint Shop Pro 8

Effects > Artistic Effects > Solarize
Image > Adjustments > Variations



Photoshop Elements 2.0

Image > Adjustments > Variations

Paint Shop Pro 8

Adjust > Hue and Saturation > Colorize

Printing in monochrome

There's a raft of information on the Internet about printing in black and white, especially when it comes to choosing inkjet papers. There are even discussion forums such as <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DigitalBlackandWhiteThePrint> that enable you to share experiences on how to create the best mono prints with other digital shooters.

Somerset Enhanced paper

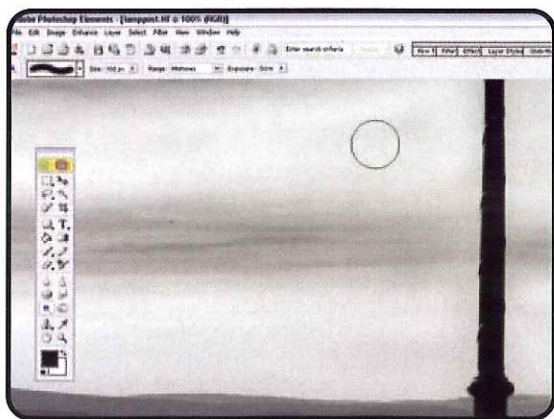
There's a huge variety of inkjet papers you can choose from. Some are more suited to printing mono than others. The Somerset Enhanced range, for example, comes in three finishes – Satin, Velvet and Textured and produces some great results when printing mono. To order a pack, call 01 384 400400 or visit www.on-linepaper.co.uk. A pack of 25 sheets of Somerset Enhanced 225gm A4 retails for £20.

Selecting a Print mode can also dramatically alter the outcome of your image. If it's high contrast you want, try printing in grey-scale. Your printer will use just black ink to produce deep tones. Colour mode is another option, but black is achieved by mixing inks, which doesn't always work.

Dodge and burn

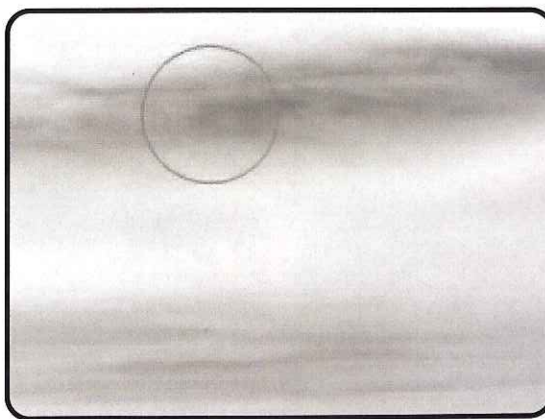
Enhance your mono images

When printing black and white images in the darkroom, it's possible to enhance aspects of the image by 'burning in' and 'holding back' areas using the Dodge tool over your image to avoid light exposure. You can achieve very similar results with your image editor's Dodge and Burn tools. In Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 and Jasc's Paint Shop Pro 8, these are found in the main Tools palette. The key to using the Dodge and Burn tools effectively, is to keep the changes subtle and limit them to small areas.



1 Do some dodging

Zoom into your image and select the Dodge tool from the Tools palette. Change the Exposure to 50% and brush over the light areas of the sky and sea to make them brighter.



2 Subtle Burn effects

Click on the Burn tool and keep the Exposure at 50%. Brush over the darker cloud areas. There's no limit to the intensity with which you apply the Burn tool but try to keep it subtle.