

Our original snap was a rather drab full-colour scene, but a few tweaks in Photoshop Elements produces a much more intriguing image. We've burned in the sky to make it darker, increased the contrast and added some film 'grain'.



# Black magic

**Black-and-white photography is alive and kicking. But thanks to digital imaging, you can achieve fantastic darkroom effects without the fiddle of a real darkroom**

**W**hy do people still shoot black-and-white photographs? If all you're interested in is archive photography, then there's little to be said for it. After all, colour pics convey more information, so are more accurate.

But sheer accuracy is not the point if you're a creative photographer who wants to achieve an artistic effect. Good black-and-white photography still has the power to stop people in their tracks.

Why is this? Well for a start, black-and-white images are much easier to control, in an artistic sense, than colour. You're dealing with light and shade alone, without having to cope with the added complication of colour. Colour evokes different responses in different people, and colours can conflict with each other or with the mood you're trying to

convey. Black-and-white photography concentrates solely on the subject, its form and lighting.

With digital imaging, it's no longer necessary to use black-and-white film (or to shoot in Mono mode) to produce excellent images. You can convert full-colour images easily, though it's not just a case of using 'greyscale', because this reduces the quality.

The first trick to learn is to reduce the saturation level to zero. This preserves the three separate red, green and blue channels that make up colour images and gives smoother tonal graduations than greyscale mode, which produces a single greyscale channel. In Photoshop Elements (a trial version of which is on the cover CD-ROM) you can use the 'Remove Color' tool to achieve this effect.

You can then apply darkroom techniques to your digital images, increasing the contrast to mimic different paper grades, burning in skies to darken them, even simulating the grain of a fast film in low lighting.

## Easy editing

All this is easy to achieve in Photoshop Elements, and there's nothing to stop you using another image editor such as Paint Shop Pro. The basic techniques are the same.

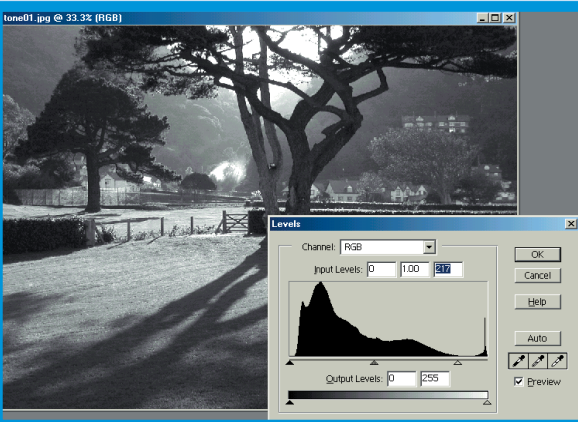
We do have one further tip. When you print out your black-and-white masterpieces, you'll see that your printer can print in black only or in black and colour. Choosing black only may not give the smooth gradation in tones you're looking for. Try printing in colour and tweaking your printer's colour controls to achieve a neutral grey.

## TONAL ADJUSTMENTS



### 1 Made for mono

This is the sort of shot that works really well because it's all about the contrast between light and shade. To make black-and-white prints work, though, you need to carefully control the shadows, the highlights and the tones in between. And that's the next step...



### 2 Highlights and shadows

We've used the 'Remove Color' command and opened the 'Levels' dialog ('Ctrl' / 'L'). This displays tonal distribution as a histogram, with shadows on the left and highlights on the right. Underneath are three sliders: one representing white, one black and one mid-tones.



### 3 Slide rules

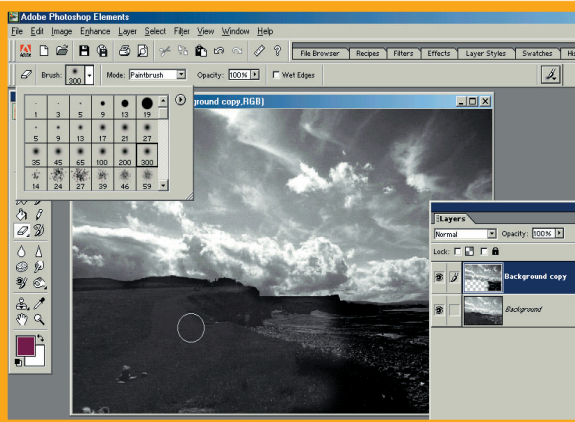
The first job is to drag the sliders to the points where your histogram curve starts taking off. This maximizes the contrast without losing any detail. Then move the centre slider to alter the overall lightness and darkness of the picture. Experiment until you get a feel for the controls.

## DODGING AND BURNING



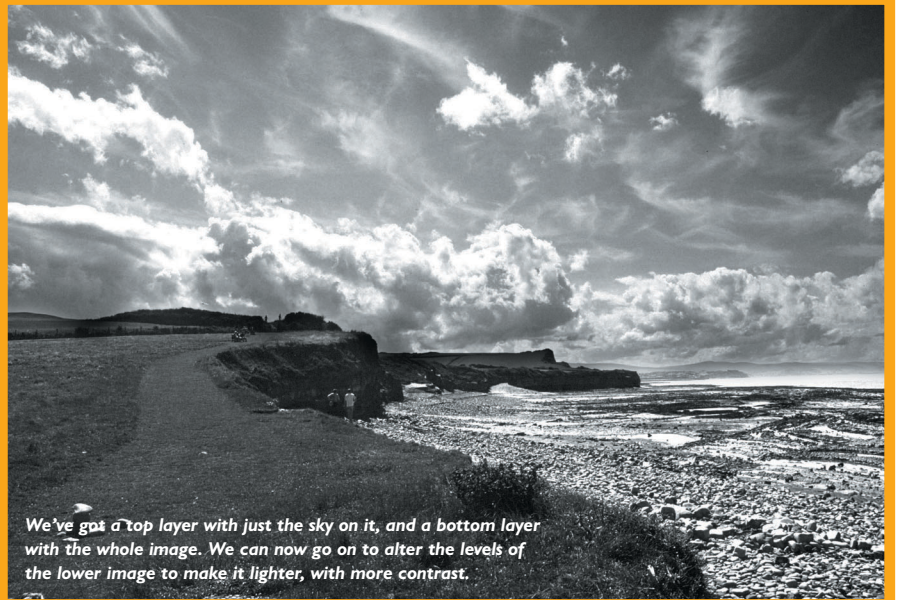
### 1 Exposure adjustments

This is an effective shot, but it could be a lot better. The sky is dramatic, but to stop it looking washed out we've had to reduce the exposure, making the foreground too dark. What we need are two separate exposures – one for the sky and one for the foreground.



### 2 Rub it out

What we've done is to duplicate the layer the photo is on, then used the 'Levels' dialog to darken the sky. Don't worry about the foreground, because the next step is to switch to the 'Eraser', pick a big soft brush and erase to reveal the foreground on the layer underneath.

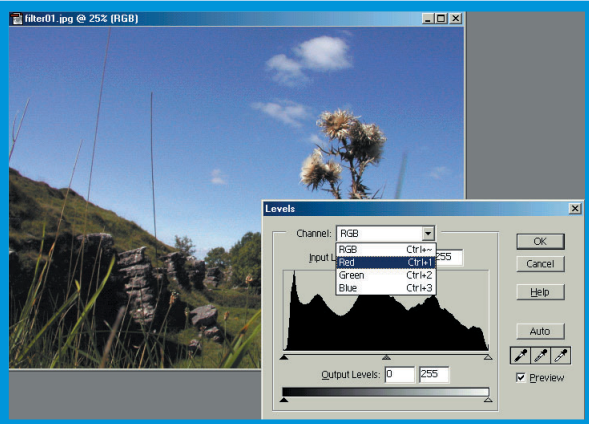


## Tip!

### Photoshop at full tilt

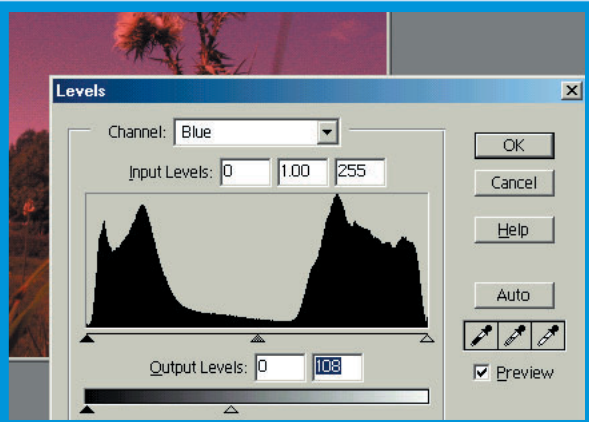
Why do people pay £586 for Adobe Photoshop when you can get excellent programs like Elements and Paint Shop Pro for a fraction of the price? It's because this kind of work is where Photoshop shows its mettle. For example, it has a 'Channel Mixer' for combining the red, green and blue channels much more easily, and you can also adjust not merely tonal levels, but tonal curves, too – a more complex option that offers greater control over the contrast distribution in your pictures. There's a lot more to Photoshop than this, of course, and it's a program that all serious photographers gravitate towards.

## BLACK-AND-WHITE FILTERS



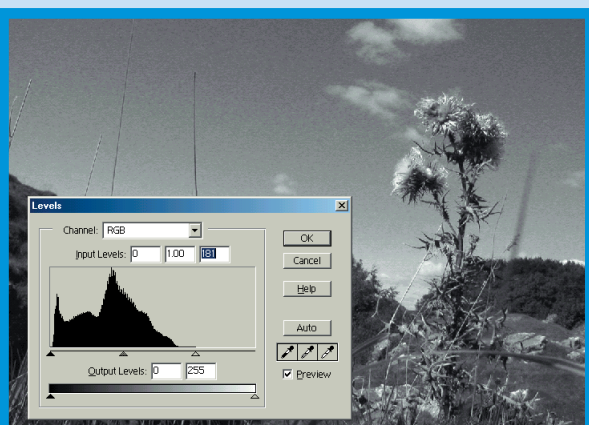
### 1 Add some colour

If you've got a colour original, you can mimic the effect of a yellow or red filter after you've taken the shot using the 'Levels' dialog. This time, though, open the pop-up 'Channel' menu at the top. It's possible to adjust the strength of the individual red, green and blue channels.



### 2 Seeing red

By doing this, you can alter the individual red, green and blue components of the image. By reducing the green and blue, we duplicate the effect of a red filter. Drag the right-hand 'Output' slider to reduce the strength of a channel.



### 3 Tweak the contrast

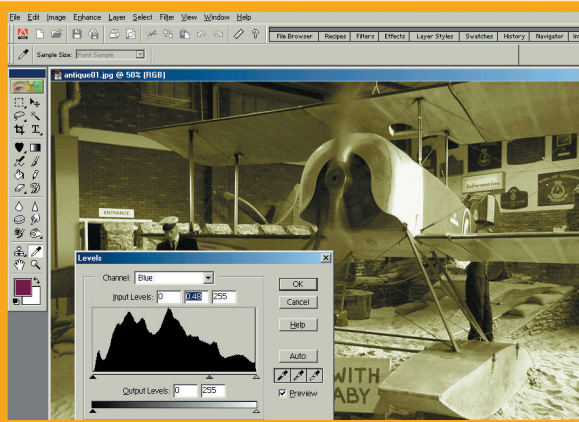
When you apply the 'Remove Color' command, you'll find the resulting image distinctly flat. Go back to the 'Levels' dialog and adjust the sliders, dragging the highlight slider back to the end point on the histogram. This gives the deep-toned sky you get from a red filter.

## ANTIQUÉ PHOTOS



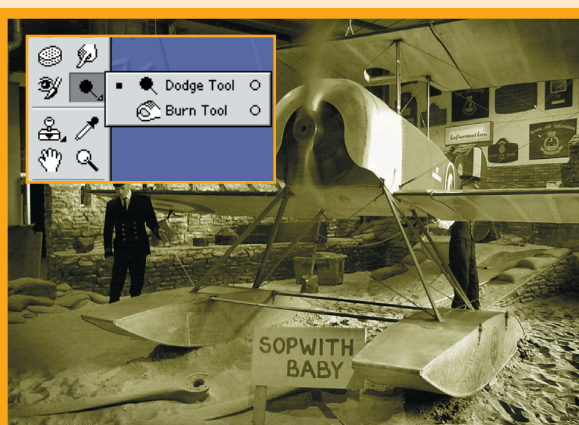
### 1 Making it old

We took this shot at the Fleet Air Museum at Yeovilton, but it doesn't really capture the mood we were looking for. What we want is one of those old-fashioned, sepia-toned photos, something that looks as if it came from the same era as that Sopwith Baby.



### 2 Channel hopping

We've used the 'Remove Color' command to produce our mono image, and we've opened the 'Levels' dialog to get the tonal balance right and to adjust the blue channel. This has the effect of shifting the colour balance. Try experimenting with the other channels to see the effects.



### 3 Time for tools

Our sepia effect was so easy, we've got room for one more tip. You'll find the Elements toolbar has little 'Dodge' and 'Burn' tools for adjusting localised areas of your image – just choose the appropriate brush size. We've used the 'Burn' tool to darken areas of our image.

## Jargon Culler

### Channel

Greyscale digital images have only one (black) channel, while colour images have three (red, green and blue). Understanding how channels work gives you a great deal of power over your images.

### Dodge

A darkroom technique where you shield parts of the printing paper with your hand while the paper is being exposed under the enlarger. This has the effect of lightening those areas.

### Burn

The opposite of dodging, where you give certain areas of the print greater exposure, which makes them much darker. Hence the term 'burning-in' skies.

## In a nutshell

- It's often a lot easier to be artistic in black and white than it is in colour.
- Don't convert your colour images to greyscale – this reduces picture quality. Reduce the saturation instead, or use the 'Remove Color' command.
- Use the 'Levels' dialog to adjust the shadows, highlights and brightness of your images.
- You can simulate the effect of black-and-white filters by juggling the strengths of the red, green and blue channels.
- If you want to adjust specific areas of an image, create duplicate layers containing just those areas.
  - Use dodging and burning to lighten or darken areas of your photos to produce balanced tonal compositions.