

Converting Colour To Monochrome

By Brian Clarke. 2009

Introduction.

Most black and white prints have been shot onto monochrome film and this way is the most satisfying method of using this medium. If you shoot monochrome film you can scan the negatives directly with any film or flatbed scanner fitted with a transparency adaptor and having sufficient resolution.

Many photographers have found that the computer provides a new option, shoot in colour and then convert to black and white. This is a new way of working and gains some unique advantages that are Unavailable when the original image is captured on black and white film. These advantages are related to filter effects in changing the tonality of a scene as captured from real world colour to black and white.

There are a variety of ways of converting colour images into black and white using the digital darkroom, the computer, using an image processing programme and the printer.

Lets explore several ways of making the conversion.

Lazy method 1. Converting the image to Greyscale mode.

Using Greyscale mode is quick and easy, it gives no control or flexibility and the entire image is changed forever. The end result is flat.

Lazy method 2. Desaturating the image.

Desaturating the image makes the image monochrome.

Go to **Image>Adjustments>Desaturate** or go to **Image>Adjustments>Hue/Saturation**. Then drag the saturation slider to minus 100.

As with Greyscale mode you have no control and file sizes are bigger due to redundant colour values.

Lab Colour.

Change mode to Lab Colour. **Image>Mode>Lab Colour**. Select the lightness channel (Monochrome) then delete colour channels **A** and **B** by dragging to the palette trash bin.

Go to **Image>Mode>Greyscale** then click ok to discard the colour information.

This method gives a finer quality monochrome image than can be achieved by simple conversion to greyscale and desaturation.

Channel Mixer.

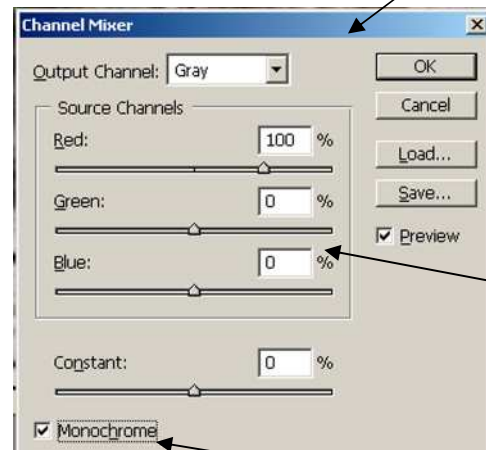
If you are accustomed to using filters in monochrome film photography, it feels most natural to use the Channel Mixer method of converting to black and white. This method can often produce much better

results. Like filters for film, this technique offers much more precise control over the conversion process, allowing you to separate tones and produce a finer black and white print.

The channel mixer adjustment layer also has the big advantage of not being destructive, unlike switching to lab mode or greyscale which both permanently change the digital file.

With this technique you can always adjust the black and white conversion afterwards. You can even restore the original colour image.

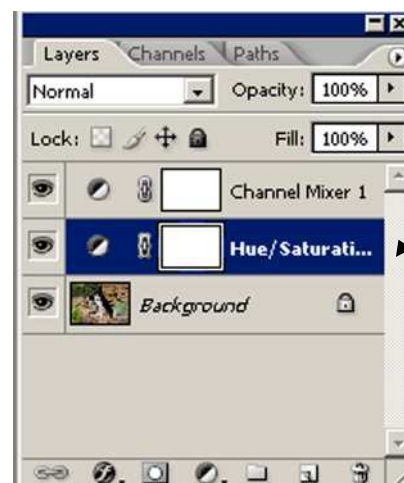
1. In the layers palette, create a new adjustment layer and select **Channel Mixer**.

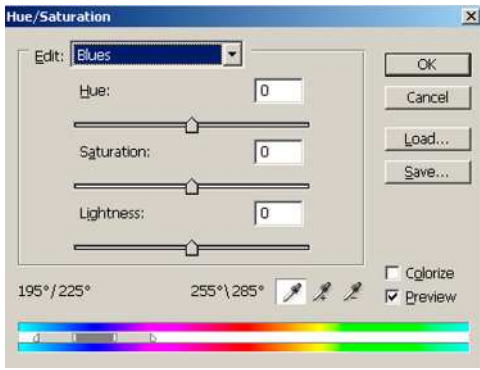


2. Check the Monochrome output box. Photoshop now shows a black and white image. Note that the red channel slider is first set to 100%, this is like using a Red filter with film.

3. Experiment with moving the other channel sliders. If you set green channel to 100% and the remaining channels are set to zero, the effect is like using a green filter over the lens. To simulate the effect of using an orange filter, set the red channel to 20% and the green channel to 80%. Note keep the total of both channels to 100%, this will prevent blowing out the highlights.

4. If you add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer in the layers palette, you can strengthen selected colours on the original colour background image.



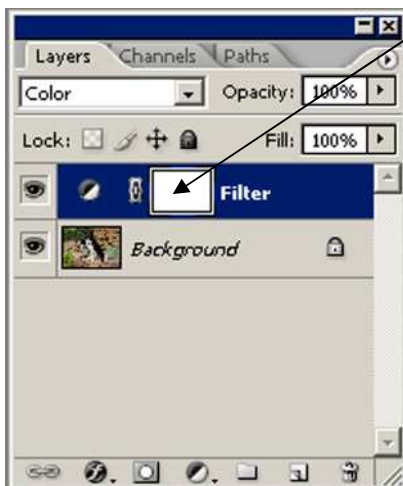


Try increasing the blue channel saturation to darken a light blue sky without affecting other colours.

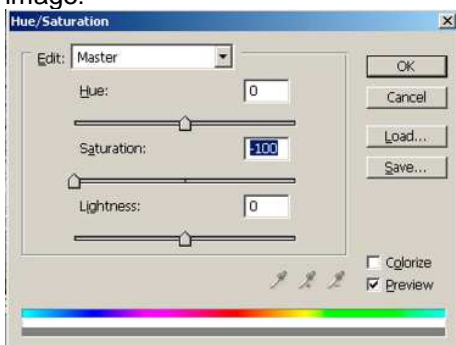
The Film/Filter Method.

The Film/Filter method is another much more powerful way to convert a colour image to black and white. It will not destroy the underlying image, so it has the same advantage as the Channel Mixer technique. The method is to use **two Hue/Saturation** adjustment layers. One is desaturated and acts as black and white film, the second functions as the lens filter. By varying the filter layers hue and saturation, you control and subtly improve the black and white tonality within the image.

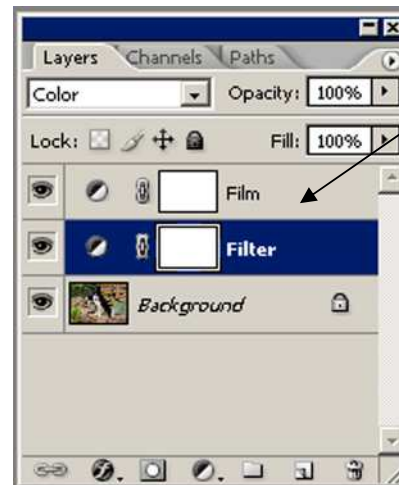
1. Click on the new adjustment layer icon in the layers palette and select **Hue and Saturation**. Change this layers blending mode to **Colour**. This layer will act as a coloured lens filter, so double click its name and rename it **Filter**.



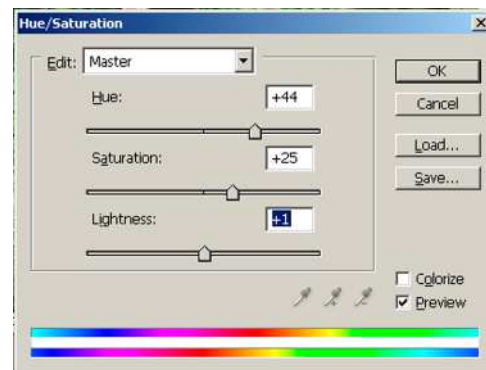
2. Create a second **Hue and Saturation** adjustment layer. In the dialogue box drag the saturation slider to minus 100, click **ok**, this will create a black and white image.



3. Because it is making the image black and white, rename this layer **Film**. Ensure that this film layer is positioned above the filter layer.



4. Now select the filter layer and double click its icon. In the Hue/Saturation dialogue box, drag the hue or saturation sliders and watch the way the black and white tones change.



5. For further fine-tuning, double click the filter layer icon to bring up the Hue/Saturation dialogue box. Click the edit drop down box, where it says master. Now you can vary each colours hue and saturation individually.

