Through The Lens

A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts.
After the click of your camera, you're only half done!

Sometimes the world is black and white!
by Lynda Buske

All of us have seen stunning black and white images but it can be tricky to determine which images would best suit this approach. I rarely figure this out while I'm shooting and so I always have my camera set for colour images. It is easy enough afterwards to switch to black and white (or grayscale) on my computer — certainly easier than to change a black and white image into colour!

So which types of photos lend themselves to black and white treatment? There is a handy feature in Windows 10 that allows you toggle between a full colour screen and black and white. That means everything you view on your screen (not just pics) will be monochrome. First, make sure the feature is enabled. Go to *Settings | Ease of Access | Color filters* and turn on the slider for *Turn on color filters*. Then in the section *Select a color filter…*, choose *Grayscale* and put a checkmark in the box *Allow the shortcut key to toggle filter on or off*. You can then toggle off color filters. Fire up whatever program you use to look at your pics then press and hold the Windows key (▦) and the Ctrl key and press C. You can then flip through your photos so see which ones may look good in black and white without actually creating a black and white image file. Toggle the feature off by again pressing and holding the Windows key (▦) and the Ctrl key and press C to put your screen back to normal colours and then use your favourite photo editing software (e.g., Windows Photos, Lightroom, Photoscape X) to convert your image to monochrome.

To create a black and white image in your photo editing software, the simplest way is to desaturate the photo entirely by setting the saturation tool to zero. This is often just a slider bar in the colour adjustment section. In the free software, Photoscape X, there is actually a "grey scale" setting that I find does a better job than simply desaturating. To further refine your image, you can adjust the individual "black" and "white" bars in the colour adjustment area.

I most often think of using black and white when I'm editing pictures with people. If they are the main subject, I might not want clothing or background colours to distract from faces and if they are not the main object of interest but just adding to a larger scene, then again, I may not want the bright colours of their clothes to detract or clash with the rest of the image. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

Other photos where black and white might work well are those that are almost monochromatic to begin with or the main subject is black, white or gray. See Figure 2. This could also include photos where the objects of interest are silhouetted.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Sometimes interesting textures can be emphasized in black and white. See Figures 3 & 4.

Figure 4

I also use black and white for photos where I am purposely trying to draw attention to a shadow. Again, the accompanying colours may be quite unimportant but still distracting. See Figures 5 & 6.
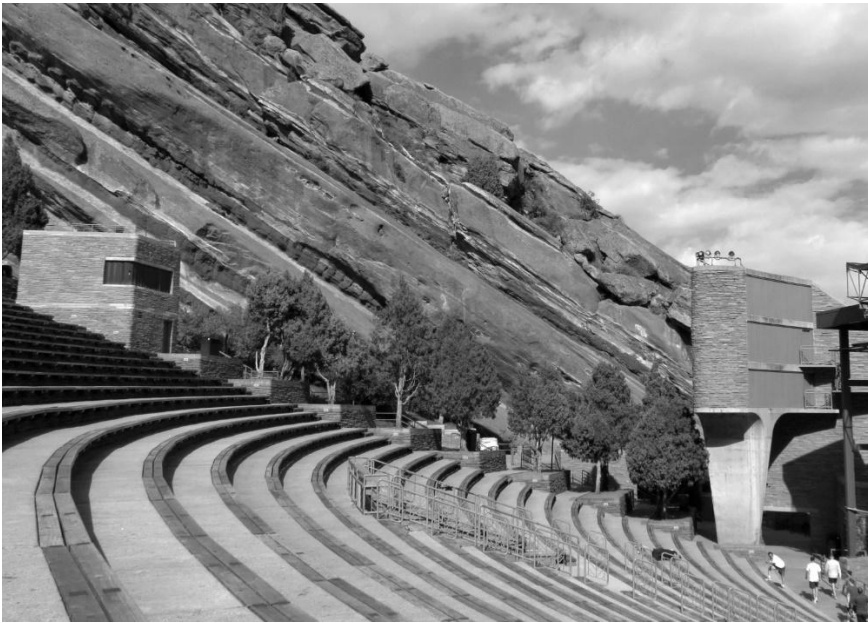
Figure 5

Figure 6

When you use black and white in nature or landscape photography, try to ensure that the viewer's brain can easily fill in the colour. We know grass is green and skies are often blue but if you are showing a blossom, we may not be able to guess the colour. See Figure 7. Trees look fine in black and white providing of course you are not trying to show autumn foliage!

Figure 7