

'There's a mystery, power and intensity to monochrome images that I've found very difficult to capture using colour. With the colour values absent, I think it's easier to emphasise the lines and contrasts in the image.'

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## selective contrast

Jeff Alu uses purely digital capture. Widely published, his work features high contrast, both in look and feel. His preferred approach is to let his imagination take him on a creative journey. But it is the modern digital techniques of dodge and burn, so at home in a 'wet' darkroom, that he calls upon most.

### shoot

Jeff shot these images with a 2Mp camera, but recently upgraded to a 5Mp model. These shots were taken at the Salton Sea in California on two separate occasions. The shack (1) is an abandoned restroom and the surrounding area was covered with dried mud. Only a couple of inches down from there was a black and warm layer of wet mud. His shoes and lower legs, almost up to his knees, were unfortunate enough to make contact with this mud, possibly full of pollutants and rotting fish. There are a lot of dead fish at the Salton Sea, not because of the pollution, but because the sea is running out of oxygen due to the warm temperature of the water and the algae that consumes oxygen. The second image was captured at a later date about 200 feet away from the first. By the second date, the mud had dried completely. A very hot day, 105 degrees, this type of weather usually makes Jeff feel very relaxed, probably because he has to move slower than usual. He thinks the hot weather is what put him into the state of mind ready to take this dream-like shot.

> digital capture  
> Photoshop  
> channel mixer  
> greyscale  
> burn tool  
> USM  
> dodge tool  
> ink jet print



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### enhance

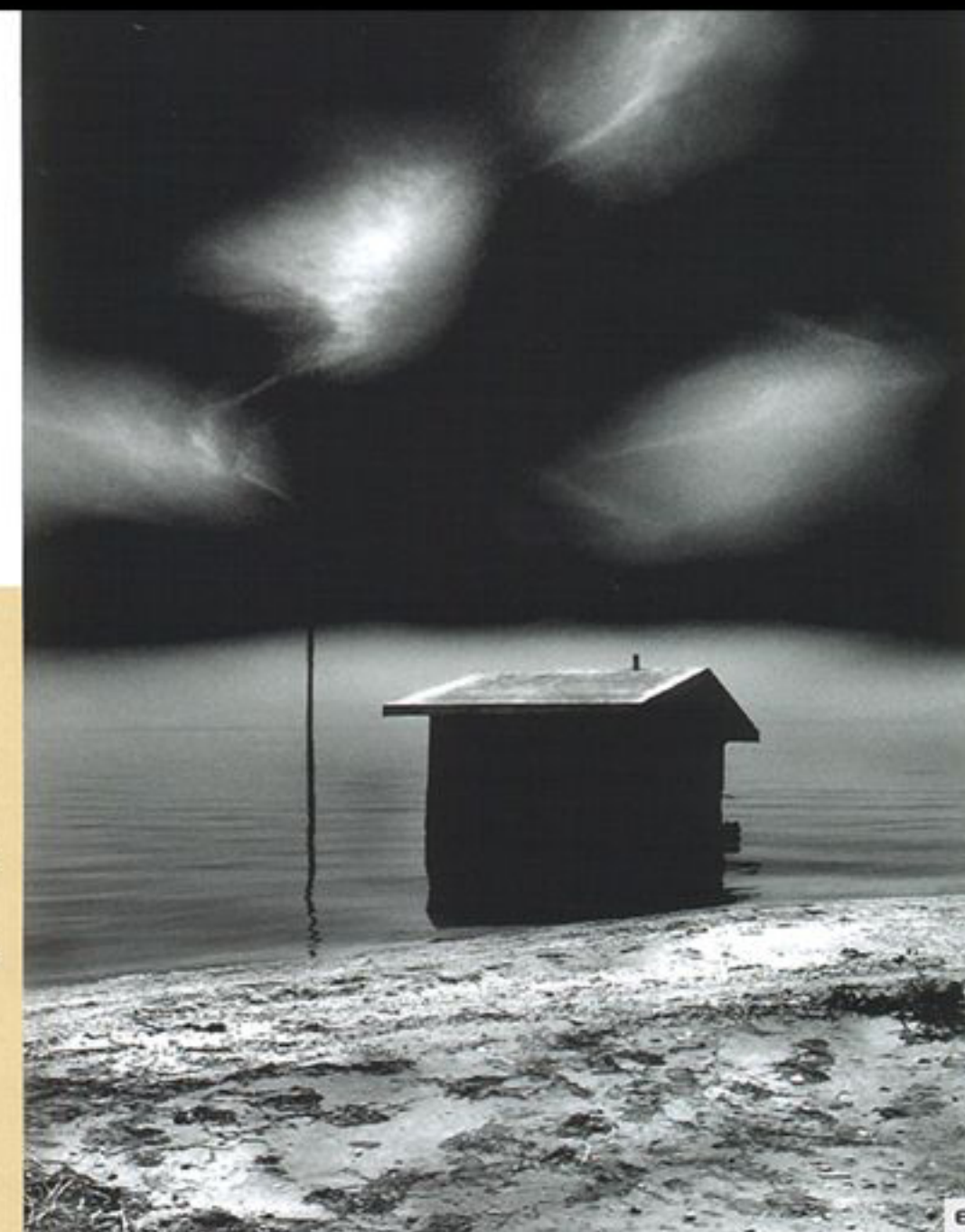
Photoshop is used for all his post-capture processing, specifically the channel mixer, dodge and burn brush, and the unsharp mask plus sharpening filter playing significant roles. The first shot, called 'Far 1', was a RAW image, shot at 1168 x 1760 resolution. Next the image was converted to greyscale (2) using the channel mixer with the monochrome box ticked. The red channel was set to 0 and the green channel to 100. This reduced the noise that was visible in the sky. Then a small amount of



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Experiment with the unsharp mask in Photoshop, especially the radius parameter. It can really make your image 'pop!'.

burning was carried out on the sand, water and house (3). Further dodging and burning of the sand was followed by burning out detail of the sky where there were no clouds (4). With the range set to 'shadows', the bright clouds were safe from being burned out (5). A touch more burning in on the sky was followed by some unsharp mask (large radius), to make the image more intense. The last stage was to dodge the sand to make it brighter (6).



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### enjoy

Jeff makes prints for exhibition purposes. He uses an online printer to make digital prints. Sales are mostly to private individuals, but of course there are quite a few prints hanging at his home. Jeff uses [www.digiprintstore.com](http://www.digiprintstore.com). At home, ink jet output is quickly placed under glass and framed (about 15 minutes per image). Sometimes, if he is not happy with the way an image turns out, he goes back (usually a couple of months later) and tries again. He doesn't like to think about the image too much while he's working on it.

'I am constantly trying to look for subjects that seem to be "crying out" to have their picture taken. I certainly am interested in creating an alternate mood, one that is different than the obvious one in front of me. I have a much easier time dodging and burning the image if I have a subject that has high contrast darks and lights to begin with. I very often burn the shadows totally black, since often, areas in the shadow will contain low-contrast objects that only serve to interfere with the overall composition of the shot.'