



## the human landscape



## selective contrast control

### shoot

Many photographers continue to find their calling creating black-and-white imagery. Jeff Alu is one of these. A 3D artist/ animator he has been shooting black-and-white photography in an attempt to get back to the basics of light and shadow. All of the work shown here was created with the same basic techniques and shows the magic that is mono. Particularly important as it was for traditional darkroom work is the use of digital dodge and burn techniques.

A compact digital camera was used for these images by Jeff Alu. It appealed for its simplicity as the preferred shooting technique is for the most part point and click. These are therefore hand-held. Due to the main subject matter, the photographer often finds himself three hours from home in the middle of nowhere. Pictures are captured in colour, with a polarising filter attached. The act of photography has come out of a love for hiking through the deserts on very hot days. Not waiting in one spot for very long, many shots are captured while on the move, with his interest mostly in finding new areas to photograph. The images tend to be graphic in nature, with strong leading lines.



- > digital capture
- > channel mixer
- > greyscale
- > dodge and burn
- > sharpening
- > contrast adjustment
- > web

88 black and white never fades

'I've found this to be such a great technique for isolating subjects or bringing out emotions. I didn't dodge and burn at first, but now I do it on every image.'



### enhance

67 Traditional darkroom shows its influence with the popular 'dodge and burn' tools. These selectively lighten or hold back parts of an image (dodge), or darken (burn) depending on which tool is chosen. There is plenty of control to exert through brush size, exposure and the ability to work on highlights, mid-tones or shadows separately.

68 In colour the image was no more than a snap.

69 In monochrome it becomes an image of slight mystery.

Once in computer the image is converted to black and white using the channel mixer with the monochrome setting checked. This allows for subtle variations in the overall look and helps to cut down on the graininess of the sky. An interesting aside is that the photographer tones down the red channel because his compact digital shows some noise and this counteracts it. Next comes dodging and burning in with the dodge and burn brush – something he feels to be by far the most important part of the process. It also was a skill initially learned in an old fashioned darkroom environment. Then there is some unsharp masking (Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask), usually in two stages. First a high radius is chosen – maybe around 50 and a low 'amount', say 25 – this makes larger details stand out a little better. The second is a low 'radius' – 8 and a high 'amount' maybe up to 70 –

and this does the actual sharpening, but the values vary depending on the picture. Finally a little contrast enhancement may be added. In this – a selective contrast control – the dodge and burn brush is used again. This allows easy brightening of the highlights and a darkening of the shadows by painting on the image. You can control what you want to work on: highlights, mid-tones, or shadows. For instance, with a sky and bright clouds and a darker 'blue' area for example, the brush can be used to burn the darker areas and paint on the image. These then become totally black, while the bright clouds are not affected. It's a great way to achieve selective contrast enhancement, and of course you can also control the strength of the brush. Sometimes you may see the brush strokes, so using a softer brush can help.

### enjoy

These images have been placed on the photographer's website.

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Shape, line and form are there to start with, but are only shown to their maximum? Turning the image into black and white enhances the key elements further. The original image had a monochromatic and 3D feel. Increasing contrast added the sense of depth.

! If you use the dodge and burn tools on an RGB image, they also affect colour as well as brightness. Lab colour separates out the brightness to one channel with two other channels 'a' and 'b' (red/green and yellow/blue) for colour manipulation. By working

on the lightness channel, the colours are not affected. Similarly, when working on one or both of the colour channels, there is no effect on the brightness. Some prefer to work on the lightness channel when judging the tonal range.

'Many of my clients demand high-impact, colourful graphics, which have their place to be sure. But, it can often become overwhelming, and the act of doing black-and-white photography clears my mind a little.'

