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# BLACK & WHITE



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## shooting techniques | expert masterclass

Shooting black-and-white photographs used to mean special film and hours of developing in the darkroom. Now digital technology means you can shoot in colour and tweak images on the computer. We speak to the experts to find out just what it takes to create a perfect mono photograph...

# A question of Black & White

**T**hink about the most memorable images since the invention of photography. Odds on, most of them will be in black and white. At one time this was the only option for photographers until George Eastman invented colour film in the 1930s.

Images captured in black and white have the power to convey an emotional undertone that colour compositions can sometimes lack. The absence of pigment allows the photographer to delve further into the drama, the texture and the light of an image. Even with colour at their disposal, many photographers have chosen to stick to monochrome. Some of the strongest documentary and portrait images are those in which the distractions of colour have been cast aside, the true nature of the scene is preserved in the clarity of black and white. Landscape photographers have also embraced the stark truth of monochrome to emphasise vast expanses of earth.

Consider that the romantic nostalgia of Robert Doisneau's kiss at Hôtel de Ville would have lost its impact in colour. Man Ray's surrealist observations

of texture and form would have become garish if imbued with distracting tones. The pictures of Ansel Adams would also have appeared excessive if the majesty of the North American terrain had been marred by gaudy technicolour.

**Either/or**  
Revolutions in camera technology have meant that photographers no longer have to choose between colour and mono. All kinds of possibilities have opened up, enabling an air of creativity to saturate each image. On site, filters can be applied, or colour images can be desaturated later in Photoshop. The photographer is able to play God with any image. But his power is not without its difficulties, as there are many considerations that need to be taken into account. While colour is a driving force in itself, black and white compositions have to be carefully thought out. First, it is necessary to identify when a scene would look better in black and white. While potential mono shots can be primarily recorded in colour, the photographer must already be in a monochrome mindset to achieve success.



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A Pop-over photo to create a bit more drama in a long day.

### DOCUMENTARY SHOOTING ADVICE: KEN GRANT

Ken Grant's love of photography started with pictures of his family. From there his interest flourished. Growing up in Liverpool, he was aware of the documentary photography that chronicled the development of the docks and the shipping industry. But what of the men who built and worked on these industrial giants?

Ken says: "I was aware of the huge amount of casual labour in the city, which meant that people would be there one day and gone the next. There was very little record of their lives and I wanted to address that..."

All of Ken's work is shot in black and white, so it is ironic that he actually teaches colour documentary photography at University of Wales College, Newport. "Apart from one pupil last year, all my students work in colour. I think it's because they have an eye on the way work is being bought, and colour is most photo-stories are in colour right now."

Ken still works in black and white, though. "I think colour would be a distraction in my photographs. I love examining light and how it works in a particular space. I use natural light as much as possible."

Ken's past projects have included photographing a community in the Liverpool suburb of Everton as well as children in several schools across the city. For one of his more recent ventures though, he has been shadowing a group who live off the proceeds of a tip. He comments: "It's an alternative kind of economy, making money from scrap."

These photographs have been included in the first Shrinking Cities exhibition ([www.shrinkingcities.com](http://www.shrinkingcities.com)) that has just taken place in Berlin; the second of which is to be held in Leipzig in the summer of 2006. The whole process has made him far more interested in the printing side of things. "I use Photoshop to tidy up my images, but black and white already gives it an inkiness, full of rich blacks and charcoals. I use an Amazon drum scanner and a large 14-inch inkjet printer. Good printing has been accelerated by the digital process in terms of accessibility."

For me, Photoshop is not about altering the image. I want to reproduce the picture as it looks in reality. It's a big transition from hand printing in the darkroom to scanning and printing. You can set a machine to auto and still get a decent image. Small manipulations are a great starting point for lifting areas of dark and light."

Ken's current book, *The Close Season* is published by Dewi Lewis ([www.dewilewispublishing.com](http://www.dewilewispublishing.com)) and is available at good bookshops for £25.



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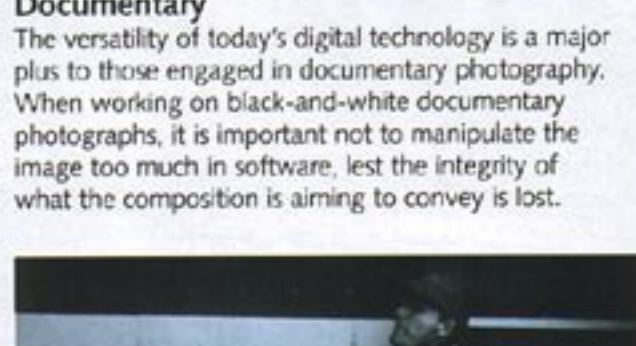
### Landscape

Digital manipulation has made creating a striking landscape much simpler. Instead of spending hours on location or in the darkroom, skies can be burnt in and curves adjusted in a matter of minutes using Photoshop. Being able to undo any step is also a huge bonus, enabling a more experimental approach to black and white photography.



### Documentary

The versatility of today's digital technology is a major plus to those engaged in documentary photography. When working on black-and-white documentary photographs, it is important not to manipulate the image too much in software, lest the integrity of what the composition is aiming to convey is lost.

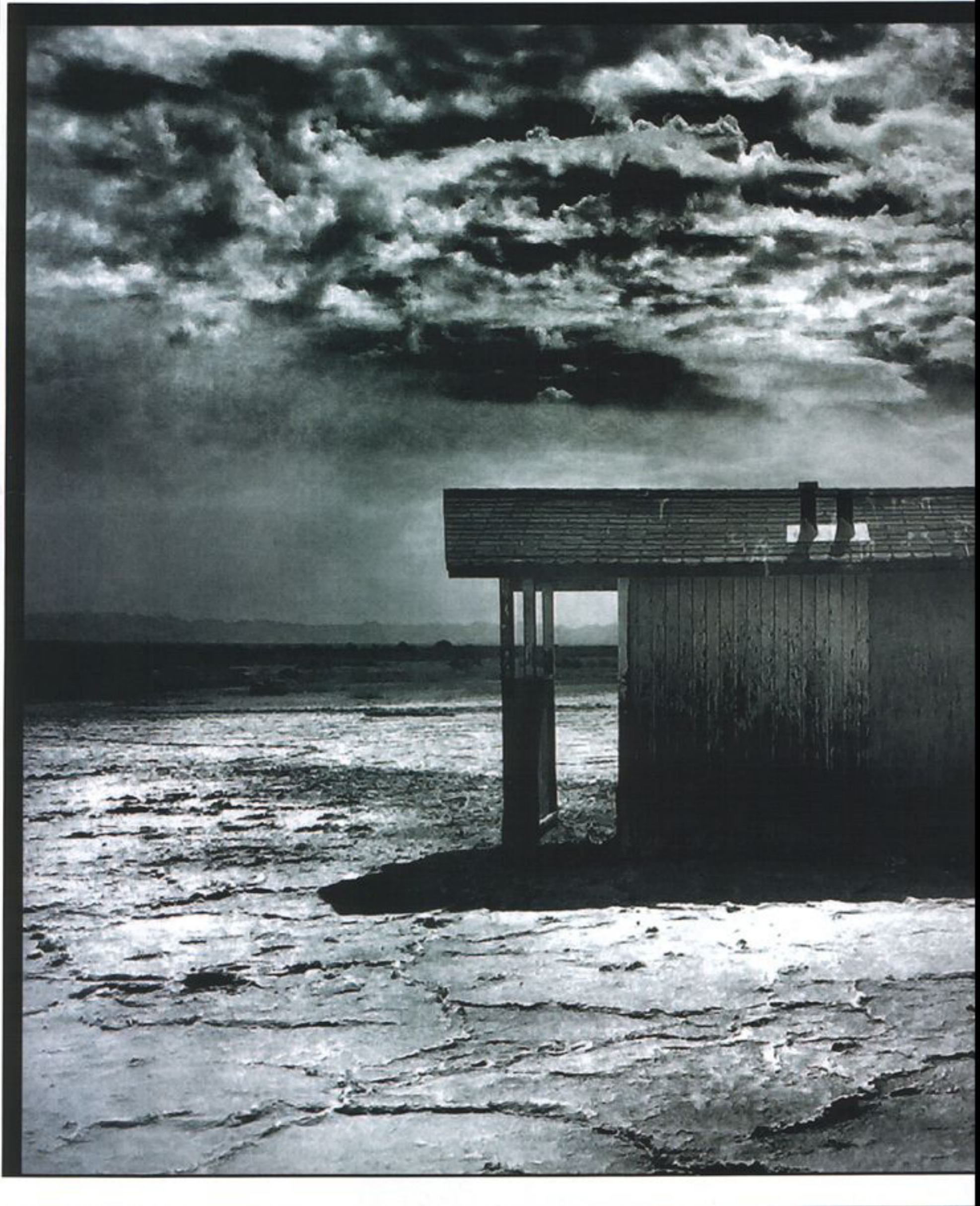


### Portraiture

Portraiture and black-and-white photography are highly complementary. A good portrait photographer will use black and white to capture something of the person's personality which has not been seen before. In Photoshop, the contrasts and tones can be controlled and any unwanted irregularities removed.

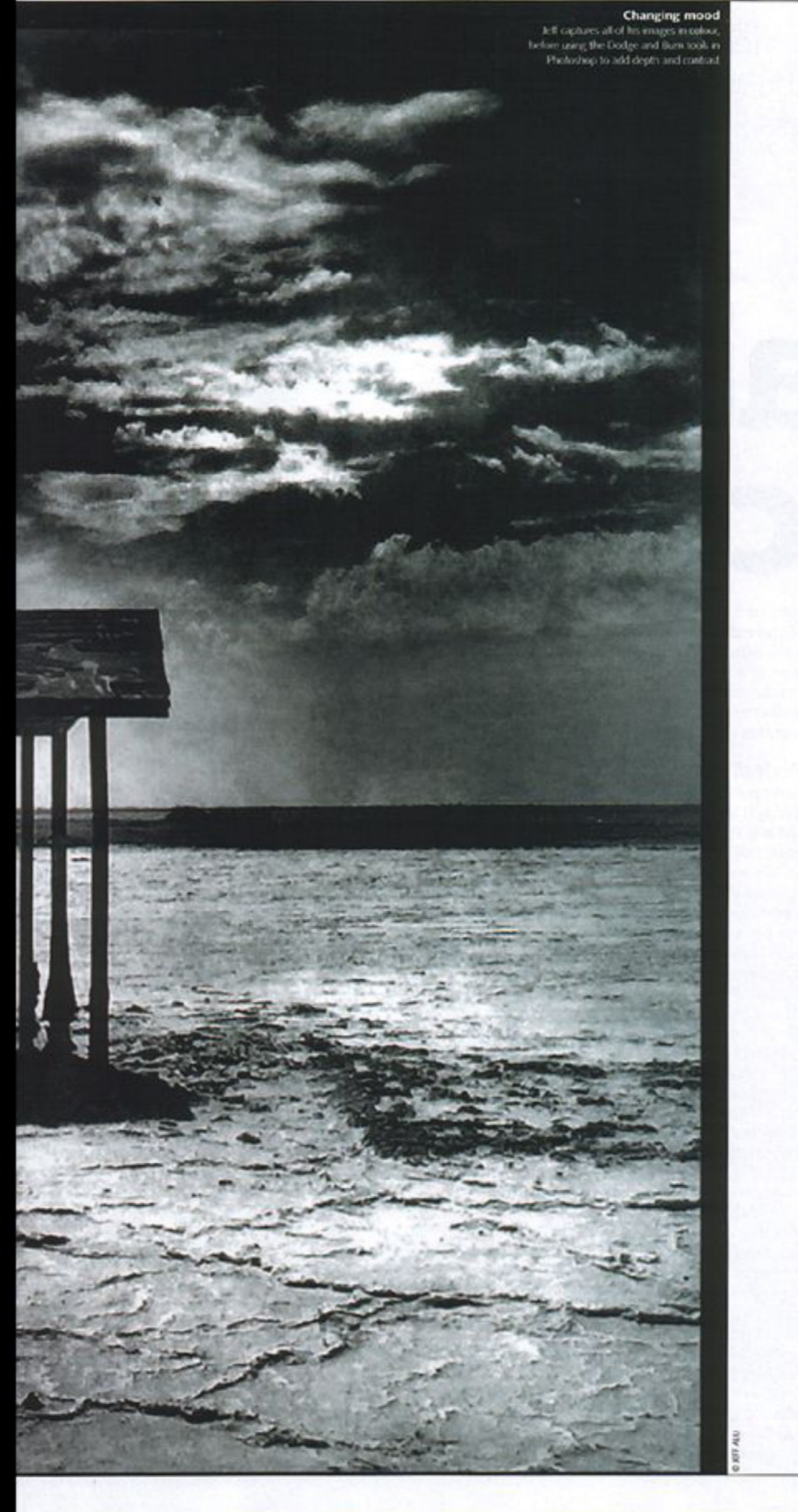
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### Changing mood

All systems did in my mind, before using the Dodge and Burn tools in Photoshop to add depth and contrast.

### Clever composition

While most of his work is landscape-based, Jeff also takes portrait shots in Los Angeles. "There are very different approaches to portraiture and landscape. I often find it difficult to get into the right mindset for photographing people. It can be difficult. Often in the areas I go to, English is not the residents' first language."

### LANDSCAPE SHOOTING ADVICE: JEFF ALU

Trekking through the desert of southern California first inspired 3D artist, animator and photographer Jeff Alu to pick up a camera. What began as a hobby has now prospered into a promising career. Photoshop is essential to his work. "It is vital for the images I want to produce. I think sometimes that if I didn't process the photographs digitally, then they might have no life at all."

Jeff packs his Jeep with lightweight equipment and takes to the desert searching for the barren landscape for images of silent isolation. "I usually go out on really hot days and look for subjects that have high contrast." He then returns to his computer and uses the Dodge and Burn tools to produce images like *Dark Fantasy* (left), taken of the Salton Sea. "I don't manipulate the images too much apart from applying Dodge and Burn. I like to try and find the surreal scenes that are set in reality. I could create exactly what I wanted on the computer, but it is a challenge to find those things in the real world."

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Although his work is in black and white, Jeff always shoots in colour and then converts it. "I find that photographing in colour is actually better for a more complex final black-and-white image. Using a black-and-white filter on site leaves you with less options once in Photoshop." Shooting in colour also means that he has less to carry while working, rather than being bogged down with equipment. "Basically, I just take my digital camera when I head out. I don't take a tripod or filters as I dangle around a lot and like to keep things light." Go to [www.animalu.com](http://www.animalu.com) to see Jeff's work.

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