BLACK-AND-WHITE VISION

In this age of multimedia, moving pictures, over-saturated colors, and digital speed, the desire to create good black-and-white images remains as great as ever. Whether it is the allure of distinct graphic lines, nostalgia, or the simplicity of the contrast (see 1-1), people continue to be drawn to black and white.

Even though you can simply and easily convert any digital image to black and white right there in the camera, that may not always be the best option. It's important to first take a critical look at black-and-white images to see what makes them work, and why people can be more drawn to them than to color images.

WHY BLACK AND WHITE?

When I was explaining the title of this book and its creation to a friend of mine who knows nothing about photography, he asked, "People still take black-and-white pictures?"

I reminded him of the black-and-white portrait I shot of his family hanging over his mantle. Not only do people still take black-and-white pictures, but these photos are all around us — they are still very much part of our culture and everyday lives.

Although there are many different types of photography, black-and-white photography is usually considered the classic form, the birthplace of

1-1

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *This swimming pool at an old hotel had interesting shapes, lines, texture, and tones, which made me want to create a black-and-white image. Taken at ISO 400, f/7.1, and 1/40 second.*

photography. However, today black and white can be used for much more than just fine art photography or Ansel Adams–type landscapes. In fact, it is one of the most prolific tools a photographer can use to realize his creative vision. Without going overboard on art-speak, black and white can make a mediocre image more dynamic, as shown in 1-2.

Removing color from an image enables the viewer to see the essential parts of that image — the textures, tones, shapes, and composition — all without the distraction of color. There is a

visceral connection between a viewer and a black-and-white photograph that does not exist with color photography. While color creates its own excitement and emotion, it can also add unwanted distraction, as was the case in 1-3.

Black-and-white photographs are limited (but not in a bad way) to gray tones. As a result, the voice of the image can become greater as the focus becomes clearer. Black-and-white images can also create not only a feeling of nostalgia, but also of pastoral or timeless beauty. This holds true for many different sorts of images, but especially for landscapes and portraits.

Whether a color photograph has been painstakingly color corrected to exactly match the original scene or is very stylized, it is based on reality. Black-and-white images, on the other hand, are based in the creative process. The creative choices regarding the tone and emotion of a black-and-white photograph are there for the photographer to make right from the start, and the possibilities are limitless.

There is really only so much saturation and manipulation possible with a color photograph. The limits on color-photo manipulation are not only part of today's digital photographic rules, but exceeding these limitations often creates unattractive or incorrect images, because they no longer appear realistic. However, when extreme saturation and manipulation are applied to black-and-white images, they can still look correct. The practice of using extreme dark and light tones in black-and-white images existed long before digital photography, and the photographer's artistic freedom has always been built into shooting in black and white.

There is really only so much saturation and manipulation possible with a color photograph. There are limits to the amount of saturation and contrast that can be added to a color photograph before the

1-2

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *The lines and shape of the water tower create interesting contrast with layers of white on white. Taken at ISO 500, f/4.5, and 1/125 second with an 18-200mm zoom lens.*

ABOUT THIS PHOTO
A red chair in front of a blue house with a yellow boat and green hose in the background create a visual mess, but in black and white, the texture of the scene creates the mood. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/200 second with a compact digital camera.

image can becomes incorrect, or worse, unattractive. These limits are due to two things: what is visually possible and realistic, and the *color gamut* of the image. The color gamut is the level of potential color in a digital image that can be reproduced, whether the output is on a screen or on paper.

However, when extreme contrast and manipulation are applied to black-and-white images, they can still look correct. The practice of using extreme dark and light tones in black-and-white images existed long before digital photography, and the photographer's artistic freedom has always been built into shooting in black and white.

CREATING BLACK-AND-WHITE IMAGES

With digital photography, the ability to create great black-and-white images, as well as the available creative options, has increased greatly from

the days of the wet darkroom. There may be purists who still embrace the hours in front of an enlarger and a sink, the chemicals, and the whole process of creating a black-and-white print from a negative, but I find there are so many more options with digital photography that I struggle to return to the wet darkroom.

Furthermore, I create more (and better) black-and-white imagery with digital technology than I ever did in the darkroom. Perhaps the single greatest option with digital photography is that you can create color and black-and-white images from the same digital file.

There are countless advantages to creating black-and-white photos digitally. One is the ability to change a digital image from color to black and white, or vice versa. It only takes a second to switch the camera so it creates a black-and-white, rather than color, JPEG. To get the best results, convert a RAW color image to black and white

on the computer. This doesn't slow you down at all while you are shooting. You can shoot away in color and make your decisions later (see 1-4). The days of carrying multiple cameras or film backs, each with a different type of film, are thankfully long gone.

The technical part of creating a black-and-white photograph from a color digital file might seem easy — just use the Picture Styles menu or Picture Contol menu to set the camera to black and white and off you go. However, I find that a lot more goes into creating good black-and-white photographs. Simply taking the color out of the image is not the only issue. Black-and-white photography has a lot more to do with contrast than a mere lack of color. Without color in an image, contrast is what creates depth and texture and accentuates the subject of the photograph.

VISUALIZING IN MONOCHROME

The act of visualizing a photograph is something you must do not with your eyes, but with your mind. I discuss some techniques to help you with visualization later in this book, but first, ask yourself what sort of photograph you want to create. What is the emotion or feeling that you want to present to the viewer? Should it be somber or

1-4
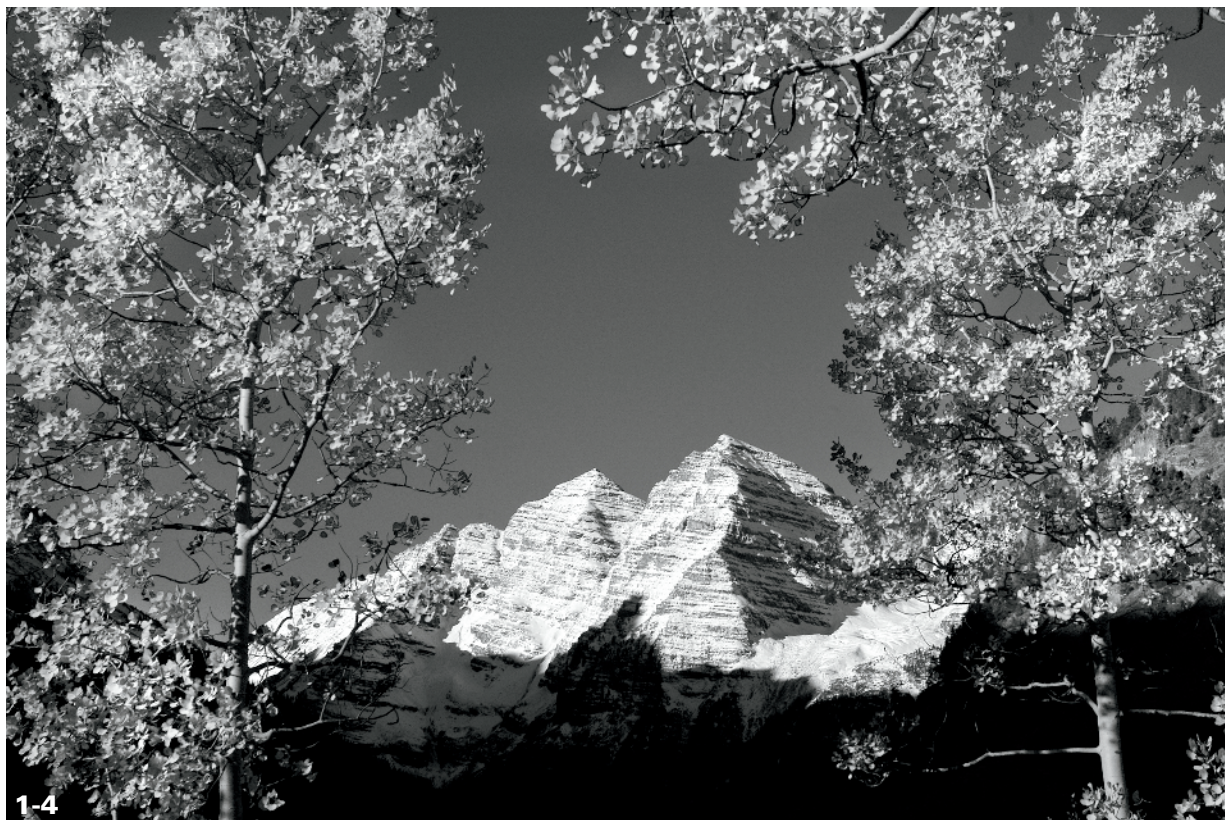
ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Aspen leaves turning yellow on a crisp morning make for an amazing color image, and a brilliant black-and-white. The conversion to black and white happened after the shot was made, and could never have happened with film. Taken at ISO 200, f/11, and 1/500 second.*

airy, delicate or melancholy, exciting or bright? The possible ways these can be expressed in black-and-white images are limitless.

Some people, such as great landscape photographer Ansel Adams, have called this thought process *previsualization*. It entails attempting to see the image in your mind's eye and imagining what emotions or feelings the image will evoke before the exposure is ever created.

The world does not appear in black and white. Everyday color images oversaturate our senses in an attempt to tell us what we need. Vegetables in the grocery store are covered with wax to make them more colorful and desirable. The television and Internet are chock-full of ever brighter, ever more colorful images to get our attention. However, sometimes less is more, and it is in those instances that black-and-white images become even more powerful.

The amount of contrast in an image is what builds the composition; how the contrast is applied to the scene builds the emotional tone of the photograph. On a misty, overcast day, a low level of contrast with more dark tones accentuates the feeling of the weather that is in the scene (see 1-5).

Begin to look more at shapes, textures, and forms rather than color in potential images. Study how the contrast within those elements enhances the image. Although you will likely change the final tones and fine-tune the image later on your computer, it helps to try to look at the composition critically, examining the contrast of the tones in the scene. For example, a bright expanse of green grass or a light blue sky look great in color, whereas the same elements in a black-and-white photo often end up as a vast expanse of light gray.

Think critically about your vision of the photograph and work toward creating the emotion you want a viewer to experience. This does not mean

1-5

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *To accentuate the weather and show the overall tone of the image, I underexposed the image and then increased the contrast slightly to make the dark rock stand out from the gray. Taken at ISO 320, f/7.1, and 1/320 second with an 18-200mm lens set to 200.*

you should only photograph dramatic, moody, or exciting images. Just as much effort goes into a softly lit scene, or a stark, austere one. Each has its place, and it is up to you to create the image for the viewer.

Without the color information, the contrast of a scene becomes even more important. This doesn't mean that high-contrast images are better in black and white, but being mindful of the contrast in an image will help make the photograph better. In some cases, scenes with a lot of hard

blacks and whites (that is, high contrast) will be exactly what is needed, whereas in others, subtle changes of gray (that is, images with virtually no highlights or deep shadows) may be perfect.

SELECTING YOUR IMAGES

If you have been photographing in color for a long time, it may be a challenge to start viewing the scenes in front of your camera in black and white. As you move to shooting in black and white, you gain a new level of attention to the contrast and form in an image.

> **tip**
> You often come across subjects that are monochromatic — that is, scenes with only one or minimal color. Stones, concrete, and steel can all create monochrome-like images while still being a full-color photograph. Studying such scenes can help you easily visualize what it might look like in black and white.

CREATING PHOTOGRAPHS

Think more critically about the scenes in front of you, and truly imagine what the image will look like as a finished work. Remember that your vision is exclusive to you in your individual place and time, so create photographs that are interesting and compelling to you.

Being passionate about what you want to create will help you select the right image to shoot. This may mean that you need to create an entirely new vision of how you like to photograph, what the subject matter will be, and the style with which you shoot. Listen to your instincts about how to proceed. Look at photographs that inspire you. The idea is not to emulate these images, but to gain inspiration — see what makes them important or interesting and how they inspire you to create better images.

Try an entirely new style of photography to help build your black-and-white vision. If you have mostly enjoyed landscape photography, start creating portraits. If you have always photographed still lifes, get out and capture what is going on in the street. Shooting in black and white allows you to rethink the possibilities of your photography. When you have started seeing the world anew in black and white, returning to where you were will be even more exciting.

Use the rules of design (discussed further in Chapter 2) to create good composition in photographs. Learn to use the tools in your camera to create great exposure. Once you learn the proper exposure for each scene and good compositional rules, you will feel comfortable breaking those rules and experimenting with new things. This helps build your personal vision.

PREVISUALIZATION

Take the time to look around you at shapes, textures, tones, and the contrast between them. As I write this, I see the repetition of my neighbor's white fence against a dark shadowed lawn and accordion blinds with glowing light tones between alternating white and dark lines. Use these common things in your everyday view to help you previsualize how those things will look in your black-and-white photography.

It is often a great idea to stop where you are, evaluate the scene in front of you, and really see if that is the image you are trying to create. Take a moment to think, "What if …" and go beyond what might be considered normal. This could mean making a compositional or exposure change.

Sometimes you'll make a change, say, "Yikes," and quickly revert to where you were. However, other times there will be a breakthrough, and you will have created an image beyond what you

imagined. Going forward, apply these ideas to your photography. They can be useful tools for building your photographic vision.

While photographing a group of boxers, I spent a bit of time working to get technically good images in challenging situations. There were plenty of images that I was happy with that were interesting enough to share and display, but it seemed as though I needed to add some interest or (more likely) soul. So, I tried something totally new: I simply slowed down the shutter speed and started to recompose a little bit. I realized that I wasn't shooting reportage. I was trying to create art from violence and I needed to show more of that movement and motion (see 1-6).

As soon as I started trying a few new things, the imagery changed into exactly what I had intended to shoot from the beginning. I had a purpose and a vision, and I was taking good photographs. However, it wasn't until I connected with my vision that the images came into their own.

But it takes more than just trial and error.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to interview legendary photographer Pete Turner, who is best known for pioneering the bold use of color. One thing he said was appropriate to any genre of photography: "Go out to photograph with a purpose. Have an image in your head and a plan to create it before you leave the house. If you just go

1-6

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *By slowing down the shutter speed to capture the motion of the boxing glove, I was able to create an image that captured the feeling I had envisioned. Taken at ISO 1000, f/1.8, and 1/80 second with a 50mm lens.*

with the idea that you're 'going to take a great photo today,' your photographs will be as aimless as your plan. If you have a plan and a new opportunity arises because you were prepared for something, you are much more likely to have great images."

Even if you are simply making photographs at a family event or during a photo-walk, think ahead and envision those photographs. This gives you a purpose and the focus to create the images you desire. Make sure that your eyes are open to opportunity; when chances for new photographs come to you, take advantage of them.

In black-and-white photography, your selection of images should reflect your ability to see contrast in the scene; for example, the way that light wraps around a subject, or the simplicity of a single subject against a stark background. As you practice seeing and shooting in black and white, the subjects that work best for your photography will become more obvious.

THE PROBLEM WITH DIGITAL

It cannot be disputed that the digital camera is a great teaching tool. Immediately after it's shot, the image and the information used to make it appears on-screen so that you can correct your mistakes — or at the very least review what you did.

However, digital photography also introduces issues of volume and management. I often remind photography students that, not that long ago, they would have been shooting with film and having to keep track of every exposure, meter reading, focal length, and weather conditions. Now, virtually all of that information is attached to the photograph in its *metadata* so that it is easy to get and learn from.

The volume and management issues come in when a photographer fills an entire memory card with photographs she doesn't really care about.

Try to think through the photograph before you make it and then create an image that is compelling to you. This way, your enthusiasm and passion for the image will not only come more easily but will show in the photographs.

Although the term *taking photographs* is common, and I even use it quite a bit in this book, I believe that there is a difference between taking photos and making photographs. If you are reading this book, or any of the *Photo Workshop* titles, chances are you are probably attempting to make photographs with your own creative tools.

Work at creating new images that you love, rather than just taking a bunch of photos. In the end, if you aren't excited about the images you have created, you'll just fill up your hard drive with images that you won't ever learn from.

x-ref More thoughts on being comfortable with your camera and its settings are discussed in Chapter 4.

TIMING THE MOMENT

Photographers such as Robert Doisneau and Henri Cartier-Bresson were masters of real-life reportage and street photography. Their photographs are classic examples of timing the shot to capture a precise moment just as it happens. Cartier-Bresson coined the term *decisive moment*, which describes the precise moment that the pivotal action occurs in any event. This event could be anything from a fleeting glance or a stolen kiss, to the moment the running back crosses into the end zone.

Cartier-Bresson describes the decisive moment as the "creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the

camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative." He then goes on to explain that if the moment is missed, it is gone forever. This process and this timing is what can separate a good from a great photograph.

HURRY UP AND WAIT

Timing the moment takes practice in many ways. The first thing you need to have is familiarity with the equipment that you are using. It is vital that you know how your camera works — that you are comfortable with the controls and settings, so you are ready to shoot when the moment is upon you. Being ready is the first step, but having the patience to wait for the right time is of equal importance.

Good timing takes a quick eye on the scene. While you are walking through the city, you might see an interesting background.

In the case of 1-7, I saw that a couple was approaching my scene as they were on their way home from the market having a conversation. I quickly framed my composition and waited until they were where I thought they should be for the composition I had in mind. Just as they were in place, the man turned to listen to the woman, and that was the decisive moment — the moment I was looking for. I took a few more frames as they walked away, but at that point I had the image I had envisioned. The rest of the images were inconsequential, as the couple was too far away and I had only captured photos of the backs of their heads.

Many new digital cameras have motor drives that can capture so many images in such a short time, it seems impossible. There are digital cameras that capture four, five, six, or even up to 11 frames in one second. That capability is fantastic

1-7

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Because I composed before the subjects entered the scene, it took only patience and timing to capture the decisive moment. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/125 second with a 14-45mm m4/3 zoom lens set to 29.*

for sports or action photos, when you are looking for series of images or when the speed of the subject is too fast for you to be certain of capturing the correct frame with one click.

Many sports photographers and photojournalists take advantage of camera speeds like that; and it may be helpful for you to do so in many

photographic situations, so make sure to time even those brief bursts of images well. Be ready by having your camera set to its highest frame rate, usually designated by an icon with multiple rect-angles or something that indicates *continuous high*. In addition, setting your camera to *continuous autofocus* is a must when capturing a quickly mov-ing subject.

x-ref More thoughts on setting up your camera for high-speed photography are discussed in Chapter 4.

Next, you have to compose the image, and make sure the exposure settings are correct. Only after you have those things ready can you sit with your eye pressed to the viewfinder and wait for the action to come in front of your lens. Keep in mind that there are often photographic moments between those frames, and the autofocus cannot always keep up with the speed of high-speed capture.

As you can see there's a lot more to timing the decisive moment with high-speed continuous drive than just smashing down on the shutter button. Even with all of that speed, knowing the sport, the event, the athletes, and how the action flows is a much better way to time the images. It is imperative to know the subject matter and how the action tends to work so you can try to predict what will happen next.

Even though the camera was set to the highest speed continuous frame rate — that is, nine frames per second— the image in 1-8 was captured because of the attention paid to the boxers and how they were performing up to a sin-gle moment. Just as a flurry of quick jabs to the

body may wear down an opponent but a big roundhouse to the head wins the match, several frames taken in a series may make for some nice images, but it is the one that is perfectly timed that captures the emotion and vision of the event. With practice and patience, you learn to pay close attention to a scene and be ready for that moment that defines the creative process.

Timing the moment still comes into play with landscape photography. Although the precision of the timing might be slightly less critical, being in the right place at the right time is very important.

The sun moves quickly (well, the earth spins quickly), and that movement is shown by the sun appearing to cross the sky. If you take a moment to see some sunlight coming through a window and mark where shadows hit, it is a very short time before the shadows change. Compared to the speed of a camera's shutter, the light's move-ment may not appear to be very fast, but in just a few minutes, the shadows will move a few inches.

Getting this timing right can be tricky. If the sun is waning towards the horizon, it may seem like the sunlight you desired was only there for a pre-cious few seconds. With such fleeting moments, it is imperative that you have your camera ready (double-check that the right lens is on or at least in your bag), and that a memory card with ample space, and any other accessories, such as filters or tripods, are on hand.

Those long shadows and warm sunlight at sunset help create very dark blue skies, which, in black-and-white images, appear as dark gray or black. The contrast between the light hitting the land-scape and a dark gray sky is very dramatic in black-and-white photography. As the light moves closer

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *A single frame taken and caught at exactly the right moment is far more expressive than several images taken at almost the right moment. Taken at ISO 4000, f/2.8, and 1/320 second with a 70-200mm f/2.8 lens zoomed to 110.*

to the horizon, the contrast slightly lessens as it becomes slightly diffused, adding texture to the rocks as the light comes across the scene (see 1-9).

> **note**
>
> Is the theme of preparation starting to hit home yet? It is something you will hear about time and again, both in this book and whenever you are talking to serious photographers. Most views on the importance of being prepared are based on experience and mistakes made in the field.

Days with clouds have their own timing issues. The beauty of a blue sky with bright, white puffy clouds is really fantastic, and makes for, perhaps, the most dramatic looking skies in black and white. The contrast between those white clouds and the dark gray or black sky is striking, and those are the kind of days that cry out to be photographed in black and white.

The clouds move even faster than the light from the sun, so timing their movement is critical to the image. Make certain that the sun is hitting the subject as you want it to be seen. You may have to wait for the sun to pop out from behind a cloud to get the light right. This may be not only a timing issue, but also an exposure issue. Make sure that you get the correct exposure for the scene in front of you as the light changes.

If you are exposing for a scene with clouds creating a shadow in the foreground or on the subject, when clouds move and brighten the scene, you

1-9
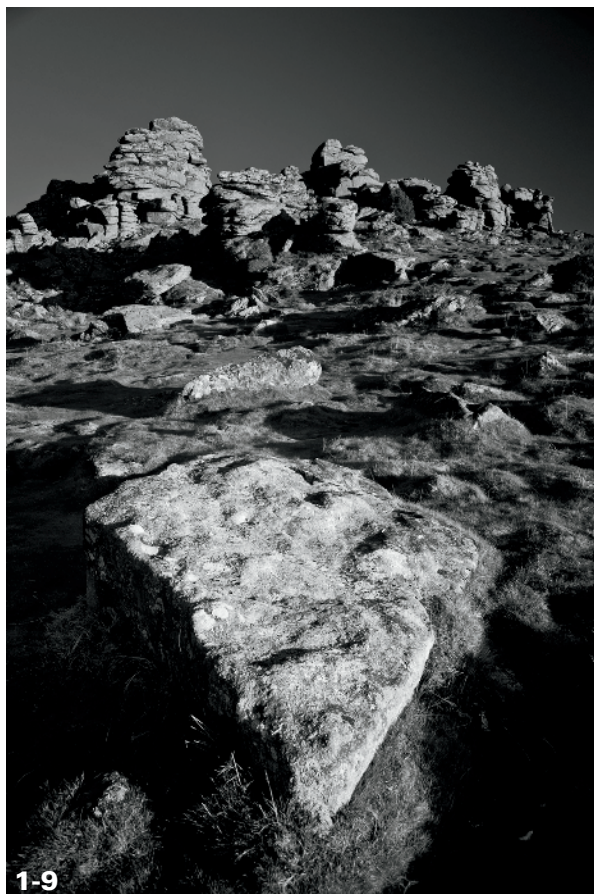
ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Because I waited for the sun to near the horizon at Hound Tor in the English moorland, there were opportunities for great black-and-white images. The textures and contrast of the light near that time of day often make timing your images well worth it. Taken at ISO 200, f/8, and 1/80 second with an 18-200mm lens set to 18.*

will need to reset the exposure; otherwise the photograph will be far too bright. If you don't wait for the sun to come out from behind the cloud, it is possible to get a decent exposure, but the foreground may be dull or dark with a sky that is too washed out.

By simply timing the clouds, you are bound to get a much better image. Take a look at the clouds and watch the direction they are going. Estimate

how long it might be until the sun strikes your scene, or until there is enough blue sky to get the image you desire. The day shown in 1-10 was mostly overcast, with a few patches of blue sky, a stiff breeze, and some fast-moving clouds. That made me think that some nice sunlight and blue skies were on their way. A short hike around the area was all the time it took for the scene that I was looking for.

1-10

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Timing cloud movement can help you get texture and drama in a black-and-white image. Look for good clouds to come on either side of inclement weather patterns, and time the sunlight with your cloud cover. Taken at ISO 100, f/11, and 1/100 second with a 12-24mm zoom lens set to 12.*

CREATE PERFECT TIMING

Shooting photographs of people is possibly one of the most challenging things when it comes to timing. In these situations, it is important that your subject feels comfortable. These images are about expression, and people express emotions with their entire bodies — more than just their faces, where they put their hands, and how they are seated — so capturing an image with the expression you are after often requires split-second timing.

Often, when people get in front of a camera, the photographer just says, "Okay, smile." However, is this really the best way to encourage the emotion and personality you want in the photograph? It is okay to take photographs of people who are smiling, but what is most important is that the expression captured is genuine.

x-ref For more on people and portrait black-and-white photography, see Chapter 3, where lighting for portraits is covered in greater detail.

When taking photos of people, you often benefit from the speed of the continuous drive in your camera. There are usually tiny differences between expressions as people relax or even between breaths. Making people feel comfortable is the first order of business. Moving them into positions where they feel relaxed and confident only takes a moment, but pays off hugely.

Once your subject is comfortable, use some conversation to get her face to relax. Have your subject think about her family or pets, or simply ask

tip There might be many times when the best expression comes when you are not looking through the camera's viewfinder. Use a cable or wireless remote so you can trigger the camera whenever your subject's expression is best, not necessarily when she is smiling directly into the camera.

her some questions so she's not thinking about having her photograph taken. Being a good photographer means being a good listener as well.

Using your practiced timing skills, you'll be able to press the shutter release button at the exact moment those perfect expressions occur. This is particularly important when working with kids. Young people are only just beginning to have a sense of themselves. Often, they are only capable of coming up with big, cheesy smiles, as they are asked to do by their parents and grandparents.

Wait for better expressions with kids. It may not be the big smile that is expected, but it is probably more genuine. While taking a photograph of my friend's daughter, I made sure to get down on her level. As soon as I had the camera up to my eye, she gave me a frozen, posed smile in a valiant attempt to hide some missing teeth. With some questions about school, her room, and boyfriends, I quickly captured the skeptical smirk seen in 1-11. This is exactly the look that her mother was hoping for in the image because of the bright and joyful look in her daughter's eyes.

Getting your portrait timing down takes not only practice and a quick shutter finger, but also dedication, the ability to push until you get what you want, and enough experience to know when you're done. Practicing your portrait timing on kids will hone your skills because of how quickly their expressions come and go.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Great timing helped capture this image. There wasn't another image in the shoot with this expression, which portrays exactly this girl's mischievous spirit. Taken at ISO 200, f/2.5, and 1/60 second with a 50mm lens.*

1-11

Catching these moments between moments is like capturing gold. The expressions between perfectly planned poses (which can be just slightly off) can end up being the perfect images when you have perfect timing and are prepared. When a child who is fussy from being posed too much finally jumps down and starts running towards the camera with a great big smile, great timing captures that priceless image of freedom (see 1-12).

Even when I work in a very conservative studio setting, after I have shot a number of solid head-shots as requested by a client and know that I

have captured the right one, I'm free to open things up a little. In the case of 1-13, I decided that it was time to mix it up, so I changed the lighting to something more dramatic and started asking much more pointed questions. This subject is the host of a local radio show and has quite an acerbic wit. He is used to being the interviewer, not the respondent, and quickly lost his composure. In fact, he began laughing hysterically, which is true to the persona that I feel I know.

WHEN SHOULD YOU USE BLACK AND WHITE?

Black-and-white photographs work for almost any situation.

Although bright, saturated colors in photographs are always a draw, there are truly very few situations where black-and-white photographs will not work. Whether or not black and white is the best approach for the image that you are trying to create is another issue. If you are trying to record something exactly as it is in the real world, naturally you would chose to do so in color. But the reality is that there are just so many ways to create fantastic black-and-white images. Therefore, when I am shooting for myself, black and white is the default, thus leaving all creative options open.

For example, one of my favorite magazine editors asked me to update her portrait. When I arrived to take the photograph, I looked at a few different locations to see which was most suitable. After

finding a great place to shoot, I realized that it would only be exactly what she was looking for if we shot it in black and white. I asked her if this would be okay and she said, "Oh, absolutely! Black and white covers a multitude of sins!" Now this person is quite lovely and would look fantastic no matter how she was photographed. However, she knows that black and white can create fantastic looking skin (see 1-14), whereas a color photo might not be as forgiving.

Every aspiring photographer has attempted to re-create classic black-and-white photographs taken by the masters, whether he is shooting at a national park or creating a still life in the

> **note** This is not to say that a photographer should use black and white as a crutch, but simply that the possibilities for creating beautiful skin tones in black and white are abundant, whether the subject is a beautiful bride or a weathered grandfather.

kitchen. Instead, try shooting black-and-white snapshots at the next family event, such as a birthday party or bowling night. Plain old snapshots can suddenly take on a whole new life and become classic heirlooms or pieces of art. Because there are color images all around our everyday life, working in black-and-white makes the entire process of photography a new and exciting experience.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO
Sunlight streaming through a large picture window illuminated the background, and the reflected light from all around made for a softly contrasting, high-key portrait. Taken at ISO 320, f/2, and 1/50 second with a 50mm lens.

1-14

Go on a photo-walk with fellow photographers around your town or at the park, or take a camera to lunch. Scenes you might have missed because of their familiarity could lend themselves to new possibilities (see 1-15). Suddenly the high-noon, harshly lit scene of your local downtown area becomes a black-and-white jewel. Attempt to see only the contrast in an image and see past the color. Make the viewer feel the texture of the steel and grease.


1-15

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Noon-time sunlight hit the grease-covered gears and cable, creating some very high-contrast texture. In order to keep the highlight detail in the metal, the shadows are very black. Taken at ISO 125, f/9, and 1/60 second with a 45mm lens on an m4/3 camera.*

Many places have a reputation for inclement weather and can be quite dreary. That does not mean for one minute you should stow your camera away. In fact, a cloudy, foggy day while I am on vacation can be one of my favorite days to

shoot. Scenes that might be otherwise nondescript and plain suddenly become studies in soft texture and fine contrast.

While I was in the Pacific Northwest for a too short visit, gray days were common. However, an overcast sky is no reason to forgo taking photographs (see 1-16). Use the weather to your advantage. With black-and-white photography, you can focus on the essential parts of an image or create a different mood than expected.
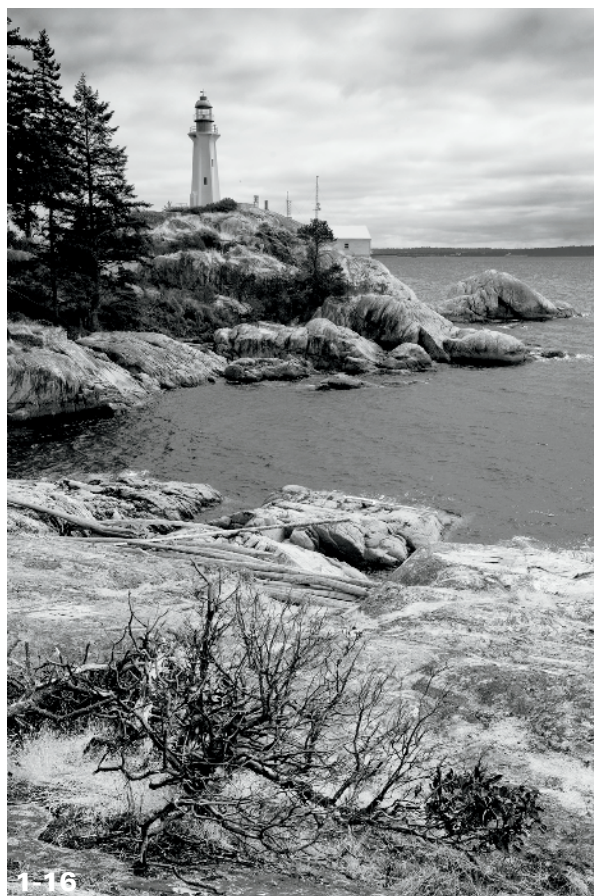
1-16

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *Overcast days have their own feel and dynamic. Mixing the texture of the clouds with the rocks makes an image that is just as dramatic as one captured on a sunny day. Impart the emotion of the day to the viewer. Taken at ISO 200, f/13, and 1/160 second with a 35mm lens.*

FINDING PHOTOS WHEREVER YOU ARE

Black-and-white photography is such an amazing medium — just when you think you've seen something a million times, you see it in black and white. Suddenly, it is new and fresh, or old and nostalgic, or gritty, or has a cool, clean contemporary look that is totally surprising. All of these can be in the same image depending on how you look at it and how you shoot it.

It is not imperative that you travel far to take effective and impressive black-and-white

photographs. No matter what the weather is like or what the light looks like, photographs are there to be found. Studying things that are close — the things that you see every day — creates a greater challenge, but the lessons you will learn by shooting black and white in your neighborhood will help you develop your vision and prepare you for shooting things that are new and different.

The obvious first step is to have your camera with you. For example, there was nothing to stop me from shooting this little guy peering out at the action outside his yard (see 1-17). His face is bathed in the soft light of open shade, which

1-17

ABOUT THIS IMAGE *Using a telephoto lens helps isolate the subject, giving him sharp focus in contrast to the soft background. In black-and-white photography, it can be important to make sure that the subject is separated from a busy background. Taken at ISO 100, f/2.8, and 1/125 second with a 300mm lens.*

draws the viewer to observe the contrast of his eyes on his pale skin. Because I used a telephoto lens with a wide aperture, the shallow depth of field isolated his face against a softly textured, natural background, which is important in black-and-white portraiture.

Farmers' markets and open-air local groceries are always a great source of interesting textures and tones for black-and-white images. In many cases you will find displays that already have great designs or at least a nice aesthetic of mixed goods. Look for contrasts in the light, in textures, and especially in colors.

tip When you shoot at markets and other public places, most proprietors will have no problem with you taking photos of their displays of goods — especially if you purchase something from them, which is a small price to pay for a nice image. Use common sense. If signs are posted for no photography, please respect the wishes of the shopkeeper. Try not to be intrusive or hamper other shoppers from getting their goods. A smile, a compliment, and a quick query for permission go a long way.

The contrast between color and texture makes for interesting studies in black and white. Placing rough, light green artichokes over the soft, round, richly dark tomatoes nicely juxtaposes the textures and tones. At first glance, this image was too flat, but by making the reds a darker tone, and the pale green of the artichokes lighter, things fell into place. A normal focal-length prime lens set at a wide aperture

helped to isolate the artichokes, and also made it possible to shoot in the lower-light of the market (see 1-18).

1-18

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *There were about a million different opportunities for interesting compositions at the local market this day, with my favorite being this contrast between the artichokes and tomatoes. The textures here are fascinating, even though this may be a somewhat busy image for black and white. Taken at ISO 500, f/3.2, and 1/80 second with a 20mm lens on an m4/3 camera.*

Architectural details are also interesting places to look for black-and-white imagery. Keep in mind that you are looking for shapes and contrast. Even a simple bandstand shell can make for an interesting composition, as shown in 1-19. With the sun illuminating the front of the structure, the internal ribs are mimicked by the shadows of the shapes repeating behind the bright front arc. The arc cuts a bright curve through a scene of dark tones. By intentionally underexposing the scene, the front shape is properly exposed for the sun striking it, making for a high-contrast dynamic.

For this particular shot, being at the scene at the right time of day was very helpful. The sun was low and is reflected practically right off the front of that arc. This makes the arc as bright as it will likely be for that day and angle, and lets the inside of the shell and the sky fall into dark tones.

Other times of day might be good for this west-facing structure, but the result would be very different. A morning shot would be more of a silhouette and a midday shot might be good, but there would likely be more shadow on the front arc. None of these are good or bad per se, just different versions and options available to you as the photographer. Black-and-white enables you to walk by a scene at any time of day, any time of the year, and perhaps get an entirely different image.

1-19

ABOUT THIS PHOTO *On a walk before dinner I found this excellent example of a black-and-white shape creating contrast. The repetition of the arc and the ribs underneath the shell are what initially drew me to the scene, but it was the bright arc that gave me the impetus to shoot. Taken at ISO 100, f/5.6, and 1/1250 second with a 20mm lens on an m4/3 camera.*

Assignment

Something Out of Nothing

Look at the things around you to create a new black-and-white image. This could be an image of something inside your home or apartment, something down the street, or a shot of your family. The only requirement is that the subject be something nearby that you see often. Use some of the ideas discussed in this chapter about tones, shape, and contrast to locate things right under your nose that would make interesting photographs.

The smokehouse in this image is not far from my home. The tones and texture were created by the light just before sunrise. This photograph was taken with an exposure of ISO 400, f/5, and 1/125 second.

You will be amazed at what you find when you look with black-and-white vision.

Remember to visit www.pwassignments.com after you complete this assignment and share your favorite photo! It's a community of enthusiastic photographers and a great place to view what other readers have created. You can also post comments, read encouraging suggestions, and get feedback.