Convert Color Photos To Mono

In Black and White Photography, Color Is Crucial or At Least How Different Colors Are Converted To Grey Tones

Black and white photography shows no signs of dying away. In fact, it's become a mainstream creative choice for photographers attempting to capture the world in a dramatic or timeless way. But creating a successful black and white image isn't as simple as just removing the color information, because the way different colors translate into different shades of grey makes a massive difference to the finished picture.

You can do it using a black & white adjustment layer in Photoshop. With this, you can control the relative strengths and hence brightness values of the colors in the photo as they are translated into shades of grey. Black & white adjustment layers have sliders for six colors: reds, yellows, greens, cyans, blues and magentas.

You'll notice that we're using a 16-bit sample image to get the best quality. This is important when your final image relies heavily on individual color channels in the photo. Remember - the only way to get a 16-bit image is to shoot raw. This is one time when JPEGs won't do.

1.Check the Bit Depth

Open the "Convert Color Photos to Mono.tif" image. This is a TIFF file rather than a JPEG because mono conversions like this work much better on 16-bit images. With 8-bit images you quickly get banding effects.
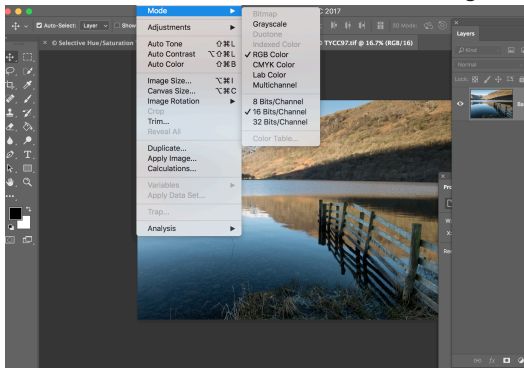

2. Default Mono Conversion

Open an adjustment layer and add a black & white adjustment layer. At the default settings you'll see that the color mix isn't exactly even. Some colors (yellow, magenta and cyan) are made stronger and hence lighter than others.
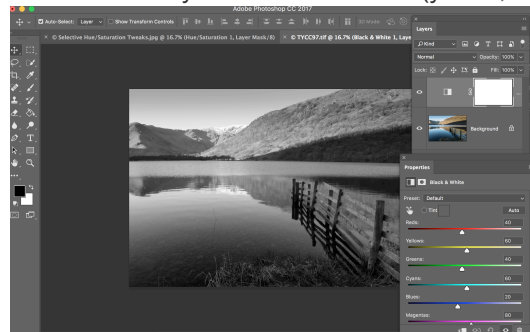
3. Red Filter Effect

The default color mix will probably work well with many images, but for landscapes in particular it's definitely worth trying some alternatives from the drop-down preset menu. The red filter effect, for example, makes the blue sky and lake darker and the green hills lighter.
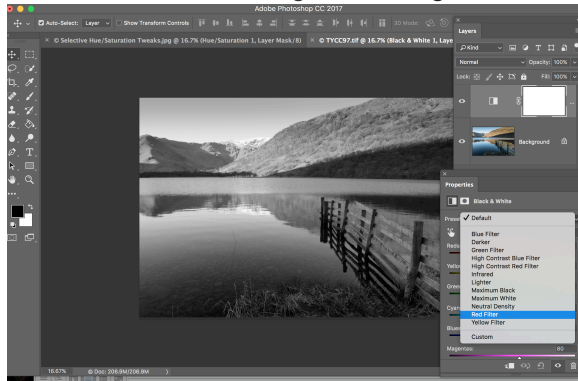
4. Blue Filter Effect

Compare this with the blue filter effect! Because a brighter tone, while the yellows and greens in the hills (on the opposite side of the color wheel) are much darker. This shows the importance of color filtration in black and white.
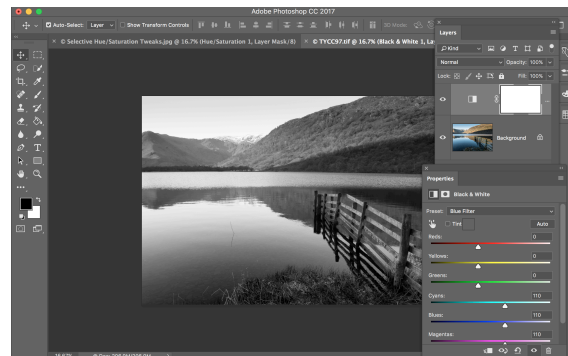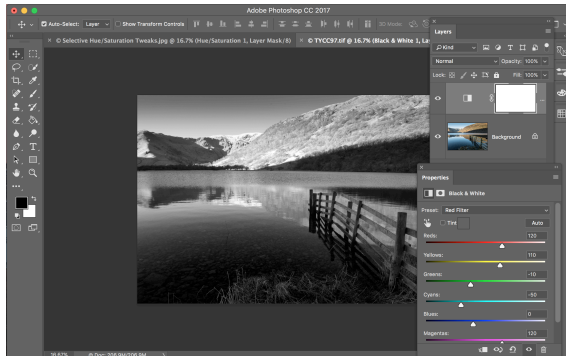
5. Manual Adjustments

Once you've found a preset that gets close to the look you want, you can fine-tune the sliders to finish the job. Here, we've increased the contrast and drama in this landscape by making the cyans and blues darker still and slightly lightening the reds and yellows.

6. Adding a Tint

Many photographers like the look of 'toned ' black and white prints, and you can achieve that effect here by checking the tint box and then the color swatch just to the right. This opens the color picker, where you choose the tint hue and its strength; subtle tints are almost always better.