

Digital Photography 101

Color to Black & White Conversion. -Text & Photos © R.Munguía

There are many techniques used to turn a color image into B&W by using Photoshop. Which one is better, depends more on your taste than the technique used. But I will provide you with one unique technique that can satisfy anybody's taste. By means of the simple slider on the layer transparency menu, you'll be able to transform your color image to the black & white of your taste. While most people use the simple convert to grayscale mode, this process leaves you with a flat image with a weak tonal range. My technique involves the use of the channel mixer to maximize the number of color values that can be turned into B&W information. By retaining the color information on our file, you will be able to keep tonal values that are lost during a straight grayscale conversion. This technique is effective on both 8-bit and 16-bit images.

Step One:

Open the color image you want to convert to black & white and duplicate the background layer by dragging it to the New Layer icon (Fig.1). Now you should have a copy of the background layer as illustrated on (Fig. 2).



Original Image

Fig. 1

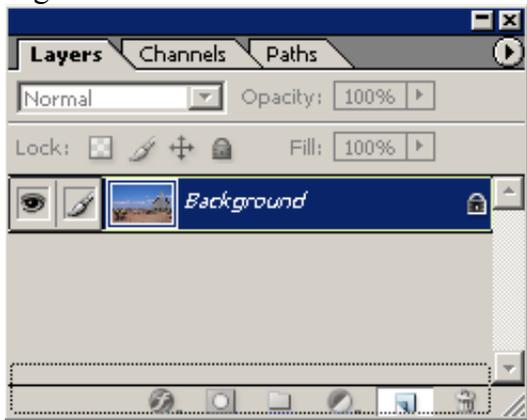


Fig. 2

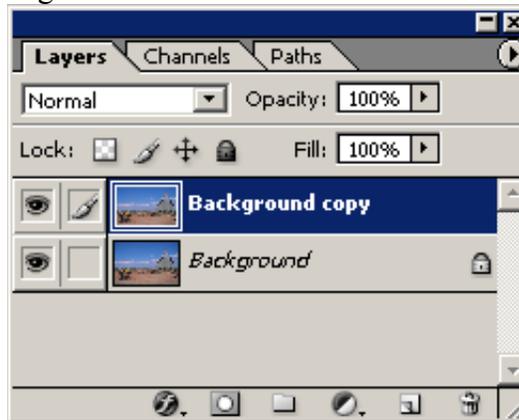
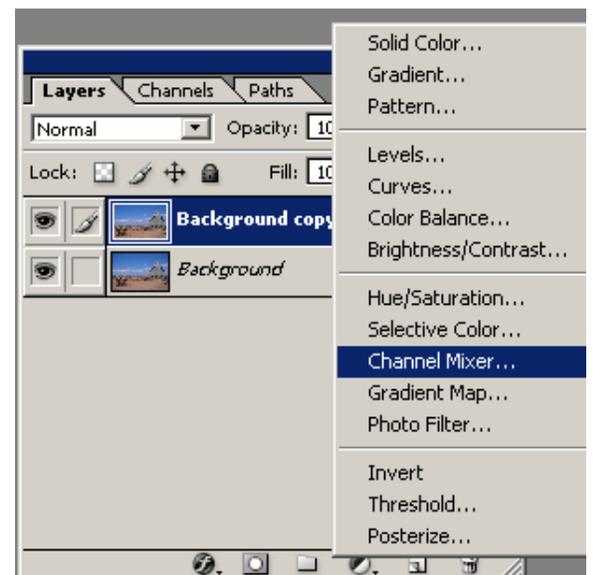


Fig. 3

Step Two:

Click on the Background copy layer to select it then proceed to add an adjustment layer selecting channel mixer for the adjustment (Fig.3). On the Channel Mixer pop-up window, click ok to accept without making any adjustments. Do the same procedure for the background layer. In the end you should end up with one channel mixer adjustment layer for each one of the color layers (Fig.4).



Step 3:

Now that you have both channel mixer adjustment layers, lets input some numbers to make the difference (Fig.4). Double click the background adjustment layer, check the monochrome check box on the bottom left and input the following numbers in the channel mixer menu.

Values for the Channel Mixer 1

Red +0
Green +100
Blue +0

Check Monochrome

Values for the Channel Mixer 2

Red +100
Green +50
Blue -50

Check Monochrome

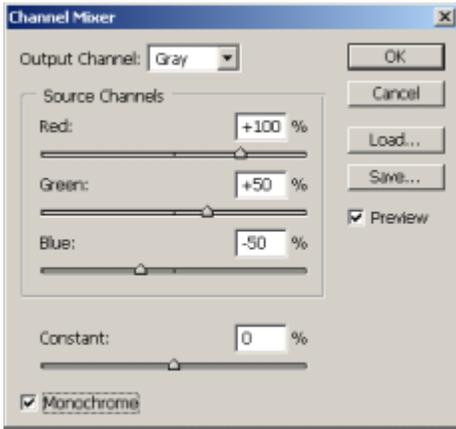
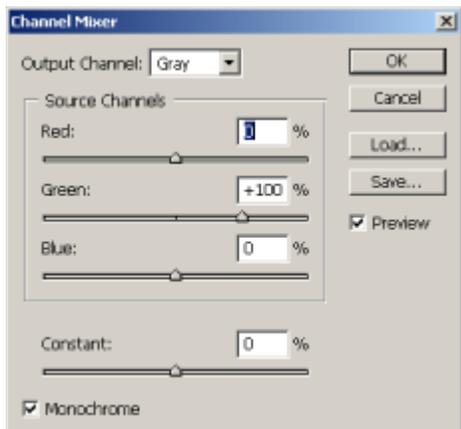


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Step 4:

Once the values are entered for both layers, the Background copy layer is going to look a little to contrasty but with an amazing tonal range (Fig. 5). Now it's time for you to tweak it to your liking. If you don't like the Amsel Adams look you can select the Background copy layer and adjust the opacity until you get the desired effect (Fig. 6). By just changing the opacity you'll be able to adjust the tonal values of your image without sacrificing the quality. The final image below is the result of adjusting the Background copy layer opacity to 70%.

Fig. 6



Final Image

