Converting Colored Images
To Monochrome
By Jerry Koons

The following tutorial outlines a very effective method for converting color images to black and white, or more accurately called monochrome.

Numerous techniques may be utilized to convert to monochrome but this one provides more control and therefore becomes the preferred method.

With this technique, you will use adjustment layers, which are very powerful tools and easy to use. If this is your first experience with Adjustment Layers, please do not fear them as you will quickly learn how valuable they can be for tuning images.

Step One
Open the desired image in the Adobe Elements 4 program.

Step Two
Click on the *Create Adjustment Layer icon* located near the top of the Layers Palette and choose *Levels.* Click OK to create the adjustment layer without making any adjustments.

Step Three
Click on the *Create Adjustment Layer icon* again and choose *Hue and Saturation*.

Step Four
Move the *Saturation slider* all the way to the left for the value to indicate -100 and click OK. Note that the image is now monochrome.

Step Five
Double-click on the thumbnail of the Levels Layer (the middle one) to open the Levels dialog box. Click on the down arrow for Channels and choose the Red channel. Refer to Figure 1 below.
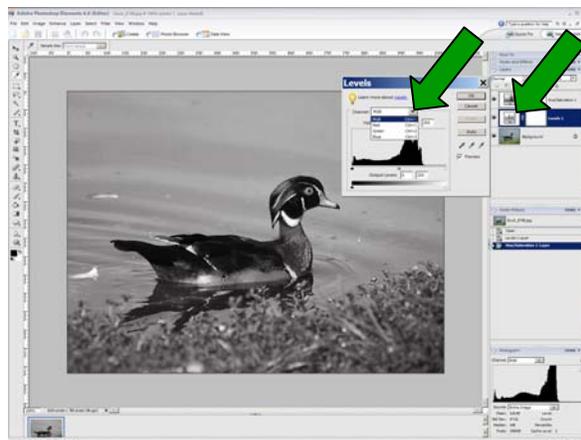

Figure 1

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Step Six
Move the Black and White end triangular sliders until they are located directly below the end of the corresponding pixel grouping. For this specific image in the tutorial, only the White, or highlight, slider needs to be moved because the Black slider is already directly below the pixel grouping for the Shadows.   Refer to Figure Two below.
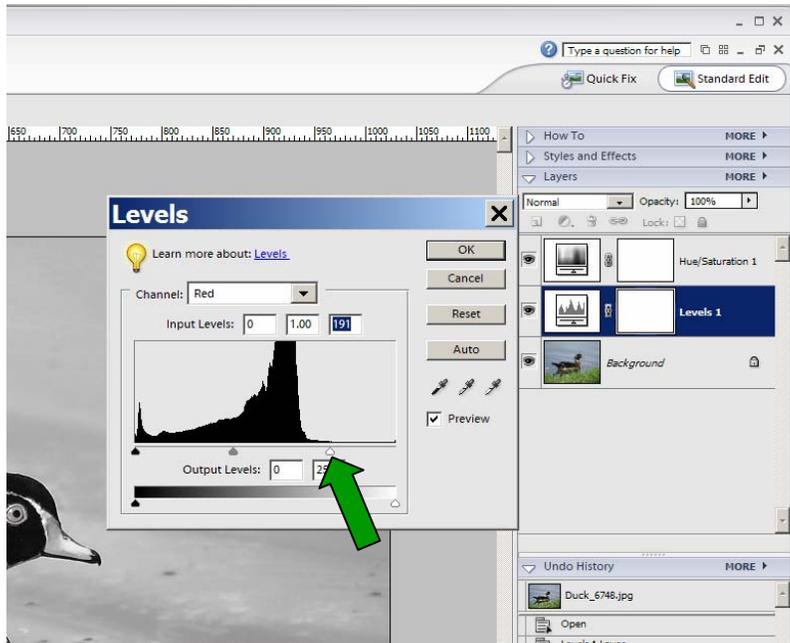

Figure 2

Step Seven
Click on the Channel down arrow again and choose the Green channel. Move the Black and White end triangular sliders until they are located directly below the end of the corresponding pixel grouping like you did in the preceding step.   This image requires only the White (highlight) slider to be moved.

Step Eight
Click on the Channel down arrow again and choose the Blue channel this time. Repeat the process of moving the end triangular sliders as before.   This particular image requires moving only the White slider.

NOTE: Each image has it's own specific pixel grouping for each channel and many images require moving both sliders for specific channels.   An image with higher contrast may not require moving any of the sliders.   Each image is specific.

The purpose of moving the end sliders is to maximize the contrast for the entire image.

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Step Nine

When all of the end sliders for each channel are positioned directly below the pixel groupings, click OK to apply the adjustments.

Step Ten

a)   Click on the *Background Layer* thumbnail to highlight it and make it the active layer.
b)   On the upper toolbar, click on *Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Shadows and Highlights* to open a dialog box and immediately press the *Zero key* on the keyboard.

I recommend this because the default setting in Elements for Lighten Shadows is 25% and we want to make our own adjustment, starting with the existing image appearance.

Step Eleven

a) IF the Shadows need to be lightened (as they do in our sample image) slowly move the Lighten Shadows slider to the right until the shadow tonal values reach the desired level.
b) IF the Highlights need to be darkened, move the Darken Highlights slider to the right until the highlight tonal values reach the desired level.   Note: The Duck image does not require any Highlight adjustment.
c) On some images (but not the Duck image) it may be desirable to increase the Midtone Contrast adjustment to help the image.   Be careful to not negate the improvements made with the other sliders.

If the image is acceptable, skip to Step Fifteen.   Continue below if additional tuning is required.

Each image is truly individual and the necessary adjustments vary dramatically for each specific image.

If the image needs additional fine tuning, the following steps provide some recommendations for achieving the desired effect.   Use only the ones that are necessary and they may used in any order.

Step Twelve

a) Double-click on the Levels Layer thumbnail to reopen the Levels dialog box.   Note that the adjustment settings remain as you had previously set them.   This is one of the great features of an adjustment layer.
b)   Move the *center triangular slider* (RGB gamma control) to lighten or darken the image. By clicking on the Channel down arrow and selecting a specific color channel, you can darken or lighten one or more individual color channels which may provide more control.
c) Click OK when you have improved the image.

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Step Thirteen
a) Click on the uppermost Layer thumbnail and then click on the *Create Adjustment Layer icon* and choose *Brightness and* Contrast to create a new adjustment layer which will be the uppermost layer.

b) Move the Contrast and Brightness slider controls until the image is improved and click OK to apply the adjustments.

If the image does not require any additional tuning, proceed to Step Fifteen. If it does, refer to the next step.

Step Fourteen
IF the image stills needs improvement, reopen one of the adjustment layers and continue adjusting as required. Repeat for as many adjustment layers as required.

Step Fifteen
a) Click on the small right facing arrow near the word *More* on the Layers tab and choose *Flatten Image* to combine all of the layers into one. Refer to Figure 3 below.

b) On the upper toolbar, click on *File > Save As* and choose your desired file directory and save the image with a different name.
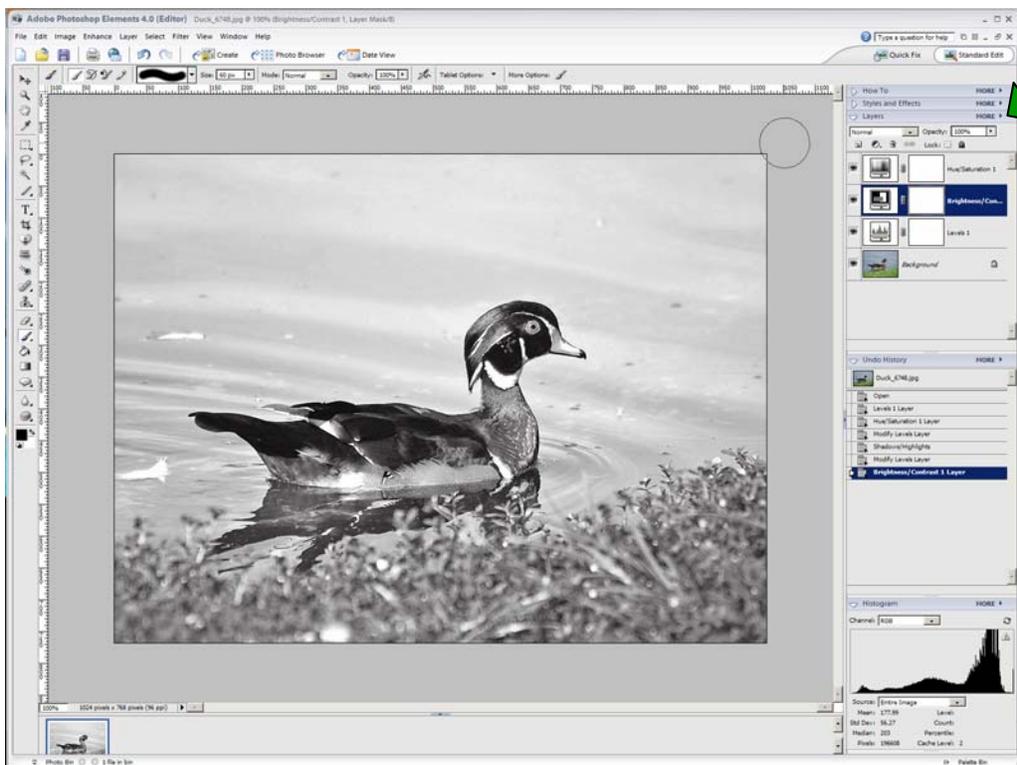

Figure 3