

Digital Diva

Smoothing Skin & B&W Conversion

A friend recently took a picture of her new grandchild which was pleasingly side lit, but unfortunately the lighting emphasized the baby acne that so many newborns have. She had tried fixing it with the healing brush but still ended up with a very splotchy face. Since she was planning to render the photo in B&W anyway it made the fix that much easier.



First we need to get rid of the major bumps on the face, this is quickly done with a few clicks of the healing brush. Be sure to take your sample from a relatively smooth area as the beauty of the healing brush is that it not only blends the color in to the surrounding pixels, but it also maintains the texture of the area where the sample was taken.

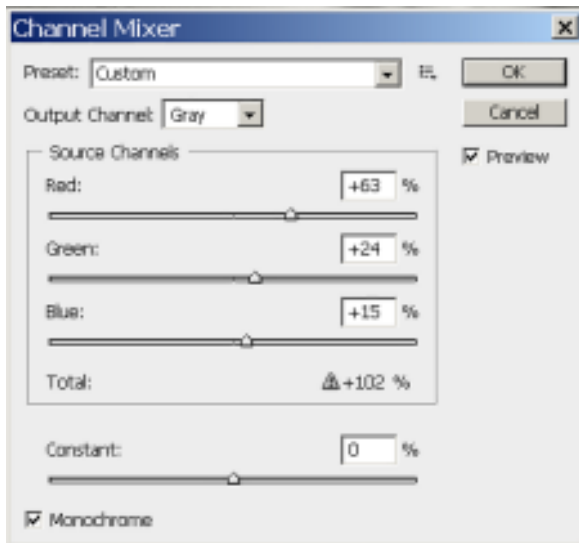


Next we'll use an adjustment layer to convert the image to B&W. If you are working in CS3 you will be able to use the new B&W adjustment filter, in older versions we'll use the Channel Mixer. They are both found in the same place in the drop down menu under the adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the layers palette. It is the fourth icon from the right and looks like a half black, half white circle.

First we will look at the Channel mixer.

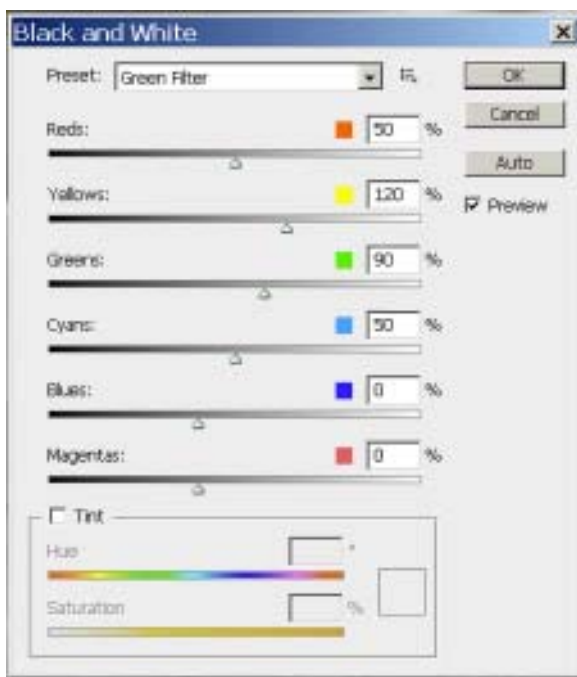
The best way to use the Channel mixer is to first go to your channels palette and look at each channel individually to decide which channel gives you the closest look to the results you want. In this case it was the red channel.

Check the monochromatic box in the lower left hand corner of the palette, then start adjusting the sliders.



These are the settings that gave me the most pleasing result for this image. Red channel +63, green channel +24, Clear Channel +15. You will see that the total comes to 102%. It is often suggested that the totals should be in the area of 100%, but this is really only a guideline and you can tweak these channels anyway you like to create the effect you want.

Now for the wonderful B&W filter in CS3. You will see that with this new filter you have many more options than with the Channel mixer which only has the three RGB adjustments.



In addition to red green and blue this filter also has cyan, magenta and yellow giving you much more control over your black-and-white result.

Those of you who shot film in black and white will probably remember that for portraits we often used a green filter over the lens. If you look at the drop down menu for the presets you will find most of the black-and-white filters that were used with film there. For this image I used the green filter, I could have adjusted the individual colors further if I had wanted, but I didn't think it necessary for these image.



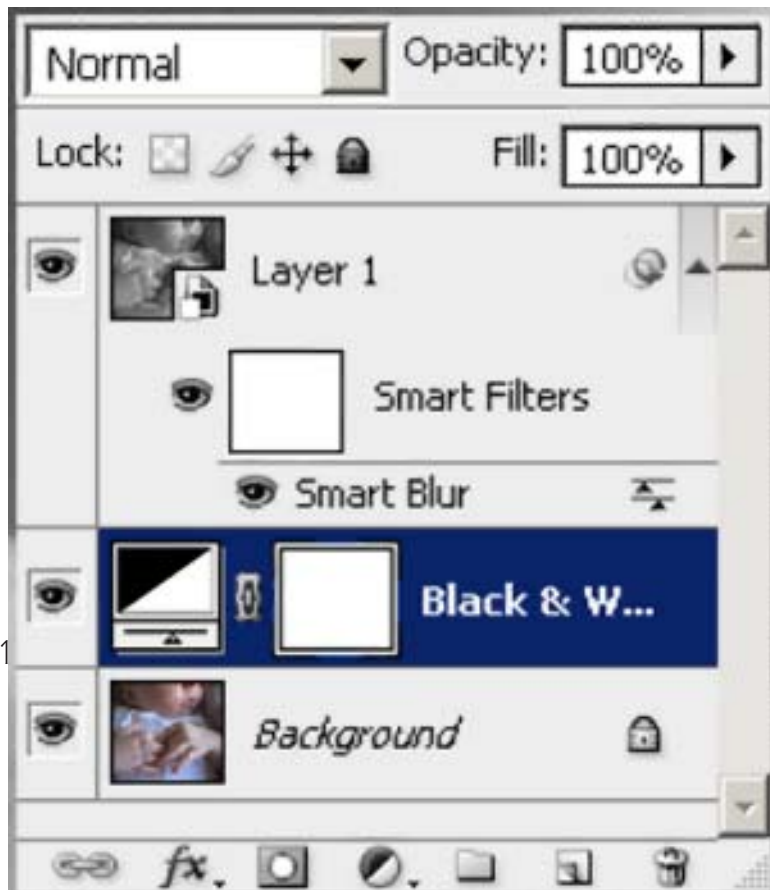
Here is the black-and-white image as rendered by the black-and-white filter. You can see that the green filter took care of the red splotches on the face, but the skin still looks a bit bumpy, so now we will use

another wonderful new tool from CS three called Smart Filters. Those of you with an earlier version can still use the same filter but not with the same flexibility. First we will create a new composite layer consisting of the two layers we already have. The background layer with the original photograph and layer with the black-and-white filter. With the top layer active press Sh+Ctrl+Alt-E on the keyboard, and this will give you your new composite layer at the top of the stack. If you are in an older version of Photoshop you need to press Sh+ctrl +Alt-N-E, or on a Mac in any version Sh+Cmnd+Opt-N-E. In CS3 go to filter> Convert for smart filters. Then in all versions Filter> Blur> Smart blur, and the following dialog will appear.



adjust the radius and the threshold until the skin looks smooth, for this image I used a radius of 2 and a threshold of 12 with the quality high.

If you use the Smart Filters command your layers palette will look like this.



The little icon in the lower right of the Layer 1 thumbnail shows you that this layer has smart filters enabled. It also has a layer mask ready to go in case you want to paint out some of the effect of the filter on the layer. At the bottom where it says Smart Blur you can click any time to change the settings of the filter. The dialog box above will return when you double-click. This gives you an amazing flexibility for your choices. The Smart Blur filter has smoothed the skin of the baby while leaving the details in the hands and clothing intact.

Happy fixing,
Susannah.

If you have any imaging questions send them to noonum@verizon.net and I will answer them in this column

