A landscape photograph of a field with a tree and mountains under a cloudy sky. The foreground is a vast field of tall, golden-brown grasses. A single, large tree with vibrant orange and red autumn foliage stands prominently on the right side of the field. In the background, there are dark, rugged mountains with patches of snow on their peaks. The sky is filled with dramatic, grey and white clouds, with a bright light source breaking through near the horizon, creating a strong contrast and highlighting the textures of the grass and the tree's leaves.

PLUG IN with NIK

A Photographer's Guide to
Creating Dynamic Images
with Nik Software

John Batdorff

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Peachpit

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Introduction

Although digital processing can be enjoyable, I'm a photographer at heart, and my number one goal is to take more images and spend less time processing. I've always been drawn to solutions that help me achieve my vision without bogging me down in a technical labyrinth. Many years ago I bought Nik Software's Color Efex as my first plugin, and I've never looked back.

I love when photography and technology come together to create a product that's easy to use yet remarkably powerful. By utilizing proprietary algorithms and patented U-Point technology, Nik Software has done just that by providing photographers with a software suite that is second to none. Not only is the suite wrapped with a beautiful interface that's easy to operate, but it's also packed with powerful features that help you bring your vision to life.

U-Point Technology

At the heart of Nik Software is its propriety U-Point technology, which analyzes an image based on its attributes, such as hue, saturation, brightness, red, blue, green, and texture. Using this technology in conjunction with unique algorithms, Nik provides photographers with amazing creative control over their images. You'll use U-Point technology in depth in this book.

Advanced Photoshop Techniques

Each chapter explains the individual plugins, but I also delve into more advanced techniques, such as Adobe Photoshop layers and Smart Objects later in the book. These techniques take your editing to the next level to help you gain even more creative control over your images.

How to Approach This Book

This book has been written as a reference tool for new and established Nik Software users. Although you can jump from chapter to chapter, I've broken down the chapters based on a recommended workflow, starting with Dfine and finishing with Sharpening. Each chapter is a self-contained unit because not all users will own every plugin in the suite. With that said, some user interface controls are common between plugins and therefore are discussed in each chapter. After exploring the interface in detail, I move on to using the techniques in real-world editing. I provide step-by-step guidance on how to use the most efficient editing techniques, as well as some more creative uses for the tools and presets.

As you read along, I share several Hot Tips with you so that you get to know my favorite tips and techniques. You'll also find my Top Ten lists at the end of a few chapters. These are quick reference guides that share what I think are the most important pieces to remember about each suite.

Resources

Make sure to register your book at www.peachpit.com/nikplugin to access special bonus content. Look for the "Register your product" link. Make sure you login to your Peachpit account (or create one and login). After you complete the registration process look for your bonus content in the "My Registered Products" tab. You'll have access to additional learning aids as well as a few of my presets. I've also provided several images so that you can follow along with my workflow step by step as we process these images together. The images are strictly for educational purposes, but the presets are yours to use. I also share some videos with you for more in-depth and complicated processing techniques. By signing up for Peachpit TV (www.peachpit.com/podcasts), you can watch several videos of me using Nik to process some of my favorite images. And for even more free preset downloads, visit my blog at www.johnbatdorff.com/nikpresets.

The Future of Nik Software

At the time of this writing, Google purchased Nik Software and took ownership of its entire suite of plugins. The future of Nik is somewhat speculative, but Google has made public reassurances that it will continue to support and provide professional plugins for the photography community. I'm sure you will see Nik's technology deployed in some fashion in the years to come, but what form it will take is anyone's guess.

Experiment and Have Fun

Don't be afraid to make a few mistakes and venture off the path. It's via these experiments that you find our own vision. While you review this book, remember that my vision might not be shared by you, but my hope is that the images and process will spark your creative fire. Keep in mind that if you're not enjoying the process, you won't be happy with the outcome, so relax and have some fun.



Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes, Death Valley, 2011

Canon 5D Mark II 17mm 1/400 @ f/13 ISO 100



Chapter
4

SILVER EFEX PRO 2

Very few plugins have met with as much success as Silver Efex Pro 2 (SEP) and for good reason: It's simply the best and most essential black-and-white plugin on the market. Photographing a good image is difficult enough, so when it comes to processing, plugins that help you bring your vision to life effortlessly are indispensable. SEP does a great job of blending superior technology with ease of use. Frankly, I wouldn't have been able to make many of my favorite black-and-white images without this software!

In this chapter I'll explain my approach to using SEP while orienting you to SEP's interface and rich set of creative tools. Of course, you'll do this by creating images and exploring all the creative possibilities SEP has to offer.

Why I Use Silver Efex Pro

Black-and-white photography is experiencing a major resurgence despite film's ill-fated future. Although this may bristle the hairs on the backs of a few of you holding on tightly to your last roll of Tri-X, the reality is that the digital era is here to stay. You can think of SEP as a digital darkroom; its sole purpose is to help you create dynamic black-and-white images.

Why use SEP and not some other plugins or a software suite? Simply put, SEP does a better job because of its unique algorithm, which is designed to render a superior tonal range with exceptional contrast and texture control features. Its U-point technology allows you to make both global and very selective adjustments, depending on your visual direction, and its easy-to-navigate interface makes doing all of this fun! As photographers, you should own software that makes your life easier and that helps your visions come to life. SEP does just that.

Managing Your Files

Using SEP can be as straightforward as importing an image, applying a preset, and calling it good. Or, the process can be as complicated as creating several layers in Adobe Photoshop and mixing and matching different plugins to create your desired look. Regardless of the approach, all of my images start out in Adobe Lightroom before they are exported either into Photoshop or directly into SEP.

Proper image management is crucial to creating a seamless workflow, so I recommend using a program like Adobe Lightroom or Apple Aperture to manage your image library.

Two Approaches to Using SEP

When I first started using SEP, I exported the images directly into SEP, made the desired adjustments, and then saved the images back into my Lightroom library. This is still a great approach for black-and-white conversions, and if you're new to the plugin, I recommend this is where you start (**FIGURE 4.1**).

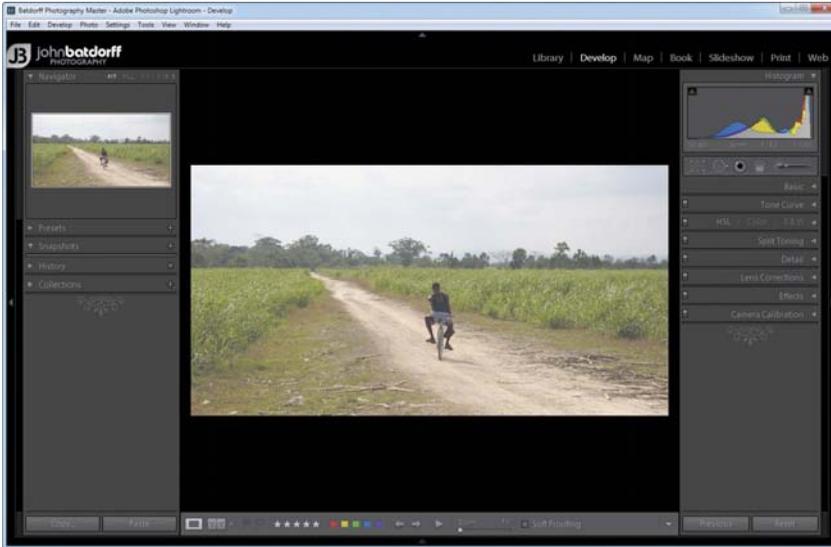


FIGURE 4.1 Exporting from a host program like Lightroom.

However, for those of you who use SEP in conjunction with Photoshop, you will benefit from the additional flexibility of being able to brush on certain effects (I'll show you how in Chapter 7), adjust blending and opacity, add layers—the list goes on. All of this flexibility comes at the cost of additional software and larger files but is well worth it when you're trying to create your unique vision.

Analyzing Your Image

Every time I import a new image into SEP I get a little giddy, simply because it feels like I'm an artist staring at a canvas. But instead of a blank canvas, it has a grayscale sketch of my image. The trick is to learn to use the tools in SEP to bring that sketch to life by dodging, burning, using the color filters, or choosing one of the many presets. Of course, understanding how to apply or when to apply these tools is part of the learning curve. By the end of this chapter, you'll be analyzing and creating wonderful black-and-white images.

When you import an image into SEP, first you want to examine it carefully without any distractions, so it's best to always start off in Single Image Preview. Once you have your image in front of you sans any distractions, you can take a three-part approach to evaluating it (**FIGURE 4.2**).

FIGURE 4.2 Use Single Image Preview to analyze your image.



1. Identify the compositional components that make the image unique. It will be your job to highlight those components based on their characteristics and determine whether they require you to dodge, burn, amplify the texture, and so on.
2. Evaluate the tonal quality of the image. Begin by looking at the image and comparing it to the histogram. Is the image relatively flat with mostly midtones (**FIGURE 4.3**), or does it have a lot of contrast? Is it dark (low key) with the histogram pushed to the left (**FIGURE 4.4**), or is it light (high key) with the histogram pushed to the right (**FIGURE 4.5**)?



FIGURE 4.3 This histogram shows a lot of midtones with some contrast.



FIGURE 4.4 Notice how the histogram is pushed to the left in zones 0–3.

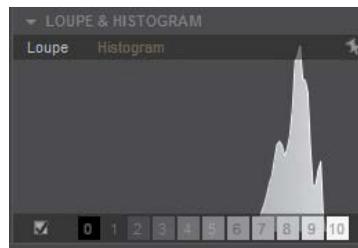


FIGURE 4.5 Notice how the histogram is pushed to the right in zones 7–9.

THE ZONE SYSTEM

You may have heard of The Zone System created by Ansel Adams and Fred Archer. The Zone System is an exposure technique that segments an image into 11 equal tonal graduations. Zero represents pure black (shadows), 5 represents middle gray (midtones), and 10 represents the pure white (highlights).

3. Envision how the image will look when you're done. Or, determine if you are at a loss for where to take it and need one of the many presets (FIGURE 4.6) to help guide your direction.



FIGURE 4.6 If you need help finding a creative path, start with a preset.

You're probably thinking that I spend a lot of time talking to myself; well, I won't deny it! But following the simple steps that I just outlined will help steer your process so you won't click presets aimlessly and move your sliders around until the image "just looks right." Although there's nothing necessarily wrong with that approach, it's not the most efficient or consistent way to produce a great image.

Setting Up Your Editing Workspace

Immediately after you've finished analyzing your image (**FIGURE 4.7**), one of the decisions you should make is whether or not you'll need to review the original color image during processing. By default, SEP displays only the grayscale conversion of the original image (**FIGURE 4.8**), so if you need to review the original color image, you need to change a few settings before beginning.

You might be wondering why you would need to review the color image. Well, you might use Selective Color to bring some color back into the image; in that case you'll definitely benefit from reviewing the original color image. In the image of a woman carrying groceries during a snowstorm in **FIGURE 4.9**, you'll notice a lot of yellow in the original. So I was able to brighten the image simply by using the yellow color slider, which has a very unique and different effect than if I had just used the Brightness slider.



FIGURE 4.7 Chicago, 2011; the last snow storm of the year. I used the color cast to my advantage when converting to black and white.

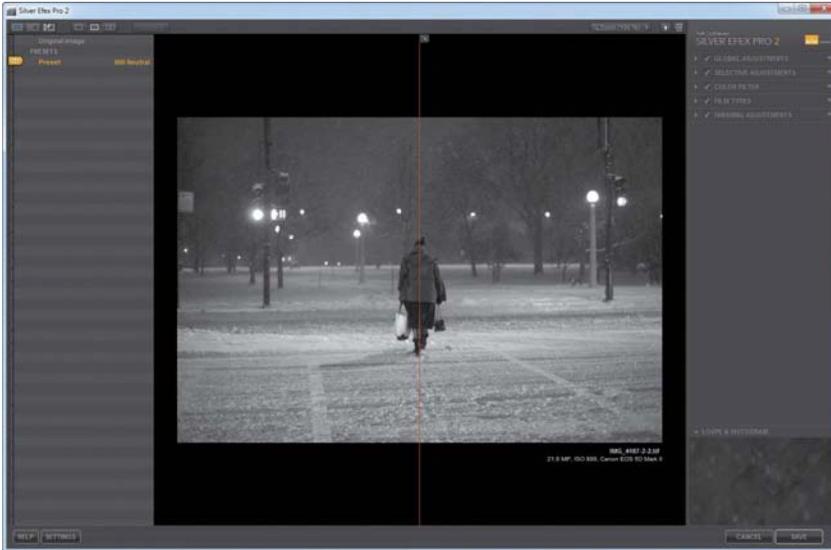


FIGURE 4.8 The default comparison view is set to the (000 Neutral) preset.

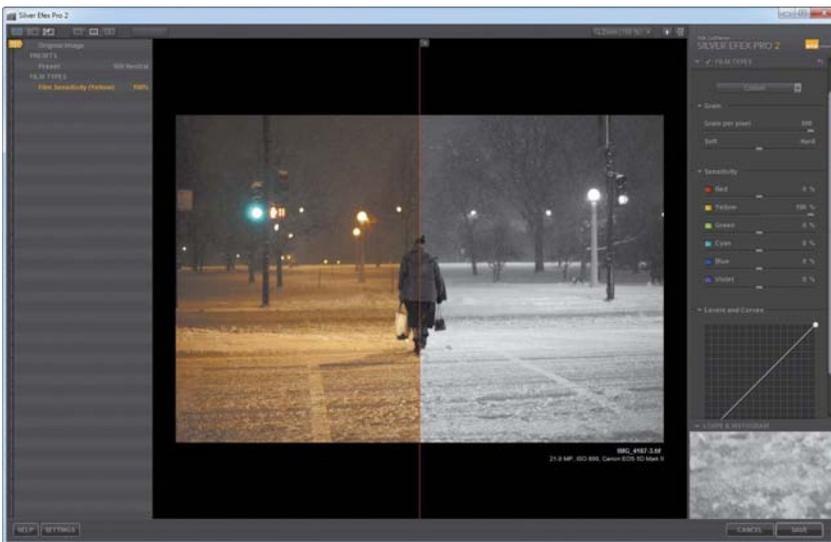


FIGURE 4.9 I prefer to set my comparison view to the original color.

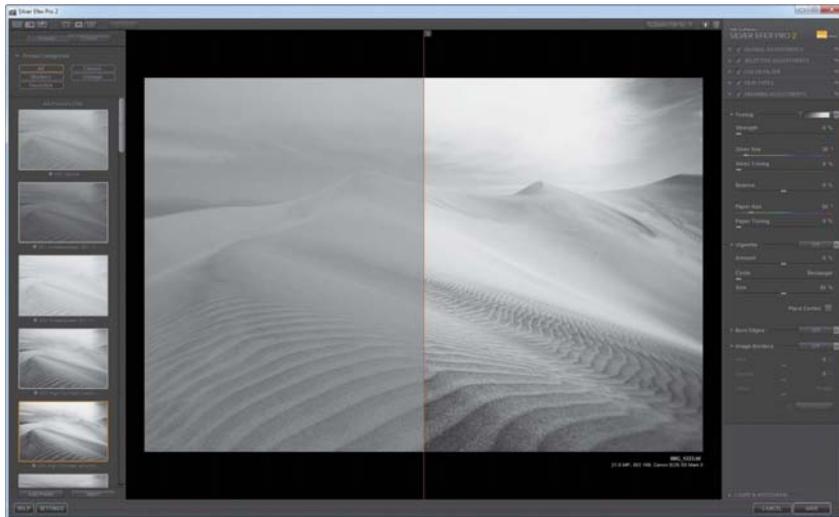
COLOR TEMPERATURE IN NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

When it comes to processing my night photography, I rarely set my color temperature prior to exporting into SEP. I'd rather deal with the color cast and use it to my advantage when creating a unique-looking image versus neutralizing it prior to its black-and-white conversion. Many times the color sliders (yellow in particular) can add an extra level of creative control by allowing me to adjust the contrast in the image after the conversion.

Understanding the SEP Interface

Before exploring the SEP interface in detail, you need to spend a few minutes getting to know your way around it and learning a few of the tools you'll be using. Nik Software has done a great job of standardizing many of its plugin's interfaces, so if you know your way around one, you'll have a general feel for the rest of the plugins (**FIGURE 4.10**).

FIGURE 4.10 This main display is where you'll be doing your editing.



Top Menu

In the top menu you'll see a number of features, such as the browser control, image preview modes, the Zoom tool, and more. Most are depicted by icons. Let's review these top-menu features, starting from left to right.

Browser control

The first three options in the menu control the left panel view primarily, but they also allow you to access important features, such as History. You can collapse the left panel by clicking the Hide Preset Browser icon (FIGURE 4.11). To navigate back to the Presets view, click the Show Preset Browser icon. To view image adjustment history, click the Show History Browser icon.



FIGURE 4.11 Change your browser by selecting one of the three options: Hide Preset Browser (a), Show Preset Browser (b), Show History Browser (c).

Image Preview modes

One of the first tasks you should do in SEP is set up how you'll be viewing the images. You have the options of viewing your image in Single Image view, Split Preview, or Side-by-side Preview mode (FIGURE 4.12). You can alter your view simply by clicking any one of the three boxes. I begin most of my image edits in the default Split Preview mode, which allows me to make sure that I like the changes I'm making by seeing the before and after in split-screen mode. When I've decided on my processing direction, I'll then select Single Image view to view the image larger and focus on details.



FIGURE 4.12 Click Single Image view (a) or one of the two image-compare views: Split Preview (b) or Side-by-side Preview (c).

Compare button

The Compare button allows you to toggle between the newly edited black-and-white image, the original converted image, or any of the states selected by the History State selector. Keep in mind that the Compare button works only in Single Image view. Simply click the button to compare the images (FIGURE 4.13).

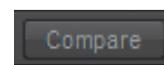


FIGURE 4.13 Click the Compare button to toggle between the before-and-after views.

Zoom tool

The Zoom tool is excellent for reviewing images and identifying potential problems, such as dust, noise, or halos. To activate it, click the magnifying glass or press the spacebar; the Navigator window will pop up, enabling you to pan around the image (FIGURE 4.14). To toggle back to your original view or change your viewing percentage, click the magnifying glass a second time or press the spacebar. The default is 100%, but you can change the percentage to suit your needs.

FIGURE 4.14

Use the Zoom tool to magnify your image for inspection.



Background color

You can change the background color by clicking the Lightbulb icon (FIGURE 4.15) located directly to the right of the Zoom tool. The background options are black, gray, and white. I prefer to work with the black background because it helps me visualize the contrast within an image. You'll want to set this option based on your preference.

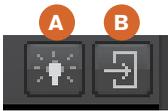


FIGURE 4.15 Click the Lightbulb icon (a) to change the background color. Click the right arrow (b) to close the Adjustments panel.

Hide/View Adjustments panel

The last tool in the top menu is the Hide or View Adjustments panel. You can choose to hide the right panel by clicking the right arrow icon (FIGURE 4.15), or you can press the Tab key to close both the left and right panels at the same time. This is very helpful when analyzing your image and reviewing your final edits, or whenever you just want a less-cluttered view. Click the right arrow icon or press the Tab key again to return the panels to the original view.

The Browser Panel

The Browser panel on the left is where you'll find two very important tools: Presets and the History browser. Let's review each of these features further.

History browser

The History browser is a valuable tool to use to review all the changes you've made to an image in chronological order. Clicking any adjustment will take you back to that state of your image. This is especially helpful if you get carried away and realize you don't like the path you're on. Just click a previous point where you were happy with your changes and continue editing from that point.

HOT TIP

Remember that if you make any adjustments after clicking a previous place in your editing history, you will permanently lose everything you did after that point. However, if you don't make any adjustments, you can click your most recent state and continue editing your image without losing previous edits.

Comparing your edits using the History State selector

Another very helpful way to determine if you like the edits you've made is to use the History State selector (**FIGURE 4.16**) to compare your previous edits to your very last edit. To do this, slide your History State selector to a previous edit that you want to compare to the current image. You can even slide the History State selector as far back as the original color image (as discussed earlier in the chapter) or to its original, converted black-and-white state (000 Neutral) and compare it to your last edited state.



FIGURE 4.16 Use the History State selector to view and compare previous stages in the edit.

I like to use Split Preview when comparing edits using the History State selector. In Split Preview mode, the History State preference is displayed on the left side of the split screen, and the last known image edit (denoted by the orange highlighted text) is displayed on the right.

Presets

The Preset Categories panel on the left side of the screen organizes all of your standard presets as well as any newly imported or customized presets. SEP ships with nearly 40 presets, which are broken down into three categories: Modern, Classic, and Vintage. You can view all of the presets by clicking All (FIGURE 4.17) or just view Favorites. To add a preset to Favorites, simply click the star at the bottom of any preset and it will be added to your Favorites list.

Any presets that you created or imported will be accessible by clicking Custom at the top of the Presets panel (FIGURE 4.18).

It's important to note that your original imported image is always converted using the top preset labeled 000 Neutral. Think of this as the "reset preset." At any point along the way, if you want to go back to your original image, click the Neutral preset and you'll be taken back to your starting point.

Whenever you select a preset, it makes adjustments, which you can view in the right panel (Adjustments panel). In the image of the leaf in FIGURE 4.19, I selected the High Structure (smooth) preset. Notice the adjustments it made to the Structure slider. It increased the Structure and Midtones while decreasing Fine Structure.

Each preset has a unique look and will affect the right panel differently. I'll discuss the right panel controls in a bit, but it's a good habit to select a preset and review its effects in the Adjustments panel. If you like the look of a given preset, you should note the changes that it makes to the Global Adjustments, Color Filters, Film Types, and so on. This information will be very helpful when you decide to go it alone without presets but still want to create a certain effect.

It is very easy to add more presets. You can create your own and save them as custom presets or import new presets from a number of sources. Start by downloading over 40 of Nik's additional presets at www.niksoftware.com/presets or at my blog at www.johnbatdorff.com/pluginwithnik.



FIGURE 4.17
Choose to view a preset by category or peruse them all.



FIGURE 4.18
Click Custom to view presets you created or imported.

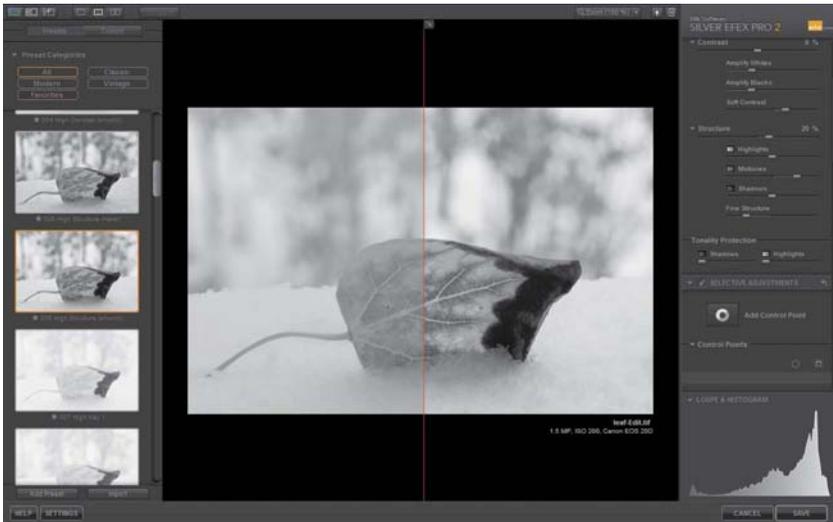


FIGURE 4.19
The Structure slider is one of my favorite sliders. I use it on almost all of my images.

Adjustments Panel

You can think of the right panel as the darkroom's digital toolset. There is nothing wrong with clicking a preset and calling it good if you're satisfied, but sometimes a preset just doesn't get your image where you want it. In the Adjustments panel you can be creative and truly take control of your image. The Adjustments panel has been laid out with a typical workflow in mind, meaning that you make adjustments starting at the top (Global Adjustments) and work your way down (Finishing Adjustments). However, this shouldn't stop you from jumping around the panel and making edits as your creative mind sees fit. Let's review the tools in the Adjustments panel and then move to its practical use in processing an image.

Global Adjustments

The Global Adjustments tools—Brightness, Contrast, and Structure—make corrections to an entire image. You can adjust each slider independently, and for greater control within that slider, simply expand it by clicking the disclosure triangle (**FIGURE 4.20**). The Structure slider does a great job of adding texture to an image. This feature is unparalleled by any other black-and-white software. SEP's unique algorithm maps your image into zones, so when you make an adjustment, it changes the pixels based on their individual placement, brightness, and an array of other factors. Remember that you can reset any adjustment you make by clicking the reset arrow on the right.

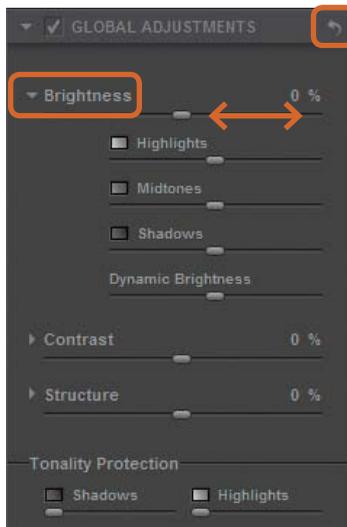


FIGURE 4.20 Make adjustments to an entire image by using the Brightness, Contrast, and Structure sliders.

Tonality Protection allows photographers to avoid loss of detail in an image's shadows or highlights (FIGURE 4.21). This feature is very similar to using Lightroom's Highlights or Shadow adjustment tool.

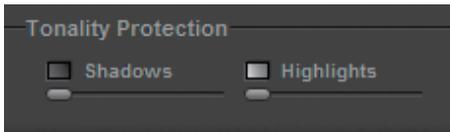


FIGURE 4.21 Make sure you're not losing any details in your highlights or shadows by using the Tonality Protection feature.

Selective Adjustments

Moving down the panel, the Selective Adjustment section is next. This is probably my favorite tool in the entire Nik Software suite and especially in SEP. You can create a selective adjustment by clicking Add Control Point and positioning the control point on a desired location on your image (FIGURE 4.22). Using Nik Software's U-Point technology, you're able to control the tonality, structure, and selective color of any particular region of your image. The ease and precision with which you're able to navigate these adjustments allows you to focus more on the image and worry less about the technical how-to.

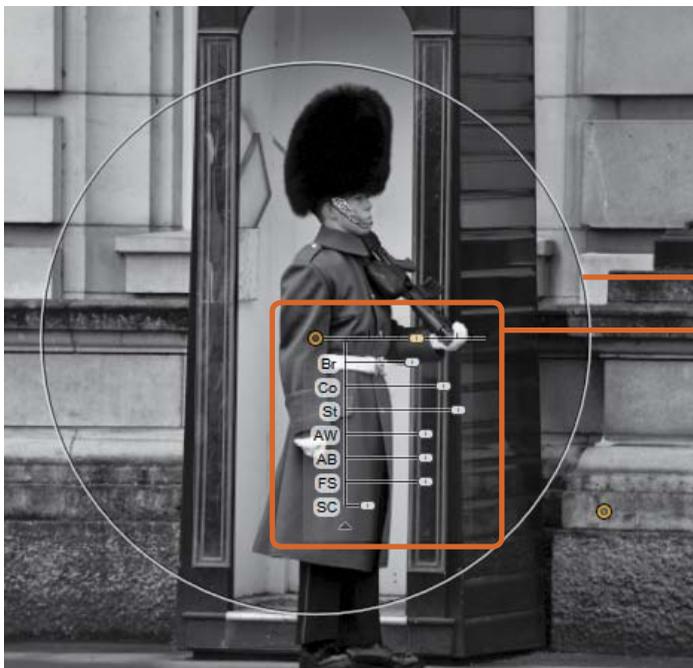
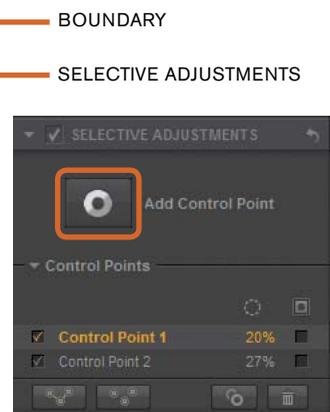


FIGURE 4.22 Use any one or all of the eight fine-tuning sliders to make zoned adjustments to an image. Using the Control Points in the Selective Adjustment section (right panel) gives you ultimate processing control.



If you want to visualize the specific region of your image that is being affected by a particular control point, select that control point's Show Selection check box (FIGURE 4.23). When you're using the Selective Color option, always turn on this feature to see if you have any spillover in unintended areas of the image (more on that later in this chapter).

It's helpful to group control points that are performing similar functions (such as Selective Color). To group the points, highlight the points in the panel by holding down the Shift key and selecting the points you want to group. Then click the Group Selected Control Point button (FIGURE 4.24), which we'll abbreviate as Group, immediately below to group them. Now you can make your adjustments to the grouped control points using one master slider. To ungroup the control points, select the master point and click the Ungroup button. To duplicate a control point, highlight the control point you want to duplicate and press Ctrl+D (Command+D). You can delete a control point by selecting it and clicking the trash can, or by selecting the point and pressing the Delete key.

FIGURE 4.23 Select the Show Selection check box to see what area of the image you are isolating when making adjustments.



FIGURE 4.24 Grouping your control points can remove a lot of clutter. Use the Group button (a), the Ungroup button (b), the control point (c), and the trash can (d).

Using color filters

Black-and-white photographers have been using color filters to control contrast since long before the digital revolution. But with today's digital cameras, it is no longer necessary to use a color filter at time of capture. SEP users have the ability to simulate color filters by taking advantage of available presets (FIGURE 4.25). Instead of carrying color filters, you can now use any of the six easy-to-use filter presets: Neutral (no color effect), Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, or Blue. Alternatively you can use one of the six Color Sensitivity sliders.



FIGURE 4.25 Silver Efex Pro 2 provides you with the best color filter control over your images. You can increase or decrease the effect of the filter with a simple slider.

The traditional black-and-white filter kit consists of red, yellow, green, and orange filters. These work by absorbing light and lightening colors similar to their own while darkening other colors. Lighter color filters will have minor effects on an image; darker colored filters will have more intense effects. It's useful to understand how each filter works, whether you're using them on-camera or applying the effects in postprocessing. A red filter, for instance, lightens skin tone and darkens green foliage.

In FIGURES 4.26 through 4.29 you can see how the color image is processed in SEP once the filter has been applied. The left side of the image shows what the unaltered grayscale image looks like; the right side of the image shows what it looks like once the color filter is applied. I like to start by studying the color image. Pay attention to the areas that the filter should affect as well as the overall brightness of the image. All these filters have sliders that control the overall strength of the effect (FIGURE 4.30). That's the beauty of using a digital filter.

FIGURE 4.26 This yellow filter absorbs blue, and will darken skies and green grass while lightening anything that is yellow.





FIGURE 4.27 This orange filter absorbs blue and blue/green, and creates contrast in many landscape images.



FIGURE 4.28 The red filter works by absorbing blue/green and will lighten skin tones.



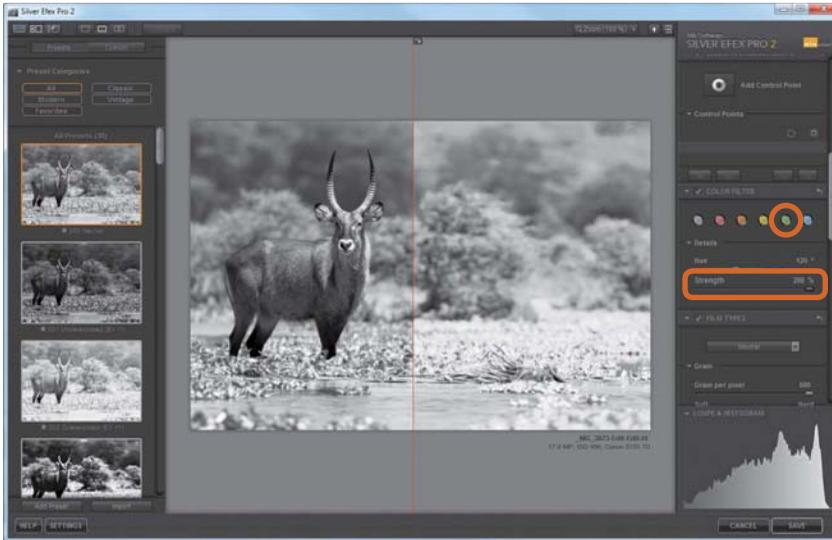


FIGURE 4.29 This green filter absorbs red and lightens green grass.



Remember that you can toggle the before/after preview by selecting the Color Filter check box (FIGURE 4.30).

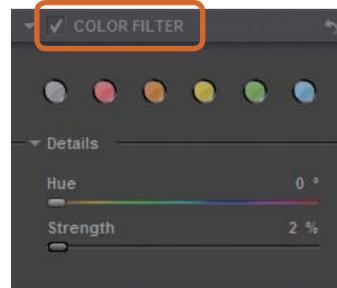


FIGURE 4.30 Personalize your color adjustment by using the Hue or Strength slider.

Film Types

Those of you yearning for the good ol' days of film will enjoy working with the Film Types section of SEP. Each of the 18 types of film to choose from simulates a film's sensitivity to color, grain, and tone (FIGURE 4.31 and FIGURE 4.32). As with the other presets, you can click and be done with the edit, or customize it further by using the Grain and Hardness sliders. The Grain per pixel slider adds or reduces the amount of visible grain. The Hard/Soft slider adjusts the visible separation between the grain. You can think of these sliders in this way: If you want the image to look noisy or like an old-fashioned image, reduce the grains per pixel and hardness. If you want the image to look modern, do the opposite and increase the grains per pixel to 500 and maximize the hardness.

HOT TIP

If you'll be using a film type, it's always a good idea to set your Levels and Curves after you've completed your film selection because the Film preset will directly affect this selection.

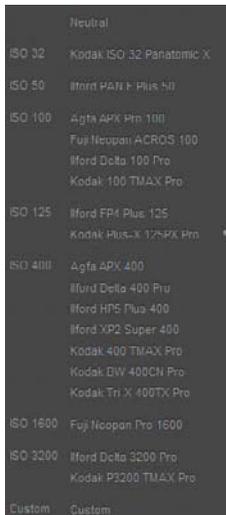


FIGURE 4.31 Use the Film presets to give your digital image the look of classic film.

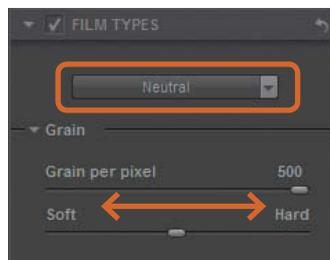


FIGURE 4.32 Add or reduce grain and size by using the sliders.

Color Sensitivity

You'll love using the Color Sensitivity sliders to control certain colors and color cast within an image. As mentioned earlier, often I won't set the white balance during my night photography and will instead use the yellowish color temperature to my advantage when converting the image to black and white. The Color Sensitivity sliders are a great way to lighten or darken a particular color by moving the sliders to the left to darken or the right to lighten (FIGURE 4.33).

Levels and Curves

The Levels and Curves feature (FIGURE 4.34) controls the brightness and contrast of an image's tones. To add a point, either click the graph, or using my preferred method, click the line and drag it up or down. To remove a point, double-click the point. To be honest, this is one feature I don't use very often while in SEP unless a preset that I'm using sets it for me. I prefer to work the tone curve in Lightroom or Photoshop after I've finished converting the image in SEP. The reasons for this are twofold: First, the tone curve in SEP seems to be a bit crude, whereas the one in Lightroom has a few more bells and whistles. Second, I don't like being locked into my tone curve settings "forever," which is the case for non-Photoshop users (I'll explain that further in Chapter 7). Although it's still best to do most of your postprocessing in SEP, leave the tone curve adjustments for Lightroom. You'll gain the flexibility of being able to revisit the tone curve as often as you deem necessary.

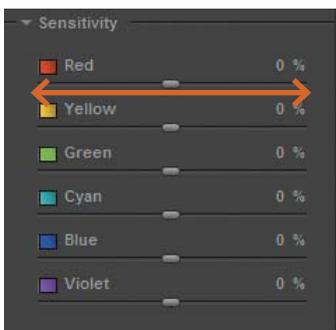


FIGURE 4.33 Use the Color Sensitivity sliders to control individual colors within an image.

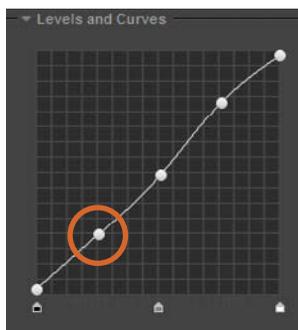


FIGURE 4.34 I'll often create a gentle S with the tone curve setting.

Finishing Adjustments

The Finishing Adjustments allow you to get creative with your images by applying old-school darkroom techniques, such as toning, vignettes, borders, and burned edges. Toning is a term used in the darkroom for changing the color or tone of a print. Sepia and Selenium (FIGURE 4.35) are two popular examples of this technique. The beauty of today's digital darkroom is that you no longer need chemicals to change the silver in an image or the color of the paper. You can use one of the 23 presets or create your own custom tone by using the Silver and Paper sliders. Although I don't do a lot of toning in my images, I'll show you one example and then move on to spend more time on vignettes, burned edges, and image borders—all of which I use often.

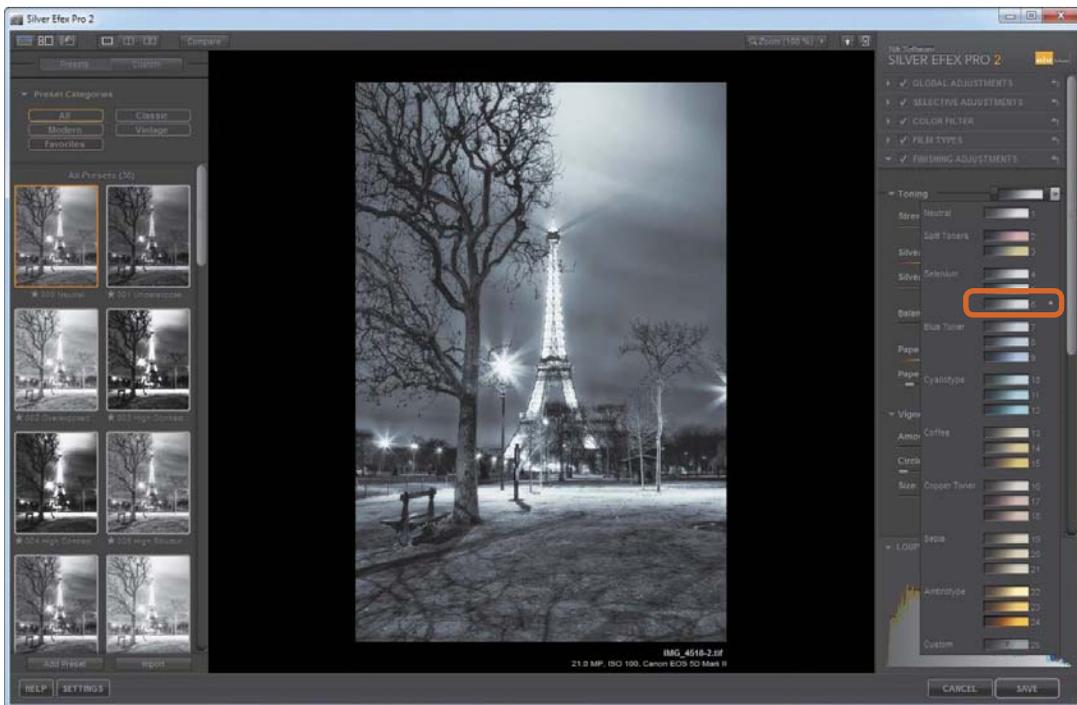


FIGURE 4.35 I used the Selenium (number 6) tone to add to the cool temperature of an early spring evening in Paris.

FINISHING ADJUSTMENTS QUICK TIPS

The Finishing Adjustments sliders have always been confusing, so you might find it helpful to think of them in these terms:

- Silver equals the dark areas of an image.
- Paper equals the light areas of an image.
- Strength (**FIGURE 4.36**) increases or decreases the saturation of the tone on the entire image.
- Silver Hue is the color that will be applied to the dark tones of an image.
- Silver (dark area) Toning is the overall strength of the hue's dark tones.
- Balance is the blending of the effect between the dark and light areas of an image. Moving the slider to the left increases the effect applied to the dark areas of an image; moving the slider to the right affects the toning applied to the light areas of an image.
- Paper Hue is the tone applied to the light tones of an image.
- Paper toning is the overall strength of the hue on the light tones.

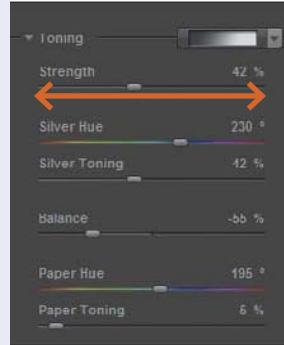


FIGURE 4.36 Use the Strength slider to increase or decrease the saturation of a tone.

Vignettes, Burn Edges, and Image Borders

A vignette allows you to darken or lighten the edges of an image to give it a natural frame and draw the eye to the focus point. A vignette can be either circular or rectangular. In SEP you can use one of the seven presets or manually place the center location of the vignette exactly where you want it using the Place Center tool.

Burn Edges is an incredibly handy tool for directing viewers' attention to your subject. In **FIGURE 4.37** I burned in around the bottom to help draw attention to the tree shadows. This feature can also work like a Gradient tool to darken an overexposed sky.

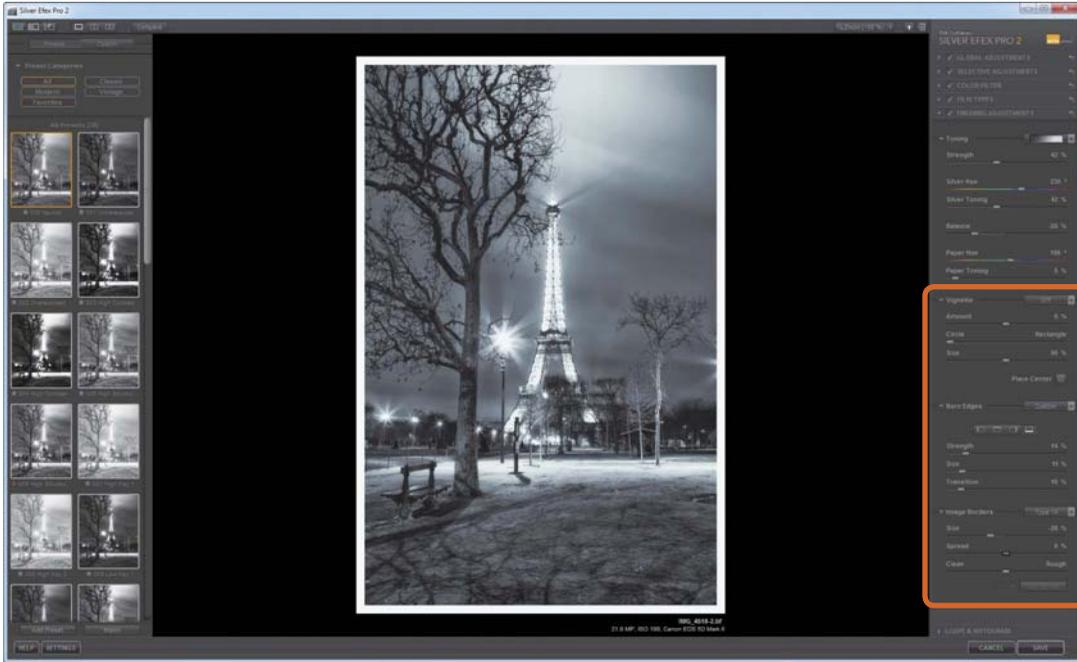


FIGURE 4.37 Finishing Adjustments has a great set of tools for making your image stand out.

Using the Image Borders feature is a great way to polish your image's presentation. I used a classic white border (Type 14) on the image of the Eiffel Tower. You can select from one of the 14 presets and customize the effect from there using the sliders. When you select certain presets, you have the option of using the Vary Border feature, which is a slick tool that generates variations of any particular style. Simply click through them to see the variations on your selected border.

Creating Your Own Presets

Presets are great for speeding up your workflow and guaranteeing a consistent look and feel. However, the downside is that everyone has the same presets available to them, so many of your images will have a “SEP” look to them. I’m guilty of this as well; so one of the ways to set your processing apart from the rest is to create presets that are unique to you. That, of course, doesn’t mean reinventing the wheel. There’s nothing wrong with starting off with a Nik preset, making a few tweaks, and saving it as your own.

Before you get started, locate an image you want to edit and follow the steps in the exercise as I work on my image. Any of your images that have a nice earthy or nostalgic feel will work wonderfully. I'll create a preset using the image in **FIGURE 4.38**, which I shot in rural Jamaica a few years ago. I shot film for years, and although I don't miss working in the darkroom, I do miss the look of a black-and-white image produced from film. SEP has done a great job of simulating many of the popular films, so let's create a custom preset by starting with Film Types.



FIGURE 4.38 Film presets do a great job simulating film.

1. Select the Agra APX Pro 100 film type. This film type is ideal for expressively reproducing scenes with action or moments of quiet.
2. In the Finishing Adjustments, move the Toning Strength slider to the right until you achieve a nice sepia look.
3. Apply a small vignette by using the lens Falloff 1 preset, and then reduce the effect by moving the slider to the right.

4. To create a preset that you can use in the future based on these settings, select Add Preset in the Preset Browser's left panel. A window appears in which you can enter your new preset's name. Click OK. You now have that preset available to you in the custom presets window for future use (FIGURE 4.39).

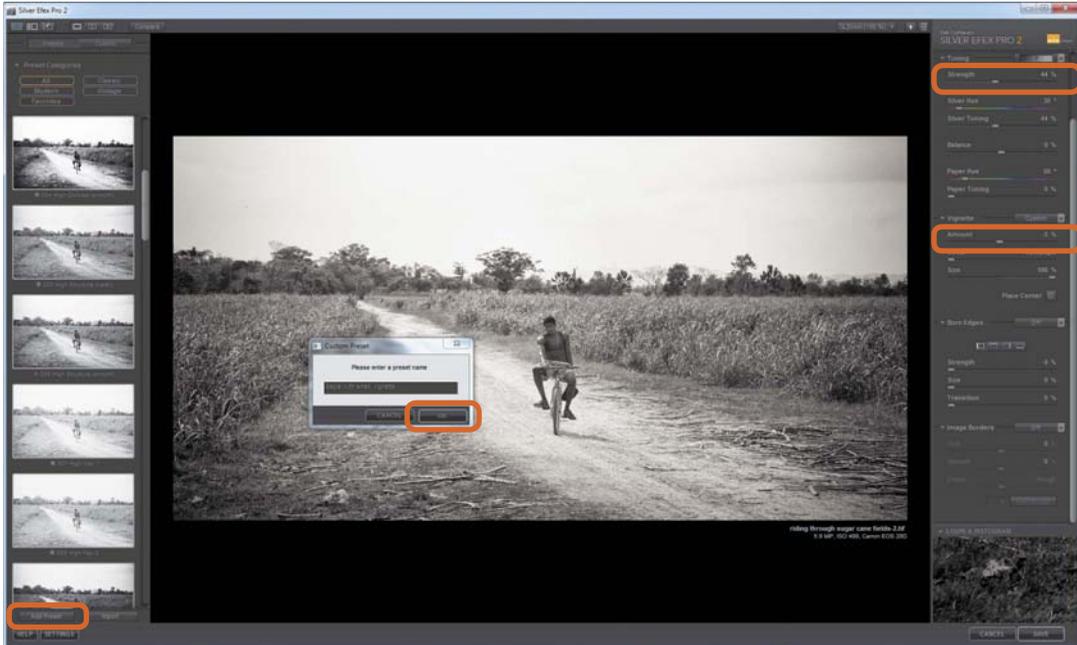


FIGURE 4.39 Creating your own preset takes only a few clicks of the mouse.

Using Selective Colorization

One of the best features in SEP is the ability to “selectively” introduce color back into a grayscale image. I don’t do a lot of selective color, but when I do, I try to make it really count. The trick is to not overdo it. Let’s take a look at the image of the leaves on the rock (FIGURE 4.40). Once again, select an image you want to edit, but this time focus on an image that has one or two dominant colors. Although I like how my image looks, it could really pop with a little color added back into it, so let’s explore that now.

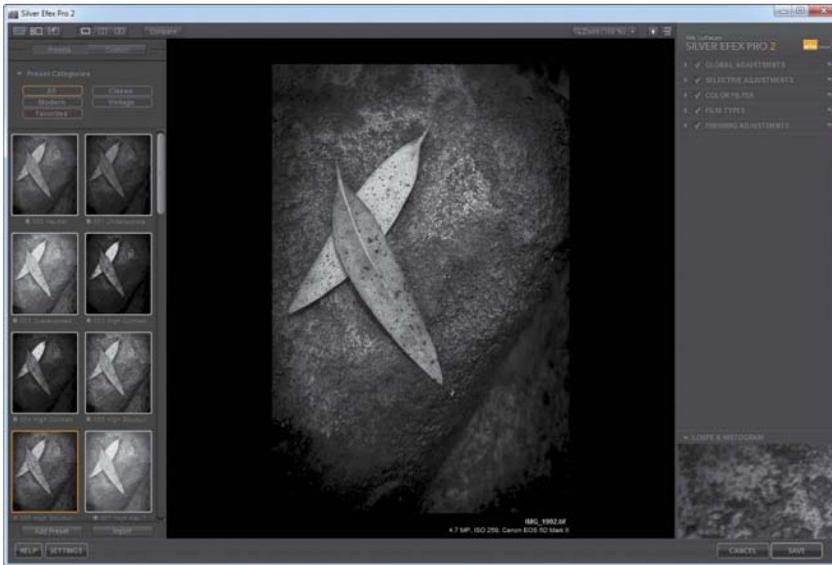


FIGURE 4.40 High Structure (smooth) is one of my favorite presets.

1. Select the High Structure (smooth) preset.
2. When you're using Selective Color, it's critical to know which areas you want to select. Click the Show History Browser icon, click the Split Preview icon, and slide the History State selector to the top where it displays Original Image. Now you can identify the areas where you want to add color simply by moving the split-screen slider (red line) to the left or right (**FIGURE 4.41**).

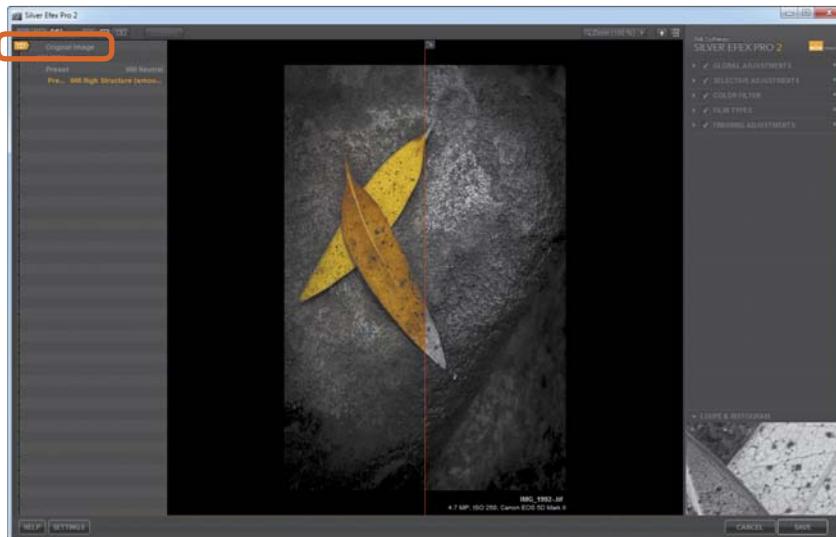
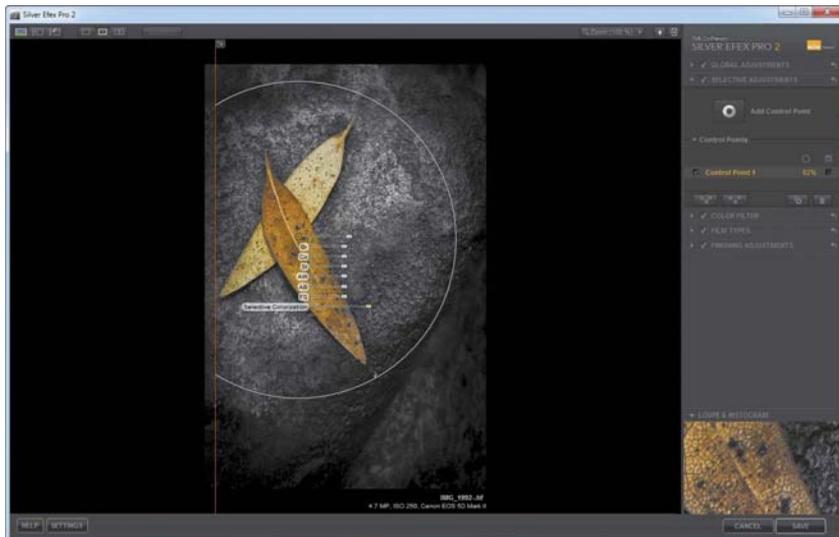


FIGURE 4.41 Seeing the original color image is very helpful when creating a Selective Color image.

3. Close the left panel by clicking Show Image Only at the top and then head over to Selective Adjustments in the right panel. To add color back into your selected image area (in my example, the leaves), add a control point by clicking Add Control Point or by pressing Ctrl+Shift+A (Command+Shift+A). Because adding color may require several steps, place the control point in the center of the area where you want to add color. The Loupe view can be very helpful to pinpoint areas where you want to add control points. Make sure the control point's boundary (size of circle) covers the areas of the object but doesn't cover beyond the area where you intend to add color.
4. "Turn on" the color by moving the Selective Colorization slider to the right. To mute the colors a bit, move the slider to 85%. As in the example, you might notice a little bit of overspray of color on other objects in the image, but don't worry; you'll fix that next (FIGURE 4.42).

FIGURE 4.42 Make sure your boundary isn't too large but that it covers just the area you want to affect.



5. Select the Show Selection check box for Control Point 1 so you can see the area being affected (FIGURE 4.43).
6. Click a control point and place it on an area where you don't want color. I refer to this as a neutral control point to help reduce the overspray of color. Repeat this step as many times as necessary.

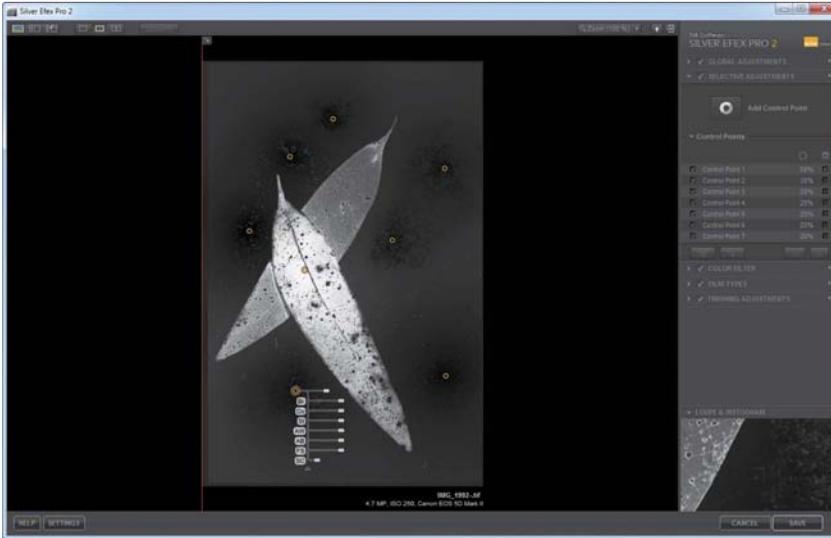


FIGURE 4.43 Use neutral control points to chisel away areas where you don't want color.

7. Deselect Show Selection so you can see your subject in color again. Notice that you've effectively eliminated any overspray. Neutral control points don't work 100 percent of the time; therefore, you may need to revisit your image, place a new control point on the area where you want to add color, and increase the Selective Colorization slider again (FIGURE 4.44).

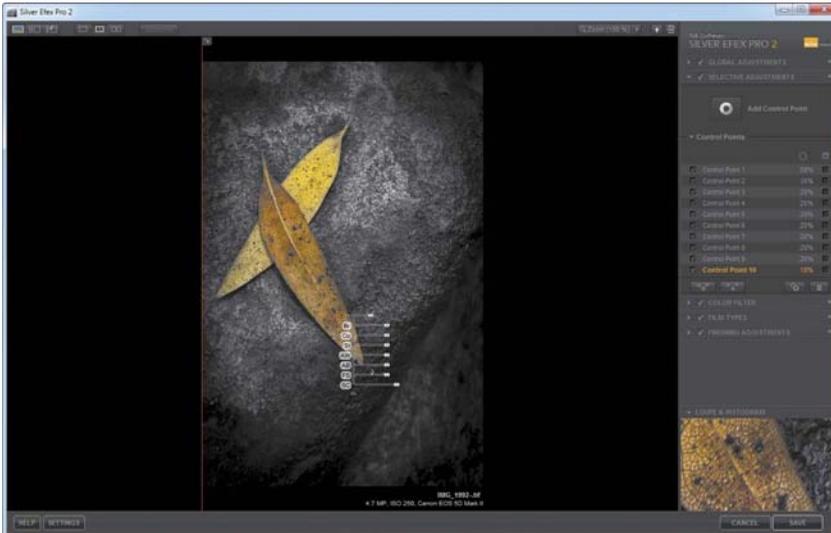


FIGURE 4.44 Repeat adding Selective Color points as needed to refine the image.

HOT TIP

To make your Selective Color image pop, once you're back in your host program, use Vibrance or Saturation to increase the color portion of your image.

Processing an Image: From Start to Finish

You've spent most of this chapter dissecting all the great tools SEP has to offer. Now let's put those tools to good use and process a few images.

Creating a Landscape

The key to creating a dynamic black-and-white landscape image is keeping it simple and accentuating the obvious. **FIGURE 4.45** shows an image I took at Mono Lake, California. When processing an image, you first need to analyze it and think about what it is that makes it good. In this instance it boils down to three compositional elements: the billowing clouds, the mountains in the distance, and the reflection of the clouds in the water. The image appears a little flat, but the histogram indicates that there is a decent tonal range to work with.

FIGURE 4.45 A decent tonal range spans from the shadows to the highlights.



Although the current tonal range is good, it would be better if the final image had a high amount of contrast as well as increased texture. The goal is to make the clouds appear almost three-dimensional by darkening the sky and adding texture to the clouds.

Let's begin by using the High Structure (smooth) preset (**FIGURE 4.46**). I typically use the same preset 70 percent of the time because it ensures that my

style stays consistent. (However, you can use whichever preset you feel is necessary when developing your vision.)



FIGURE 4.46 The High Structure (smooth) preset adds more structure to the midtones.

Darken the sky

We can skip the Global Adjustments because the preset has set those already and they look good. Taking control of the sky and darkening it without affecting the clouds is the next step. To do this, we'll use the Blue Color Sensitivity slider located under Film Types and slide it to the left to darken the sky (**FIGURE 4.47**).



FIGURE 4.47 Moving the Blue Color Sensitivity slider to the left darkened the sky.

Dynamic clouds

Next, head to Selective Adjustments and add control points to the clouds. To add a control point, simply click Add Control Point or press Ctrl+Shift+A (Command+Shift+A).

The key to making a good selection with your control point is to use your histogram's zones and identify the best location to drop your control point for the maximum effect. In this example, Zone 8 covers most of the highlight region of the clouds, so placing a control point on pixels that fall within that zone is needed. Once the control point is placed in the right location, it's critical to make sure the control point size, or boundary, is large enough to encompass all of the clouds. Also, cranking up the Structure slider adds texture to the clouds and makes them pop (FIGURE 4.48).

FIGURE 4.48 The Structure slider does a great job of adding texture to an image.



The final image now meets the original goals. The subtle enhancements to the sky wouldn't have been achievable by using only a preset (FIGURE 4.49).



FIGURE 4.49 Notice how the sky pops now compared to the default conversion.

Creating a Portrait

Creating an interesting portrait is about finding the balance between showcasing your subject's personality and integrating your own personal style as a photographer. For those of you who follow my blog, you'll quickly recognize my daughter Anna in the photograph used in this exercise. She's been an inspiration and source of silliness throughout the years. There's very little that is dark about her personality, so a high-key image would work well for her portrait. Matching the mood to the key is very important. For solemn or serious subjects, a low-key or dark image works well, but for happy or funny moments, a high-key or light image is more appropriate. Knowing your subjects and their personalities, and matching them to the key of the image, is critical for setting the tone of a black-and-white portrait.

Beyond balancing the mood, it's also important to highlight the unique physical features of your subject, which in this photo is Anna's blue eyes and smile. The goal is to create a high-key image and draw attention to her eyes and smile without being distracted by the background or clothing.

Creating a high-key image

Let's start by using the Overexposed Preset (Ev+1). Click the Overexposed Preset (Ev+1) in the Preset panel to create a nice baseline. Then click Show Image Only view so that only the image and the Adjustments panel are open (**FIGURE 4.50**).

FIGURE 4.50 The Overexposed Preset is a good starting place for this high-key image.



This image is now very bright. Using the Dynamic Brightness slider, darken the image a bit by moving it to the left. The image needs to be high-key but not blown out. Add a little detail back into the midtones by increasing the Midtone Structure slider to the right (**FIGURE 4.51**).

The background is still a little distracting, so let's place four control points strategically around the subject to help shape the high-key image. Remember to draw the boundary so it's affecting only the area you want to adjust. Next, group the control points by holding down the Shift key and clicking each point until they're all selected; then click the Group Control Point button or press Ctrl+G (Command+G). Using the master control point, decrease the Structure to 0 and increase the Brightness to 50% (**FIGURE 4.52**).

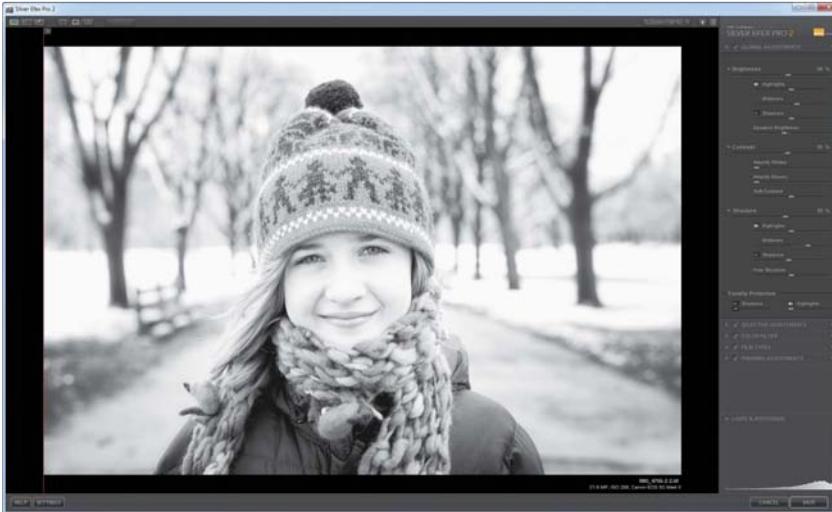


FIGURE 4.51 Use the Midtone Structure slider to increase details in the midtones.



FIGURE 4.52 Using control points, you can effectively dodge (lighten) or burn (darken) in a background.

You might be wondering why you did all that work with the midtones just to undo it now. Remember that Global Adjustments affect the entire image; the goal was to increase the midtone details in Anna's hair, hat, and jacket but not add to the distracting background. So, by using control points, you're able to chisel away at the effect.

All about the eyes

Now it's time to bring out the details in her eyes and accentuate her smile. Create two small boundary control points in the colored part, or iris, of the eye. I strongly recommend using the Loupe view to assist in placing the control point. Group the two control points and increase the master control point's Structure slider to 50%. To accentuate the smile, add another control point where the lips meet and increase the structure to 30% (FIGURE 4.53).

FIGURE 4.53 Using the Loupe view can be very helpful when placing your control point.



Working the Color Sensitivity sliders

The Color Sensitivity sliders located under Film Types work great when you're trying to adjust contrast within an image. In this case, the color sliders are used to adjust the contrast of the background, Anna's hat, eyes, and face. Decreasing the red slider by 50% darkens her hat, skin tone, and lips. Increasing the blue slider lightens her eyes, and adjusting the yellow and violet sliders tweaks the color in her hat (FIGURE 4.54).

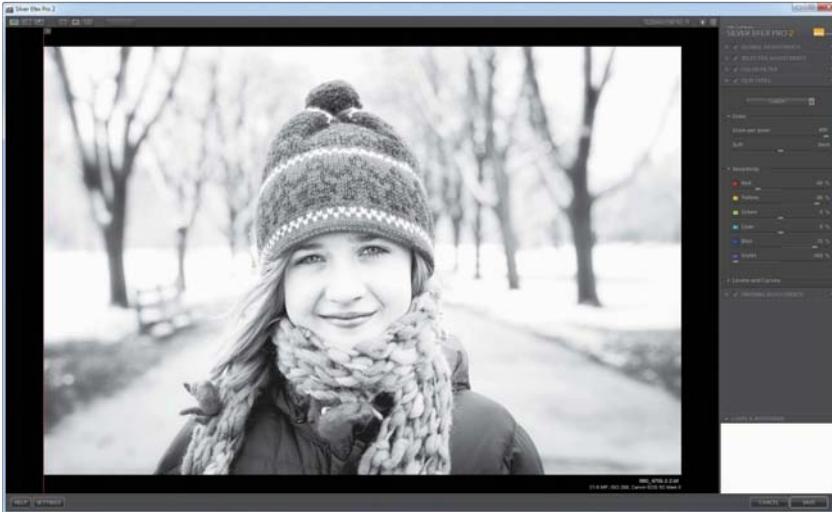


FIGURE 4.54 The color sliders work well when increasing or decreasing a particular tone.

Now compare the edited version against the original black-and-white image to see that the goals for this image have been accomplished (**FIGURE 4.55**).



FIGURE 4.55 Notice how the background has less definition, whereas Anna's eyes and smile pop.

Toning an Image

Toning an image can be a creative way to deal with images that are very flat or gray by nature. **FIGURE 4.56** shows an image I photographed of two male elephants fighting for dominance. Although I thought this image would make an interesting black and white, none of my editing attempts seemed to do it justice until I decided to head down the road of using a Cool pre-set. Let's work this image together. You'll first need to register your book so that you can download this image from www.peachpit.com/nikplugin. Once registered, open the file `elephant.start.tif` and follow along with me to practice toning this image.

Click the Cool Tone 1 preset and switch to Show Image Only view. Although this preset is a great starting point, it needs some tweaking. Notice how blown out the highlights are in the center of the image and how little detail is in the shadows. To bring that detail back to the highlights, you need to move the Highlights Tonality Protection slider all the way to the right. To gain back some detail in the shadows, jump down to the Finishing Adjustments to back off of the vignette that the preset created. Then increase the Shadow Tonality Protection slider to bring detail back into the shadows.

FIGURE 4.56 The tonality sliders do a great job of adding back lost detail in the shadows and highlights.



Now it's time to add texture to the elephants' heads by creating a group of control points and placing them along the elephants' heads and trunks. Using a master control point, increase the Structure to 100% and Fine Structure to 32% (FIGURE 4.57).



FIGURE 4.57 Grouping control points that perform similar functions saves time.

To really make the elephants stand out, you need to burn in the background. To do this, place a few control points in the background and create a group, but this time instead of increasing the Structure, decrease the Brightness to -60%, Structure to -100%, and Fine Structure to -100% (FIGURE 4.58).



FIGURE 4.58 Using a group of control points to burn in the background.

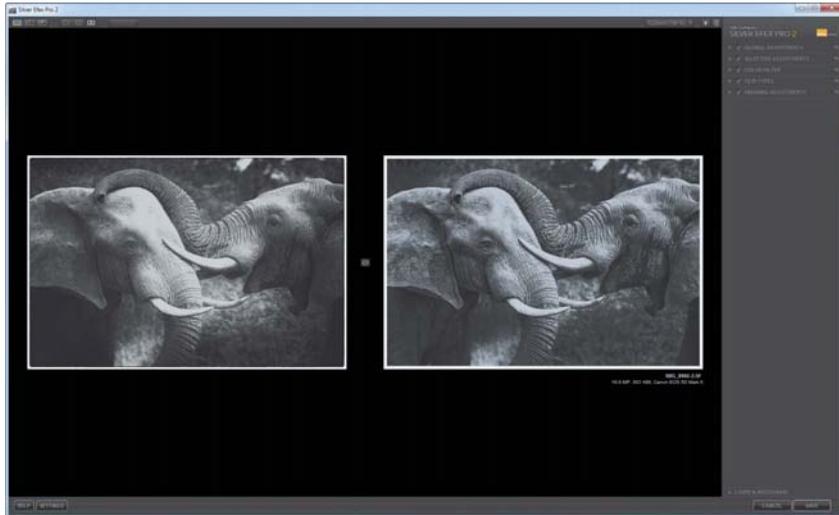
Finally, add some finishing touches by increasing the Toning strength to 50% and changing the border to a cleaner look by selecting a Type 14, which I like better than the preset's default (FIGURE 4.59).

FIGURE 4.59 Using the Finishing Adjustments tools should be one of the last things you do prior to saving an image.



FIGURE 4.60 compares the image to the original Cool Tone 1 preset that was used at the start. The goals of showcasing the texture and adding a unique tone to the image were definitely achieved.

FIGURE 4.60 Notice the detail in the trunks and shadow regions of the image.



Top Ten Tips for SEP2

As a quick review, I'll share my favorite tips for efficiently editing great black-and-white images. See Table 4.1 for Silver Efex Pro keyboard shortcuts.

- 1.** Add to your preset collections by downloading new presets from Nik Software.
- 2.** Before you start using presets and moving sliders, spend time analyzing your image and visualizing the final outcome.
- 3.** If you don't like the direction in which you're heading, use your History Browser to go back a few steps instead of starting all over again.
- 4.** Selective Color is ten times easier when you use the compare view while the History State selector displays Original Image.
- 5.** The Loupe view is best for identifying the exact place to place a control point.
- 6.** Use the Histogram Zones to help identify similar tones throughout an image.
- 7.** Press the Tab key to hide the panels and focus only on your image from time to time. To bring the panels back, just press the Tab key again.
- 8.** If you want consistency in your style, create a preset that's unique to you.
- 9.** If I had only three tools to use, they would be the Dynamic Brightness, Structure, and Color Sensitivity sliders.
- 10.** Group control points that are performing similar functions.

TABLE 4.1 Keyboard Shortcuts for Silver Efex Pro 2

	WINDOWS	MACINTOSH
INTERFACE		
Undo	Ctrl+Z	Command+Z
Redo	Ctrl+Y	Command+Y
Full screen	F	F
Compare/Preview	P	P
Zoom	spacebar	spacebar
Show/hide panels	Tab	Tab
Save	Enter	Return
Close application	Esc	Esc
CONTROL POINTS		
Add control point	Ctrl+Shift+A	Command+Shift+A
Delete control point (while selected)	Delete	Delete
Duplicate control point	Ctrl+D	Command+D
Copy control point	Ctrl+C	Command+C
Paste control point	Ctrl+V	Command+V
Expand/Collapse control points	E	E
Group control points (while selected)	Ctrl+G	Command+G
Ungroup control points (while selected)	Ctrl+Shift+G	Command+Shift+G

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