

Silver Efex Pro software review

by Peter Rowlands

If there is one aspect of the film days that I miss it is black and white imaging. Hours spent in the darkroom splashing about in trays of developer and fixer watching in anticipation as the black and white image appeared on the paper under the red safe light. It was magical stuff with chemical names like Microdol X, Tri X, Neopan and Delta Pro.

In addition to the variations of black and white film there was also different grades of paper to enhance contrast. It was like a little bit of wizardry but, to be honest, I don't really miss the splashing about bit, it was more about the eventual image with its rich blacks and smooth tonal range. In addition black and white simplified the image and made you concentrate much more on composition and form.

Never having been much of a dab hand with Photoshop other than a bit of retouching and resizing of images I was always disappointed with the 'desaturate' facility to convert a colour image into a black and white one. I'm sure the controls are in there somewhere but it's not a process I find interesting (or appear to be capable of).

As a result I'd put black and white on the back burner and even avoided using images in UwP so I was excited to learn about Silver Efex Pro, plug in filter software for both Photoshop and Apple's Aperture. The kind people at Nik Software e mailed



The slightly gritty grain and increased contrast of the Kodak TriX 400 preset have converted the colour image into one with much more impact and evocative emphasis.



me a review copy and very quickly I found myself excited at the prospect of producing black and white all over again but without the splashing about.

The beauty of Silver Efex from my point of view is that they have done all the hard work and research for me and produced a series of effects which emulate the film days of old at the click of a mouse. Firstly you open up your colour image in Photoshop or Aperture and then open up the Silver Efex filter which loads up a whole new page with the image basically converted to black and white.



The 'High structure' style improves the suns rays and increases the atmosphere of the image. Simplifying the tonal range to black and white clarifies the composition and emphasises that feeling of the image being a moment in time.



There are then 2 columns left and right full of additional settings to work on the image.

On the left there are settings with thumbnails showing variations in exposure, emulations of push and pull processing as well as various types of



Silver Efex Pro has 6 colour filter settings (including no filter). From left to right the original colour image then unfiltered, red, orange, yellow, then on the lower line green and blue. I like the orange filter best but to each their own!

processing such as sepia and cyanotype and many more. This alone was pretty exciting for me until I discovered on the right hand side, five settings for differing colour filters followed by the piece de la resistance, a pop down menu of presets for 18 types of traditional film from the fine grained Kodak ISO 32 Pantomatic right up to the golf ball grain of P3200 Tmax Pro. Roll your mouse over the links and the image changes to emulate the traditional emulsion. Included in the list was my old favourite Kodak Tri X 400 and when I clicked

the link I was taken back in time to evocative images with pure blacks and a smooth tonal range with a gritty but atmospheric grain.

For the tinkerer in you there are additional controls for the tonal range including grain and sensitivity but I was more than happy with the film presets. I am sure experienced Photoshop manipulators could get close but I do believe Nik Software when they say “Featuring Nik Software’s patented U Point® technology to selectively control the tonality and contrast of the image, Silver

Efex Pro includes advanced imaging algorithms to protect against unwanted artifacts, a comprehensive collection of emulated black and white film types, a variable toning selector for adding traditional toning techniques, over 20 one-click preset styles, and a state-of-the-art grain reproduction engine that help produce the highest quality black and white images possible from your color images while providing more freedom to experiment”

If, like me, you have missed black and white in the digital age I would highly



recommend Silver Efex Pro as software that will rekindle your enthusiasm and will have you shooting with black and white in mind all over again.

At €200 Silver Efex is an investment but I think if you like black and white the

images and the enjoyment it will give you will be priceless.

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com

www.niksoftware.com