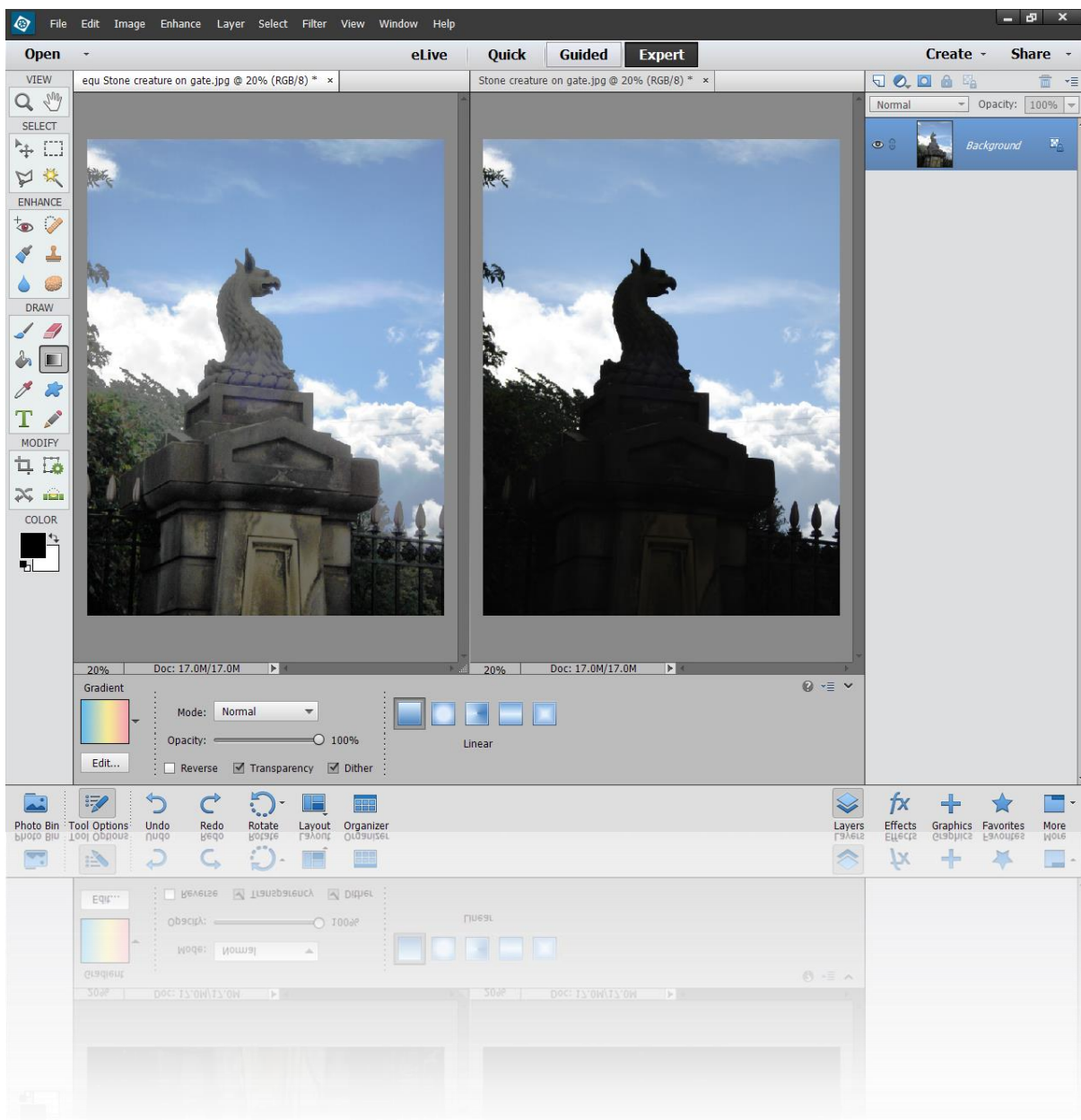# Chris Hester's Photoshop Elements Tips

By Chris Hester © 2018 · Version 1.1

Introduction

I've been using Photoshop Elements since the first version was released. I've always been amazed at the power of the program, but also aware of the complexity. Often there are several ways of doing the same thing, such as making a photo black and white. It's great to explore and I am learning new tricks all the time. These are just some of the tricks and tips I've learnt over the years. Now I feel it's time to share them.

Note: These tips were made using Photoshop Elements 13. Many of them should work in earlier and later versions, but I can't guarantee it. Some of the tips should also work in Photoshop (the full version) though the menus and keyboard commands may well differ.
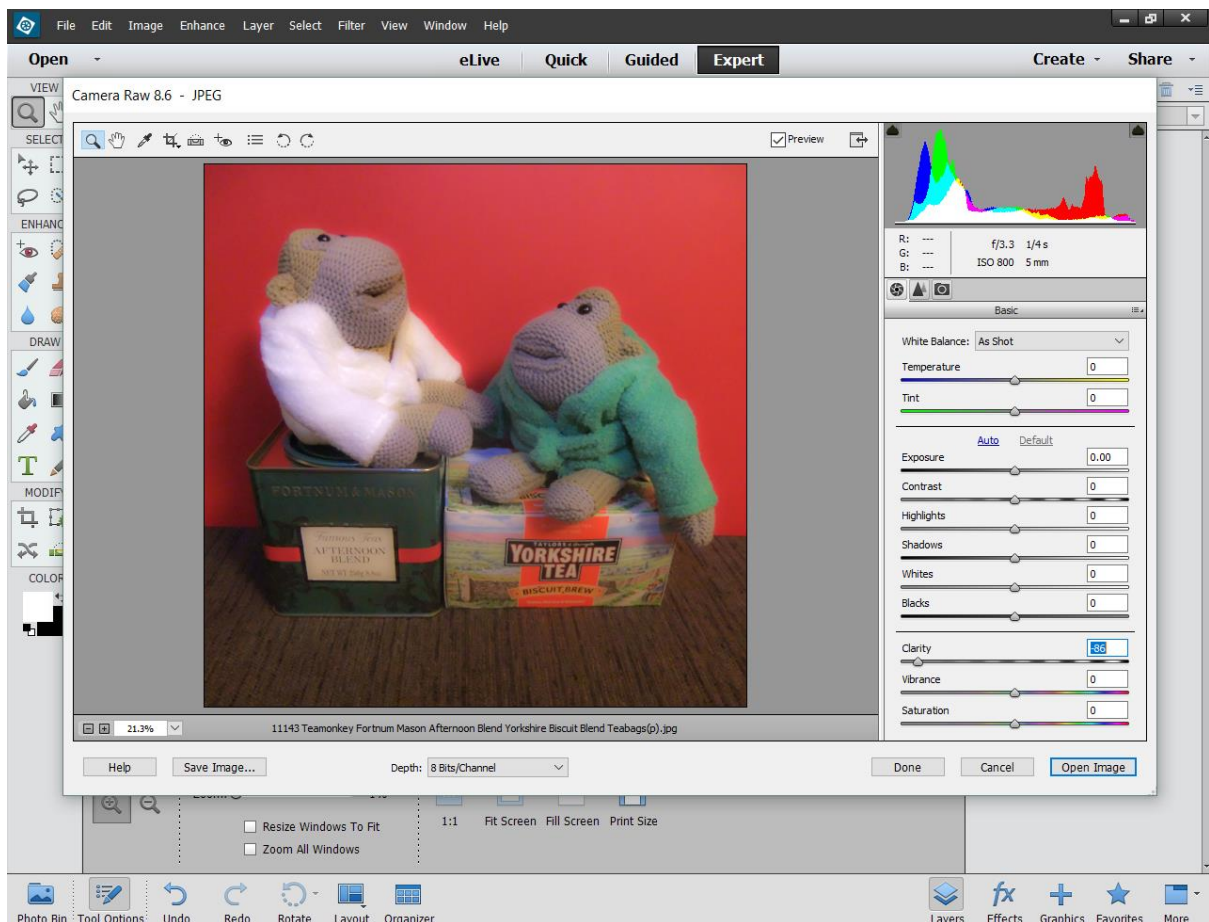
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General Tips

You can open JPEGs in Adobe Camera RAW! This gives a simple way to control several key image editing controls in one place. Plus it gives you effects like **Clarity** which, given a negative value, can add a nice glow effect.

If you save layered images from Photoshop as TIFF files with "save layers" ticked, they retain all the layers, just like a Photoshop (PSD) file. You then get a thumbnail in Windows. (On my PC I don't get these with PSD files, even with the option to save thumbnails ticked in Photoshop.) I don't know if TIFFs preserve all the layer information saved in PSD files, but the ones I tried did.

Gradients

The Gradient Map is an easy way to make a black and white image with a strong contrast. Firstly, make sure the foreground colour is set to black and the background colour to white simply by pressing **D**. Then go to **Filter → Adjustments → Gradient Map** and use the gradient that goes from black to white in the **Default** set. It's the one titled "Foreground To Background" if you hover over it to see the name. That's it!

Note: you can also choose a different colour from black to give a tinted effect, such as brown for a sepia look.

To darken an image on one side only, such as the sky, apply a gradient that fades from black to transparent. Go to **Layer → New Fill Layer → Gradient Fill**. Make sure the **Default** set of gradients is shown and the "Foreground To Transparent" gradient is visible. (It's the one that fades from black to a grey checkerboard.)

Note: before you click **OK**, you can drag the gradient up or down (or to the sides) by dragging the cursor over the image.
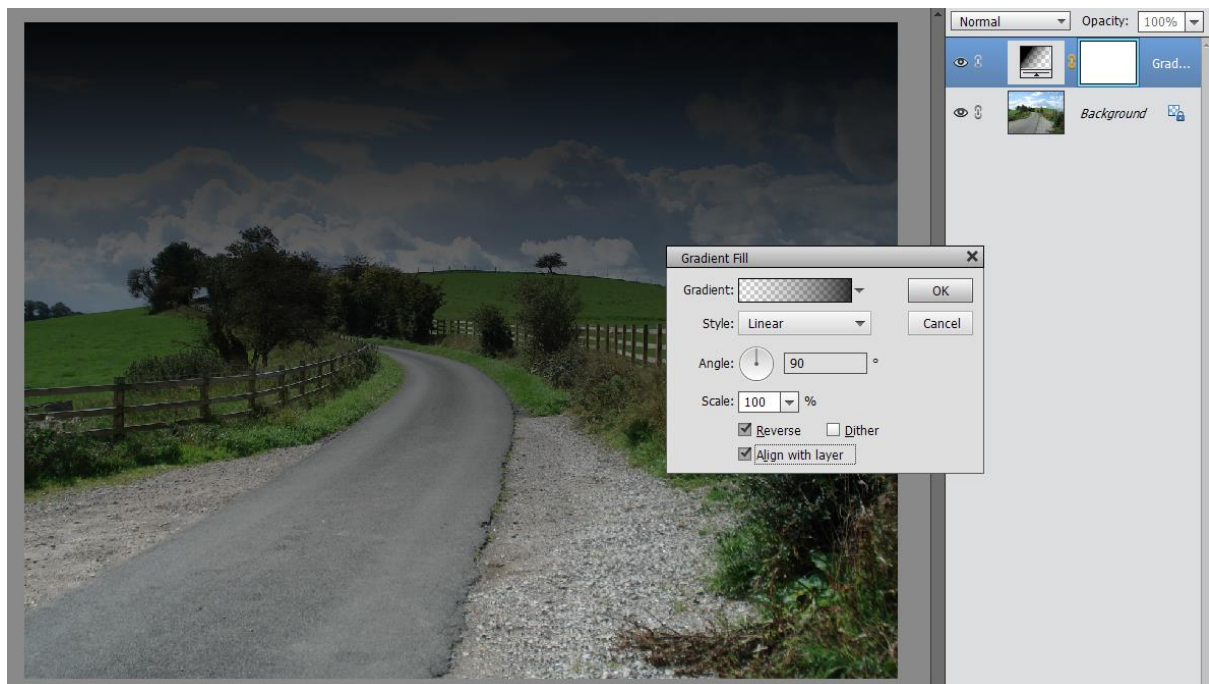
Now you can change the **Layer Styles** to let more of the original image show through. The effect is likely to be too strong, so use the **Opacity** drop-down menu to set a lower figure, such as 50%.

If the effect covers areas you don't want darkening, choose a large rounded brush and paint over the areas. If the colour is black, it'll cut through the gradient and show the original image underneath. You can also repair any cuts by painting in white.

The **Gradient Tool** from the left side menu can be used to add gradients over an image more precisely. Drag over an area you wish to darken or lighten, such as the sky. (Hold down **SHIFT** to keep the gradient straight.) Now choose a gradient that fades from colour to transparent (in the **Default** group of gradients).

Equalize

If you have a dark image and want to brighten it up so that the dark areas reveal hidden details, then use Equalize! It's a great way to rescue a badly exposed photo, though it can sometimes make the sky break into blocks of colour, so use it wisely. To equalize an image, go to **Filter → Adjustments → Equalize**. Just look at the detail it's brought to light in this photo! (The original is on the right, the equalized version on the left.)


If the effect is too strong, duplicate the original image in a new layer, equalize the layer and just fade down the effect using **Opacity**.

> Note: You can also just equalize part of an image by making a selection first.

Coloured Tones

You can use **Photo Filters** to get coloured tones and other effects. Go to **Filter →
Adjustments → Photo Filter** and select a colour like orange to warm the image, or blue to
cool it.
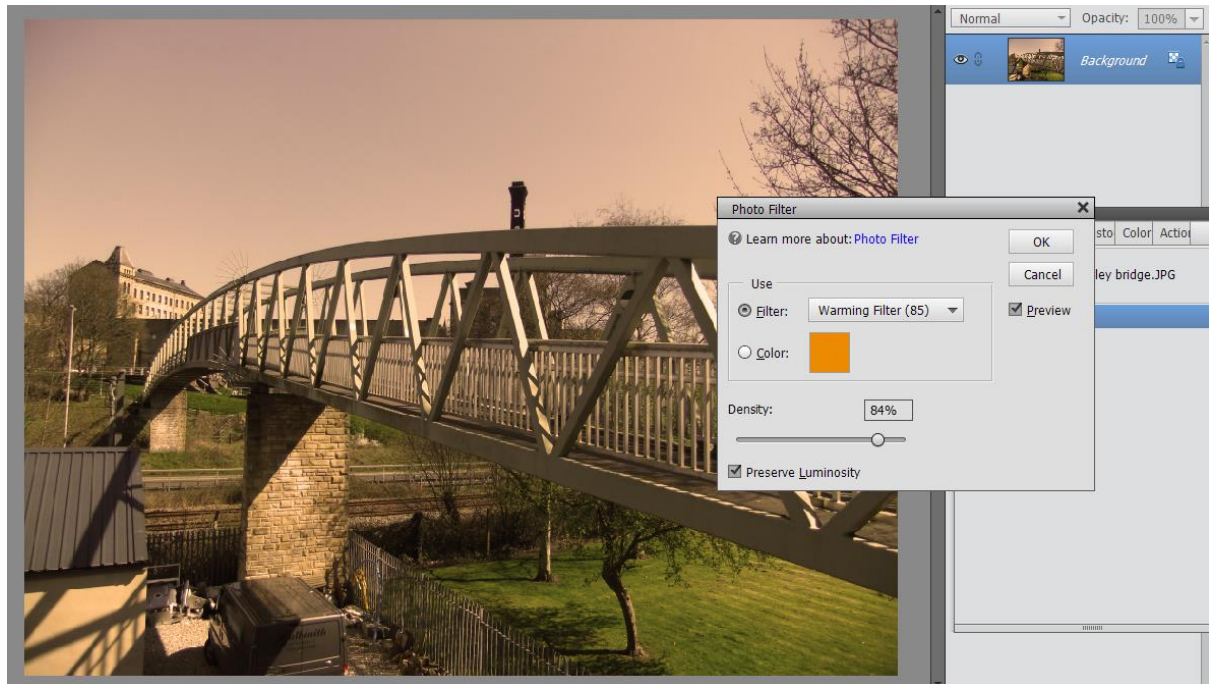
To get a mix of colours go to **Layer → New Fill Layer → Gradient** and choose a pastel gradient from the drop down menu. This will cover the image so just choose **Multiply** from the **Layer Styles** menu to apply the pastels across the whole image. Experiment with other layer styles - **Linear Burn** and **Color** work well too. Try reversing the gradient if the effect isn't quite right. Or adjust the **Opacity**.

Selective Toning

Here's how to make part of a monochrome image use a coloured tone. For this shot I made the building stand out by toning it blue.
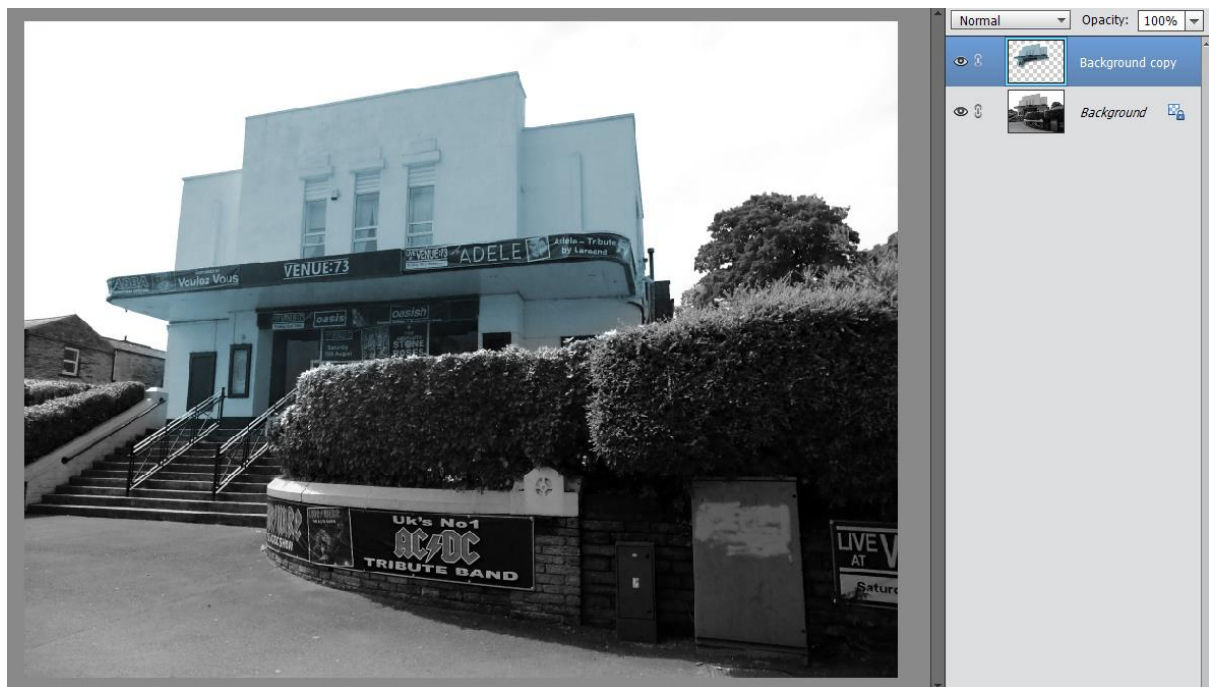

I started with a monochrome photo, then duplicated it into an identical layer by going to **Layer → New → Layer Via Copy**. I then used the **Lasso** selection tool from the main side menu to draw roughly around the building. A button marked **Refine Edge** appeared below the photo on the tool options panel. If you don't see one, you can go to **Select → Refine Edge**. Or right-click on the selection.

     Refine Edge has loads of options, but the main one I needed was **Feather**. I set this to 50px to smooth the edges of the selection. But when I clicked **OK** the effect seemed to disappear. So then I had to right-click and choose **Select Inverse** to select the background followed by the **Delete** key. That's because I wanted to delete the background around the selection. It then let the bottom layer shine through. If I turned off the bottom layer I could see the selection only, nicely feathered around the edges. Any changes to the layer would then blend into the background layer smoothly and not have a noticeable edge.
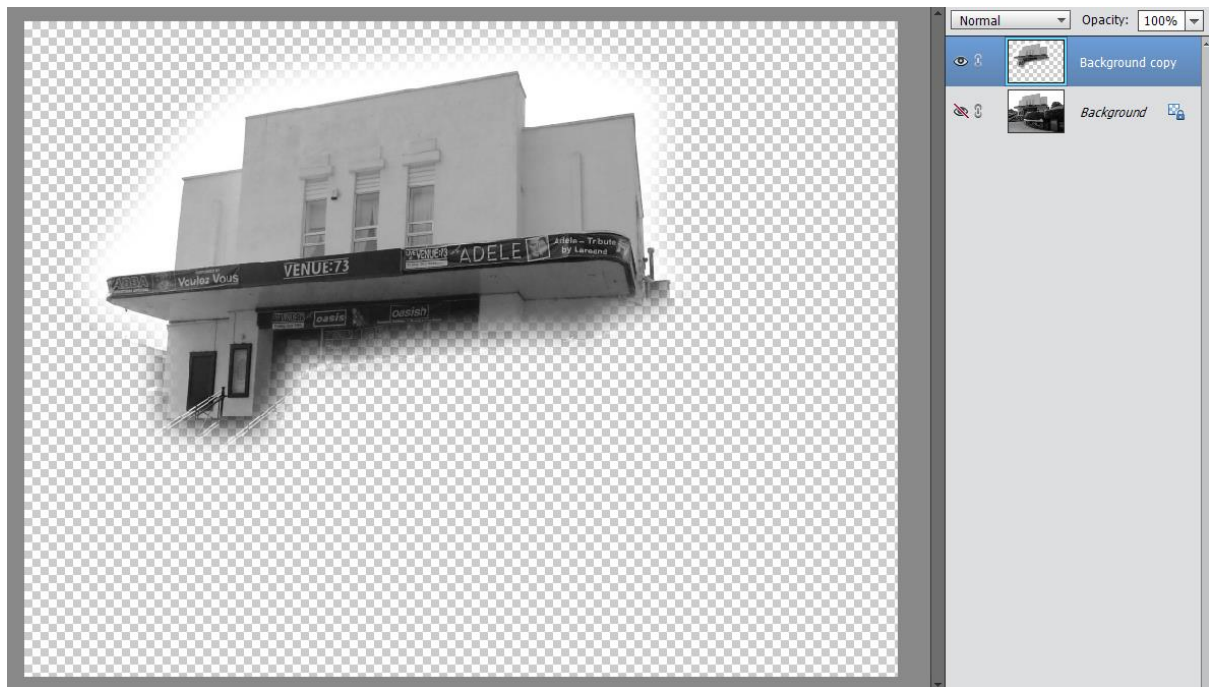
Of course both layers were still monochrome, so I needed to add some colour. After first right-clicking to **Deselect** the cut-out, I then went to **Layer → New Adjustment Layer → Hue/Saturation** and clicked **OK**. This brought up a set of sliders to adjust the colours, but also a tick-box marked **Colorize**, which I ticked. I moved the Hue slider to choose a blue tone for the building. However, this colour affected all the layers, so I had to isolate the selection layer only by clicking on the tiny icon in the bottom left of the **Hue/Saturation** panel. It looks like a white square with an arrow. This 'clips' the effect to the layer underneath, so the colour is only applied to that. Done! I could then save the finished image.
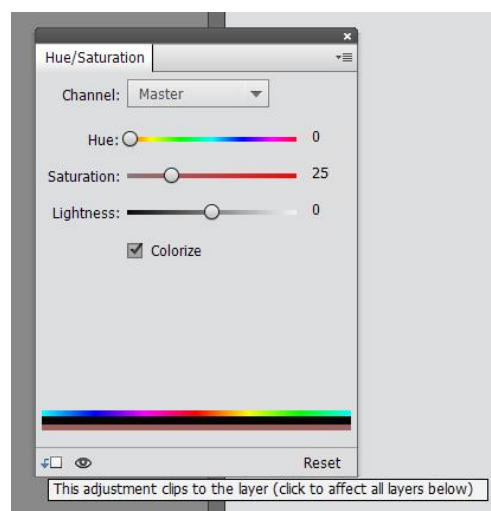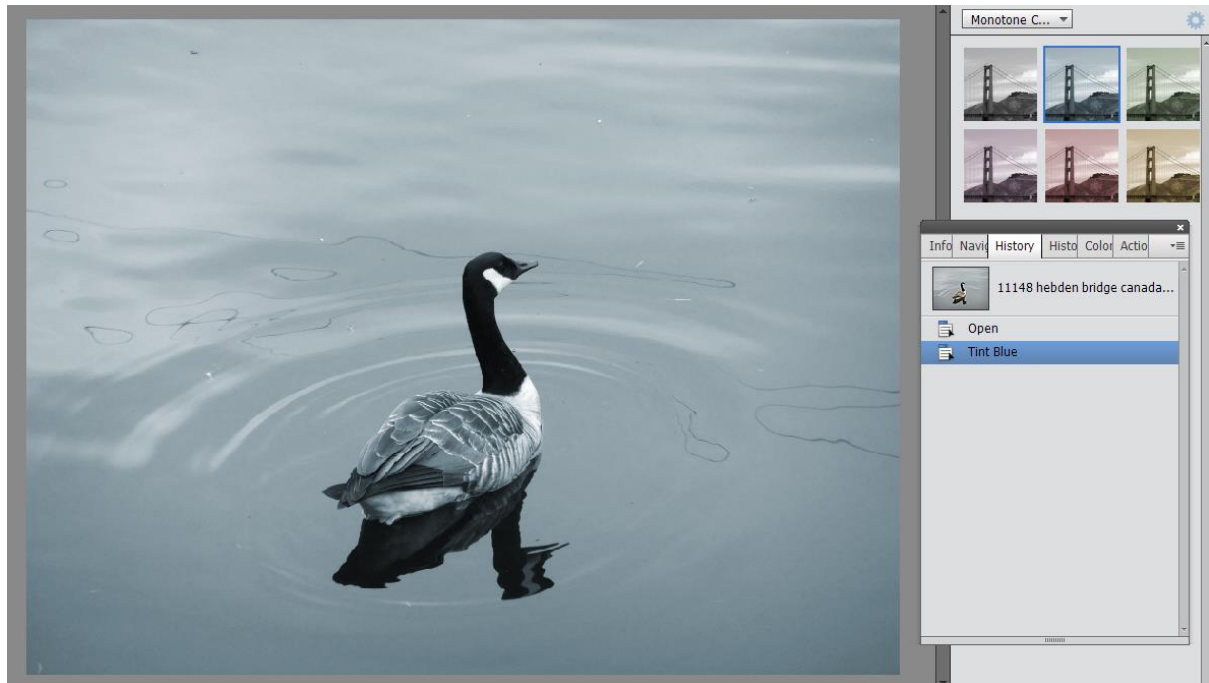
Effects

These are another way to add styles like sepia and monochrome to photos. They contain some unique styles like fading from monochrome to colour. To apply them, use the **Effects** button (marked "fx") on the bottom right toolbar. From the **Effects** tab (next to **Filters** and **Styles**) is a drop-down menu where you'll find some useful pre-made styles. Double-click the styles shown to apply them (or drag them onto your image).

Here I've applied **Desaturate Greens** from the **Faded Photo** menu as a quick way to make the landscape mostly monochrome:

For a range of coloured tints such as sepia, select the **Monotone Color** effect. This offers a range of ready-made tints. This is what the **Tint Blue** effect looks like:

More tones can be applied via the **Styles** tab. Choose **Photographic Effects** in the drop-down menu for a range of colours.

Removing Selective Colours

You can remove just some of the colours in a photo to give a monochrome image with highlighted areas in colour. That way you can make parts of the image stand out. Rather than selecting the parts you want individually (and spending a long time carefully going round the edges) simply use the colour sliders to turn off unwanted tones. Go to **Enhance → Adjust Color → Adjust Hue/Saturation**, or just hit **CTRL + U** in Windows. In this photo I wanted to keep the red and blue of the flags and the car, but make the rest grey. All I had to do was choose each of the other colours (from the menu button marked **Master**) and reduce the saturation to 0. This takes out all the selected colour in the image.

Of course you might still see the remaining colours in other parts, but you can soon remove the colour from those later using selections. Besides, sometimes it looks good to leave the colours in, as with the woman's skin tones in this photo.

Note: If you want to see how much of each colour is in the image before removing it, turn the saturation up to 100 on each colour's slider and it'll make that colour appear really bright. Then you'll have a better idea of what effect removing the colour will have.
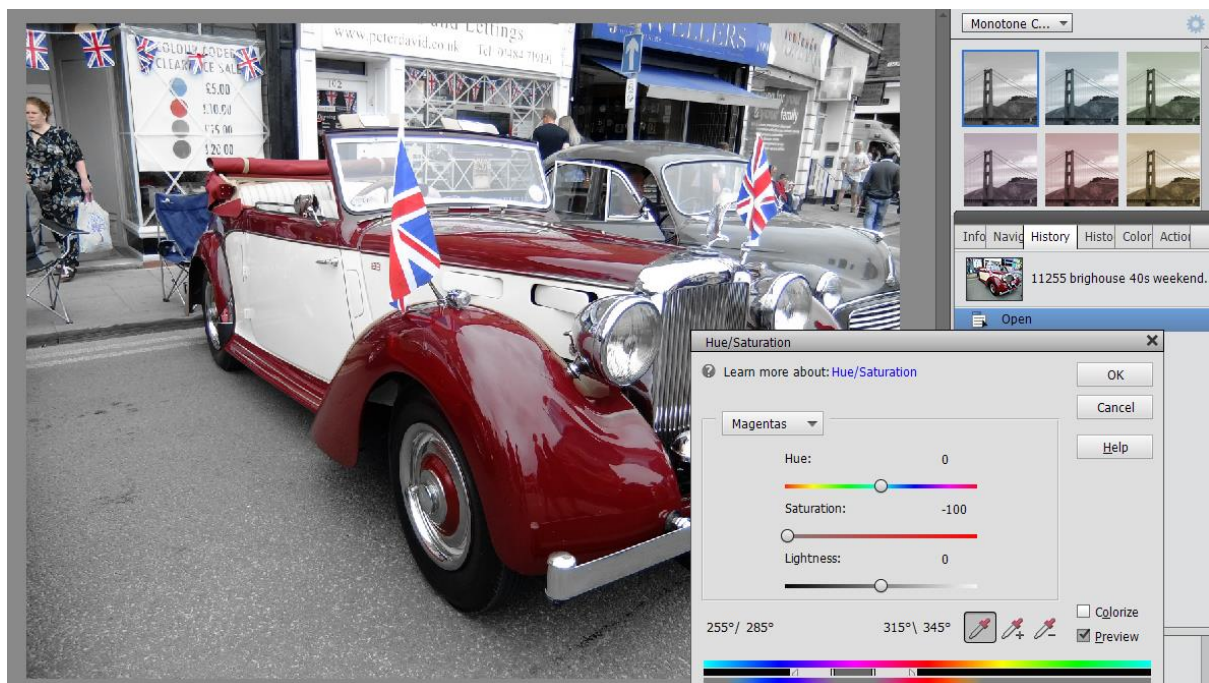
Actions

Actions are another way to apply effects such as sepia toning. You'll find them hidden in the **More** button (bottom right), or via the **Window** menu at the top. Try **Faded Ink** (with or without a vignette.) Expand the folders in the list of actions to see all the steps they use to get the effect.
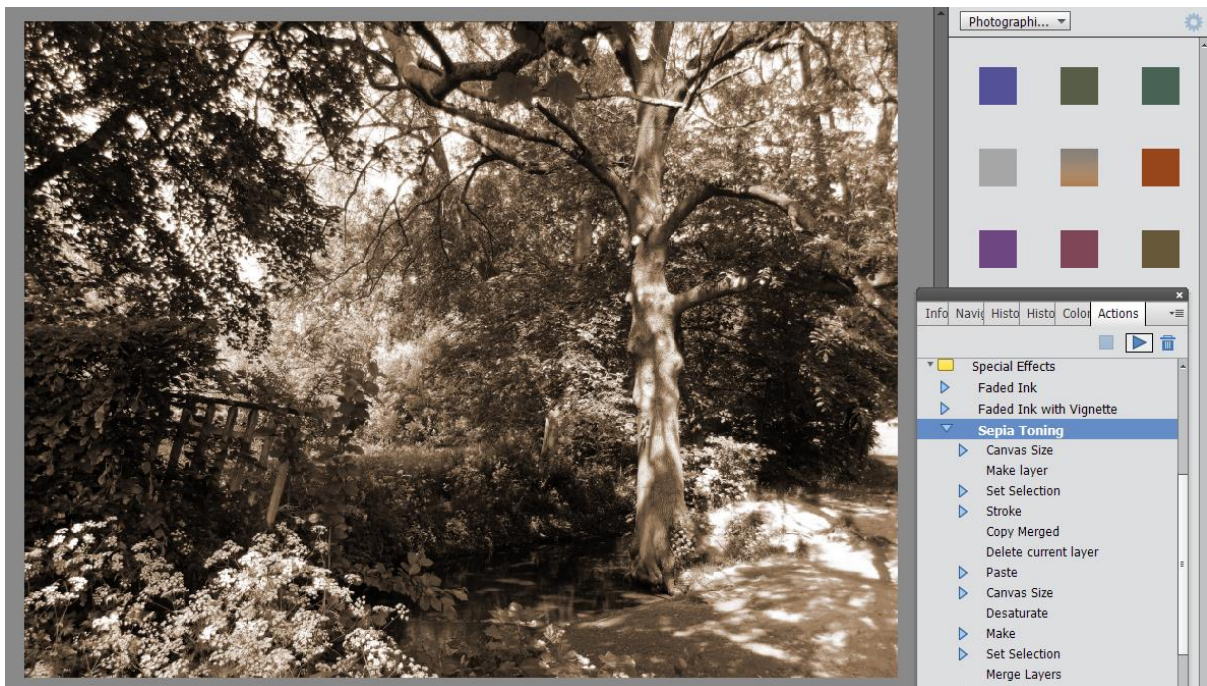
Keyboard Tips

You can move quickly through all the different **Layer Styles** by first clicking on the drop-down menu to choose one. Then hover over the menu and rotate the mouse wheel to try each style.

Hold down the **SPACE** bar to get the Hand tool while using another tool. When you let go, the main tool you're using is still active. This makes it easy to quickly switch to the Hand tool for moving the image around.

Press the **TAB** key to show the image without the side menu and windows. This gets rid of the clutter on screen so you can focus on the image. Press the **TAB** key again to restore the layout.

CTRL + L in Windows is a great way to bring up the **Levels** window quickly.

When you are working with sliders, click on the percentage box and use **SHIFT** with the arrow keys to change the value in steps of 10. Just use the arrow keys to change the value by 1.

Hold down **CTRL** when cropping to fine-tune the movement of the selection near the edges.

When using a brush, the square bracket keys '**[**' and '**]**' increase or decrease the size of the brush.