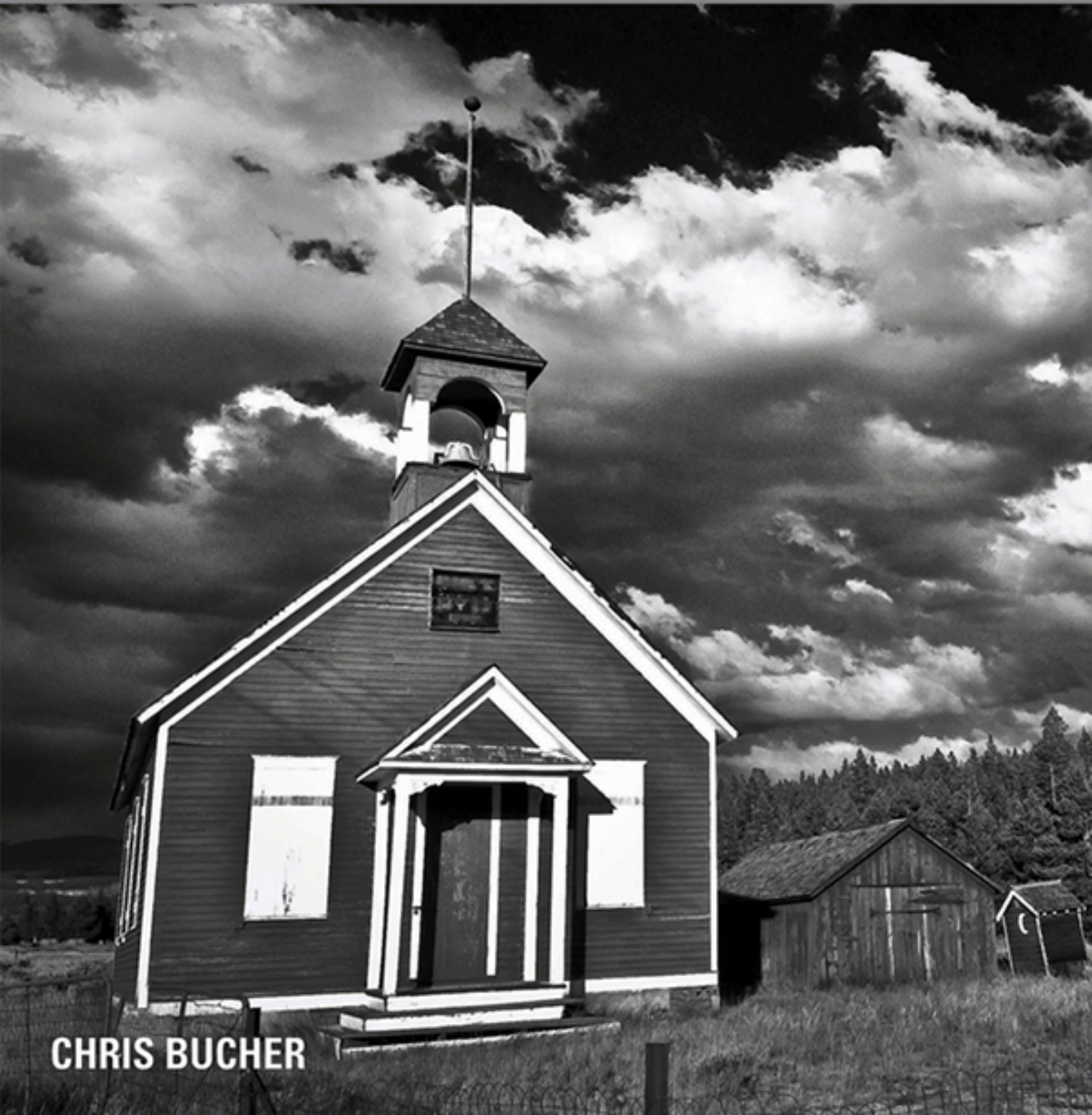




# BLACK AND WHITE DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO WORKSHOP

Develop your digital photography talent



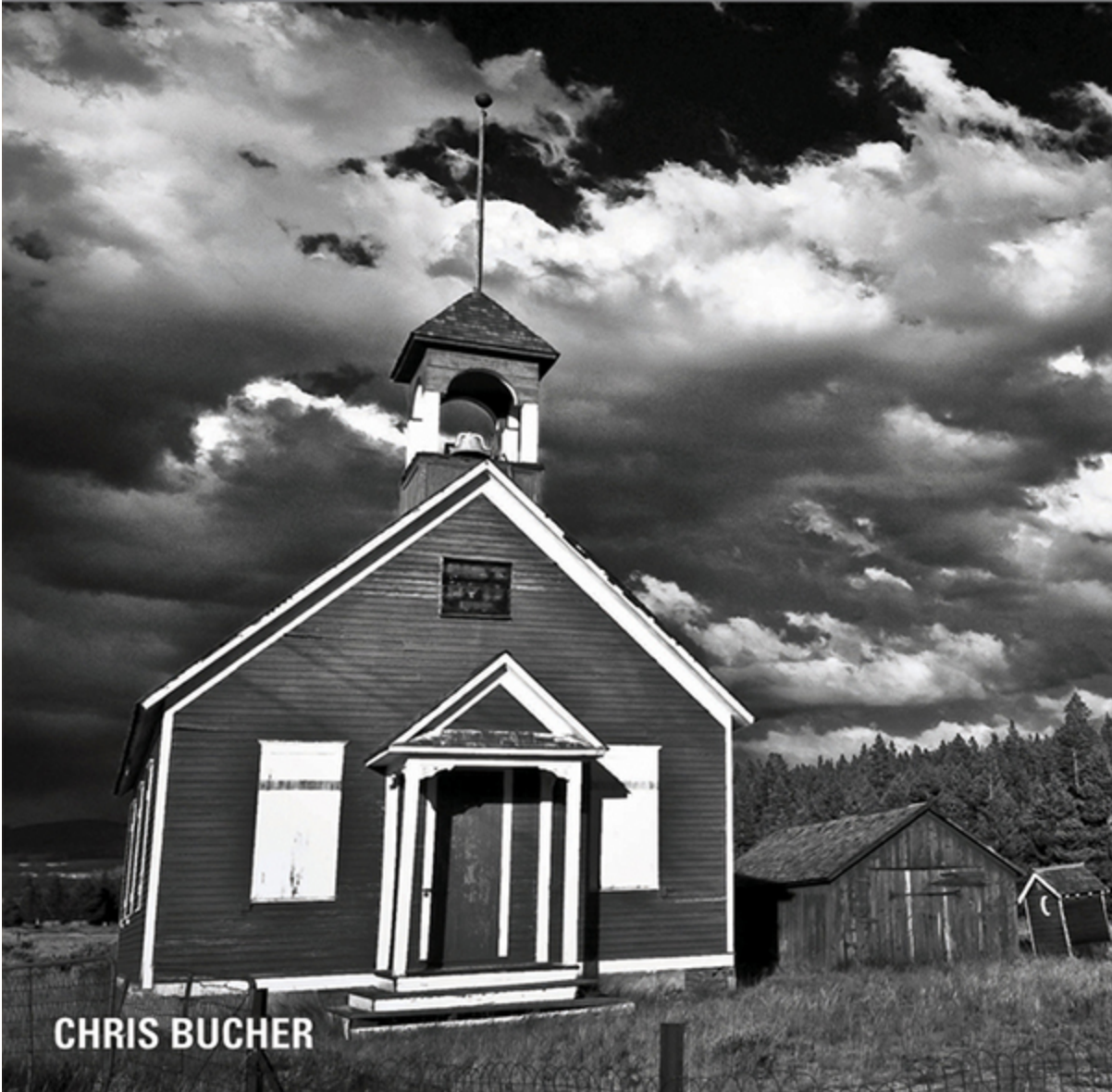
CHRIS BUCHER



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**PHOTO WORKSHOP**

Develop your digital photography talent



**CHRIS BUCHER**

# Black and White Digital Photography Photo Workshop

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## About the Author

**Chris Bucher** is an award-winning, Indianapolis-based photographer and author whose work, assignments, and clients are extremely diverse. Chris has editorial and commercial photo projects across the country, and he takes every opportunity to return to the deserts of the Southwest, where his fascination with natural light is fueled by the harsh but striking landscapes. His artwork has appeared in shows, galleries, and museums throughout the country and overseas. When not behind the camera, Chris enjoys mountain biking and serving the Humane Society of Indianapolis as a foster parent.

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# **Dedication**

For my mom, Lee Bucher

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# Introduction

Now that digital cameras are just called cameras, and film can be the added modifier, some might think that black-and-white photography is passé and no longer of interest, but that couldn't be further from the truth. There has actually been a revitalization of black-and-white imagery because there are so many options for creating new visions in black-and-white photography.

From the many monochrome options now onboard any digital camera to the black-and-white photo apps for today's camera phones, opportunities for black-and-white images are all around us. The ability to create fantastic black-and-white images is right there in every digital image that is taken (even when taken in color).

It wasn't too long ago that as a budding photographer, I put together a makeshift darkroom in my studio apartment. With an enlarger in the closet, chemistry trays perched across the sink and commode, and the shower to wash the prints, I attempted to create my own black-and-white masterpieces of the deserts in the Southwest. Those bathroom prints were mediocre at best, but it fueled my passion to become a photographer and to build on what I learned about black-and-white photography in that makeshift darkroom.

The advent of digital black-and-white photography opens all types of creative doors. By moving a slider or clicking a button, you can affect exposure, contrast, and tone greatly or subtly, and get immediate feedback. The learning curve is often greatly shortened, as is the amount of time it takes to create a masterpiece. Don't

hesitate to spend a few extra moments to push the envelope a bit more to create something that you couldn't have even imagined a few minutes before.

This book looks at many different avenues of black-and-white photography in the digital world. The book focuses on how to expand your black-and-white vision and the creative options that digital black and white affords you. There are discussions on how to handle different effects and options using various image-editing programs; even if you don't use one particular program for all your editing, the theories hold true from one program to another with minor differences.

While there are people who simply push the black-and-white button on their cameras and have done with it, there are plenty of photographers out there who are constantly trying to create better black-and-white photos. This book is for those of you who know that your inner Ansel Adams or Richard Avedon is just ready to break out. The examples in this book show you that there is a great black-and-white photographer in every one of you if you just try a few new things; and that while there are so many avenues to take, one of them will make sense for you depending on your thought process and how you look for a solution.

My hope is that this book will push you to create your own black-and-white masterpieces as you learn to think critically about your own work, and to recognize the opportunities around you. While plenty of photographic and computer techniques are discussed, the book is not a technical manual documenting every step of the digital-imaging process. Photography should be fun, so use the directions, and examples of the imagery, to create the photographs that you want.

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## **Chapter 1: Black-and-white Vision**

In this age of multimedia, moving pictures, oversaturated colors, and digital speed, the desire to create good black-and-white images remains as great as ever. Whether it is the allure of distinct graphic lines, nostalgia, or the simplicity of the contrast (see 1-1), people continue to be drawn to black and white.



### **1-1**

**ABOUT THIS PHOTO** This swimming pool at an old hotel had interesting shapes, lines, texture, and tones, which made me want to create a black-and-white image. Taken at ISO 400, f/7.1, and 1/40 second.

Even though you can simply and easily convert any digital image to black and white right there in the camera, that may not always be the best option. It's important to first take a critical look at black-and-white images to see what makes them work, and why people can be more drawn to them than to color images.

## **Why Black and White?**

When I was explaining the title of this book and its creation to a friend of mine who knows nothing about photography, he asked, "People still take black-and-white pictures?"

I reminded him of the black-and-white portrait I shot of his family hanging over his mantle. Not only do people still take black-and-white pictures, but these photos are all around us — they are still very much part of our culture and everyday lives.

Although there are many different types of photography, black-and-white photography is usually considered the classic form, the birthplace of photography. However, today black and white can be used for much more than just fine art photography or Ansel Adams-type landscapes. In fact, it is one of the most prolific tools a photographer can use to realize his creative vision. Without going overboard on art-speak, black and white can make a mediocre image more dynamic, as shown in 1-2.



**1-2**

ABOUT THIS PHOTO The lines and shape of the water tower create interesting contrast with layers of white on

white. Taken at ISO 500, f/4.5, and 1/125 second with an 18-200mm zoom lens.

Removing color from an image enables the viewer to see the essential parts of that image — the textures, tones, shapes, and composition — all without the distraction of color. There is a visceral connection between a viewer and a black-and-white photograph that does not exist with color photography. While color creates its own excitement and emotion, it can also add unwanted distraction, as was the case in 1-3.



### **1-3**

ABOUT THIS PHOTO A red chair in front of a blue house with a yellow boat and green hose in the background create a visual mess, but in black and white, the texture of the scene creates the mood. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/200 second with a compact digital camera.



Black-and-white photographs are limited (but not in a bad way) to gray tones. As a result, the voice of the image can become greater as the focus becomes clearer. Black-and-white images can also create not only a feeling of nostalgia, but also of pastoral or timeless beauty. This holds true for many different sorts of images, but especially for landscapes and portraits.

Whether a color photograph has been painstakingly color corrected to exactly match the original scene or is very stylized, it is based on reality. Black-and-white images, on the other hand, are based in the creative process. The creative choices regarding the tone and emotion of a black-and-white photograph are there for the photographer to make right from the start, and the possibilities are limitless.

There is really only so much saturation and manipulation possible with a color photograph. The limits on color-photo manipulation are not only part of today's digital photographic rules, but exceeding these limitations often creates unattractive or incorrect images, because they no longer appear realistic. However, when extreme saturation and manipulation are applied to black-and-white images, they can still look correct. The practice of using extreme dark and light tones in black-and-white images existed long before digital photography, and the photographer's artistic freedom has always been built into shooting in black and white.

There is really only so much saturation and manipulation possible with a color photograph. There are limits to the amount of saturation and contrast that can be added to a color photograph before the image can become incorrect, or worse, unattractive. These limits are due to two things: what is visually possible and realistic, and

the *color gamut* of the image. The color gamut is the level of potential color in a digital image that can be reproduced, whether the output is on a screen or on paper.

However, when extreme contrast and manipulation are applied to black-and-white images, they can still look correct. The practice of using extreme dark and light tones in black-and-white images existed long before digital photography, and the photographer's artistic freedom has always been built into shooting in black and white.

## **Creating Black-and-white Images**

With digital photography, the ability to create great black-and-white images, as well as the available creative options, has increased greatly from the days of the wet darkroom. There may be purists who still embrace the hours in front of an enlarger and a sink, the chemicals, and the whole process of creating a black-and-white print from a negative, but I find there are so many more options with digital photography that I struggle to return to the wet darkroom.

Furthermore, I create more (and better) black-and-white imagery with digital technology than I ever did in the darkroom. Perhaps the single greatest option with digital photography is that you can create color and black-and-white images from the same digital file.

There are countless advantages to creating black-and-white photos digitally. One is the ability to change a digital image from color to black and white, or vice

versa. It only takes a second to switch the camera so it creates a black-and-white, rather than color, JPEG. To get the best results, convert a RAW color image to black and white on the computer. This doesn't slow you down at all while you are shooting. You can shoot away in color and make your decisions later (see 1-4). The days of carrying multiple cameras or film backs, each with a different type of film, are thankfully long gone.



#### **1-4**

**ABOUT THIS PHOTO** Aspen leaves turning yellow on a crisp morning make for an amazing color image, and a brilliant black-and-white. The conversion to black and white happened after the shot was made, and could never have happened with film. Taken at ISO 200, f/11, and 1/500 second.

The technical part of creating a black-and-white photograph from a color digital file might seem easy — just use the Picture Styles menu or Picture Control menu

to set the camera to black and white and off you go. However, I find that a lot more goes into creating good black-and-white photographs. Simply taking the color out of the image is not the only issue. Black-and-white photography has a lot more to do with contrast than a mere lack of color. Without color in an image, contrast is what creates depth and texture and accentuates the subject of the photograph.

## **Visualizing in Monochrome**

The act of visualizing a photograph is something you must do not with your eyes, but with your mind. I discuss some techniques to help you with visualization later in this book, but first, ask yourself what sort of photograph you want to create. What is the emotion or feeling that you want to present to the viewer? Should it be somber or airy, delicate or melancholy, exciting or bright? The possible ways these can be expressed in black-and-white images are limitless.

Some people, such as great landscape photographer Ansel Adams, have called this thought process *previsualization*. It entails attempting to see the image in your mind's eye and imagining what emotions or feelings the image will evoke before the exposure is ever created.

The world does not appear in black and white. Everyday color images oversaturate our senses in an attempt to tell us what we need. Vegetables in the grocery store are covered with wax to make them more colorful and desirable. The television and Internet are chock-full of ever brighter, ever more colorful images to get our attention. However, sometimes less is more, and it is in those instances that black-and-white images become even more powerful.

The amount of contrast in an image is what builds the composition; how the contrast is applied to the scene builds the emotional tone of the photograph. On a misty, overcast day, a low level of contrast with more dark tones accentuates the feeling of the weather that is in the scene (see 1-5).



**1-5**

ABOUT THIS PHOTO To accentuate the weather and show the overall tone of the image, I underexposed the image and then increased the contrast slightly to make the dark