

## Why Do We Love Black-and-White Images?

Black-and-white photography was first developed in the early 1800s, and in spite of the invention of color photography in 1907, photographers and photography viewers still love and value black-and-white images. Why? Some say it is more artistic than color photography. But why would it be more artistic? How would the exclusion of color make an image more dramatic, more emotional? It almost doesn't make sense, particularly when color has been scientifically proven to evoke emotional responses. The answer to this question may have something to do with what the human psyche finds appealing.

### Abstraction.

Black-and-white imagery offers an abstract interpretation of the world. Any black-and-white photograph, even if it is otherwise completely representational, is in essence abstract. By excluding real color from an image, the artist interprets the world in an abstract way. Could the love for abstract imagery come from a wish for something other than reality?

The history of art from the Renaissance era on has progressively shifted from a representational interpretation of the world to one that is more and more abstract. This fact implies that viewers now place more value on abstract art than ever before, and explains why black-and-white imagery appeals to us: it simply is not a realistic interpretation of the world. It is not what we are used to seeing on a regular basis. It takes boredom and uniformity out of the formula and adds in a welcomed element of fantasy.

### Simplicity.

A black-and-white image removes the distractions of color. It becomes easier to observe what is really going on in an image when the tonal values are simplified. The monochromatic nature of a black-and-white image helps to simplify the composition, which adds to the picture's appeal. In many cases color can work against a photograph, especially if the colors captured do not work well together compositionally. For a similar reason, artists and interior decorators often plan their projects around color schemes they know will work, such as complementary colors. However, a photographer does not always have the luxury of choosing his colors, especially if he is shooting impromptu as opposed to in the studio. Some colors simply do not work together.



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### The Classic Look.

Black-and-white photography seems never to go out of style, and rarely looks dated. In general, societies have always adhered to the idea of tradition. Black-and-white images are a tradition in the history of photography. In the same way, the change of seasons, sunrises and sunsets, the phases of the moon, the concept of cyclical repetition, are common themes not only in nature but also in the broader culture; they are traditions. So it seems black-and-white photography is here to stay just as holidays and the music of Ludwig van Beethoven are here to stay.

### Focus.

With the exclusion of color, the dominant artistic elements in a black-and-white photograph are pared down to composition, line, pattern, tone, shape, and texture. Quite often, elements such as these make an image more interesting. In this way, the exclusion of color helps to hone the photographic eye, and exposes the viewer to an entirely new way of looking at the world.

Some believe that art photography can be nothing other than black-and-white imagery, and they refuse to shoot in color. Yet even those who do work in both formats agree that black-and-white photography is beautiful in its simplicity, and that in spite of the advent of color photography (and now digital imaging and Photoshop) it will remain the classic photographic art form.