

Software Review: Silver Efex Pro 2

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I don't know of many photographers who shoot color and do not also want to convert their best images into black & whites. One great example of what can be done is seen in the Nik Software ad showing Art Wolfe's image of towering cliffs in China. In the not too distant past, to acquire a really good b&w conversion was nearly impossible. Then came along Silver Efex a few years back and changed all that, and the images and the software just kept getting better ever since.

The current Pro 2 version is both easier to use and way more powerful than anything before it. It seamlessly works inside Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom, and Apple Aperture, but not just as another small toolbox. When Silver Efex opens it does so in a large window that, on the left, contains a set of presets that will show you what each effect will make the image look like, even before it is applied. The preset thumbnail actually uses your image to represent it. The program comes with several dozen presets, and you can custom make your own to add to the selections, or download even more from online. Illustration #1 was obtained from one of those presets, the Antique Plate #1. A super effect to use on old subjects.

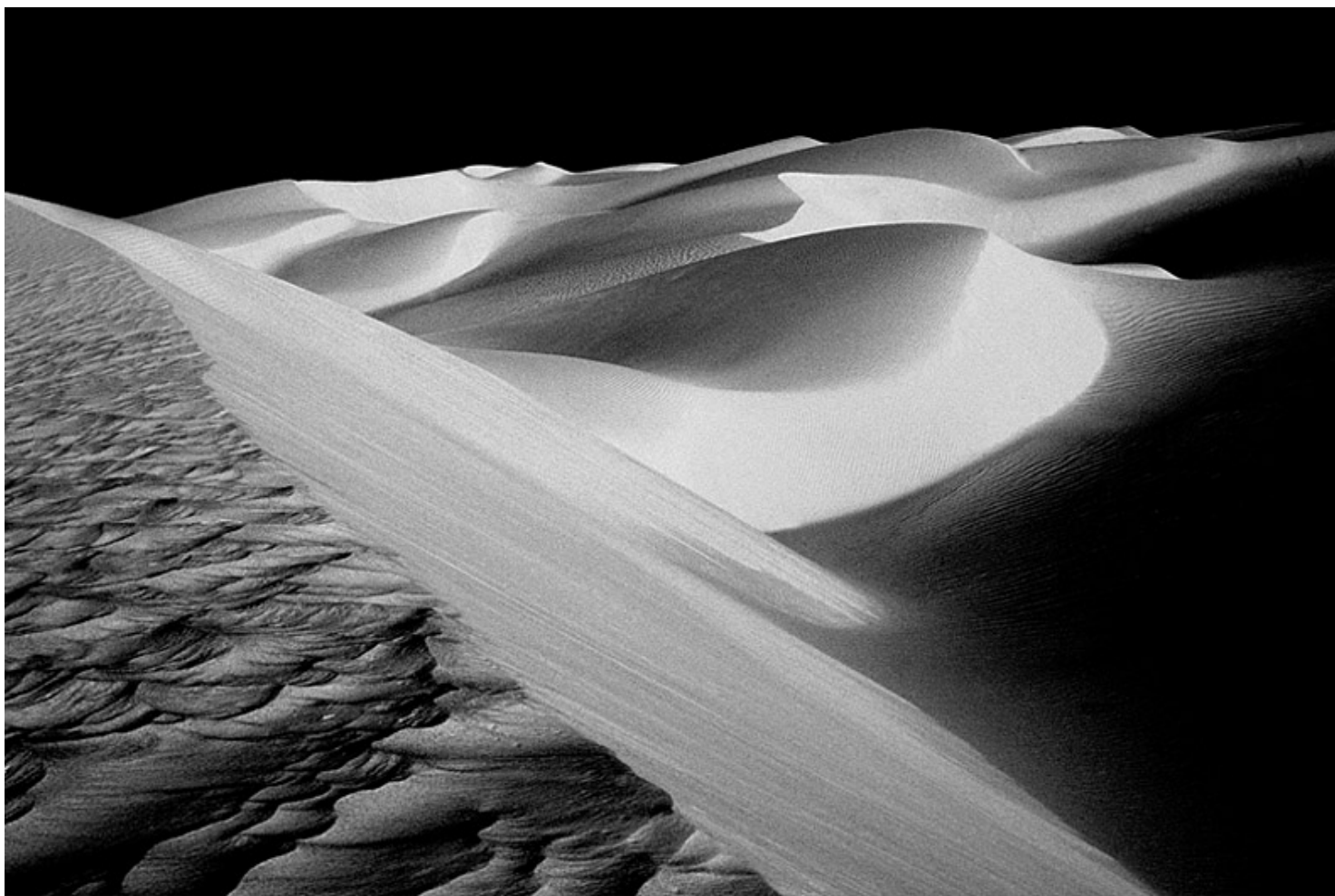


#1 - This is a toned conversion that I did with one of my color slide film images from Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. I wasn't even sure what I wanted when I started, but as soon as I got to and picked on the "Antique Plate #1" preset I knew I had it. I did not make a single adjustment to that effect and still got a real nice moody historical look to the old Revolutionary War log cabin there, and the preset even left good detail in the cabin and tree behind it.

On the right side of the window are the tools to adjust the image even more, including sets of global controls such as brightness, contrast, saturation, structure, film types, toning, and "many" more. And when I say many more that is exactly what

I mean. Some controls even have Dynamic versions to increase their power, as you can see from one result here in illustration #2 of the sand dunes, and a very fine tone range as in my last illustration of the "Weston" style Bell Pepper.

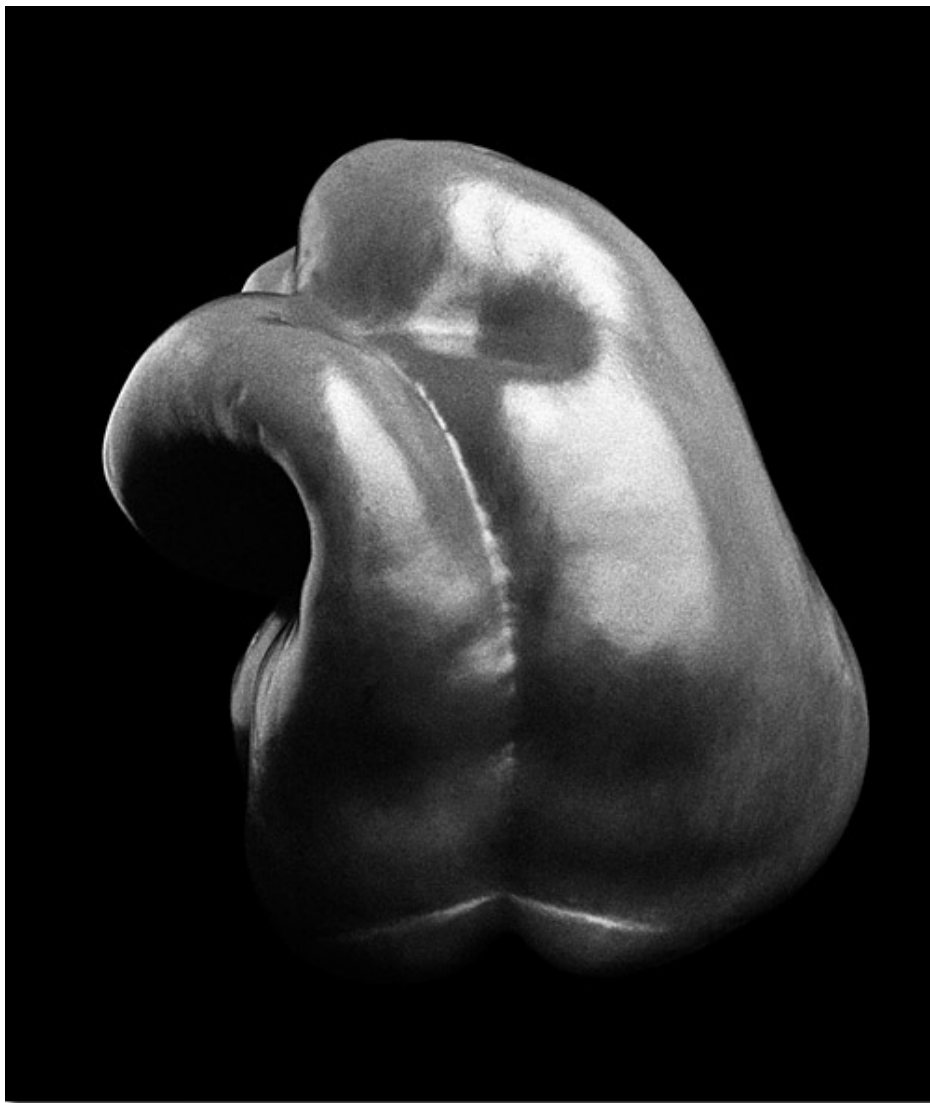
The center of the window has the preview area that can also be changed. You can pick to view the original look, the converted look, or a split preview where the left side of the image is in color and the right side is with the conversion. Or you can select yet another option to view each version side-by-side full frame.



#2 - This image was from a color slide that I took years ago and although I got several b&w versions of it over the years, I like this high contrast version that I was able to get from Silver Efex the best.

Some of the other tools include a History Browser so that you can compare several conversions that you have tried and view the difference between them. There is also an amplify black & white ability that EVERY photographer who shoots a lot of landscapes with clouds will love. Before Silver Efex, if you had a bright sky and wanted to darken it, then the landscape would also get darker and loose detail. If you had a dark landscape and lightened it, then the sky and clouds would burn out. Silver Efex Pro can work on different areas of brightness and each area can receive a different amount of adjustment, so the sky can get darker, the clouds brighter, and the rest of the image stay as it should be.

Silver Efex has a Fine Structure (sharpening) ability that works along with the contrast control and gives you much finer detail in the image's features, which will keep the image from getting that over-sharpened look. And speaking of looks, the new version has a grain engine so that you can make an image look like it was shot with film and not digitally. Other programs have that feature as well, but Silver Efex does it in a much better way. It does NOT just sandwich a grain effect on top of your image. It literally recreates your image with a grain pattern as a part of the image. There is a whole group of films to choose from, with speed ratings of 3200, and the preview image changes as you move the cursor over each one.



#3 - The tones in this image came out a lot better using Silver Efex than what I got from using other conversion methods.

There is no way I can list and tell you about all of the features of the new Silver Efex Pro 2, but you can check it out first at their online web site, (link below) and then download a free trial version to amaze yourself with. The new U Point Technology is what gives this program all of its superman type power and control point ability.

Silver Efex Pro 2 is from Nik Software and retails for \$199.95 and can be ordered at www.niksoftware.com.

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