BLACK AND WHITE CONVERSIONS USING ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

There are many methods of converting a colour image into monochrome using Photoshop and Elements. This method is one that I have developed, it was designed to be used with Elements but it works with CS3 as well.

Monochrome images are abstract visions of the world because we see in rather excellent colour, but people love monochrome images, they are perceived as pure, clean, simple, modern, timeless and yet nostalgic. Arguably it does not matter what the accuracy of the conversion is as long as it looks right!

Monochrome film could never accurately reproduce a colour scene, so coloured filters were used to correct the image into a more acceptable form by changing the shade of grey the colour becomes. These coloured filters change the colour opposite them in the colour wheel.

Coloured Filter	The filters effect on a image.
Red	Darkens blue skies, reduces skin blemishes.
Orange	Moderately darkens blue skies, lightens wood and bricks.
Yellow	Slightly darkens blue skies, slightly lightens greens.
Green	Slightly darkens blues, lightens vegetation, darkens reds which increases the effect of skin blemishes.
Blue	Lightens blue skies, darkens reds .

The problem with these filters is that they were not very precise in their effect and they affected the other colours in the image in a global fashion. If we use the Hue and Saturation controls for adjusting specific colours then we can 'fine tune' an image to get a precise effect. This can be done for more than one colour, an effect that is impossible with film and coloured filters.

Open up your image to begin the process.
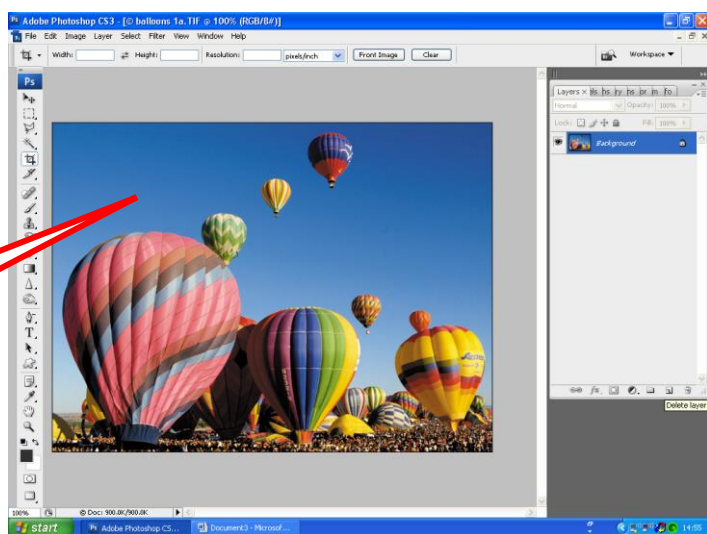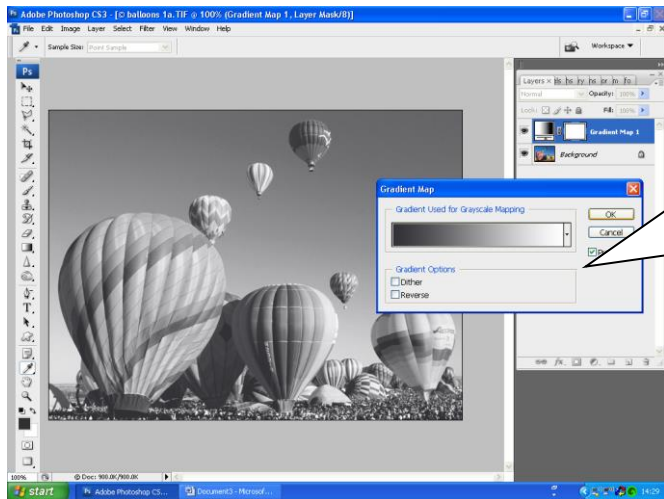
First: covert the image into a basic monochrome image. The cleanest method is to use Gradient Map in Adjustment Layers. Make sure that the foreground colour is black and the background colour is white.

Second: go to the background layer and then choose Hue and Saturation from Adjustment Layers. By adjusting the Hue, Saturation and Lightness sliders we can alter the tonal conversions of the colours. I have seen this method in a magazine before, the next stage is my own development ....
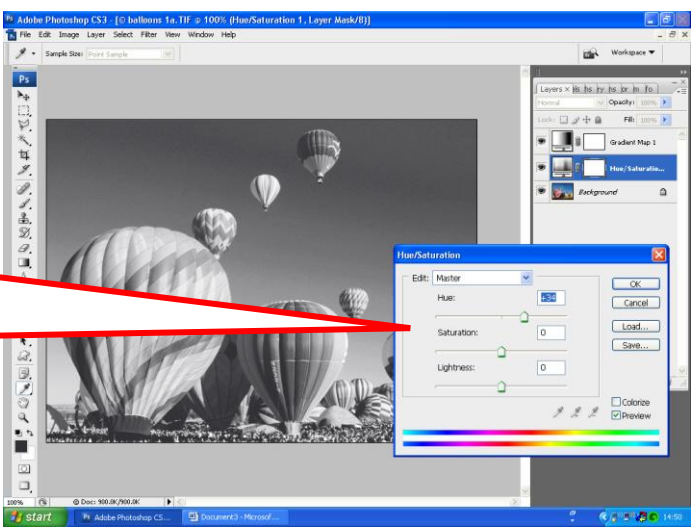
The above method is rather crude, a much more precise way of altering a colours tonal conversion, is to select the MASTER option and then choose a specific colour and alter that colour to the effect that you want. Here red has selected and specific shades of red have been lightened.
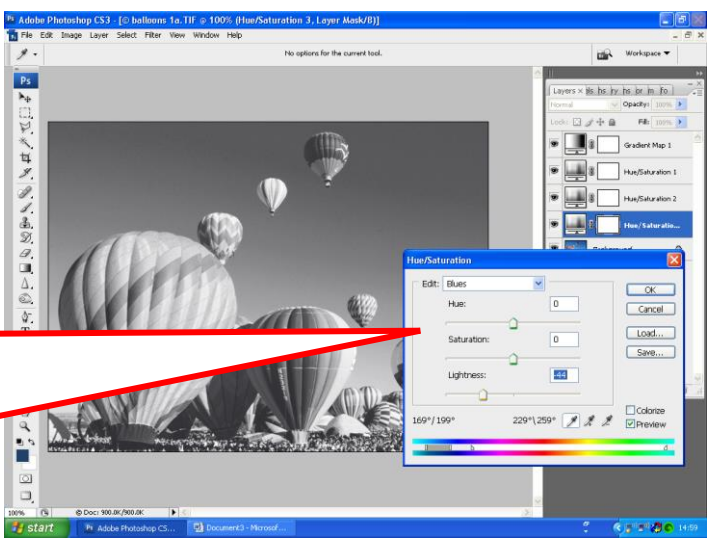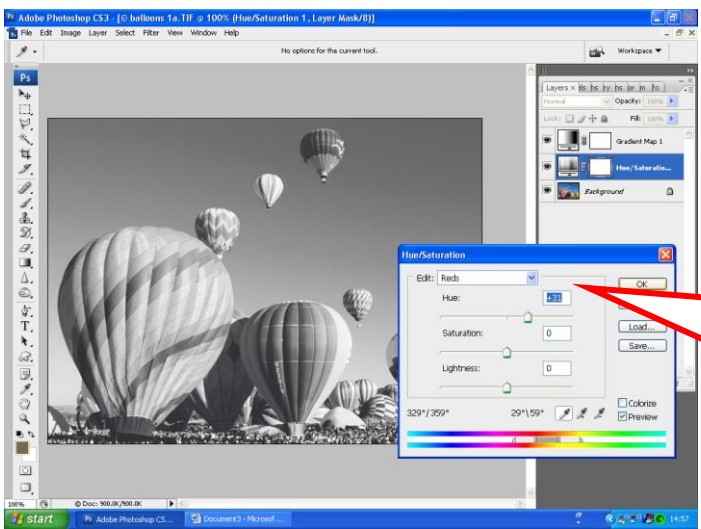
We can continue to add as many additional Hue and Saturation Adjustment layers as we wish, each layer fine tuning the colour conversion. With this image I have altered the reds, yellows and darkened the blue sky without disrupting the rest of the colours in the image. This is potentially a much more comprehensive monochrome conversion tool than anything that Photoshop offers.

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