Nik plug-in Software Silver Efex Pro 2

Launched from Lightroom 6 CC

Silver Efex Pro 2 has certain limitations as to what it can and can't do.
It cannot:

- Crop
- Change aspect ratio
- Re-size
- Correct converging verticals
- Correct tilting horizons
- Fix chromatic aberrations
- Remove blemishes, spots or unwanted objects or figures
- Move or add objects or figures

These adjustments have to be made, where necessary, in the host programme before launching SEP 2.

Considering the restrictions listed above it may be worth asking why bother with Nik plug-ins at all?

Perhaps the question we should ask is why, when the production of high quality colour images is so easy with the existing digital processes we should want to bother with B&W images. After all, B%W came about by accident. If Fox-Talbot had produced the perfect colour image first time, B&W would not have existed. It would have had to be invented. But why invent it or use it?

Black and White

- Can be powerfully creative
- More easily conveys a message, sentiment, emotion
- Widens the shooting opportunities
- Can be used successfully under mid-day light and in the tropics
- Can be used in mixed light situations where a colour cast is inevitable
- Can be used under low light with high ISO.
- Noise can be taken for grain which is more acceptable in B&W

So there are a number of advantages in producing B&W images and the use of SEP 2 plug-in can enhance the quality of the resulting B&W image. SEP2 offers excellent control and a wide range of creative options.

SEP 2 can be launched from Photoshop and Lightroom.

Once an image has been selected the initial adjustments need to be made in the host programme. Crop if necessary, enable profile correction, remove chromatic aberrations, remove offending or distracting objects or people and adjust the exposure and other settings in the Basic section of the Lightroom Develop module.

Do not add Clarity at this point as it could give difficulties with haloing in Nik. Nor is it advised to put a high contrast image into Silver Efex.

Now launch SEP 2 from the host programme (in this case Lightroom) by going to Photo>Edit In>Silver Efex Pro 2. The dialog box offers;
Edit copy with Lightroom adjustments
Format TIFF
Colour space Prophoto RGB
Resolution 360
Edit.
SEP 2 is launched.

The SEP2 screen is divided, like Gaul, into three parts. On the left hand side we have the Presets and/or the History panel. History, as with Lightroom records each activity that takes place in the modification of the image. All activities are non-destructive and can be referred back to as required.

The alternative left hand panel is the Presets. Here are stored some 30 odd presets provided by Nik, a further 10 gathered from elsewhere and several own saved presets. The top preset is always the Neutral one and is the straight grey scale rendition of the colour image that remains, unseen, behind the screen. Click on the presets in turn to show the conversion of the image on the main screen. It is not necessary to scroll through the entire Preset collection every time as Favourite Presets can be grouped together by clicking on the star under the Preset window.

In the center we have the Image Screen. This is usually set to Fit but can be changed to a choice of 25% through to 300%. The screen can also be split into a before and after state or changed into two small screens to enable comparisons to be made. The default comparison is between the Neutral Preset and the image up to the last adjustment. However, by selecting another stage in the History panel, a comparison can be made against a later stage in the History.

On the right hand side of the screen we have the control or Adjustment Panel. When the Neutral Preset is selected it will be seen that most of the sliders in the adjustment panel are set to zero. Scrolling over the Presets the adjustment sliders will be seen to change settings.

There are now a number of choices to make in the adjustment and development of the image.

1. Choose the Neutral conversion as final image. Generally useless
2. Choose the Neutral conversion as the starting point for further development of the image
3. Scan through the Presets, choose one which appears to give the rendition closest to your vision and keep this as the final image. This may very well work in some circumstances.

4. Scan through the Presets and choose one as the starting point for further development.

There is often an attraction to choose on of the Presets as it may offer a dramatic improvement to certain parts of the image, such as the sky, and it may be there is very little additional manipulation required if the right preset is available. Once a Preset has been chosen the preset panel may be closed in order to enlarge the image panel.

However, there are many advantages in selecting the neutral conversion, particularly in the early stages of using the programme, as this will teach a better understanding of the functions and effect of the multitude of sliders and other controls available. The potential of the Neutral conversion can probably be best ascertained by using something borrowed from film and darkroom technology. Scroll down the Adjustment Panel to the colour filters. In the days of film, colour filters were often used to enhance key areas of an image by either lightening or darkening. By using a yellow or perhaps orange filter, the complimentary colours in the blue range of the colour wheel will be darkened whilst the yellows will be lightened

Click on each filter in turn and compare the resultant image with the Neutral rendition, either on a split screen or by comparing two complete images. If thought necessary then choose the most appropriate filter for the image.

The influence of film technology may be taken further by the choice of film type in the same area of the Adjustment Panel. Click on Film and a range of 18 simulated film types is made available. For example, choose a 50 ASA film and the algorithm will apply what the technicians from Nik consider would have been the rendition of the image had it been taken under the given conditions using that film type. Scroll through the film simulations and choose one, which pleases and fits the rendition desired.

In addition to changing the grey scale tones, the algorithm will also add the film grain to match and this can be changed in both amount and size by using the sliders below. Many will think the loss of film grain in a digital image a distinct advantage and will ask what the point is in deliberately introducing it once again. It is a personal choice whether grain is added or not.

Immediately under the film and grain section is one marked “Sensitivity” and here are a set of sliders, one for each main colour. These sliders can be adjusted to lighten or darken the corresponding colour in the image which sits below the Black and White conversion.

Attention should now be given to the Loupe and Histogram section which is found at the very bottom of the Adjustment Panel. The Histogram is scaled from 0, which is pure black, through to 10 which is paper white. 5 is 50% grey. Scroll across the numbers and the corresponding grey tone will be indicated on the image by a coloured hatching. By clicking on the scale the appropriate tone remains highlighted.

It is also possible to show the RGB values by clicking on the Histogram itself and also to change to a 1:1 Loupe view by clicking on this word above the Histogram panel. The view can be changed as the cursor is moved across the image and the selected part of the image can be locked by clicking on the small pin to the right of the loupe window. Return to the Histogram.

By clicking on 0 and 10 it will be seen if any part of the image falls into these tones. Whilst 0 is considered acceptable for small areas of minor importance in the image it is not acceptable in any of the main features and brightness will have to be adjusted in the image so that 1 replaces areas of 0. Zone 10 shows paper white and any area indicated as being at this of this value is unacceptable as ink will not be laid on this area of the print. Adjustments must be made so that no area has a value above 9.

At the top of the Adjustments Panel there are the Global controls. Brightness, Contrast and Structure and as the name implies these are global and effect every part of the image. However, within each of these Global Controls there are sliders, which will adjust the Brightness of the Highlights, Mid-tones and Shadows. In addition there is the Dynamic Brightness slider that prevents the tonal range entering grades 0 or 10. There are also Tonality Protection sliders to protect tonal range in both shadows and highlights.

Notice the Global sliders for Brightness, Contrast and Structure will change their settings if a Preset other than Neutral is engaged. It is strongly recommended that these global sliders are used as little as possible, with the exception of Dynamic Brightness and Soft Contrast. It should be possible using these sliders, together with Amplify Whites, Amplify Blacks and Tonality Protection to produce a balanced image with tone values falling between 1 and 9.

The greatest possible care must be taken with Global Adjustments for Contrast and Structure, particularly where an image contains dark mountains or bare tree branches against a bright sky. It is very easy to introduce halos in these circumstances. Where changes to Contrast or Structure are made in such images the area in question should be viewed at 100% whilst the changes are being made.

Control Points

Control Points are used to adjust specific areas of an image and with experience adjustments can be made to very small areas if needed. A Control Point is used by clicking on the icon and then placing it on the appropriate area of the image.

Each Control Point has an area of influence which is indicated by the size of an adjustable circle. There are controls for brightness, contrast and structure and if the disclosure triangle is clicked further controls for amplify white, amplify blacks and fine structure appear. The final control allows selective replacement of the original image colour.

A more exact indication of the area of influence of a Control Point may be obtained by clicking on the dark square beside the highlighted Control Point in the Adjustment Panel. If the area of influence cannot be adjusted by the size of the circle, further Control Points may be placed on the area over which an adjustment is not required. These non-active points will restrict the area of influence of the active Control Point and prevent spillage of the adjustment.

A number of Control Points may be used together where a large area of the image can be improved by the same adjustments. These can be joined by drawing a highlight over a number of Control Points and clicking on the grouping button, The highlighted words "Control Point" in the Adjustment Panel will change to Group. Adjustments may then be made using the controls on just one of the Control Points and all grouped points will be adjusted in the same way and at the same time.

There is another way of making adjustments over a wide area with just one Control Point. Make the necessary adjustments to the first area and the whilst holding down the ALT or Option key move the Control Point elsewhere and clicking, thus duplicating the adjustment.

Move on to Finishing Adjustments in the Adjustments Panel. There are 24 Toning Presets which can be adapted for strength, colour and for split toning between paper and silver areas of the image.

There is also a choice of 7 Vignette Presets which can be adjusted for amount, circle, rectangle and size. There is also a function whereby the Vignette center can be moved.

It is also possible to the Burn Edges of an image, either together or individually.

Finally, there are 14 image border Presets. These are black, white or both with different widths and clean or rough edges. It should be remembered that a border will intrude over part of the image. It does not expand outwards onto additional canvass.

Make a final comparison with the Neutral grey scale conversion and if the manipulation is complete click Save and the completed B&W image will appear in Lightroom.

References

http://www.niksoftware.com/nikcollection/usa/silverefexpro.html
http://www.luminescentphoto.com/webstore/index.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJMJ-vyIgLg&feature=em-hot-vrecs