

CREATING THE INFRARED IMAGE

Introduction

Infrared images have a ghostly and haunting beauty about them. The traditional method of using Infrared film and a red filter so dark you can barely see through it is difficult to say the least. With Photoshop however you can produce the classic infrared look with almost any image easily.

The classic telltale signs of an infrared image are:

1. Blue skies and water turn jet black
2. Green foliage turns white
3. There is an unearthly glow to the image however this does not detract from the sharpness of the image

Whilst it is possible to shoot colour infrared images, the most common film type is Black & White so that is the look that we will reproduce here.

Steps

The first step is to select a suitable image. I try to pick one where there is blue sky and white clouds so that we can create the classic look. Landscape images containing trees and other foliage are also good subjects.

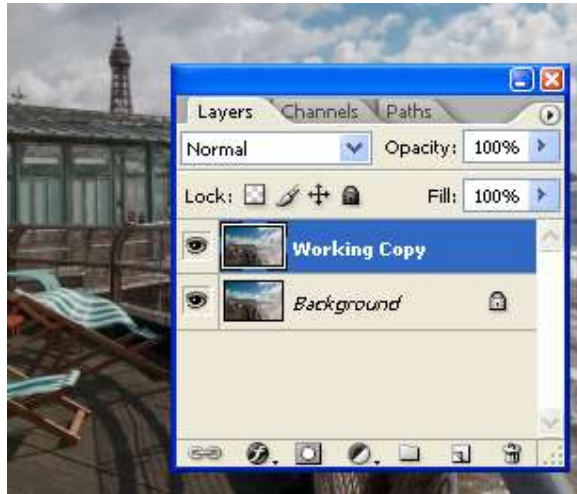
The starting image shown here is one that I specifically shot with the infrared process in mind. I liked the composition and the subject however the scene and lighting was lacking something that I hoped conversion to infrared would add.



Step 1 – Create a duplicate working layer

Open the image you have selected for your project in Photoshop. If you don't have the "Layers" Window visible in your workspace activate it by selecting **Window|Layers** from the menu or alternatively press **F7** on your keyboard.

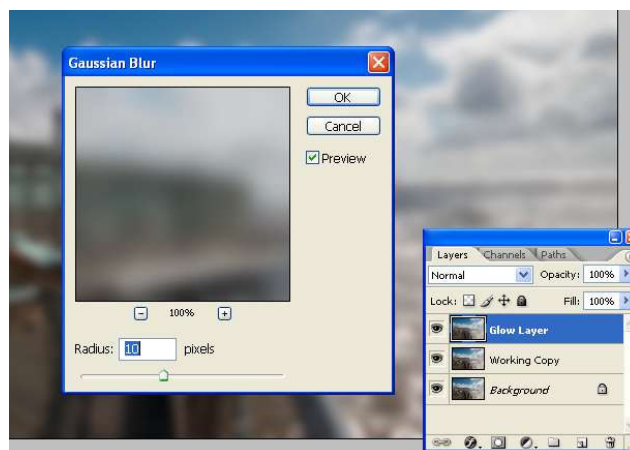
Now create a duplicate working layer so that the original image is left untouched; this is good Photoshop working practice. To create a duplicate layer select **Layer|Duplicate Layer...** from the menu. Name the new layer "Working Copy". Once created you should see the "working Copy" layer appear in the Layers Window as shown below.



Step 2 – Creating the infrared glow

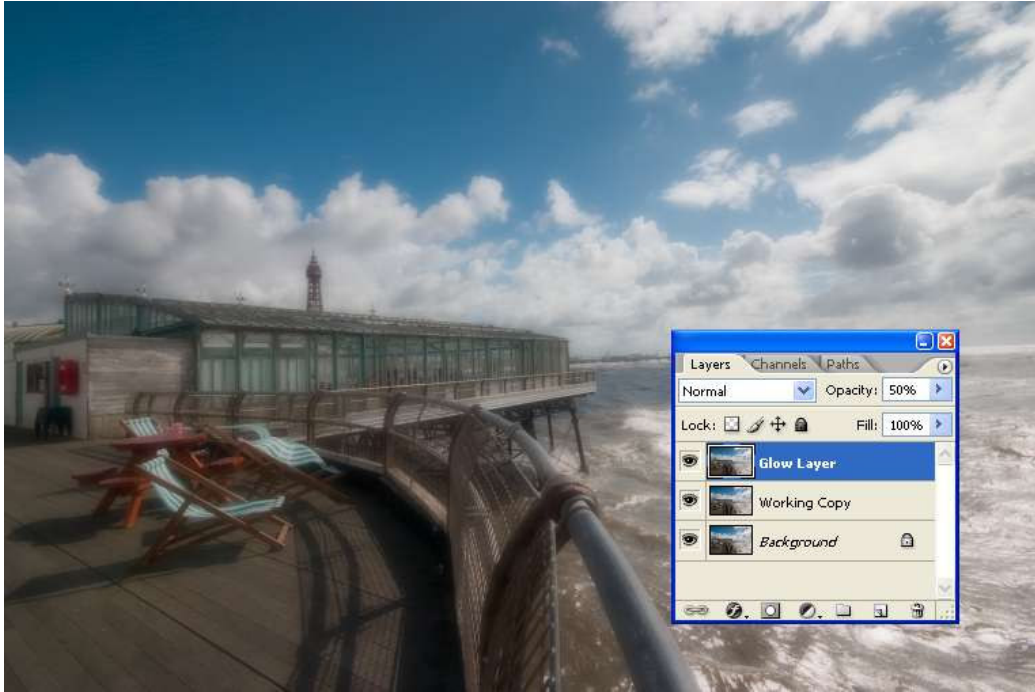
Create another duplicate layer by selecting **Layer|Duplicate Layer...** from the menu and call this layer "Glow Layer". You should see the new layer added to the Layers window and be highlighted in blue to show that it is the layer you are working on.

We will now add a Gaussian Blur to the Glow layer by selecting **Filter|Blur|Gaussian Blur...** from the menu. This will cause the Gaussian Blur filter dialog to be displayed as shown below.



The amount of blur you need will be determined by the resolution of your image. Typically you will need to set the radius of between 10 and 40. This ensures the image is sufficiently blurred but still recognisable.

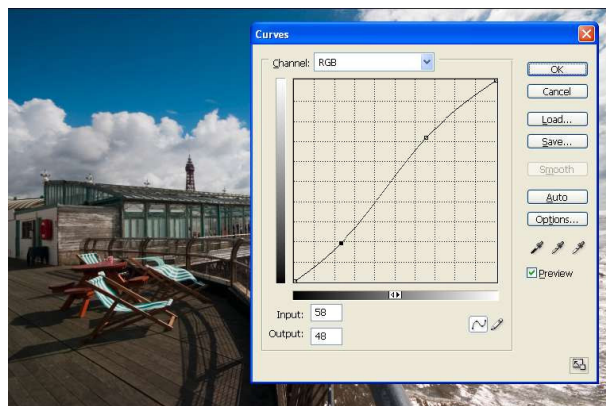
Having created the Glow layer we need to make it semi-transparent so that the Working Copy layer shows through from beneath. To do this set the "Opacity" level for the glow layer to 50% in the Layers window as shown below. Again 50% is just a general value and you may need to experiment a little to fine tune your final image.



Step 3 – Adding Image Contrast

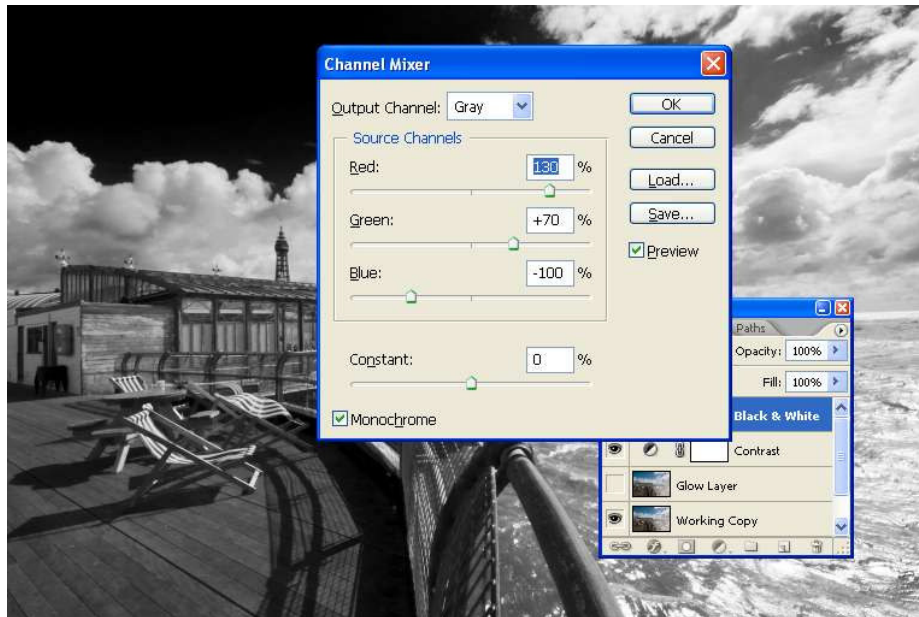
Having created my glow layer I am now going to hide it whilst I add contrast to my image as it's a little flat at present. To hide the glow layer click on the eye icon shown in the Layers window to the left.

Now add a new Curves adjustment layer by selecting **Layers | New Adjustment Layer | Curves...** and call this layer Contrast. Create an S-Curve as shown below to add the desired level of contrast. Remember, if you add too much you can always change it later or reduce the Opacity because we are using layers.



Step 4 – Creating the Monochrome Image

To turn the image black & white add a new Channel Mixer layer by selecting **Layers|New Adjustment Layer|Channel Mixer...** and call this layer “Black & White”. In the Channel Mixer dialog check the “Monochrome” checkbox and then set the Red slider to 130%, the Green slider to 70% and the Blue slider to -100%. This again is just a rough starting value so you might need to adjust the layer later to create the desired effect. You can see this being done in the screen shot below.

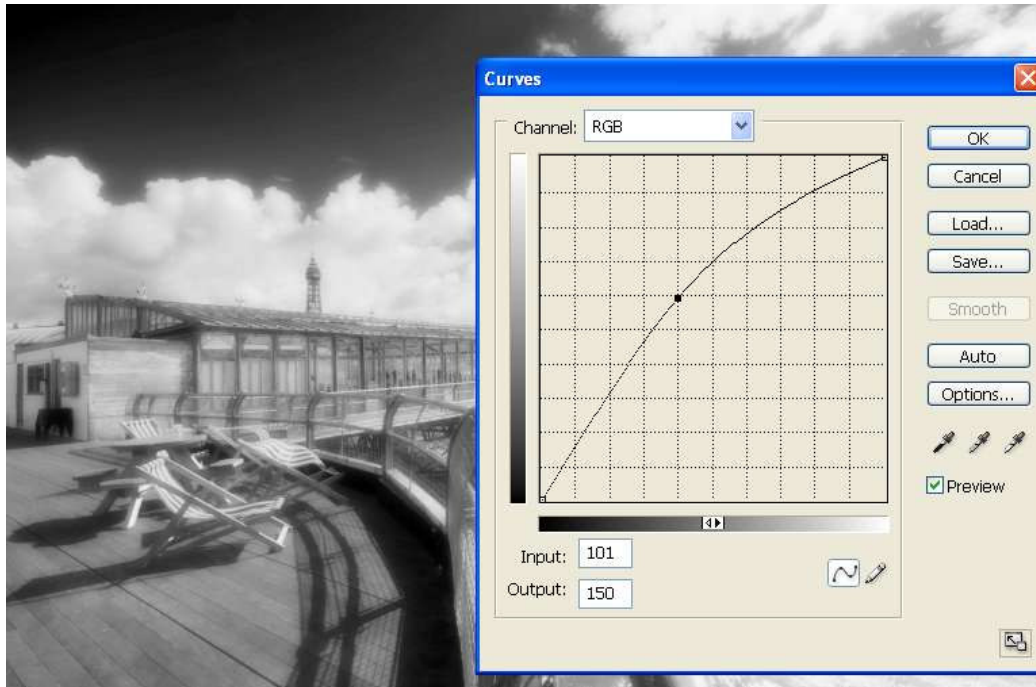


Having completed this step you can now turn the Glow Layer back on by clicking to the left of the layer in the Layers window so that the eye icon reappears. You should now have an image similar to that shown below.



Step 5 – Adjusting the brightness of the glow

Add a new Curves adjustment layer by selecting **Layer|New Adjustment Layer|Curves...** and call the layer Brightness. Drag out the curve from the centre by one square as shown in the screen shot below. This will add a lot of brightness to the image.



Step 6 – Fine Tune the Layers

The final step now is to adjust the various layers until you gain the effect that you want. For example you might decide to reduce the brightness or contrast in the image by reducing the Opacity of the Brightness or Contrast layer. Similarly the level of the Glow can be increased or decreased using the Opacity slider in the Layers window.

If you want to increase the Brightness beyond 100% opacity, double clicking on the layer in the Layers window will open up the layer for further adjustment. When doing this be sure to click the icon directly to the right of the eye icon.

Once you have your final adjustment save your file as a PSD file so that the layers are preserved. You might find yourself returning to adjust the layers again in the future.

My final before and after comparison is shown on the next page.

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