Texture in post-processing

Once you have taken a photo that you intend to convert to black and white and make use of the texture then it becomes interesting to look at the tools that you can use to do so.

## Emphasizing texture in Lightroom

The main tool for bringing out textures in Lightroom is Clarity (increasing contrast can also help). Let's take the following image as an example. This is how it looks after being converted to black and white, but without any action taken to emphasize the texture. It's another long exposure photo (shutter speed 160 seconds) taken in the early evening in a seaside town in northern Spain called Tapia de Casariego.

You can see we have a contrast in texture – the sea and sky are smooth (thanks to the long exposure) but the jetty in the background and the concrete in the foreground have lots of texture. The more we can emphasize the textures here, the greater the contrast between the textured surfaces and the smooth water and sky, and the greater the visual impact of the photo.

This I how I did it.

1. I increased Clarity globally. The first step was to go to the Basic Panel and move the Clarity slider right. In simple terms (the actual process is a little more complex) the Clarity slider increases the apparent contrast of mid-tones, which in turn makes these areas appear sharper and brings out textures.
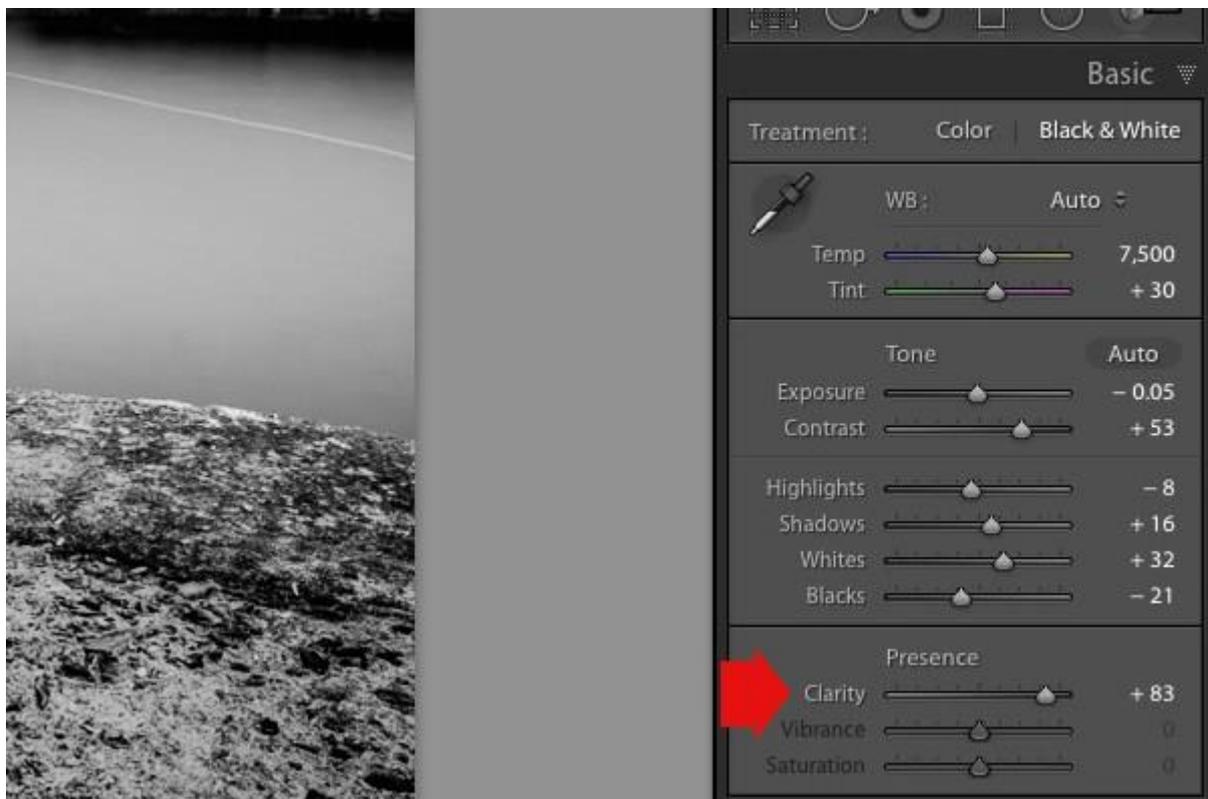
2. I adjusted Clarity locally. Next, I used the Adjustment Brush to select the areas that I wanted to make further adjustments to individually. You can see the two adjustments I made in this screenshot.

With both selections I increased Clarity and also made some adjustments to brightness and contrast. The latter action was required because increasing Clarity usually makes the selected area darker or brighter (the result seems to depend on the content of the photo). There's no set formula here – it's a matter of adding Clarity and adjusting the tonal sliders until it looks good to your eye.

You could also potentially use the Adjustment Brush to select the sea and sky and apply a negative Clarity or contrast setting to decrease texture in those areas, although I didn't do it with this image.

This is the result of my adjustments.

Emphasizing texture in Silver Efex Pro 2

There are several black and white plug-ins available for Lightroom and one feature they all share is that they have more refined tools than Lightroom for bringing out texture. This is because texture is an important part of all black and white photos (not just landscapes).

Let's take a look at Silver Efex Pro 2, which comes as part of the Nik Collection from Google. This suite of plug-ins is free and highly recommended.

Silver Efex Pro 2 doesn't have a Clarity slider. Instead it uses an adjustment called Structure, which has a similar, but more subtle, effect. A key difference is that you can apply it independently to shadows, mid-tones and highlights, giving you more control

over the areas of the photo affected. There's also a Fine Structure slider for applying structure to areas of fine detail.
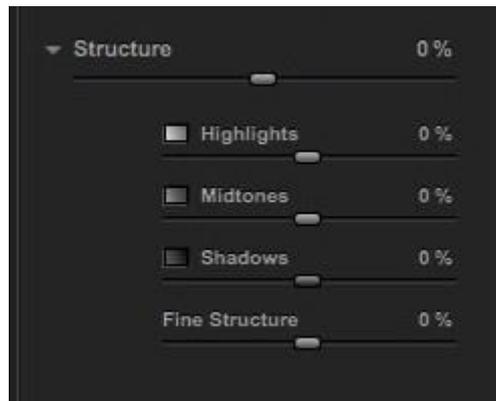
1. Global adjustments. Under Structure I set Highlights to -100%, which had a minor effect on the sea and clouds, and Shadows to 100%, which had the greatest effect on the dark tones in the jetty in the background. I left the Midtones slider alone as using it applied Structure to the sea and sky (as well as the concrete in the foreground) which I didn't want.
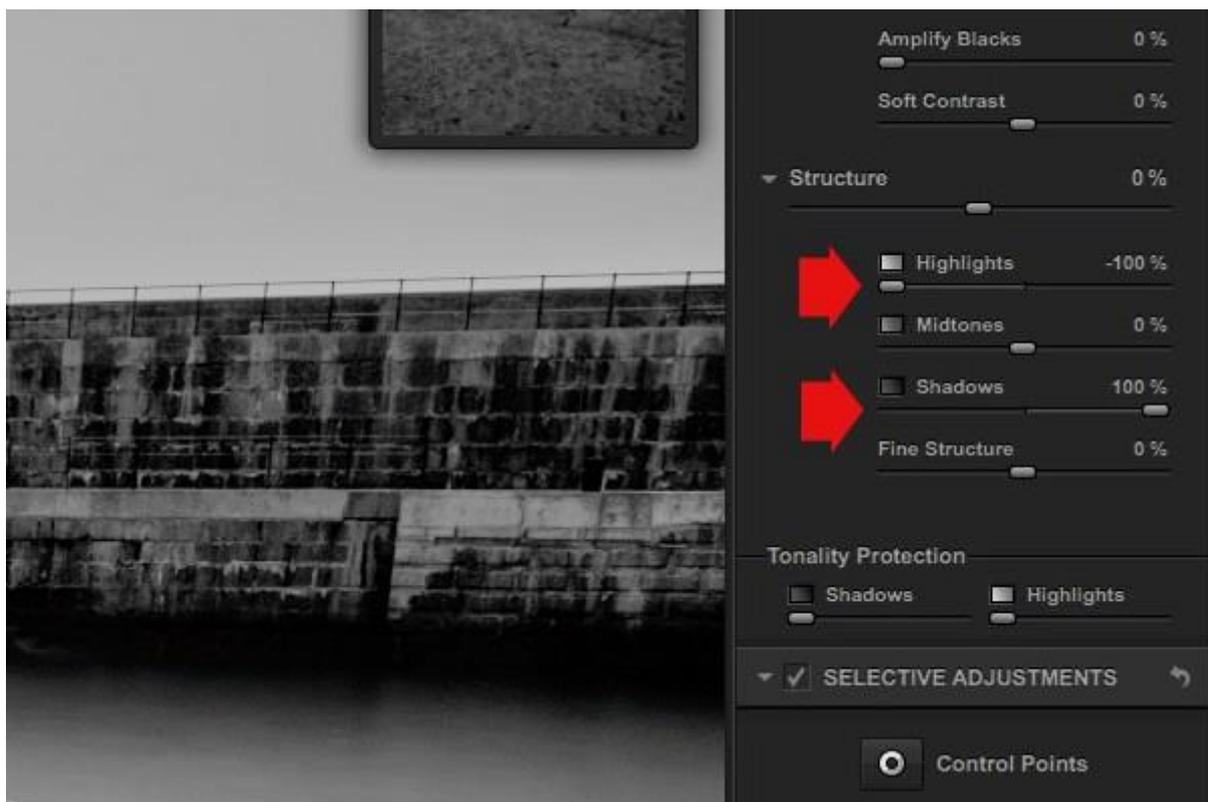

2. Local adjustments. Silver Efex Pro 2 has a completely different system than Lightroom for applying local adjustments. The Nik Collection plug-ins use a system called Control Points.

A Control Point is the centre of a circle within which you can make tonal adjustments. The adjustment is applied to tones similar in brightness and color to the pixels underneath the Control Point.

For example, if you place a Control Point over a dark tone, then increase the brightness, only the dark tones within the circle are adjusted. Light tones are not unaffected.

I placed three Control Points over the concrete in the foreground, and increased Structure and Fine Structure in each one. This screenshot shows the mask created by the Control Points. Areas in white are affected most by the adjustments, areas in black are unaffected.
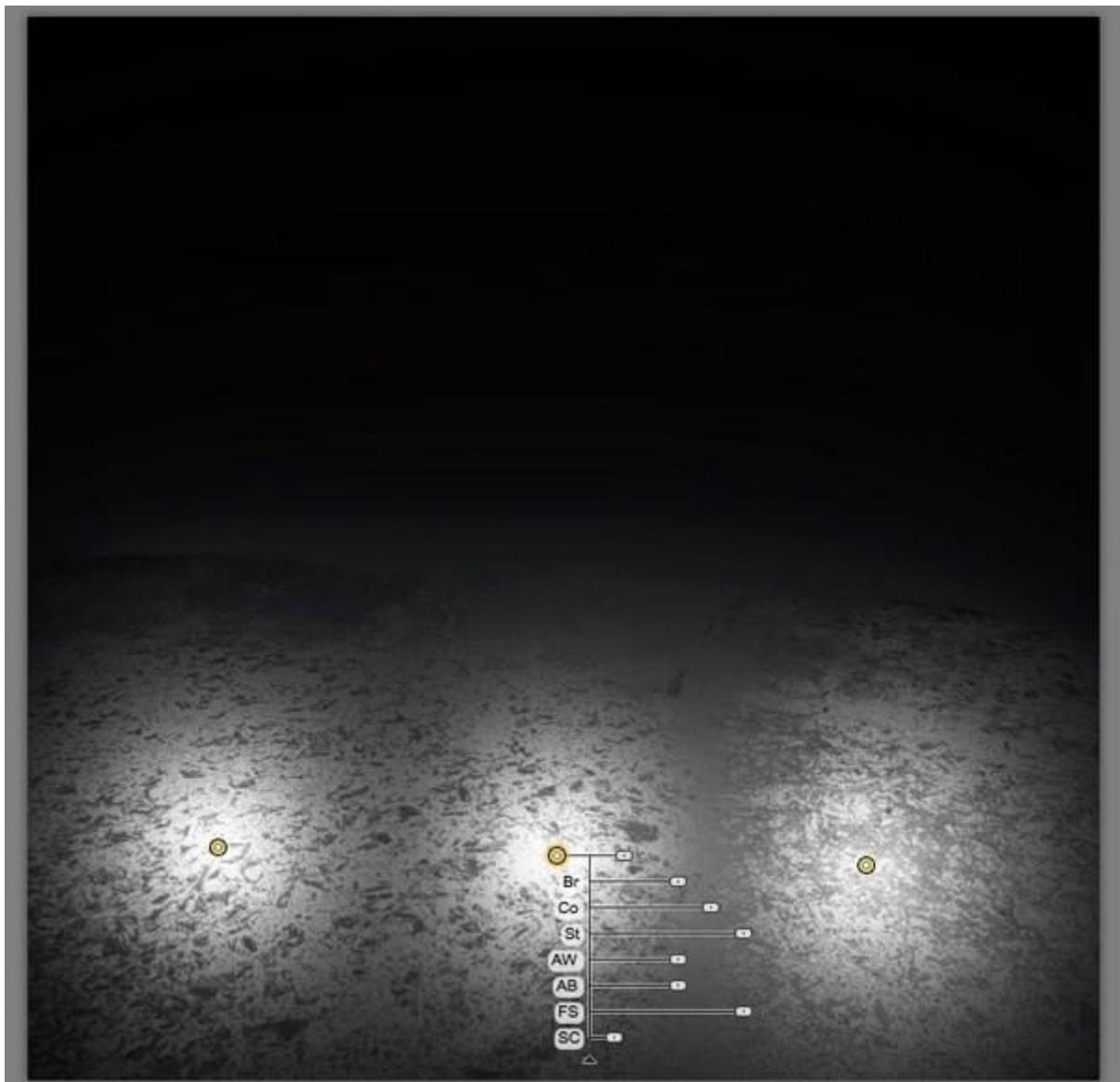
Here's the result.

Here's the version created with Lightroom again, to give you an idea of the difference.

Whether you are in the field evaluating a scene for its potential as a black and white landscape, or looking through old photos to see if any have potential for converting to monochrome, texture is one of the most important elements to consider.

I've only touched on post-production techniques here, but hopefully you can see that it is possible to spend quite some time refining a black and white landscape in Lightroom (or a plug-in like Silver Efex Pro 2) to make the most out of the natural texture of the scene.