

Tonality Tuning



A tuning toolkit by Digital Outback Photo

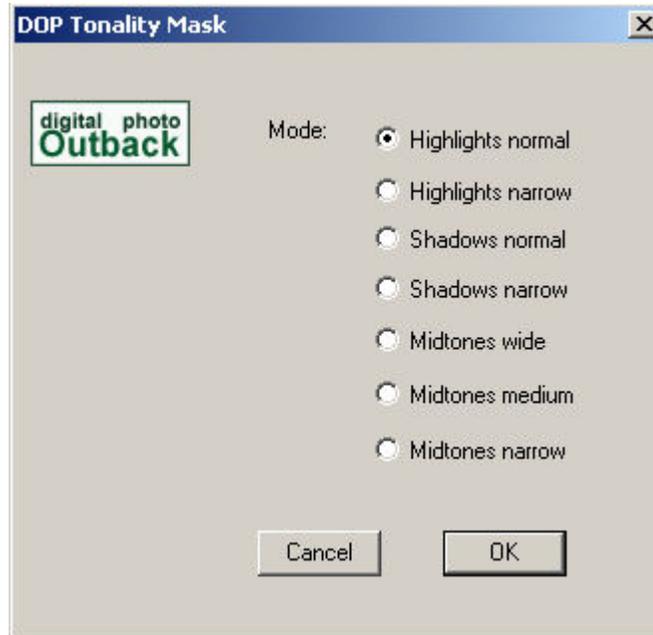
For any image two factors play an important role: Tonality and Colors. Actually B/W images are so demanding as they need the highest level of tonality tuning because no color can hide poor tonality. What makes up the tonality of an image?

- Brightness (shadows, midtones, highlights)
- Contrast (local and global)

Most of us have the desire to get the final image from the raw converter and we probably can get close. But once you start printing and want to get optimal quality you will start tuning. This article will deal only with the aspect of tonality tuning. In principle it all comes down to some sort of subtle dodge & burn. But with many images it can get very tedious if done only manually. Fortunately Photoshop provides powerful tools to streamline this process. The whole process is based on layers in Photoshop. If you want to learn more to understand layers for the use in photography then have a look at our [e-books](#).

While we talk here about the principles we also have created a commercial Tonality Tuning kit. The “DOP_Tonality_Tuning” set consists of two parts:

- Photoshop automation plugin to create the needed masks

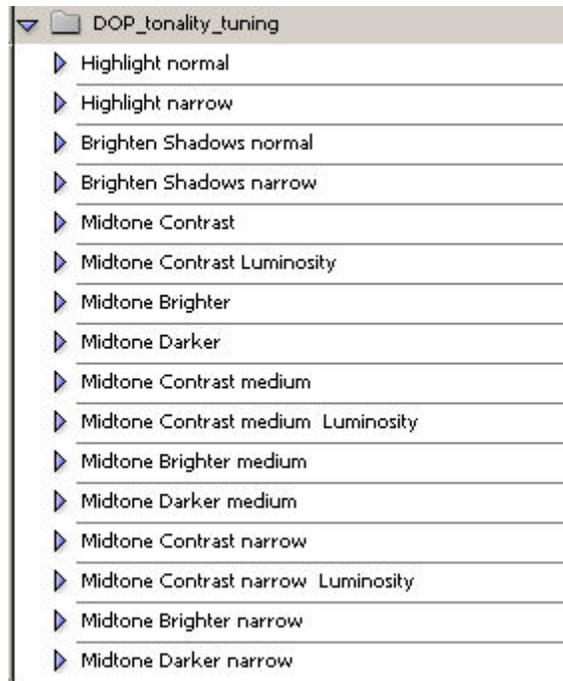


DOP Tonality Mask plugin

The plugin helps to create seven different kinds of selection masks (and will be used by our actions):

- Highlight normal: reaches from highlights into the midtones
- Highlight narrow: reaches from highlights very little into the midtones
- Shadows normal: reaches from shadows into the midtones
- Shadows narrow: reaches from shadows very little into the midtones
- Three different Midtone masks (from wide to narrow)

- Photoshop actions that use the plugin and streamline the workflow



DOP Tonalities Tuning action set

What these actions do will best be visible in our sample session below. The “Shadows” and “Highlight” actions create new grayscale layers in “Overlay” blending mode. The “Midtone” actions create S-Curve Adjustment Layers with attached Layer Masks. The actions with “Luminosity” in their name create a layer that uses “Luminosity” blending mode to minimize color shifts for contrast changes.

To say it again, this toolkit is not thought to correct major tonality problems.

You best experience the toolkit with some example image.

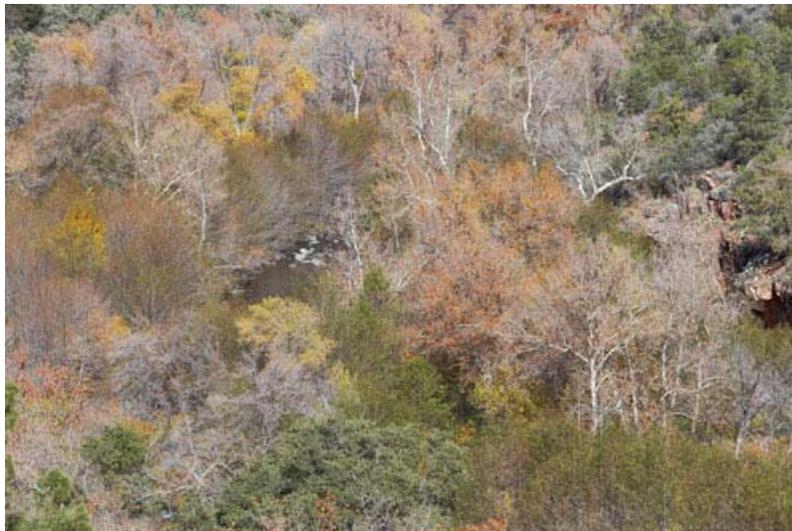
Sample Session

Here is our start image



Grasshopper Point in Sedona (Canon 1Ds Mk. II)

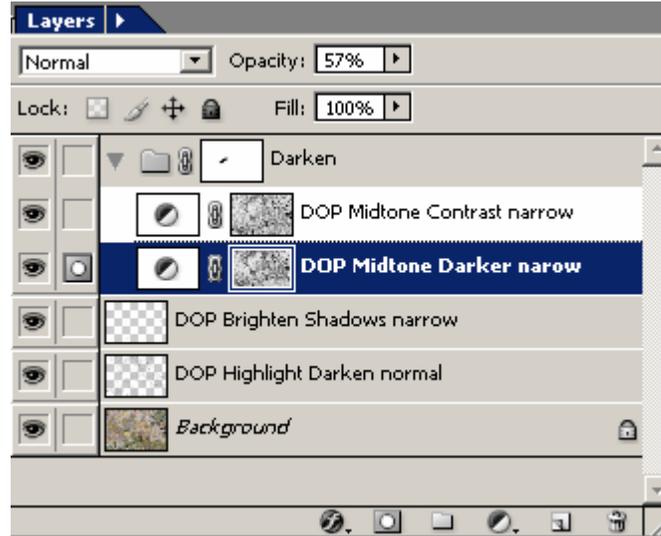
and here a final version



final version

Shown at this small size it just seems to be darker. But there is way more to it and we show this in some sample crops.

To better help understanding what we did we show the final layers



Tuning layers

Here is what we needed to do (below we will show with real crops the subtle differences the layers created):

- Tune down slightly “hot” highlights (using the “DOP Highlight Darken normal” action at 78% opacity)

Note: One very important aspect of this toolkit is that all the tuning layers can be easily tweaked using the opacity sliders. The default in the actions ranges from 40-50%)

- Brighten the shadows (using the “DOP Shadows Brighten narrow” action at 58% opacity).
- Darken the midtones (using the “DOP Midtone Darker narrow” action at 57% opacity).
- Add midtone contrast (using the “DOP Midtone Contrast narrow” action at 25% opacity).

We did not want the last two layers to change the tonality of the creek (shows up darker in prints than on the screen). How to do this? You create a new layer set and add the two layers to this layer set. Then you can create a Layer mask for the whole layer set:

- Use the Lasso tool to select the creek



- Feather the selection by 20-40
- Invert the selection and create the Layer Mask

Here are now some comparison crops to show the effectiveness of the tuning layers. Remember all the changes may look subtle but that is the whole point here.

Highlights



original



toned down

The Creek



Start

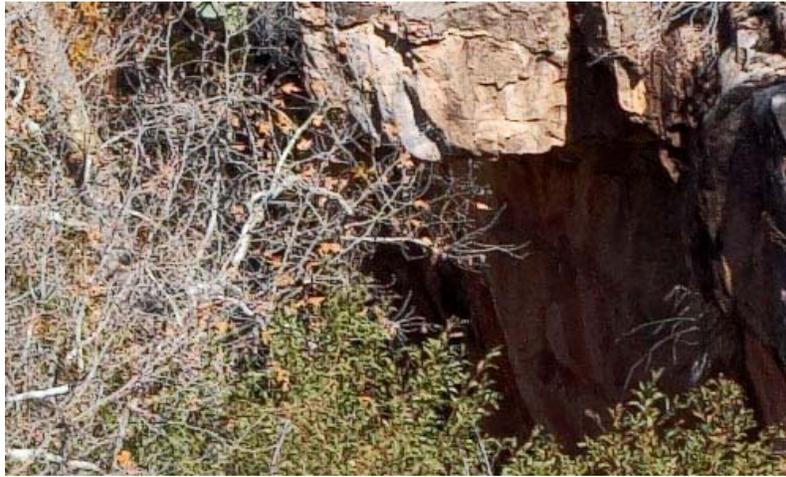


Layer Mask disabled

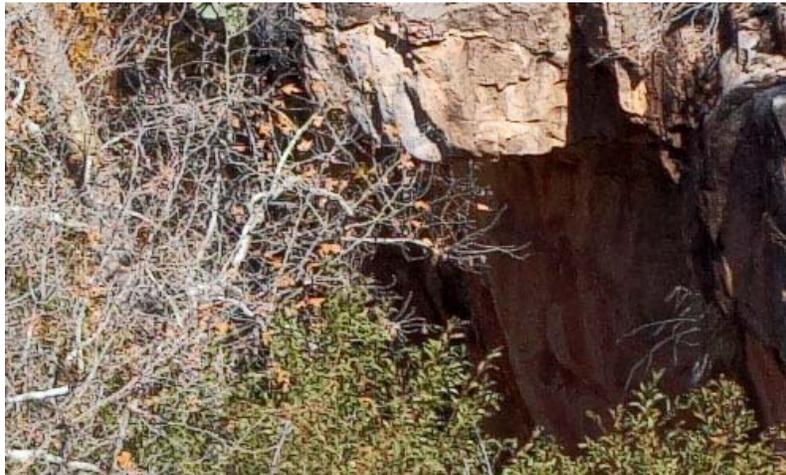


Layer Mask enabled (final)

Shadows



Shadows start



Shadows final

The best way of course to experience the toolkit is to use own images and the demo version (see below, limited to 2000x1500 pixel images).

Demoversion

We have a demo version of the full set available. The demo version is full functioning but limited to 2000x1500 pixels. To experience the toolkit just crop or downsize your test images.