

PHOTOGRAPHY

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“The reason I did fashion was it was the only way to get paid to do anything creative. You couldn't support yourself as an 'artist' - I hate that word. The only way you could be 'arty' was as a fashion photographer, because it still had a certain amount of integrity involved.”

DAVID BAILEY, *fashion photographer*

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PERFECTLY RISEN COLOUR CAKE

This recipe should also go in the Photoshop section, but by a hair's breadth made it into Photography. Only seeing as you can't do Photoshop on something you didn't include in the photograph. So it's cross-referenced in Photoshop.

This recipe takes far longer to explain than it does to cook. Especially if you automate it.

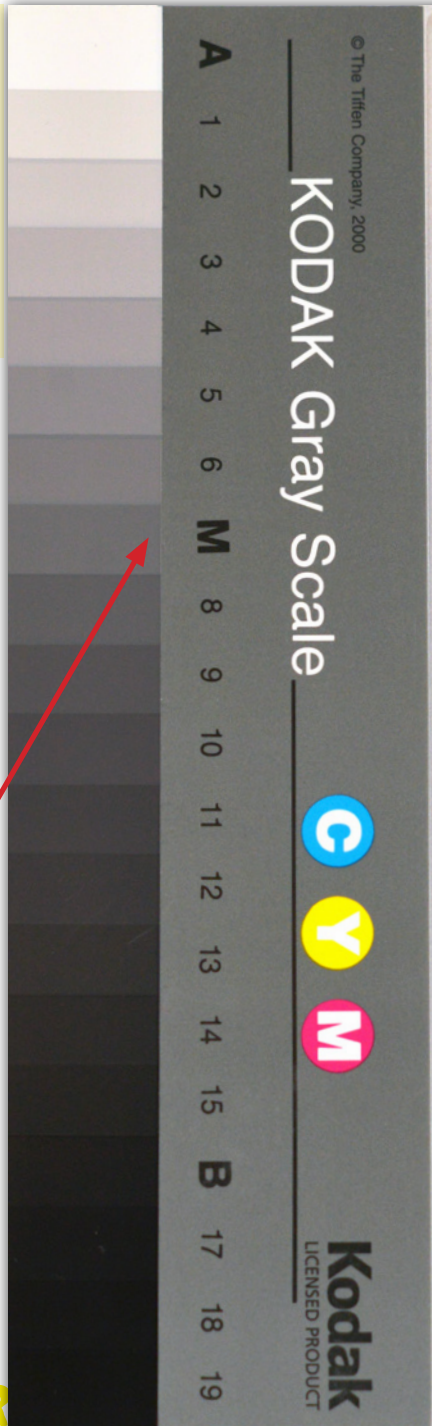
1. A quick scan of Amazon and photography sites shows you can pick up one of these beauties on the right for between USD\$50-100, which seems a lot for a printed piece of cardboard, but will earn its investment back in your time the very first time you use it.

They come two-in-a-pack, with a colour swatch one too, which isn't illustrated here, as I never use it: just this one.

In fact: just one swatch on this one - the mid-gray tone rectangle under the letter M. There. **M**

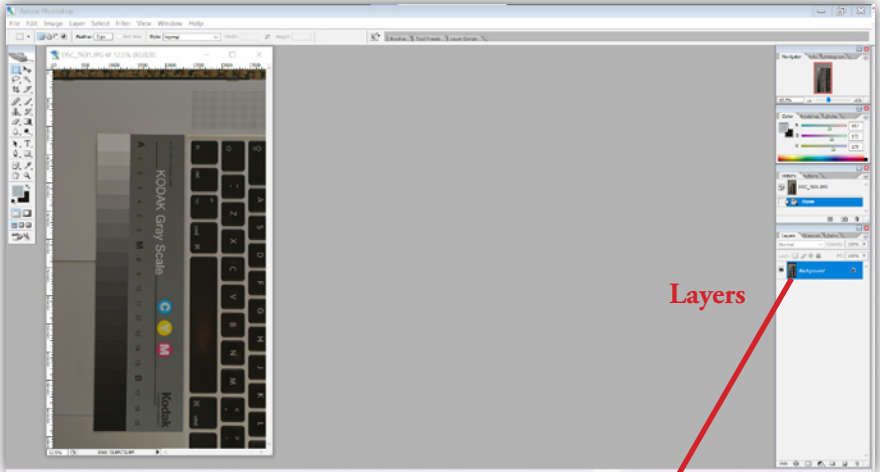
2. Place the Gray Scale next to the product you are photographing. It works great for people as well, but colour balance is usually much more selective with skin tones than it is with printed product labels. You don't have to have it "in shot" for real, just make sure you have yourself covered by taking one shot with the grayscale in, illuminated by whatever is the main light of your setup.

3. SHOWTIME! Open up your test image with the Gray Scale in Photoshop.



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It should look a bit like this (I have a very old Photoshop by the way):

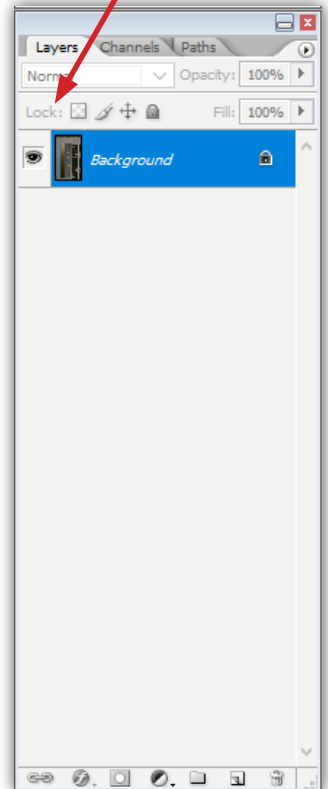


What we are looking for is the **Layers palette**, shown here in the right lower area of the Photoshop window.

Let's have a look at that up close:

The new file opens with one layer: **Background**. It also has a little padlock symbol, meaning its position is locked by default, and a little eye, meaning you can see it.

Now digital pictures often come in to an editor looking fairly lack-lustre, and there is a reason for this. The image capture records as large a tonal range as is possible, with a view to the editing software extracting the tones you want afterwards. If the tones aren't there, no amount of Wizardly Photoshop-pery will render them afterwards. But you can exaggerate desired tones at the expense of tonal range you **DON'T** need...



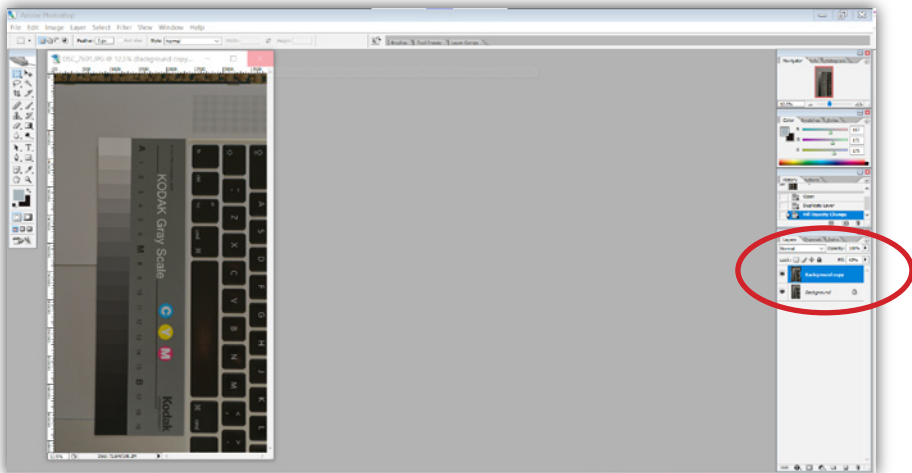
STORY TIME

Once attended a most enjoyable talk by Helen Sloan, Belfast-based Stills Photographer for HBO's hit series Game Of Thrones.

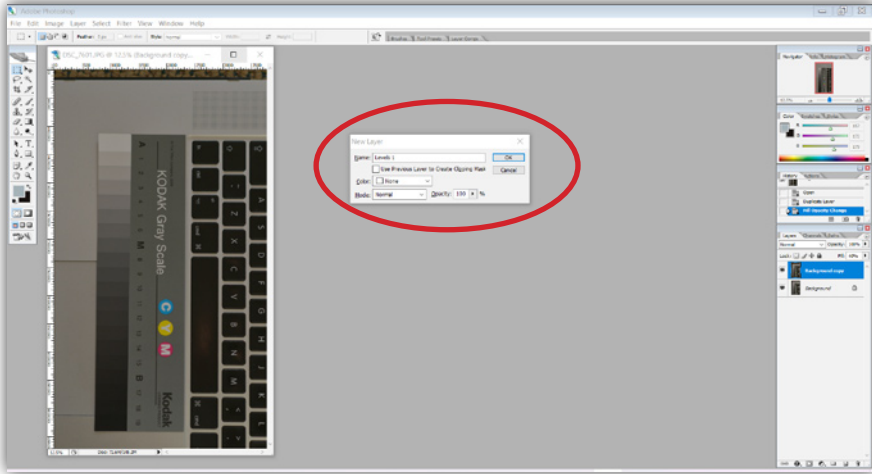
Helen had processed her initial images shot during Season 1 in a particular way for the mythical location of Winterfell. Blue, moody cold tones were boosted while all other colours were desaturated so as to blend in.

In the early days, when the production was still finding its iconic look and feel, the camera unit decided to base their colour profiles for any final Winterfell scenes on the stills pics. Cool (cool blue) or what? It's all in the tonal range. And that's what we're going to do here. Take control of our tonal range and colour balance, starting with one click...

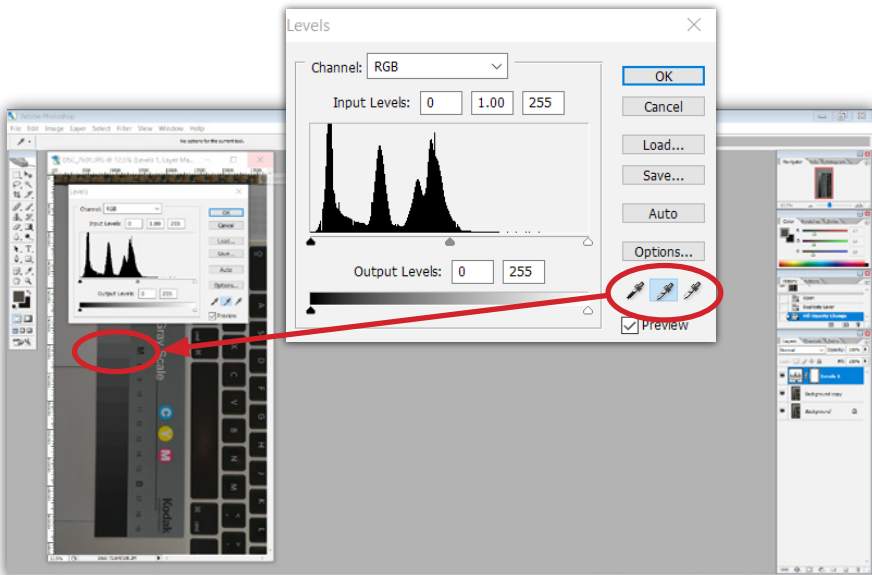
4. First thing: make a duplicate layer from your background in the Layers palette. This means all your edits are non-destructive: you've always got the Background layer, or the Background always has your back.

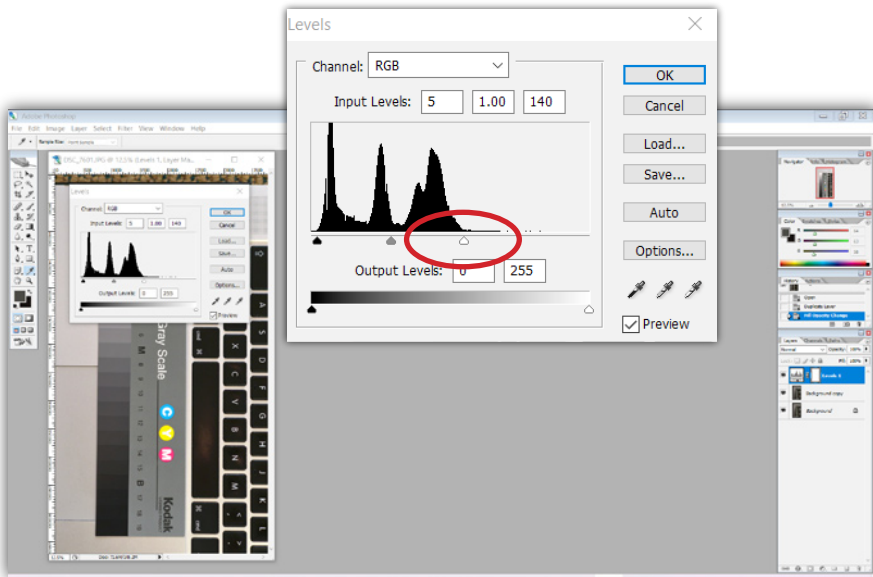


5. From the Layers menu, choose New Adjustment Layer > Levels [over]



6. OK the dialogue box that pops up. Click on the little graph on the Levels Layer, back in the Layers palette. A new dialogue box will pop up with three sampling eyedroppers for shadow, mid and highlight tones. Select **ONLY THE MID-TONE** dropper, and click **ONLY THE GRAY UNDER THE LETTER “M” ON THE GRAYSCALE**. Voilà. The tones and colours should snap in, largely corrected.





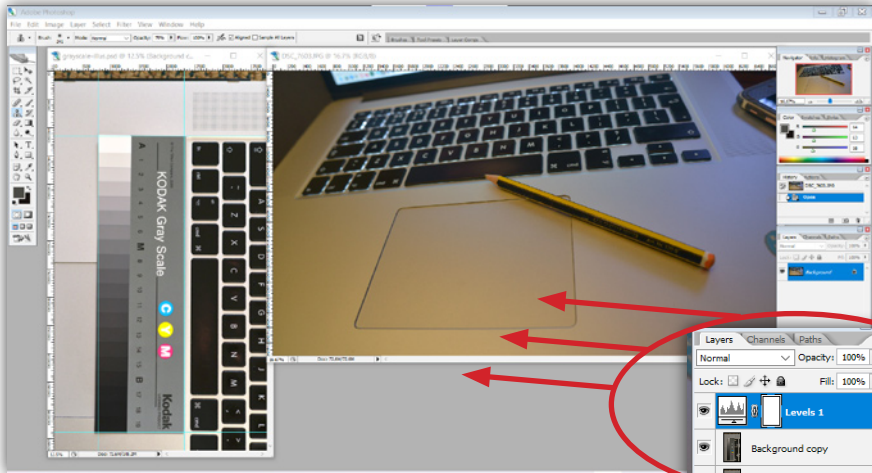
7. Next, set the highlight and shadow tones, but this time **DO NOT USE THE EYEDROPPER!** Just use the sliders on the graph, and move them in to the points where you can see the luminance histogram values starting to flatline out.

Why not use the highlight and shadow eyedroppers? The mid-tone eyedropper has corrected both for exposure and colour. Using another eyedropper will conflict with the colour sampling. But you need to move those endpoints manually, to get proper contrast, with both bright highlights and dark shadows.

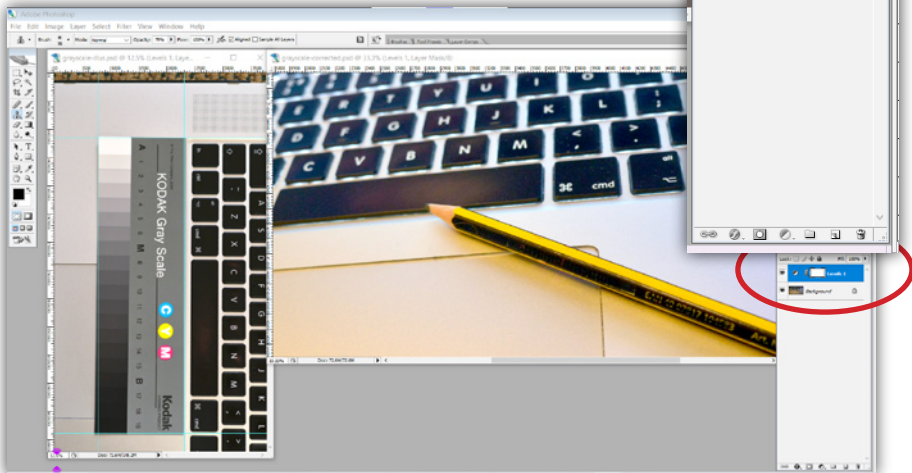
How much? It's subjective, and it varies. If you automate this process (see **RECIPE: AROMATIC ACTIONS**) the playback in the Actions palette will pause at this point for you to set individual values. I generally find my shadows are coming in at around 15 and my highlights around 240. Just move the sliders around till it looks right. It's an adjustment layer on a duplicate background layer anyway, so you can always go back in and tweak stuff. Your original lurks untouched underneath. You're only working on a copy. It's the pixel-by-pixel equivalent of **Functional Programming** (see JavaScript section).

But we are still working on the test shot with the grayscale included, and not on our final choice of shot.

8. Open up the actual photo we wish to use. Do this in the same Photoshop workspace, so you have both the test and the final image next to each other:



9. DRAG LEVELS LAYER FROM TEST IMAGE ONTO FINAL IMAGE - IT WILL COPY OVER.



10. PERFECTLY RISEN COLOUR CAKE.

In the example, I even changed the lighting inbetween test (daylight) and final (tungsten long-life fluorescent keylight and cold sun-lamp LED clip). While best not to do this, we can see this method is robust enough to cope with mixed light sources.