



# SEE THE LIGHT

Shoot infrared and you can create wacky dramatic effects and you'll soon be seeing things in a different light

WORDS & PICTURES RAY ALLEN

**G**hostly white leaves and inky black skies are familiar characteristics of photos taken using infrared film. But you don't have to use film – similar techniques can be achieved using a digital camera.

Taking a standard colour shot, converting it to greyscale then tweaking the contrast to obtain a decent black & white image can produce a great shot, but shooting

infrared style will create dramatic images with far greater impact.

Shooting infrared is

taking pictures that contain light that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Infrared is part of the electro-magnetic spectrum – a range of waves that surround us containing radio waves, microwaves, infrared, visible light, ultraviolet, x-rays and gamma rays. Our eyes only see visible light and are blind to the infrared and ultraviolet range that sit beyond the visible light range.

Traditional cameras can be loaded with film that is sensitive to different parts of the spectrum, such as infrared or thermal heat, but CCDs in digital cameras can also see middle to near infrared like the IR sensor on a remote control. Try pointing the IR remote control that comes with your TV at your digital camera,

press any key and see if the LCD screen shows the emitted light to indicate if your camera is sensitive.

If you have an expensive digital camera you may be disappointed – some contain an infrared blocking filter that stops the CCD receiving infrared light to improve picture quality. Camera manufacturers keep down the cost of cameras by not adding this blocking filter so the CCD is sensitive to the light that we are interested in.

I use an Olympus Camedia C2000 which works very well for infrared. You have to attach a special R72 infrared filter that blocks out visible light and this is where you may need the help of SRB, a filter specialist in Luton, phone 01582 572471.

The filter thread on the Olympus lens is 41mm but Hoya, who make the infrared filter, only go down to 46mm so you need a stepping ring. The infrared filter is expensive so if you have a film-based camera it's worth buying a filter that will fit this and use the necessary stepping ring to get it down to the digital camera filter thread. SRB either stock, or will make, the correct size rings.

Infrared is around us all the time so photos can be taken using the filter in summer or winter. The best shots are taken in bright





As with the church on the left, interesting buildings can be more dramatic with infrared. Infrared light is absorbed and bounced off objects in a different way to normal light so different details are highlighted.



This gives the effect of a dark and brooding sky and, coupled with the ashen white foliage, makes a foreboding and eerie composition.



Living plants such as this seaweed take on a new ghost-like appearance, water changes to a deep dark colour in contrast to its real bright blue.

## IT'S THAT TIME OF THE YEAR...

Use the filter throughout the year and you may observe a colour change. During the winter months the colour effect you get with outdoor images is more unpredictable, mainly because of the reduced amount of infrared from the sun giving a strange unnatural colour. As the summer months begin the saturation level of infrared is much higher, which produces better images with sky becoming deeper in colour and the overall colour becoming more natural – some shots even have a sepia effect.

Another factor that changes the feel of an image is the camera's colour temperature settings; on auto it can be unpredictable, but switch to manual and you obtain consistent results. This could be because the filter is confusing the camera's colour temperature sensor. Again this may vary from camera to camera so experiment to find what settings give you the most pleasing result.

conditions but overcast days can give interesting results.

The filter is very dense which makes the camera automatically fire in auto mode. This can give strange coloured effects and is worth experimenting with, but better results are obtained when the flash is turned off. This makes the camera use a slow shutter speed so a tripod may be needed to avoid camera shake. You can also get some interesting effects when it's getting dark, but, once again, longer exposure times are needed. Leaving the camera in automatic mode gives good results most of the time.

When you load the pictures onto a computer use your image-editing program to convert the result to black & white and remove the odd colour or make it more dramatic using the Hue/Saturation controls to produce bizarre, but wonderful, colour effects. Another nice post-production trick is to add a level of noise with monochromatic setting on to the image to give it an arty feel.

The best advice is experiment, you will find the settings for your camera that give predictable colour effects if you're after consistency, but half the fun is unpredictable results. Once you enter the world of infrared, you may not be able to stop...



Look quickly at this scene and you would be forgiven for thinking it's the middle of winter and not a blazing hot summer's day. Any landscape can take on a new look with very interesting effects.