GREYSCALE CONVERSION with BLACK & WHITE ADJUSTMENT LAYER

Photoshop has two tools for converting color photographs to Black & White, Channel Mixer and Black & White. The former works more like conventional film technique while the latter is a bit easier to manage, i.e. more visual than technical.

Black & White Tool Overview
Open a Black &White adjustment layer to convert a photo to greyscale. The panel has 6 sliders, 3 for the additive colors R, G and B, and also 3 the subtractive colors C, M and Y, although they are arranged in prismatic order, R, Y, G, C, B, M.

The panel opens using the Default preset that creates a generic greyscale conversion. The task is to play with the sliders to make the most interesting B&W image possible.

With a digital camera, it is best to shoot in full color and then filter the photo in Photoshop. Manipulating the sliders in the B&W panel heightens or reduces that amount of that color in a direct relationship. Moving to the right increases that color, moving to the left reduces that color.

The following is a general list of the effect of various filters on a black & white image: a yellow filter adds contrast, an orange filter adds more contrast and a red filter adds the most contrast, and has been used to darken the sky in some shots. The B&W panel makes all of these changes readily visible and one can work in a very intuitive and visual way.
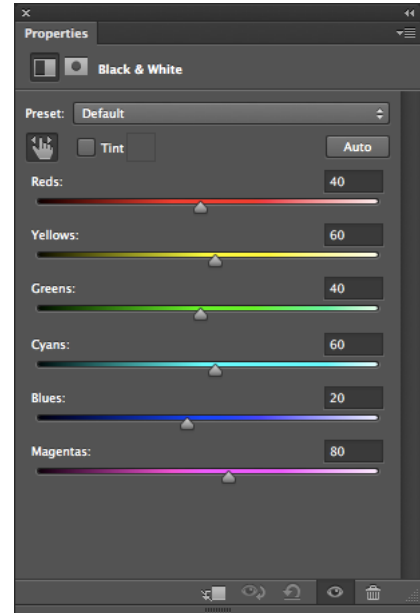
The most aesthetic way of working is to determine the dominant colors in the original photo and manipulate them. If, for example, there is a red door next to a green door, these colors can be pushed in either direction so that, in one case, the red door could be white and the green door black, and in another, the red door could be black and the green door white. There is no such thing as a 'correct' black & white conversion.

There is no responsibility to depict a scene in its 'true' appearance. All that is exists is the print. No one will be comparing the photo to the real thing. It is up to the artist to make the most intriguing or inspiring photograph that can be made. The real world is only raw material from which a great photograph can be made. [This is a philosophy called 'Active Imaging', as opposed to depicting a scene as it really appears, which would be 'Passive Imaging'.]

To make this transformation happen, it is valuable to think about pushing things to the extreme, but not beyond the point of believability. If things are taken too far the photo become fake and then your audience will not stay long. [Unless you make photos that are so obviously fake that they become fantastic, using the literal meaning of the world that comes from the root 'fantasy'. This is another level of taking it to the extreme. It all depends on what you want to say with your photos.]

PRESETS
There are a number of other presets that can be employed, although these should only be used as starting points to create your own 'look'. These presets are: blue filter, darker, green filter, high contrast blue, high contrast red, infrared, lighter, maximum black, maximum white, neutral density, red filter, yellow filter.

How Filters Work
Filters can be placed on the front of the camera lens to produce different effects. Colored filters remove certain parts of the tonal spectrum and change the way the film or the sensor record the scene. When using black & white film, removing certain tones can drastically alter the appearance of the photograph.
For example:

> Blue Filter lightens the blue tones
>> as well as the Cyan and Magenta tones
>> on either side
> Green Filter lightens the green tones
>> as well as the Yellow and Cyan tones
> Red Filter lightens the red tones
>> as well as the Yellow and Magenta tones
>> and somewhat darkens Green and Blue
> Yellow Filter lightens the yellow tones
>> as well as the Red and Magenta tones on either side

> High Contrast Blue filter does the same as above
>> raises the Blue + Cyan + Magenta
>> and *also* darkens the Red + Yellow + Green
> High Contrast Red filter does the same as above
>> raises the Red + Yellow + Magenta
>> and *also* darkens the Green + Cyan + Blue

> Darker and Lighter just push the Default sliders settings either up or down
> Maximum Black and Maximum White push all sliders to the same level
>> ¾ the way up or down

> Infrared mimics the look of film that is extra red-sensitive by pulling everything
>> down except the reds and yellows, that are pushed up high
> Neutral Density is a filter that merely cuts down light
>> and works by pushing the Default setting way up