

Seeing in Black and White

From thought (learning the characteristics that are important to a black and white photo) to action (the act of making a monochromatic image) can be a long journey. Fortunately, there's an intermediate step: learning to see in black and white. Pre-visualization techniques, explained on pages 26–29 and 68–73, can help you see your photos as they will appear in monotone before you take them, but it is also important to think about the more general issues of seeing.

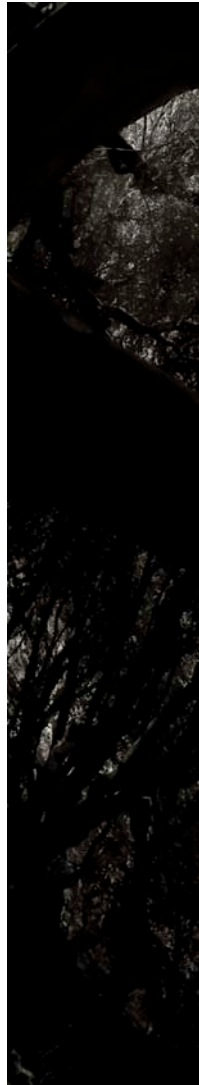
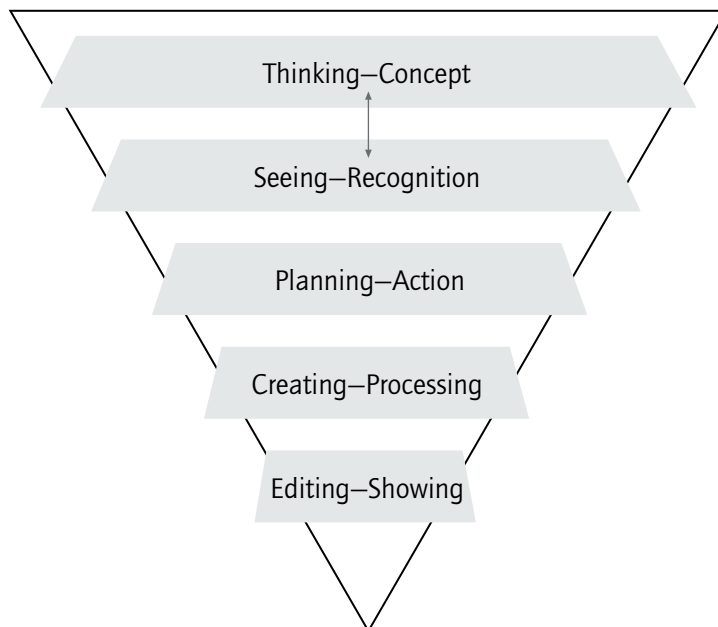
I consider far more photos in my mind's eye than I ever end up actually taking. The whole approach to photography should be an inverted pyramid looking something like what is shown below,

starting with thought and conception and ending with presenting the work. At each stage in the photographic journey, there are less and less images.

Here's the explanation for the reduction in quantity of photos. At the top stages of the pyramid, the world is one's oyster. Everything is grist for the visual mill, and the possibilities have not been limited.

A few of the possibilities out there actually become digital photos, either as planned photos or because something in the world captures the attention of a diligent photographer.

Of these few, an even smaller number will actually be fully processed in Lightroom, Photoshop or some other





- ▲ Lying back in a dense forest, I looked up at the sky. Suddenly I saw the sky as a circular shape in the center of my field of view, apparently held up by the tangled and gnarled trees. I knew that in black and white I could isolate the white, round shape of the sky from the dark background of the forest and trees—transforming the image into one “round globe” (actually the sky) held up in “space” by the trees.

If you look at the composition carefully, you’ll see perfectly well that it is an image of the sky seen through branches of trees. But at a quick glance, the circular shape makes it appear to be something else (the globe in the sky). Visual ambiguity of this sort greatly appeals to me in my black and white imagery.

10.5mm digital fisheye, 1/60 of a second at f/8 and ISO 100, hand held