

Digital Lith Effect

The darkroom technique of Lith printing is a popular technique which produces quite distinctive results. However, the process is inconsistent because of the many variables involved and the results are unpredictable. It is virtually impossible to produce two identical prints. The uniqueness of the process ensures that each print is different. Some consider that beneficial but, equally, once a good result had been obtained it cannot not be repeated.

Digital Lith removes the uncertainty of the darkroom process.

The technique outlined below is derived from a demonstration by Kinsley Amis of Digital Photo Magazine but these instructions are intentionally flexible and should be adapted to suit the image being processed.

Open your chosen image in Photoshop.

Note: This process can be done in Elements but some of the instructions will need to be adapted to apply the slightly different menu layout.

The characteristics of the Lith image are soft, glowing highlights and gritty shadows and reasonably high contrast. In this process the highlights and shadows are dealt with separately but first the contrast should be increased.

Duplicate the Background layer. There are 3 ways to do this:

- From the Menu select Layer > New > Layer via Copy.
- Drag the Background layer to the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel.
- Hit Ctrl+J (Quickest)

Note: When using the Menu it is a good idea to look and see if a shortcut is available. Learn to use shortcuts, if possible. It makes your work quicker and slicker.

Increase the contrast. There are various methods of doing this: Levels, Curves, Brightness & Contrast etc. but the method used here produces a gentle glow to the image as well as increasing contrast.

Change the blend mode of the duplicate layer to Soft Light. This will produce the required increase in contrast as well as adding a soft glowing richness. *(Check out Overlay and Hard Light blend modes to see if they give a better result).*

You may well find that, with the increase in contrast your highlight areas have been blown out. If that is the case then they need to be recovered.

Ensure your colours are set to default (Black & White) with Black as the foreground colour.

(Hit 'D' to set colours to default. If white shows as the foreground colour hit 'X' to reverse them)

Rub out the burnt-out highlights. To do that, either:

- Use the eraser tool to rub out the burnt-out highlights.
- Create a layer mask. Select the paintbrush from the toolbox and paint with black to erase the burnt out highlight areas.

Note: The use of layer masks rather than the eraser tool is for flexibility. With a layer mask, if you paint too far you just swap from black to white and paint back the error.

With the burnt out highlights restored the image can be flattened.

- **Layer > Flatten Image** or (because there are only 2 layers)
- **Ctrl+E**

Currently the image is colour. Lith prints are toned monochrome images. The tones can be anything from a rich sepia to peachy/orange shades. The choice is yours.

To remove the colour and tone the image:

Create a new adjustment layer. Click the half black/half white circle at the bottom of the layers panel and select Hue & Saturation.

Towards the bottom of the Hue & Saturation dialog box **tick the Colorize box.** The image will probably appear a deep red tone. This is the default setting but not what is wanted.

Adjust the Hue and Saturation sliders to taste. As a suggestion try a Hue of between 20-30 and a Saturation of between 25-30. The choice is yours. The settings suggested here will produce a rich sepia effect. Moving the Hue slider further to the right produces less red and eventually moves into green. Moving the Saturation slider to the right obviously just increases the saturation. Use both sliders in conjunction to provide the effect wanted.

Close the Hue & Saturation dialog box.

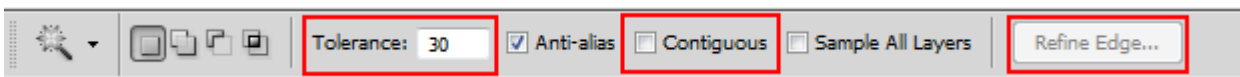
We now need to introduce a glow to the highlights.

Ensure the Background layer is active. (Click on it, if it is not active).

From the Toolbox select the Magic Wand tool.

(Note the shortcut for future reference).

From the Options Bar set the Tolerance to about 30 and uncheck the Contiguous box.



Note the Refine Edge option.

Click in the highlight area. If not everything you want is selected, hold the shift key down and click the unselected areas until you have the selection you want.

Refine Edge and set a feather of 25-30px.

Close the Refine Edge dialog box.

Copy the selection. Either of the following will work but the second option is quickest.

- Edit > Copy. Then Edit > Paste
- Ctrl+J

The selection will now be on a separate layer above the Background and below the H&S adjustment layer.

Ensure your colours are set to default. (See method above if they are not).

Apply a diffuse glow to the new layer.

Filter > Distort > Diffuse Glow.

The image will probably be too big to fit in the picture area. If that is the case hit Ctrl+0. The image should now be fitted into the area.

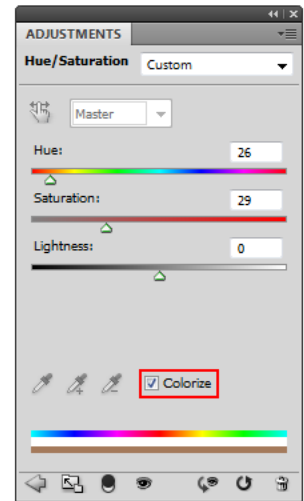
Set Graininess to 0, Glow to 5 and Clear to 10.

Click OK.

Click the eye on the left of the layer to check the effect.

You will probably find that, once again, the highlights have burned out. To bring the highlights back:

Create a layer mask. (The washing machine icon at the bottom of the Layers panel).



From the Toolbox select the Paintbrush.

In the Options bar at the top of the screen set the opacity to about 30%.

Paint on the layer mask. Don't overdo this as excessive painting will remove the diffuse glow.

Merge this layer with the Background layer. Either:

- Layer > Merge Down
- Ctrl+E

The highlight areas are now sorted out. The shadow areas are next.

Ensure the Background layer is active.

From the Toolbox select the Magic wand tool.

Select the highlights as done previously. Refine the edge to about 30px.

Invert the selection. Either:

- Select > Inverse
- Ctrl+Shift+I

Create a new Levels adjustment layer.

Darken the selection. Either drag the black input slider to the right or drag the grey slider to the right to get the darkness required.

Close the Levels dialog box.

Make the Background layer active.

From the menu go to Select > Reselect.

Create a new blank layer.

Fill with mid grey. Edit > Fill. Select 50% Grey in the Contents area. Set the Blending to Normal mode and Opacity at 100%.

To provide the grittiness we will add some noise.

From the Menu select: Filter > Noise > Add Noise.

Select: Amount 10%, Distribution-Gaussian and tick the Monochromatic box. Click OK.

Change the Blend mode to Linear Light.

Zoom in to the image to check the effect.

(Ctrl+Spacebar and mouseclick to move in. Alt+Spacebar and mouseclick to move out).

If the effect is too severe reduce the opacity of the layer to reduce the effect.

To finish off we will apply some sharpening.

Ensure the Background layer active.

Duplicate the Background layer.

From the Menu select: Filter > Other > High Pass. Set the slider to 5px.

Change the blend mode of this duplicate layer to Overlay. Reduce the layer opacity if the effect is too harsh.

That's it. The image is now complete.

You can, if you wish, flatten the image but, until you actually produce a print it might be wise to leave it layered just in case some fine tuning is required.