

Notes on Working in Monochrome

30 June 2026 · Nikon Sugar

Colour is the easiest way to add emphasis and the easiest way to hide weak structure. Taking it away is a useful discipline: with no hue to lean on, hierarchy has to come from space, weight, and scale — the things that were doing the real work all along.

I keep returning to monochrome not out of austerity but out of honesty. Colour is a loan against attention: it works, and it accrues interest. A red call-to-action is read first today and ignored tomorrow, once everything has learned to shout.

Remove the hue and the page has to earn its hierarchy. Emphasis comes from **weight**, from *space*, from the size of a heading against the text beneath it. These were always the load-bearing elements; colour merely let us avoid getting them right.

There is a second, quieter reason. A monochrome page ages slowly. Palettes date — every era has its tell — but a well-set column of black text on warm paper looks much the same across a century of books. If the writing here is meant to last, the surface should not announce the year it was made.

None of this is a rule for anyone else. It is a constraint I find clarifying, the way a poet finds a form clarifying: the smaller the box, the more deliberate every move inside it has to be.