The film look.

and

How to get the film look
in digital photography

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# I. What is the film look?

Films differ, that is perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind when trying to define this topic. Films are made to look different from one another in order for customers to prefer some and purchase them rather than the ones made by the competition; not to mention that there are film types dedicated to certain tasks, which dictate what look they have. Now, that being said, there seems to be a look that people consider to be associating with "the film look" and that can be, to great extent, be reproduced digitally. So here is what defines this look.

## Pastel colours and the such

An unmistakable feature that makes people think an image is filmy-looking is the pastel look in the colours (rather than neon). This usually happens in film when the image is shot overexposed (brighter than should be) and then processed for the correct brightness.

The greens tend to appear bluer. Colour contrast is increased; yellows are brighter and more saturated. Shadows are lifted (lighter), while blacks are still intact and strong. Shadows and highlights sometimes display colour casts (green or blue in shadows, peach in highlights).

## The Feel

More importantly than colour accuracy, when it comes to the film look, is the feeling of the image. Film looks soft and organic. Highlights are diffused and progress gradually in the high end, they do not easily reach overexposed white, and often have a peach bias to them, while the shadows, while strong hold detail and often feature colour biases such as blue or green. Skin tones tend to be pastel in nature, along the lines of orange/peach rather than red.

# II. What causes the film look?

The short answer is that years of colour theory study in the days of film have yielded results in chemical manipulation during the film development process, which successfully tweaked the colour reproduction in order to create more pleasing colour palettes in photographs than real life can offer.

# III. How to achieve the film look

In digital we do not work with chemicals and film; but there are a few tools

that we can use to tweak the colour response in photographs; such as RGB Colour Curves and RGB Channels. The reason we work in Red, Green and Blue, is twofold; firstly it is because red, green and blue are colours of light that when mixed, can reproduce most of the entire visual spectrum of colour – which is also the reason the same notion is used in film colour capture, and the second reason is that since film uses it too and we are attempting to reproduce film, this is the closest way to approach the matter.

## Every film is different ...but,

Even though films are meant to look different from one another, as mentioned before, there are those traits that people associate with film. Well here is now to replicate some of them.

### 1. The greens: Greens tend to look blue

Approach: In RGB channels, increase the amount of blue, in green, from 0 to the desired amount.

Approach: Use the HUE control, to move the green hue toward blue.

### 2. Colour casts: colour casts in shadows or highlights

Approach: Using RGB colour curves you can increase or decrease the three main colours red, green and blue. By decreasing one, the results look as if you increased the other two equally. Decrease red, looks as if you increase green and blue, producing a cyan cast.

Red – Cyan; Green – Magenta; Blue – Yellow.

### 3. Lightness:
To mimic a film-like lightness response; use the curve adjustment tool to boost the low mid tones, while leaving the blacks black.

### 4. Skin tones:
To make them pastel and golden/orange rather than red, there are a few things we can do:

Approach: Add contrast in the lower mid tones of the colours using the RGB colour curves

Approach: in RGB colour channels: remove blue from red; and/or add/remove green to/from red

Approach: use the HUE adjust tool to modify the red/orange tones

Approach: create red/mid cast in lower mid tones using RGB colour curves