Photomatix and Shadow Mapping

Photomatix is a stand-alone HDR program which I have been using for several years now, mainly because Photoshop's HDR software was a bit rubbish but they now seem to have addressed this and the version shipped with CS6 isn't at all bad (see handout Photoshop HDR in CS6). Photomatix gives more control over the final outcome and in this handout I will try to explain some of the newer features in version 4.2.6.

Open Photomatix and load in your bracketed photographs. These are best imported as RAW files as they retain the most detail. Keep the 'show intermediary 32-bit HDR image' ticked as we want to save this. A dialogue box appears. Now, the more things you tick the better the image should be but the longer your computer will take to process the image. I always have 'align source images' ticked, crop aligned images unticked (I will explain later) and 'remove ghosts – selective deghosting tool' ticked. The others it is up to you. Click ok.

You now have the chance to selectively deghost parts of the image which may have movement between shots – usually people or waves. Draw around these areas and you can preview the deghosting before clicking process.

The image on the screen will appear rubbish but don't worry – it's only because your screen can't display a 32-bit image. Save as and save this 32-bit image as a radiance HDR file.

Click Tonemapping/Fusion. This latest version has several more default presets which are great to use as a starting point. Some are more photo-realistic and some are hyper-real. Again, it's all down to personal preference. I have chosen 'Enhanced' as my start point. This is a details enhancer method. Adjust the sliders to get the desired effect and click Process. The image which comes up can be further modified to increase contrast/colour and sharpening before clicking Done. Save the image as either an 8-bit or 16-bit TIFF.

Shadow Mapping

This is a nice little method which brings more contrast to the shadows and highlights and stops your HDR image looking flat and can save you lots of time dodging and burning.

In Photomatix re-open your intermediate 32-bit HDR file and click Tonemapping.

From the Presets select Grunge and take the colour saturation all the way to the left to make it mono (and a bit sketch-like).
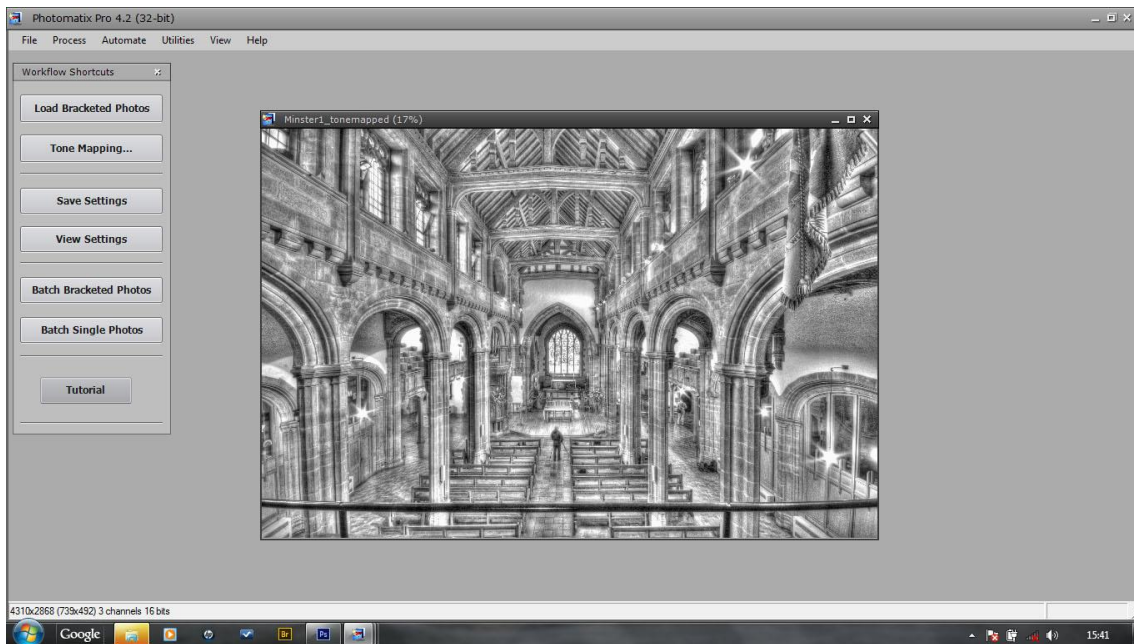
Process the image and save as a different named TIFF.

In Photoshop, open your colour and mono HDR images and drag your mono image onto the colour one to give 2 layers. Change the blending mode of the top mono image to Hard Light and reduce the opacity down to about 20-30% to give a more contrasty image.
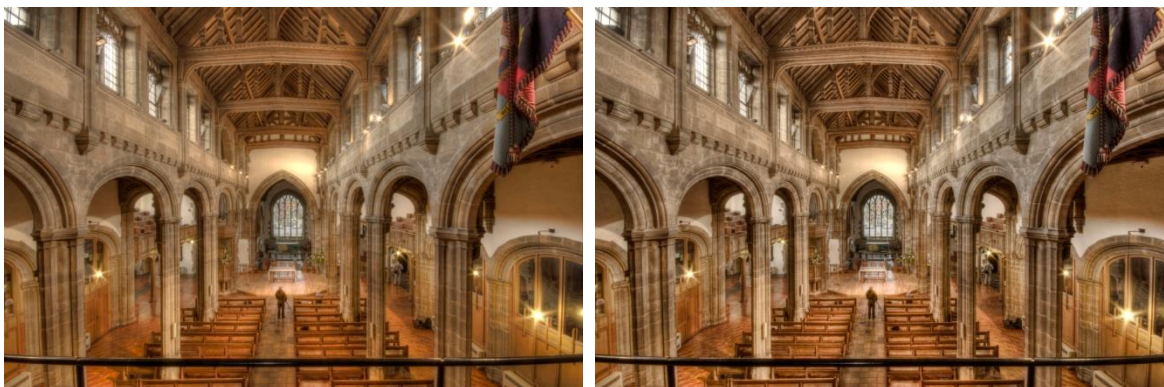
Tone mapped   Tone mapped and Shadow mapped

This technique will give strong contrast but it is worth playing about with blending more photo-realistic monochrome layers with the tonemapped image and looking at Overlay/Soft light blending modes.