



DIGITAL *Wedding* PHOTOGRAPHY

Capturing Beautiful Memories

2nd Edition

Glen Johnson

Digital Wedding Photography: Capturing Beautiful Memories

Second Edition

Glen Johnson



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About the Author

Glen Johnson, an acclaimed wedding photographer whose client list spans the globe, has shot more than 50 weddings outside the United States. His website, www.aperturephotographics.com, is filled with inspirational images and wedding stories as well as a lot of information for both photographers and brides.

Glen is a founding member of Best of Wedding Photography. This invitation-only group is the premier association for the world's top wedding photographers. Glen regularly provides input in the direction for the group as well as serves on the review board to choose which photographers are invited for membership.

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Thanks to my mom for being my constant cheerleader in everything I do, and thanks to my father for encouraging me in photography and for sending me to my first photo seminar, and especially for letting me steal every camera he ever owned.

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Preface

I was shooting a wedding in the Bahamas where the bride and groom purchased a “package” wedding from a large resort. The package came with a minister, a videographer, and all of the other essentials except the photographer (me), which the couple arranged separately because they wanted more than what the typical hotel photographer provides. On the day of the wedding, I did my usual photojournalistic thing until just before the ceremony when the videographer arrived. This man stepped up with a loud voice and took over the reins of that whole wedding. From then on, he and the minister ran the show completely, telling the bride and groom where to stand, when to move, where to put each hand, how to hold the pen, and even when to smile at the camera — much to my dismay. They were arranging shots for me (which I didn’t ask for) and then saying, “There you go, Mr. Photographer! That’s how we do it here in the Bahamas!”

When the first dance started, the videographer was occupied at the bar but he quickly came charging back with a drink in his hand and a napkin flying in the air behind him. He was waving his hands and motioning across his throat at the DJ to cut the music. The DJ was ignoring him so he finally just yelled, “Stop!” which of course everyone did. Then he walked out onto the dance floor and carefully placed the groom on one side, and the bride on the other, and then he grabbed his camera and motioned for the DJ to start the music again.

Only a few weeks before this scene, I witnessed another bride in the Bahamas almost subjected to the same treatment. However, she stopped all of that nonsense right in the beginning. She told the minister and videographer how she wanted the events to go, and if they didn’t want to do it her way, they could just pack up! At first, the minister didn’t want to comply, but when she told her father to ask him to leave, he changed his mind. She then proceeded to have a very quiet ceremony that went exactly her way, with no interruptions.

Those two very different experiences made me think about how those of us in the wedding business go about our business. Sometimes videographers, ministers, and we photographers forget to honor the sacredness of the wedding. We all see so many weddings that we forget this is the first and perhaps only time the bride and groom will ever experience it. Our familiarity makes us good at what we do, but it also wears away our perception of the sacredness of the event. Before long, each wedding is simply another day at work, and we are eventually tempted to herd our clients through the paces.

Thankfully, a change is swirling in the air around the wedding photography industry. The move toward photojournalism brings with it a change toward relinquishing control — a change toward allowing the bride and groom to express their individuality, creating their own ceremony within the bounds of whatever religion they choose without us “professionals” trying to force them into our perception of what a wedding should be.



If you enjoy photography and you want to develop those skills into a marketable business, there are many options in the photography world. This book will help you decide if wedding photography is the right path for you.

Is This Book for You?

This book is not a beginning photography book. You will find very little information here on f-stops, apertures, or how to operate your camera. If you need to learn beginning photography, this book is *not* the place to start, and I would add that taking on a paid wedding at such a beginning stage could be considered a criminal act. If you already feel fairly comfortable with the basics of photography, and you want to learn how to apply those skills to shooting weddings, then this is the book for you.

If you're looking for a book full of perfectly exposed inspirational images — this is not it. This is a textbook about the basics of wedding photography. Of course I'll try to squeeze in a favorite shot or two when I can, but if you want to see my own best images, check out my website where I have them on display. Many of the images in these pages were chosen from my files because they illustrate what *not* to do. As such, they are often pulled directly out of the trash, where they belong. I'm a big believer in the idea that your mistakes are your greatest teachers, and this book is full of them.

Anyone interested in learning wedding photography, and particularly how to do it with digital equipment, will find *this book* useful. Seasoned photographers looking to branch out into shooting weddings will also find it useful, although of course they won't have as much to gain as a complete beginner to the wedding photography business.

After reading through the chapters in this book, you should have enough information to feel comfortable signing on as a second photographer with a more established wedding photographer. If you can't find a mentor like that, the knowledge in this book provides insight about the thoughts, attitude, camera techniques, and business practices to give you a good solid starting point from which you can comfortably take on (preferably free of charge) those first few small weddings on your own.



Being tuned into the things in your environment is key to finding and using the beautiful elements each wedding location has to offer.

What Does This Book Cover?

In this book I take an in-depth look at the challenging and rewarding world of digital wedding photography. Whether you are an aspiring amateur or a professional looking to add weddings into your business, I provide valuable insights and information to assist you on your way to becoming a digital wedding photographer.

Part I: Understanding Digital Wedding Photography

This book is organized into three parts with 19 chapters. Part I is a general overview of styles, equipment, daily workflow, and some specifics about composing good images.

In Chapter 1 I provide a general overview of the business of wedding photography.

We must remember that the bride and groom hire us to create a beautiful record of their wedding — not to create the wedding itself. We must also remember that the purpose of a wedding is to publicly announce the couple's agreement to be bound together as a family for the rest of their lives, and contrary to what some photographers seem to believe, a wedding is *not* a photo shoot.

In writing this book, my wish is that a new generation of photographers will continue the current trend of working in a more discreet fashion through the ceremony while still enjoying unhindered creativity in the more quiet moments of the wedding day.

In Chapter 2 I provide an overview of the different styles of wedding photography and how the style is determined by your personality type and the sort of images you prefer to shoot. If you're just starting out, this chapter may give you some direction in developing your own style.

Wedding photographers have a set of unique and very specific equipment needs, as you'll discover in Chapter 3. Many equipment choices you make are simply a matter of personal preference, while others are dictated almost completely by the specific requirements of the job at hand. No matter how serious your business aspirations are, this chapter can give you a long list of qualities to look for as you shop for that perfect camera system.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the various ways to set up your camera and how all the settings are used in a wedding photography context.



Creating beautiful images requires an advanced knowledge of how to use your camera and the specific ways to set it up for wedding photography.

Part II: Wedding Photography Techniques and Concepts

In Part II I go into depth about the thought process and techniques used to shoot a wedding. Topics range from camera setup to where to stand at any particular moment during the ceremony.

In Chapter 5 I discuss how the rules of good composition are simply guidelines that help to set you on your way toward creating great art. These guidelines are valuable to all artists, but the beginner stands to gain the most from learning and adhering to them. As you master the basics, you develop a *feel* for when you can bend or break the rules and still create images that work.

In Chapter 6 I cover information on how to develop a comfortable relationship with people while shooting in the dressing rooms. Anyone getting started in wedding photography needs to know how to approach the dressing rooms so that your clients will trust you to capture

great images while still respecting everyone's need for privacy. Other topics range from what sort of equipment is needed, what settings to use, dressing room etiquette, how to arrange the room, and how to create detail shots that capture the feeling of the day.

In Chapter 7 I discuss general concepts and specific techniques that can help you deal with changing outdoor light conditions, from the bright sun of a mid-day ceremony to the complete darkness you may encounter with a late evening event.

Shooting indoor weddings requires some specialized equipment as well as a lot of knowledge about how an indoor ceremony works. In Chapter 8 I cover everything from how to put out the candles, how to set up your lights, how to avoid reflections, and how to select a good background for family groups. Reflections are discussed in detail because they are a constant threat to your indoor images and you need to know why they happen and how to avoid them if you want to shoot indoors. The dark scenes you often encounter shooting indoors present a unique set of challenges, forcing you to make decisions about whether to set your ISO high and go for the natural light look or to use artificial light and lose the natural qualities of the scene. Your personal shooting style dictates which type of images you choose to create.

The ceremony can easily be considered the pinnacle of every wedding day. In Chapter 9 I provide an in-depth look at this important time in the wedding day. Months of preparation lead up to this one moment and yet when it actually happens, it seems to go by so fast that I often find myself standing there thinking, "Is that it? Is that all of it?" Thankfully, most weddings follow a predictable sequence of events that seldom varies within the United States. This predictability enables an experienced wedding photographer to stand in exactly the right spot at exactly the right time to catch the most important events. In this chapter I share some insights and the thought processes that go into every movement that a professional photographer makes during those few fleeting moments of the ceremony.

In Chapter 10 I provide information on equipment to use as well as tips on capturing candid by learning how to see them coming. A good candid image captures a spontaneous natural moment. Candid frequently tell a story, but more important, they simply capture people living their lives. The images are not contrived or posed. Candid catch rare and fleeting moments of reality — often achieving a "snapshot" look by trading perfect photographic technique for speed.

In Chapter 11 I describe a few of the techniques and thought processes that go into creating a type of image that contains such elusive qualities that no words can fully describe what it is or how it should look. For thousands of years, artists have been trying to capture or create images that portray romance. Photographers, painters, and sculptors alike all struggle with the same question, "What does romance look like?" For that matter, what is romance? Like beauty, romance is an elusive trait that only the eyes of the beholder can judge. Every person knows it when he or she sees it, yet no two viewers see it in the same place.

In Chapter 12 I talk about shooting at the reception. During the hours that follow the ceremony, you will have few responsibilities and only a couple of "must have" shots to capture. There are shots of the food, the first dance, the cake cutting, and the garter and bouquet toss. The last portion of this chapter introduces some advanced flash techniques that are so much fun to experiment with that you may find yourself staying at the reception far into the night.



After the ceremony there is often time to walk around the grounds and shoot some creative images with just the couple.

Part III: The Business of Digital Wedding Photography

The last section of the book looks at the most important and least glamorous side of wedding photography — running a business. Topics in Part III include how to create your own workspace, what types of equipment you need, and what sort of products you might offer to your clients.

In Chapter 13 I offer a brief overview of the workplace options and office equipment you need to create a full-featured digital wedding business capable of handling all aspects of image processing and client contacts. The space needed may be as small and unassuming as a spare bedroom or as large as a full-featured studio, without having any effect on the style or the quality of the final product. In this chapter I look at the physical space where a wedding photographer works on a day-to-day basis, as well as the many different types of equipment and software needed to run a successful photography business.

In Chapter 14 I cover the topic of digital workflow. I break down the whole process into the major parts and then analyze the various jobs you must perform in this rewarding yet tedious part of a digital photographer's day. Each photographer must develop an organized system that allows work to flow from one task to the next as each job progresses from beginning to end. Tasks include downloading and editing the previous weekend's images, backing them up on the computer, editing out the bad ones, and finally delivering the images to the client. The workflow information you gain in this chapter can help you to streamline your business so that it functions as efficiently as possible.

In Chapter 15 you'll find an overview of the techniques used to manipulate images in Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom. These two programs dominate the wedding photography business today and mastering their use will be one of your greatest challenges as a wedding photographer.

In Chapter 16 I look at the various ways you can deliver finished products to your clients. Current options include online print sales, albums, DVD data discs, DVD slide shows, and more. The digital age is teeming with products that you can offer to your wedding clients. The choices are so numerous that the job of narrowing down to the best offerings is a difficult and time-consuming task.

Breaking into the wedding photography business may seem like a daunting task to the beginner. In Chapter 17 I discuss the major options for finding jobs and provide tips on who to talk to about finding jobs. In this chapter I also discuss how to conduct client interviews. After all, finding a client is not the same as getting one to sign a contract. Knowing where to meet and what to talk about in client interviews is vital to your ability to get the signature on that contract.

In Chapter 18 I discuss the topic of web sites. Your website is the single most important part of the advertising puzzle. If you don't have one, you don't exist. And if you have one, but you don't know how to set it up for basic search engine optimization (SEO), then for all practical purposes, your website still doesn't exist. Your website has to be attractive, and your clients have to be able to find it.

In Chapter 19 I take a look into the special requirements and rewards of destination weddings. Topics include options for marketing yourself to these clients, pricing the job, choosing the right equipment for travel, and getting there and back in one piece.



Dramatic couple shots are always challenging and fun to create. If you shoot destination weddings, the challenge is multiplied by the fact that every wedding takes place in a completely new location.

Contacting the Author

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P A R T

Understanding Digital Wedding Photography



Chapter 1

The World of Wedding Photography

Chapter 2

Developing Your Own Style

Chapter 3

The Right Equipment for the Job

Chapter 4

Camera Settings and Digital Exposure

1 The World of Wedding Photography



Wedding photography varies from other types of photography in that you must move from place to place throughout the day, constantly searching for tiny important details to record, and constantly trying to catch your clients in the act of doing something interesting. You'll be expected to create beautiful images at times when they may not appear to exist. The pressure to create art on demand (whether you're in the mood or not) can feel quite overwhelming — especially if the people or the settings don't inspire you. And the pressure mounts even higher when you have to set up and compose twenty group shots with a hundred thirsty people who have only you standing between them and the bar. However, all the external pressures are nothing compared to that internal nagging fear that you have to get it right. Unlike other types of photography, with wedding photography you don't get a second chance to do it over.

Capturing Weddings

Telling the story of an entire wedding day with still images is not something that can be distilled into a simple formula that you can repeat over and over. No two weddings are alike, and even if you go back to the same location over and over again, every day has different light and every wedding has different people and different customs. You can't just sit down the night before to plan your workday or make a list of the images you want to create. You have to be ready and able to handle all sorts of conditions quickly and without help from other people (see Figure 1-1). Your equipment must be reliable and self-contained, and you must have back-ups of the most critical pieces of equipment, such as the camera body and the flash. Further, everything you use must be fairly portable so that you can easily move it from one location to another during the day without causing much fuss.



Figure 1-1: This first dance took place in a very dark indoor location. You can make it look well lit if you know how to mix your flash to get the foreground, while adjusting your ISO and shutter speed to get just enough of the background.

If you are considering diving into the world of wedding photography as a career, or even as a part time job, you will soon learn that this job is not just about creating a few artistic images

on the wedding day. Much more important, wedding photography is a performance art. Those who do it well glide through the day with grace and confidence as they anticipate and capture hundreds of tiny moments of the day. Each picture becomes a fleeting glimpse of everyday events preserved in a way that brings out a hidden beauty that was simply not accessible to the average person until it was captured and then revealed through that particular photographer's vision. And each image is far from a random event captured in a haphazard manner. Each image says something important about the day (see Figure 1-2). And each image is crafted very purposefully; sometimes with the goal of including all the essential pieces of the story; sometimes eliminating all but a single detail; sometimes capturing the light in a specific way; sometimes playing with a shadow; sometimes showing motion; sometimes capturing an emotion. Later, when the best images are viewed together as a slide show or in an album, the collection captures and distills the emotion and the story of the day down to the absolute essentials.

The art of wedding photography is in seeing beauty in everyday life.



Figure 1-2: These items are examples of things you might find in the bride's dressing room, but they were not arranged like this. I gathered them up and placed them here. Teaching you to see opportunities like this and then capture them with your camera is the goal of this book.

A Challenging and Rewarding Profession

The world of digital wedding photography can be both challenging and rewarding. You set your own hours during the week and then work on the weekend at what is probably the grandest party a couple will host in their entire lives. You get to be a “fly-on-the-wall” for one of the most important and emotional days of a new couple’s life, inconspicuously following every move the bride and groom make from the time they arrive in the morning until they leave at night. If you become good at it, couples won’t hesitate to pay you large sums of money and fly you around the globe for your services.

As glamorous as the job may sometimes sound, in reality, the digital wedding photographer spends long hours sitting in front of a computer, editing images, building a website, working on album pages, answering e-mail messages, burning discs, and much more. The actual wedding shoot is only a small fraction of the job.

A common industry adage about photography is, “You can be the greatest photographer in the world and still starve; or you can be a mediocre photographer and make millions if you’re good at running a business.”

I’ve had young people ask me what sort of college classes they should take to prepare them for a career in photography. My advice is to take classes in this priority:

- Business management

- Advertising

- Website development

- Computer technology

- Art

- Photography

Yes, photography appears last on the list. This is because without a strong basis in the other skills, your photographic abilities are useless.

Using the Tools of the Trade

The tools of the trade are few. As businesses go, wedding photography requires a relatively small cash outlay to get the few pieces of high-quality equipment necessary for the job. Learning how to use the equipment is the real challenge, because, fortunately for photographers, having the best camera in the world won’t make you a good wedding photographer, and having the fanciest computer won’t get your color correction right, nor will it build beautiful albums. Many excellent wedding photographers use old, beat-up cameras with far fewer settings and capabilities than the high-end cameras many wedding guests will have slung around

their necks. However, as you probably already know, cameras don't take pictures — photographers do! A good wedding photographer can take better shots with a point-and-shoot camera than the ones most people can take with a top-of-the-line digital camera.

What camera should you use?

The specific tools each photographer uses have nothing to do with whether or not the person can be a good photographer or run a successful wedding photography business, but they will play a major role in the styles of images you create. As shown in Figure 1-3, the important part is how skilled the photographer is at seeing a beautiful moment and capturing it in an artistic manner. For example, when you admire a painting by Picasso or Rembrandt, you don't ask what brand of brush they used. The tools they used are as irrelevant as the choice between a Nikon and a Canon. The artistic vision of the person and the technical expertise necessary to capture that vision are what make the real magic of photography. It doesn't matter if the person used an old beat-up camera body, or a funky lens, or an expensive lens; all that matters is that the equipment produces the image qualities the photographer is trying for.



Figure 1-3: While the tools used to capture an image like this are important — they must be of the highest quality — the vision of the person holding the tools is the most important part of the creation.

With that said, I will add that the difference between a low-priced “consumer” camera compared to the speed and added functionality of the “pro” cameras is *huge*. In the right hands, the professional-level cameras and lenses will contribute a tremendous amount to the type and quality of images you can capture, as well as the ease with which you can make them.

Personality goes a long way

One of the most valuable tools you can have as a wedding photographer is the right kind of personality. You don’t have to be the life of the party, but you should have a friendly, outgoing personality that puts people at ease almost immediately. If you don’t like people, or if you are impatient or easily frustrated by people who are always late and generally can’t seem to get it together, then this job isn’t a good match for you. But if you function well under pressure (a lot of pressure), and if you’re flexible enough that you can go with the flow when the bride is late, or it rains all day, then this job might be a good fit.

Training your mind

Last but not least, the most valuable tool you need as a wedding photographer is knowledge. You need to develop your skills and understanding of photography to the point that taking a picture is no more difficult than walking across the room. Eventually, you will be able to create the vision of what each picture should look like before preparing to take the shot. When you see an activity taking place — or better yet, about to take place — you’ll envision the image and know which lens to grab, how to set the camera settings, and what angle to shoot from to tell the story. And you’ll put it all together in the span of about 10 seconds or less.

With practice, you will become in tune with the types of locations that make good portrait backgrounds, such as the one shown in Figure 1-4. Eventually you’ll find yourself noticing places with good light or great angles, even when you’re not at a wedding. You’ll find yourself thinking things like, “These converging lines look so cool, I could put the bride right there and shoot it from down low with about a 20mm lens.” Or, “That long line of trees would be so nice with the bride looking around the trunk of the fourth tree. I could shoot it with my 200mm at f/2.8 to throw all the other trees into a blur.” Once you get to the point of thinking like that, things will come together quite easily on the wedding day.

Getting experience

A trained eye can only be gained through experience. Practice on your friends and family and anyone else who might be willing. Kids and pets make great subjects because it’s so darn hard to control them that you’ll soon give up and just start capturing whatever it is that they want to do — hey, that’s just how a wedding works! Ask a caterer or florist to help you find couples who don’t have the budget to hire a professional photographer, then approach the couple and

offer to volunteer your services for free. It's actually much better for you to work for free when you start out because once there are contracts and money involved, you have a legal responsibility to perform and will be held accountable if the couple is not happy with your results.



Figure 1-4: Finding the right light and posing a romantic scene takes a lot of practice. When you've done it well, it looks as if it happened naturally, without any forethought. Soft focus effects like this can be added later in Adobe Photoshop to further complete the effect you envisioned when the scene was happening.

With this book, you can read all about how to make great images, but no amount of reading can substitute for the experience you get working at a real wedding. I highly recommend that you seek out wedding professionals in your area and ask them if you can assist or shoot as a second photographer to gain experience and confidence before you take on your first paid wedding. In the beginning, you should expect little or no pay for the education you get while working with established wedding photographers. Consider it the cheapest college course you ever bought and learn everything you possibly can. In fact, I'd go so far as to tell the photographer you don't want money; you're willing to work for free just so you can pick his or her brain at every possible moment throughout the day.

As your skills progress, you should start getting paid, but don't expect to make much money at first. The point of working as a second photographer is to gain all the experience you possibly can. When you reach the point where your first mentor has little left to offer, take your portfolio and seek another mentor. Eventually you will have to shoot a wedding on your own to understand the full impact of the job, but I don't recommend that you do this until you've shot at least ten weddings (unless you're already an accomplished photographer in some other field).

Other valuable sources of education include seminars at big photography conventions like the annual Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI) convention in Las Vegas, or your state branch of Professional Photographers of America (PPA). Of course, there are also many photography schools where you can take classes to develop your photography and your business skills. Some classes may be as close as your nearest community college, while other classes are at schools like the Brooks Institute, which specializes in teaching just photography. Another good educational tool is, of course, the Internet. You can learn all sorts of techniques on YouTube or with a Google search. You can also check out the website, Best of Wedding Photography (www.bestofweddingphotography.com), to peruse the websites of the cream of the crop of current wedding professionals throughout the world.

Recording Life's Milestone with Pictures

In almost every human life, there are at least four major milestones: birth, marriage, birth of the first child, and death. A wedding photographer has the privilege of being a witness and a historian on one of those four big days.

If you've ever looked through old albums of pictures from your childhood, you may realize that the memories you have of your childhood are actually somehow tied to the pictures. For example, you probably have many pictures where you can't remember anything else that happened during that day or even the month it was taken, but because you've looked at that picture many times over the years, the events immediately surrounding it are burned into your memory. While I can't explain how it works, I do believe that photographs help us store memories in a way that makes them last for the rest of our lives. Seeing that photo every few years reinforces that memory and embeds it in a way that causes it to remain present.

The first time a bride looks through her wedding pictures, there is a very high likelihood she will be moved to tears. If you've done a bad job, they will be tears of deep sorrow. If you've done a good job, they will be tears of joy — the same sort of tears she may have cried when the groom said his vows and when her father made a toast to their happiness. These are memories, such as those shown in Figure 1-5, that you've frozen in time for her. Other types of photography are important to our clients too, but nothing will be as emotionally charged and profoundly important as their wedding photographs.



Figure 1-5: Allowing the couple to create their own pose takes very little coaching but it requires a lot of ability on your part to realize when they've got something good and press the shutter before it disappears.

Breaking Into the Business

What is it that attracts so many to the lure of wedding photography? Having been the paid photographer at hundreds of weddings, I still find myself amazed at the number of people who recognize the best angle, and stand up in front of me and my camera to try their hand at getting a good shot of the bride and groom. They are all interested in wedding photography on some level. Few have professional aspirations, but many will come up to me repeatedly throughout the day and ask questions because they are genuinely interested in the wedding photography business. You can see the gleam in their eyes as they think to themselves, "I could do that!" Their eyes sparkle even more when they find out how much it pays. When they hear that I've shot weddings in Mexico, Jamaica, and the Virgin Islands, and that my next few weddings are in Aruba, Greece, and Hong Kong, their eyes become wide and their jaws drop in disbelief. After all, wasn't it only just a few years ago that "real" photographers didn't shoot weddings? It simply wasn't cool.

Even today, remnants of those feelings persist among older photographers, but the younger crowd is embracing the new world of wedding photography like never before. With the likes of photographers Joe Buissink, Mike Colon, and Denis Reggie not only shooting celebrity weddings, but also showing up on TV shows as celebrities themselves, the world of wedding photography has taken a decided turn in popularity. It's becoming downright stylish!

Of course, reading this book won't make you a celebrity wedding photographer, or get you a bunch of calls for destination weddings, but it will give you the information you need to start down the path in that direction. Who knows where that path may take you? Even if you don't want to shoot celebrities or jet off to exotic locales, shooting weddings right in your own neighborhood is a great way to make a comfortable living while doing something that is fun, creative, and extremely enjoyable. And never underestimate the power of determination. After all, every established wedding photographer out there today — no matter how famous — started off at the beginning, right where you are standing today.

Summary

The world of wedding photography is an exciting and challenging place to be. If you are an aspiring professional photographer or simply an amateur who wants to learn more about digital wedding photography, you'll find the business surprisingly easy to enter. After you've built a small portfolio, either by working with an established photographer or shooting a few weddings for free, I'm sure you'll find no shortage of eager clients who are more than willing to try you out. It may take several years to work your way up the ladder into the higher price bracket, but if and when you do, you may find clients willing to pay extraordinary fees to reserve your services.

The job definitely has its challenges. You have to learn to control your equipment in any sort of lighting conditions imaginable, with a lot of hectic activity going on around you, and with a lot of people watching and waiting on you. And, unfortunately, you'll end up spending far more time running the business than shooting pictures.

Not only can you make a comfortable living, but also you get to work at something you can truly enjoy, while performing a service that is extremely important to your clients. Many of them will tell you that your pictures are one of the most important things happening on the wedding day, second only to the act of getting married. This is a day they will remember for the rest of their lives and they want those memories to be formed by an artist. When clients hire you, they are entrusting you to create images that will shape their memories and become part of their family history.



2 Developing Your Own Style



Your “style” of photography is a combination of the way you act while shooting the pictures and the type of pictures you create. Wedding photographers generally fall into one of three styles; however, it is possible for one photographer to shoot in more than one style and even to switch styles throughout the wedding day. In this chapter I take an in-depth look at the three main stylistic approaches to wedding photography: Traditional, Photojournalistic, and Portrait Journalism. I discuss the different photographic techniques used in each style, how the images differ, and what the clients want; and I include a few tips

to help you decide which style is right for you. But first, I begin the chapter with a discussion about various methods for pricing wedding photography. Although the topic may appear to be misplaced, it is vital to understanding the different styles of wedding photography.

Two Business Models

Key to developing your own wedding photography style is understanding the various methods of pricing wedding photography. The price structure you choose is what motivates you to shoot certain types of images and to work in different styles throughout the day. For example, are you shooting to generate print sales, or are you shooting to provide a personal service for the bride and groom? Your answer may be determined by your personality, or by a conscious effort to adopt a certain business model.

Essentially there are two financial models for a wedding photography business. I call them the “Aftermarket Sales” business model and the “Creative Fee” business model. The one you choose determines your motivation for taking pictures, which in turn determines the type of images you create for your clients.

The Aftermarket Sales business model

A longstanding tradition in the wedding photography business, the Aftermarket Sales business model relies on a low initial fee to attract customers, with a heavy push on aftermarket sales of items such as prints, albums, frames, video slide shows, and digital image files, which serve to bring in the real profit. The typical wedding package includes the service of taking the pictures only. Afterward, clients must purchase any prints, albums, or other items for an additional fee. In general, photographers using this business model keep the negatives or digital files; otherwise, the client could make her own prints. Occasionally, these photographers sell the digital files, but they often charge a hefty price for them to compensate for the loss in print sales.

Clients know they’re purchasing the wedding photography service, but many neglect to consider the fact that after the wedding is over, they will have nothing physical to show for the money they’ve spent, unless they spend a substantial additional amount. These clients are initially happy because they’ve gotten such a bargain on their photographer, and their thought is that they’ll just buy a few prints after the wedding. But when they go to place an order and discover that the few prints they want will cost another \$1,000, they start to grumble. With this model, it is not unusual for clients to be surprised at the high cost of the additional prints and then end up spending more on these aftermarket items than what they originally spent on the photography fee.

Photographers who use this model are not out to cheat anyone; they just know that human nature makes us all suckers for a low price; and with all the competition photographers face, any little thing one can do to lower the price or give the appearance of having a low price, helps to draw in more business. This method can be highly effective if there are many other photographers in your area in the same price bracket and you don’t have anything in particular that differentiates you from the crowd.

When shooting in a traditional style with the Aftermarket Sales business model in mind, photographers are looking for images that the couple may want to purchase to frame or put into albums (see Figure 2-1). Such traditional-style prints include and are often limited to shots of the bride and groom, their families, and group shots of the wedding party. Of course, the couple may also purchase many loose prints in smaller sizes to give as gifts to family and friends, but with this limited number of purchases in mind, it doesn't take much experience for a photographer to get a feel for the types of images clients want to buy and then shoot only those — thus limiting the types of images a couple receives to the types of images a photographer believes they may actually want to pay for.

In combination with these factors is the fact that you, the photographer, will quickly develop a feel for how much you think each client can afford to spend. If you know the client has an unlimited budget, then the quantity and variety of the images may be unlimited. However, many clients are attracted to the Aftermarket Sales business model because they are working with a limited budget. If you know this, then there is little motivation for you to create anything that you know they can't afford to buy.



Figure 2-1: Traditional-style images are not found; the photographer creates them.

The Creative Fee business model

With the Creative Fee business model, photographers charge the full amount of the entire sale up front. The client pays for the photographer's service, and the photographer typically delivers images on a set of DVDs or a small USB drive that the clients can keep and print in any quantity they like as long as it is for personal, noncommercial use. The "creative fee" pays for the photographer's talent, overhead, business expenses, and everything else that the photographer needs to make in order to stay in business and make the desired profit. Because the finished product is frequently a full-resolution set of images, when the photographer delivers the image set to the client, it may be accompanied by a good-bye handshake or hug. After that day, the photographer and client may never speak again unless the client orders an album or custom prints, and these items may also be purchased from other photographers or graphic designers if the client chooses to do so.

The Creative Fee price structure influences what sort of images each photographer creates. For example, if you are paid a low price up front and the only remaining income is generated from print sales, then there is no motivation to take a shot unless you think it might generate print sales (see Figure 2-2). You may take a few extra shots just to be nice, but you are not required or motivated to put any effort into anything unless you think it will sell.



Figure 2-2: Cute moments like this are of little value to a photographer who is concerned with print sales.