

“Questions To Ask Wedding Photographers...”

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STYLES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Professional wedding photography today falls into one of three general categories—it does not matter whether it is digital or medium format, black & white or color. This is one of the most important things to consider—many photographers may not have the experience or the necessary equipment to emphasize the style you prefer.

- 1) **TRADITIONAL / FORMAL PHOTOGRAPHY:** Wedding photography usually always includes this—for example full-length photos of the bride & groom and posing & arranging groups and families. Professional studio lighting & backgrounds may be used for individuals and smaller groups—with this style of photography you will need a more experienced and usually more expensive photographer. For sanctuary photos experienced photographers usually use tripods and slower shutter speeds, along with umbrella reflectors or soft boxes for dimensional lighting—this minimizes distracting shadows and dark backgrounds which otherwise are common when hand-holding a camera with an “on-camera” flash. There can be huge differences in the quality of these pictures—always ask to see samples of photos of the full wedding party in the sanctuary. Are backgrounds excessively dark or are there distracting shadows? Are people arranged in a pleasing manner?
- 2) **CANDID PHOTOGRAPHY:** This style has also been around for a long time—photos using stained glass windows, the unity candle, silhouettes, etc. Can be very elegant and classical in look, the key in distinguishing this style is that the photographer is “arranging” or composing the photo and the people in the photos are usually “reacting” to the photographer. Elegant candid photography using studio lighting and backgrounds, stylized by trend-setting professional photographers became very trendy in the late 80’s and continues to be popular today. Black & white or sepia tinting are often used in candid photography and the quality can be very high.
- 3) **WEDDING PHOTOJOURNALISM / EDITORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY:** An unobtrusive perspective capturing the real moments as they happen—a more documentary style with no formal posing. Often emphasizes black & white photography but that is not the key to being photojournalistic—what is important is that it is not directed or “arranged” by the photographer. When someone is looking at the camera they are “reacting” and it is not true photojournalism. Even though many photographers today say they are photojournalists less than 5% of wedding photographers actually qualify for membership in the Wedding Photojournalist Association (WPJA). More information can be found at their website at www.wpja.org. Just because something is B&W does not necessarily mean that it is “photojournalistic.”

★ A special note about **Black & White Photography**... Most often associated with photo-journalism but can be used in traditional and candid settings as well. Some photographers shoot B&W film, others shoot color and have it printed on B&W paper. For digital photographers any photo can be printed in B&W—or sepia, or just about any other effect, so this is becoming less of an issue today.

- In sample sanctuary pictures... are backgrounds excessively dark or are there distracting shadows?**
- Are arrangements of individuals and groups pleasing?**
- Do you have the option of having pictures printed in black & white? Is there an additional cost?**

PHOTOGRAPHER BASICS

- How long have they been photographing weddings?** *Experience* and *Reputation* cannot be underestimated.
- Do they provide referrals? Can you see actual samples of their work?** Remember that studio samples may have been taken by a different photographer.
- Does the photographer/studio have adequate business liability insurance?** What happens if someone at the reception trips over a tripod?

- Does the photographer use a photo assistant or a second photographer?** This is usually an additional expense but can make the photography go faster and smoother, and in the case of a second photographer things that happen are not missed when backgrounds are being set up or when formal portraits are being taken.
- Does the photographer allow family members or others to take photographs at the same time?** Many professional photographers do not allow this and it can be a big issue for them. Be sure and ask ahead of time!
- How does the photographer interact with the wedding party?** Does the photographer wear a tuxedo—or a tweed suit or sweater? Does he or she interact with the wedding party as if he or she is a part of it? Or is the photographer quiet and distant, staying in the background?
- Does the photographer adapt to the desires and styles that the Bride & Groom want?** Or does he or she only fit the Bride & Groom into his or her style of photography?
- Does the photographer keep current by attending workshops, seminars or classes to learn new techniques and trends?**

TIMING - BEFORE OR AFTER THE CEREMONY?

- Are the formal photographs taken before or following the ceremony?**

Today the vast majority of formal professional wedding photography takes place before the ceremony. This has numerous advantages, but most importantly it ultimately allows the Bride & Groom to spend more time with their guests. Many photographers and studios turn down weddings where the bride & groom don't want to see each other before the ceremony, or they charge an extra fee; weddings like this can mean extra work and stress for the photographer. But the final decision must rest with the Bride & Groom, for it is their day and their wishes must be honored. If most or all of the group photos are taken after the ceremony you must allow enough time--for most weddings plan on 1-2 hours.

- ➔ **Taking formal photos before the ceremony** (bride & groom together): *Advantages:* allows for more time with guests (between the ceremony and reception; usually is less stressful; more efficient in use of time--allows for larger number of total photos; easier to have a "send-off" to the reception. Emphasizes the differences between before and after--more variety *Disadvantages:* breaking family tradition; against one's personal feelings.
- ➔ **Taking formal photos after the ceremony** (bride & groom not seeing each other): *Advantages:* family tradition; personal feelings. *Disadvantages:* takes time away from guests; usually less photography time and thus fewer pictures; can be more stressful for bride & groom; for many photographers there is an additional cost.

FORMAT

- What type of camera does the photographer use--35mm, Medium Format (120mm) or Digital?**

1. **MEDIUM FORMAT:** The vast majority of "Professional" wedding photographers for many years have used medium format or 120mm cameras, such as Hasselblad, Mamiya or Bronica. 120mm film has advantages: the image is three to five times the size of a 35mm negative so they can be enlarged to large sizes with less grain, and the negatives can be retouched (usually at an added charge). The drawbacks to using medium format are also significant: the cameras, film and processing are all more expensive, and these costs ultimately must be passed down to you. Medium format cameras are bulky, slower and more difficult to use compared with 35mm cameras, and as a result photographers tend to take fewer photographs (although at a higher quality which is noticeable in very large enlargements). They also tend to follow the more "formal" and "candid" style of photography; these cameras do not work as well for a photo-journalistic style. Fewer professional photographers are using this format today.
2. **35mm:** Professional 35mm wedding photography using a SLR camera in recent years have been much more common, especially as the image quality of professional films and photo-processing improved. 35mm can be much better for candid or photo-journalistic photography--they are quicker and more economical to use. 35mm negatives cannot be retouched but as we move into the digital age this is not a significant disadvantage for most people. Today you can easily get enlargements up to 8x10 with virtually no loss of image quality and in most cases up to 11x14 enlargements will be fine. If you are not into 16x20 or larger wall portraits than this format can be right for you.
3. **DIGITAL:** Today many if not most professional wedding photographers have made the switch to digital cameras--especially those emphasizing editorial or photo-journalistic styles of photography. The advantages of digital are numerous... Any photo can be color or black & white--you don't have to shoot both color and black & white film. Digital files can be printed on traditional photo paper or ink-jet or dye-sublimation, along with the option of e-mail and web-based delivery--all viable options at an affordable cost. There are significant

differences between digital cameras—professional models will capture better flesh tones, and many of the better photographers have switched to shooting RAW images instead of JPEG for improved image quality.

The bottom line... today's professional digital cameras made by Nikon and Canon are equal and may even surpass the image quality of medium format cameras—2005 & 2006 saw more significant changes to the world of photography than the previous 75 years! When meeting a photographer be sure to see actual samples of their work to determine if the quality meets your expectations. TECHNOLOGY IN ITSELF NEVER GUARANTEES HIGH QUALITY WORKMANSHIP--it is the person behind the viewfinder who will make the final difference! More and more people are shooting weddings today as a result of digital photography; unfortunately many people still feel that "getting the right camera" is the answer to being a great photographer; instead we should realize that a great photographer should be able to take great photographs with any kind of camera, and this is where the emphasis rightly should be.

EQUIPMENT

- What kind of cameras and flash equipment does the photographer use?** 35mm cameras (both film and digital) can range from very high-quality 'professional' to moderate 'prosumer' and lower quality amateur models.
- Does the photographer have back-up cameras and flashes?** THIS SHOULD BE AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY!
- If Digital, what added precautions does the photographer use for file storage or transfer?**
- If Digital, does the photographer shoot RAW or JPEG? What is the reason—do they know the differences?**
- Does the photographer use a tripod with slow flash exposures in order to balance the flash and ambient or room lighting?** This prevents the background from photographing too dark and de-emphasizes shadows, making the photograph look more natural. THIS SHOULD BE AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY!
- Does the photographer use Soft-Focus or other Special-Effect Filters?** Using film... a good soft-focus filter can remove or de-emphasize facial lines and blemishes in portraits. If used poorly, they can make a photograph look out-of-focus. Photographers using digital cameras, however, usually do not use filters on the camera.
- Does the photographer own, rent or borrow the equipment?** This can determine how comfortable and knowledgeable he or she is with it. There is nothing worse than a photographer who does not know how to properly use the equipment.

TIME LIMITS & EXTRA MILEAGE CHARGES

If the photographer begins two or three hours before the ceremony and stays for the beginning of the dance, time can be a very significant factor. If there is no dance, or if the reception is not a high priority--then this is not an important factor.

- Are there additional charges for time beyond typical package limits?**
- Is there a mileage charge for locations outside of the Twin Cities metro area?**

OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY

- Is there a charge for additional photography locations?**

The best wedding albums usually have a variety of backgrounds and locations, both at and away from the church. Some photographers, though, charge extra for additional locations. If this is the case use the professional photographer for the photos that are critical and have friends or family take photographs later at the reception or dance.

Weather permitting, most weddings provide excellent opportunities for a variety of background settings. One option is to pick a location that has some special meaning to the Bride & Groom (along a river or in a particular park, for example). Usually all that is necessary are trees for shade and a non-distracting background. Direct sunlight and wind are the most difficult outdoor elements to deal with. In case of bad weather there is also the option of going to an indoor area such as International Market Square, Town Square, or the courtyards of many Twin City hotels.

STUDIO / PORTRAIT LIGHTING & BACKGROUNDS

Many churches are very photographic, with many different locations with a variety of backgrounds. If the weather is favorable, photos can always be taken outside. But what if the weather is not cooperative? Or the church and reception hall does not have a wall without something

distracting hanging on it? A canvas or muslin background can offer an additional background option--this works especially nice with families and formal photographs.

- Does the photographer have the option of a canvas or muslin background available? Does the photographer use a studio or portrait lighting system?** Are there an additional charges?
- Can the photographer take photos of other families, groups or individuals (time permitting)?** When distant or extended families or college groups are together and dressed appropriately—it can be a good opportunity to take additional photos for those who may desire them.

PROOF BOOK

- Do the Bride & Groom receive a proof-book? What size?** (3½ x 5, 4 x 5, 4 x 6 or 5 x 5?)
- Is there a deposit or any additional cost to keep them?**
- Are photographs available to view and order online? How long will they be available?**

Some studios use video proofs or slide presentations instead of proof books, others may use computer / on-line ordering. Make sure you know up-front exactly what the restrictions and expectations are. As we become a more digitally based society there are advantages for being able to view or order on-line--especially when friends or relatives may be all over the world. Photographers who host their own websites sometimes can have lower reprint/enlargement costs than others who use big-name online hosting services which can have significant hosting costs which must be passed on to you the consumer.

ALBUMS

- Do you want the studio or photographer to give you a finished album--or do you want to take the photographs and create your own album?**

There are many decisions to make regarding albums... Pin-hinge or library-post? Lacquer finishes? Embossing or laminating? Parents' Albums? Some brides and grooms are comfortable and capable to put together their own albums but most are not. As with the proof book be sure to find out all of your options.

PRICING

This is perhaps one of the most important questions to ask. 8"x10" enlargements usually range anywhere from \$10 to \$30 or more per enlargement. Please remember that an inexpensive package can become very costly when all the additional orders are added up.

- What are the costs for reprints and enlargements? Textures or UV inhibitor finishes?**

No matter what is sprayed or laminated over a photograph, sunlight and fluorescent lighting in particular will fade the colors over even shorter periods of time. If you take care of your albums and enlargements, however, they should last many years with little noticeable change in appearance.

ORDERS & DEADLINES

- Is there a time limit on keeping the proof book or video and in placing photo orders?**
- When orders are placed, how long will it take for them to be finished?**
- Are there pricing deadlines on orders?** For example, a set price for orders placed within thirty days and a higher price for orders placed after thirty days.

THE NEGATIVES OR DIGITAL FILES

- Do you have the option of buying or getting the negatives or digital files?**
- How long are the negatives retained?**

In the past several years this has become much more important to clients—primarily because of the advent of digital photography. Legally, the studio or photographer owns the negatives unless there is a subsequent transaction specifically transferring their ownership. Over the years the vast majority of photographers have retained the negatives for several reasons.

- 1) Negatives when taken to inferior photo processors will yield lower-quality prints—which is a poor reflection on the photographer. As a result most better photographers are hesitant to give up control of their negatives. As photography moves digital this still can be an issue—high-quality digital photos printed on actual photographic paper will look and feel much better than prints from a \$100 ink-jet printer...
- 2) Photographers or studios can derive a high percentage of their income from reprint sales which they would give up if they did not retain the negatives or digital files.

Today more and more photographers are offering digital files for their customers—primarily because of digital photography and increased competition. In addition there are more 'new' photographers who will offer packages that include negatives or digital files because they are less experienced or the quality warrants that this needs to be a selling point. Others, primarily because of time or staffing issues will be more willing to either include or sell them to you—usually after a set time period, one or two years after the wedding for example. It is up to you to work these things out ahead of time, remembering that wedding photographers traditionally can be some of the most set-in-the-way or inflexible people you will ever meet...

It comes back to the first question at the beginning of this brochure—*Experience* and *Reputation* cannot be underestimated; it doesn't matter who has the negatives if the photographic experience was less-than-desired.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Is there a Contract? What are the deposits to hold the wedding date? When are payments due?**
- Accept Credit Cards?**

In today's society it is in your best interest to have a signed contract, one which covers all the details. This is especially important with a newer photographer or someone who does not have an established reputation. Credit cards can also give you a level of protection in case services are not rendered but there is also the added cost of this to consider.

GUARANTEES

- What are the conditions for a partial or full refund?**

What are the guarantees in professional wedding photography? If the unthinkable happens—film is stolen or critical equipment breaks down at the worst time—the most that can usually be done is the full return of your payments, and any reputable photographer would do this. The legal liability for virtually every processing lab if they make a mistake is only the replacement cost of the film—nothing for the intrinsic value of the images themselves. Just like anything else in life there are no absolute guarantees that something cannot go wrong—another reason to go with someone who has a good reputation... and back-up cameras!

What if something happens to your photographer before or on the way to the wedding? A prominent wedding photography association suggests when choosing wedding photographers to make sure that the photographer has a "ready replacement" who can photograph your wedding. I would hope that every photographer would make every attempt possible to find another photographer when time permits. But this statement on the association's website unfortunately creates the expectation that photographers should have another equally qualified photographer ready to step in at the last moment. Of course this is unrealistic—virtually every good wedding photographer will want to be photographing weddings—if they are merely backing up another photographer how will they be make a good living. And this also assumes that every photographer or studio uses the same styles, techniques, etc. Having a photo-assistant who also takes pictures is a good option—but they should drive separately and have their own equipment. Just remember that whenever there is a second person taking pictures or arrangements made for backups, this can often substantially increase the cost of the photography.

Do your homework and then make your best decision.