

# A Photographer's Dreams...

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This is my "wish list" of all the little things I wish every bride and groom would do to help make the photos better. These are not hard and fast rules by any means - just suggestions from someone that's been there.

## **1. Tips for Group Photos**

Group photos are not required but they seem to be a necessary part of almost every wedding. If possible, plan your groups for an outside location with enough shade to cover your largest group. Avoid places where there are distracting backgrounds and make sure everyone is in the shade. While you're thinking about groups - make a list of who is in each shot. Having a list makes everything go so much smoother. Tell all your relatives (in advance) that they should be there at a certain time, then tell them again on the wedding day. Waiting for the missing person is the only thing that keeps group shots from taking more than about 20 minutes. If you want to do groups indoors, please warn me days in advance so that I will know to bring the necessary lighting equipment and have it all set up on time.

## **2. Make Time for Pictures**

Plan on spending at LEAST 1/2 hour shooting couple portraits. Ideally, that time should BEGIN about 20 minutes before the sun goes below the horizon and then last another 20 minutes or so afterwards. I would consider 20 minutes to be the absolute minimum for this photo shoot. If you can plan more time... the more the better. This is especially true if you are getting married in a location that has a lot of variety with different locations for us to move around in. Dramatic backgrounds are great for this photo shoot but many things will work.... a forest, field of flowers, old buildings, barns, rocky riversides, meadow, city streets, college campus, city park, etc. Please don't plan your couple portraits for the middle of the day unless you absolutely have to. Early morning and late evening light have the best light and mid day is the worst.

## **3. Decorate the Bride's Dressing Room**

This almost always gets overlooked in the planning and decorating phase. First start by picking a room with some ROOM. One with lots of natural light. And use light gauzy fabrics over the windows instead of thick curtains or shutters that cut out all the light. Having nothing on the windows looks almost as bad as too much. Decorate the girls dressing room just as carefully as you would any other part of the wedding location. And cover up anything ugly with curtains or drape cloth. Have your girls clean up all the non-wedding messes like piles of blue jeans and tennis shoes or other clothing that are not wedding related clothing. Don't try to make it look too neat. Messes are ok if they are wedding messes. Empty boxes and bags should be placed somewhere outside the dressing room. It looks wonderful to have all the dresses hanging around and shoes lying around on the floor, but they look awful if they are still in the box or if they have piles of plastic wrappers and cardboard boxes lying next to them. Flowers also look much better in some sort of vases instead of the cardboard boxes the florist packed them in.

## **4. Lighting the Girls Dressing Room**

If you have no window light, think romance! Get creative. Try lots of candles or little christmas lights placed on and under things. You can't have too much window light. However, you should try to avoid having direct sunlight streaming into the windows. If you have direct sun, pick some curtains that are a little thicker to diffuse it. You can also put light cotton cloth over the outside of the window in order to cut down the direct sun. Or better yet, pick a room with windows facing north so you don't have problems with direct sunlight at all.

## 5. Photos in the Dressing Room

If you are self conscious or modest, of course we will leave the room whenever you ask, but personally I don't see what all the fuss is about. Some of the best images from the entire wedding happen in the dressing room and especially when the dress is actually going over the bride's head with all the bridesmaids helping to get it on. If you have your photographer wait outside when this is happening you will miss one of the most beautiful (and important) events of the entire day. Remember, with photography, its easy to delete things later, but its impossible to turn back time and do it again. Will the dressing pictures show up on my website? My policy is this... if it shows more than what could be seen if you were in a swimsuit, then I would never show it. Nobody will see nude or partially nude shots but you and your husband. I could even put them on a separate disk so that they don't go to the lab accidentally - whatever you want, just try to figure out a way that we can get photos in the dressing room.

## 6. Light the Reception

Personally I do not like having a black background for dancing photos. A little bit of light in the background makes a huge difference. Christmas lights and hanging bulbs and rope lights all look good in the background especially if you hang them just above head high. If you are having an outdoor reception, placing your dance floor under a tent will make a world of difference because we can bounce our flash up into the tent roof and make a much more even light than what we would get with direct flash. A tent also gives you a structure to hang the small lights in the roof which create a mellow warm background light. Outdoors... paper lanterns are beautiful and mason jars with candles inside look wonderful hanging in the trees.



## 7. Moving Strobe Lights on the Dance Floor

If you hire a DJ and they use moving spot lights, every place where that light is hitting will be WAY brighter than the rest of the image. And since the lights are usually moving rapidly it is impossible for me to calculate them into my exposure. This ruins many of the dancing photos and there is nothing I can do about it except shoot a strong flash to overpower the disco lights. The bad news is that if I shoot a strong flash, then the background goes black. I prefer to get some room light showing in the dance photos by using less flash, so if you can have the DJ cut the disco lights or use constant colored lights that don't move, that would be a big help. Lights that throw colors or patterns on the wall or roof are great but ideally you would not let them hit the crowd.



This is a great example of what disco lights can do to an otherwise good image.

## **8. Videographer Spot Lights**

Videographers often use a bright spotlight while filming at the reception. This light basically has the same effect as the moving disco lights and it will ruin many good images. I can occasionally use this light to my advantage and get some great photos out of it, but in general, it will do more harm than good for me. And unfortunately the videographer will only turn on this light when something important is happening. So for example, when you get ready to throw your flowers, I get myself all set up for the shot and then right before you throw, the videographer turns on his spotlight and totally changes the light. It's almost impossible for me to recalculate everything before the moment is gone.

## **9. Throwing Flowers**

Don't rush through this part... take a minute to play with your crowd. This gives us time to get a shot of you holding the flowers and looking back over your shoulder at all the gang getting lined up. Before you throw, I recommend chasing off all the little kids because they are quick little rascals and they will almost always beat your bridesmaids and friends out of the flowers. Now look up and make sure you don't have anything low like lights and ceiling fans that are going to intercept your flowers before they get to the crowd. When you throw, be ready to call for a do-over if it doesn't go as planned. Many times I have seen it go bad. One time I was standing beside the groom and he somehow managed to turn far enough around to shoot me in the back of the head with the garter, then it fell to the ground and a little kid grabbed it and ran off. If something strange like that happens, please call for a do-over and try it again.

## **10. Dance to the Photographer**

During the formal dances like the first dance or the father daughter dance you should ignore us completely. However, late in the evening when we come around to shoot the fun dancing shots, it would be wonderful if you and your wedding party would occasionally turn and dance facing a little bit towards us. Otherwise we get a lot of dancing pictures with your backside showing. Don't worry about doing this a lot - but once in a while.... if you just turn and show off for the camera a little, the pictures usually turn out really good.



## 11. Feed the Photographers

Did you know it is customary to feed the photographers? You may not feed some wedding vendors that are only there for a short time, but we won't survive a 9 or 10 hour day without dinner. We don't normally shoot constantly during mealtime but we do shoot some and we will almost always have the camera close at hand in case anything interesting happens. If you could seat us about 20 feet from your own table that would be the perfect distance to get candid shots of you and your bridal party at the table. If the meal is buffet style, we usually eat near the end of the line, but if you want to run off and shoot portraits while your guests are finishing dinner, make sure to warn us in advance and we can eat at the same time you do so that we're all ready to go take pictures at the same time.



## **12. Putting on the Rings**

This is one of the most difficult shots to get for a wedding photographer because most couples are not aware of the fact that they are blocking it either with their hand positions or with their bodies. To turn this moment into a great photo opportunity, all you need to remember is that as you are putting the ring on, you hold the ring so that your fingers are on the top and bottom instead of on the sides of the ring. This turns your hand so that the ring is visible from the sides and now your photographer and your guests can see it go on. Another thing to avoid is putting your free hand out and grabbing your partner's wrist so that you can push that ring on there better. If you feel it is necessary to do this, try putting your hand UNDER your partner's hand and grabbing on from below. This keeps your wrist down below so it doesn't block the shot. Practice this a couple of times and you will see that it is possible to put the rings on while still leaving the sides open to a clear shot for your photographer, and a great view for your guests.

## **13. Lighting the Unity Candles**

These are usually placed at the back of the altar. However, this arrangement guarantees that you alone will witness the event because your backs will be to the audience and the candles will be hidden completely. Consider placing the candles out on the side of the altar so that you can stand facing the crowd when you light them. This gives your photographers a much better chance of getting a shot and it allows your guests to see what you are doing.

## **14. Videographers**

Some inexperienced videographers will occasionally get right up in the middle of the altar area during the ceremony. If you don't want their backside to show up in all your pictures, please tell them to stay at least 15 feet away during the ceremony. I've actually seen these guys standing right between the bride and groom during the whole ceremony with a wide angle lens. They could get the same shot from 15 feet if they used a telephoto lens. Tell them to stay back and to be aware of where the photographers are so that they don't block all the shots of any event. I've also seen videographers that would watch to see what I was shooting and if they liked it, they would step in front of me to get their own shot. Make sure to tell them to watch for where the still photographers are so we don't get in each other's way. It's probably also best to specify very clearly as to which one of us has the highest priority for you. And if you don't want to worry about this at all, ask your photographer to recommend a videographer that he/she has worked well with in the past.

## **15. Sunburn**

If you happen to be a white-skinned north-american type like me, and you go off to your caribbean wedding destination a week in advance, you should be extremely aware of staying out of the sun before the big day. Save the suntanning until after the wedding. All too often I've seen brides that got burned in the week before the wedding and were extremely upset to have peeling skin or bright red tan lines on the wedding day.

## **16. Caribbean Attire**

When you plan the clothing for your Caribbean wedding you might want to take the temperature into account. It might be hard to imagine if you're buying your outfits in New York in the dead of winter, but that nice thick black wool jacket and poofy wedding dress will cause you a great deal of discomfort when you're standing on the beach in Jamaica with the bright sun beating down on your head. I've seen grooms that looked like they were going to pass out at any second, and brides that refused to budge from in front of the air conditioner. Dressing light should be foremost in your mind when you plan your wedding for a hot climate. Silk, Cotton and Linen are preferred fabrics in hot climates.

## A Short Story.....

I was shooting a wedding where the bride and groom purchased a “package” wedding from a large resort. The package came with a minister and a videographer and all 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 normal photojournalistic thing in the dressing rooms and then we did a few low key family groups outside. Then the videographer arrived! This man was the exact opposite of photojournalistic, and everyone (including me) was amazed as he stepped up with a loud voice and just took over the reigns 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, when to smile at the camera and then back at the videographer. Every little move was dictated by these two men. They were even 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 over at the bar but he came charging back waving his hands and yelling STOP! - which of course everyone did. Then he physically grabbed the groom by the shoulders and placed him on one side of the dance floor, and the bride on the other, then hand grabbed up his camera and motioned for the DJ to start the music again - which he did.

Only a few weeks before that I saw another bride in the Bahamas that stopped all that nonsense right in the beginning. She told them how it was going to be done and if they didn't want to do it her way they could just pack it up right now! The officiant initially refused to comply until she asked her dad to escort him off the premises and he quickly changed his tune. Then she proceeded to have a very quiet ceremony that went just exactly the way she wanted, with no interruptions.

The moral to the story.... Lead, or be led!

That's right girls, you either have to take charge of how you want your wedding to go or someone else will do it for you. If you want your wedding vendors to take charge, say so. If you want your wedding vendors to obey your wishes and work on the sidelines, make it clear.

Those two very different experiences started me to thinking about how those of us in the wedding business go about our business. I've been noticing how often we photographers and videographers and sometimes even ministers, forget to honor the sacredness of the wedding. We see a new wedding every weekend, sometimes two or three in a weekend, and we forget that for the bride and groom, this is the first and hopefully the only time they will ever experience it. Our familiarity makes us good at what we do, but it also eventually wears away our perception of the sacredness of the event, and before long a wedding is simply another day at work, so we herd our clients through the paces to get it over with.

Make it clear how you want your wedding vendors to act during the ceremony and other sensitive events like the first dance. Don't assume that they will behave in a certain way.

And just in case you couldn't guess, if you hire me, you can bet I'll be as discreet as possible while getting your pictures, and I won't try to take over unless you ask me to - usually only for the group photos.

That's it for now, I'm sure I'll think of something new to add after the next wedding.