



Photo (this page): Elizabeth Messina Photography; (opposite page): Todd Nichols Photography

SMILE *for* The CAMERA

Say “I do” to the right photographer

By Julie Wilson

As a bride-to-be, you remember that feeling – the “a-ha” moment when you just knew he was the one for you. His personality spoke volumes, and you felt completely at ease with him. You were ready to take the plunge.

To hire him as your wedding day photographer.

Finding your wedding photographer can be a lot like discovering your soul mate. “Finding the right photographer is a little like finding the right man,” admitted renowned wedding photographer Elizabeth Messina, who was named one of the top 10 wedding photographers in the world by American Photo in 2008. “You may have to look at a few before you find the perfect fit.”

How Well Do You Click?

So why all the seriousness? I mean, they’re taking photos, not performing surgery. True, but think about it. Your wedding photographer will be there with you all day ... ALL day. Everything you experience will be captured by their camera. “I don’t think people realize how intimate of a job this is,” said Sarah Alair Bible, owner of Sarah Alair Photography in Winchester. “I get there when [the bride] is in sweatpants. I’m in there when she may cry, when she’s happy.”

Because of this level of intimacy, it’s important for you to find a photographer that you’re comfortable with. That’s why Bible recommends you listen to your gut. “If you feel any awkwardness, any red flag, really take that into consideration,” she said.

Ian Lozada, who does double duty in New York and Kentucky as owner of Ian Lozada Wedding Photography, feels that personality really is



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the key to making a decision on a photographer. “I’m going to spend more time on your wedding day with you than your future husband,” he said. “If the person you engage as your wedding photographer rubs you the wrong way, it’s going to show up in your pictures.”

And sometimes it’s the photographer who feels the connection, or lack thereof. “I know right off, as soon as I do the first consultation,” said Todd Nichols, owner of Todd Nichols Photography in Louisville. “Right then and there, I know if we’re going to be a perfect fit or not.”

Photography really is an emotional medium, and it’s the couple’s reaction that gives Nichols some insight into their feelings. “When reviewing my slideshow, if they’re not getting excited at that point, I pretty much know,” he said.

The initial meeting with a photographer usually takes about 30-40 minutes, but even in that short amount of time, you should know if you’re ready to commit.

However, Bible recommends not signing on the dotted line just yet. “Don’t make a decision right then and there,” she said. “They’re talking to me, they’re nervous. I don’t know if they’re really seeing, really looking. Look at more of their photos online.” Unless, of course, you’ve chosen a very popular date as your wedding day. Then, you’ll want to contract with your first choice as soon as possible.

And although this may seem like a “duh” moment, look through the entire wedding of a photographer, not just the highlight reel. “What we put on our Web site or blog, it’s the best of the wedding,” admitted Bible. “With any photographer, you should ask to see the whole wedding. You need to look at everything.”

So if you think you’ve found your photographer and you’ve only seen photos from outdoor weddings, simply ask to see photos from a church ceremony if that’s what you have planned.

Grace Under Fire

It doesn’t hurt either when your photographer can also handle the role of mediator. The family dynamics that play into your wedding day can often stabilize with the help of an unbiased professional, and that means your photographer needs to have a bold yet pleasant personality – no wallflowers need apply. “Photographers, compared to other self-owned businesses, is one segment where you get a lot of introverts,” said Lozada. “Part of my job is to have people skills to help manage situations for the bride ... very gently.”

Take a recent wedding of Bible’s, for instance. “I had a wedding in Chicago where the wedding coordinator pulled me aside and said ‘The groom’s parents informed me that they don’t want to be in any photos with the bride.’ So your job is to negotiate that,” said Bible. “So the bride went to the bathroom and I fired off pictures of the groom with his Dad and Mom. There’s always going to be family drama.”



Photo Finish

A photographer's visual style vs. what you have in mind also plays a large role in whether you two will be a perfect match.

"I think wedding images in part should have a timeless feel to them," said Messina. "If there is some new cool style you like, it should be more of an accent to the coverage."




Because what's trendy today certainly won't be the same as 10, 15 years down the road. Just look at the recent shift in what's currently in style. "In the last 8 or 9 years, it was all about black and white," said Bible. "But in the last 3-4 years, people have been coming back to loving color."

Photojournalism came into fashion several years ago and still remains popular. It's an organic approach, explained Lozada. And now brides are wanting to remember their wedding day as more of a fashion shoot, like something they would see in a magazine. "I'm seeing more of a high-end fashion look," said Nichols, "along with an editorial style that captures the details, emotions and story of the day."

But this is usually in addition to, not instead of, the more traditional shots. "If I was hiring a photographer for my wedding, to appease everyone in the family,




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I'd want about 20% posed shots," said Bible. "Even though they're not your favorite, you still need those 'Everyone look in the camera and smile' photos."

No matter what you choose, it needs to complement your style. "My wedding photographer took the exact same wedding pictures that he probably took two other times that same day," admitted Lozada. "It wasn't about our vision of the wedding; it was about his. It was an assembly line."

By the Book

The wedding day is over, but the memories will last forever, so it's important to create an album with just as much passion as when you chose your photographer.

"I love being a part of the design process," said Messina. "Good editing can really help tell a story of a couple's wedding day."

And much of that editing happens on the actual wedding day... in the mind of your photographer. "As an artist, at their wedding, I'm always thinking 'This is going to make a great transition in their album,'" said Bible. "I think of it as a piece of artwork."

This artist's frame of mind is what makes for a good album, so most couples leave the album planning to the photographer.

Instead of the "drop the photo in the slot" versions of days past, today's albums are more like coffee table books (technically known as flush mount albums). "They go extremely well with today's photojournalistic style," said Nichols.

And unlike albums of the past, you don't have to put them under glass to keep them safe. "We make whatever we sell 'Declan-proof,'" joked Lozada, who, with three kids (including son Declan), knows the "destruction your future children are capable of."

However, some couples are into designing their own wedding albums. If this is the case for you, work with your photographer, who can recommend some reputable online sites where you can design your own album. However, you need the photos to work with first. "You need to make sure you have the ability to buy the whole CD of images," said Bible. "Some photographers don't even sell them at all."

So if it's important to you to make your own wedding album, make sure the photographer you've set your sights on hiring for your wedding offers a CD of images for you to purchase – and that you receive the usage rights with purchase.



This page, photos by: Ian Lozada Photography (top) and Sarah Alair Photography (bottom); opposite page: Ian Lozada Photography

A Double Shot

From the flowers to the bridesmaids' dresses, you've put your heart into the overall design of your wedding, and you want to remember every detail. So will one photographer suffice?

You and your photographer should make the decision together whether a second shooter is required. Some of the determining factors:

- Are you OK with seeing each other before the wedding?
- How many guests do you expect?
- How long will your wedding be?

If the bride and groom are in two separate locations, this is when Bible will ask the couple to consider a second shooter. "If I'm alone, I have no chance to do any guy shots and there are a lot of details I miss – their arrival, flowers, empty pews," said Bible.

She also feels more comfortable with having a second shooter if the guest list is more than 100 people. Without one, the couple needs to realize there won't be as many guest shots.

For Nichols, a team perspective is important. "I don't want to have a lot of photographers running around like paparazzi," he said. So he'll split the duties – he'll focus on the bride and his second will focus on the families during the ceremony to capture the raw emotions, for example.

And if it comes down to a budget matter, Bible tries to show the pros and cons. If there's a second shooter, that photographer can provide a great deal of detail shots – something you have invested a great deal of money into and want to remember in your photos.

She also explains that at a large wedding, no photographer can be as "on" as they were at the beginning of the day, and this is where a second shooter comes in handy. "At the end of an 8-hour day, I'm really tired," admitted Bible. "There's no way I can be as fresh at the end of the day as I would be with an assistant helping me."

Here's a secret straight from Bible to help out with that: "Feed your photographer!" she laughed. But seriously, "People forget," she said, "even the sweetest brides forget." Nothing extravagant, just a simple boxed lunch to keep them going.

Get Engaged

There's no trial run for your wedding day, but an engagement session with your photographer can serve as a bonding experience to keep your

wedding day stress-free. "If I've done an engagement session, I get a feel for what they're like," said Bible. "They can tell me what they don't like about themselves – most girls don't like their arms – and you get to talk about that without your family staring at you."

Although engagement sessions are a completely different animal, it creates a bond between photographer and the couple. "A 77mm eye on you, that's a scary prospect for some people," said Lozada. "We just want you to feel comfortable to understand that thing isn't going to hurt you."

"I don't think people realize how intimate of a job this is. I'm in there when she may cry, when she's happy."

An engagement session is also a great way to see how your makeup and hair will look in photos before the actual wedding day. Lozada had a bride come to an engagement session with her makeup done by her friend. "Her friend was clearly thinking 1975 photography because she came with stuff just pancaked on," he said. Luckily, the rain stopped the shoot and gave him a chance to explain how her makeup should look. "It's one reason you need a professional makeup artist, somebody who understands modern photography," said Lozada.





Couples also have the chance to express their unique personalities during an engagement shoot. “You can do engagement photos that don’t look like anyone else’s if you’re willing to take some chances,” said Lozada.

Bible suggests doing an engagement session opposite your wedding season – if it’s a spring wedding, do a fall engagement shoot for a variety of photos.

A New Filter

Just as fashion trends change, so do wedding day timelines. One of the most significant adjustments is the couple’s change of heart to see each other before the ceremony.

Messina has seen this as a great opportunity for the photographer to capture a whole other side to the couple. “I find more and more that

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“It’s important to set aside a little alone time with your photographer.”

couples are interested in taking the time to do more stylized shoots,” she said. This requires more time, so couples come together before the wedding to get the shots and give them more social time during the reception.

Locations are changing, too. Nichols sees more brides choosing to hold their ceremony in a less traditional place – her parents’ backyard! And often it’s in early spring or late fall, two uncommon seasons for a wedding.

But one trend that will never go out of style is finding a photographer who is on board with your vision. “It’s important to set aside a little alone time with your photographer,” explained Messina. “The images of a bride and groom together on their wedding day are often full of emotion and sweetness.” 



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