

Shooting for the Album

By: Jason Stratton

Remember your first wedding? What was the purpose of your photography? What were you thinking about while you were shooting? I was thinking, "WHAT DID I GET MYSELF INTO?" I was also trying to pay attention to details, posing, getting all the shots the bride and groom wanted, and trying not to look like I didn't know what the heck I was doing!

A lot changes after you've photographed quite a few weddings. You start to get a sense of what your purpose is. You begin to become aware of all that is taking place around you and it becomes a personal challenge to capture that day with more detail than any one person could remember on their own. Still, what do you think about while you are shooting? Are your shots random? Random images that attempt to get the point across? Or a story board of artistic expressions that capture the very essence of what took place? A story board that portrays the day in an almost word for word fashion?

Unfortunately even though I became comfortable with shooting weddings, my goal for the images I was capturing hadn't changed. I felt that every image needed to stand on its own, and would lament if I felt I missed the perfect shot. This way of shooting will get you that hero shot from time to time, but what about the rest of the pictures you took? Are they nothing more than expensive snapshots? What do the bride and groom do with those pictures of the bride's shoes you took? No one blows those shots up and hangs them on the wall. It begins to feel as though no one really appreciates the detail shots you so passionately capture, especially when all the family orders are the pictures of family members standing at the front of the church.

In the long run this will have a detrimental effect on your shooting style. You will pass those details by and begin to focus on nothing but group shots and reception party pics because after all those are the only ones people buy.

What if every shot mattered? What if every detail could be used to relive the day? What if that shot of the "something borrowed" brought tears to the bride's eyes because on either side of that detail shot is a picture of the grandma she borrowed it

from; pride in her face as she looks back at her granddaughter all dressed in white on the opposite page. Now, did you visualize this layout when you took the shot of "something borrowed"? I challenge you to change the way you think when shooting these simple details. Here are few suggestions that will help you create better albums that will tell the story... the FULL story in a way that each viewer can relive.

1. Don't pass up the detail shots.

Take pictures of everything around you. When you walk into a room, look around that room. What captures your attention first? Was it a brick wall, a stained glass window or a stately door? Take a picture of those things because they will ring true with the memories of everyone who walked into that room. Use those shots as layout backgrounds, textures and color swatches. It will create an environment for the viewer to relive.

2. Shoot available light shots.

This may mean that you have to go out and buy a fixed lens. If you don't have a 50mm f/1.8 lens make that your very next purchase. If you have one already then GET IT OUT of the bag. People don't remember images with a flash blasting away. They remember the way the light was falling through the windows, how the color of the stained glass washed the wedding party in reds and blues during the ceremony and how the unity candle caused a flickering yellow glow on the bride and groom's face as they lit it. These shots will look more like memories than the way a flash photo looks.

3. Create a theme in your mind.

Break your photos up into groups by theme. If you shoot a shot of the bride's feet then maybe you want to get a shot of the groom's feet as well... maybe even the whole bridal party's feet and the kid's feet. Take all these shots and make a feet layout! Another theme based on the bride's feet might be to also get a shot of her hands, ears, eyes and lips. Create a layout of detail shots of the bride. There are many ways to do this. The key is to think ahead. Don't let an image stand alone. As soon as you take one shot begin to mentally link it to other shots you have taken, or other shots you need to take.

4. Go left AND right?

Think about the pages that these images will end up on. Think of them as a room that all of your pictures will hang out in. Create an environment where people are looking at each other across the page. Don't have the bride on the left page looking across the page and the mother on the right page looking right off the page. No, you want her looking back at the bride across the page. Set yourself up so that you have to point the camera one direction to get the bride and then the opposite direction to get the mother. Put yourself in the middle of the action. Immerse yourself in the interaction between people and let your camera soak it all in. Windows are one exception to this rule. Just as someone might look out of a window in a room you might put a picture of a bride on the left page facing left looking out the window. On the right page you might put the bride's maids admiring the bride as she looks out the window. This works just as a room's environment works.

5. Shoot the fringe.

Don't just shoot what's going on immediately around the bride and groom. They will remember those events, but may not have seen the ring bearer break dancing with the maid of honor on the other side of the reception room. Don't miss out on those moments. Some of my favorite comments from the bride and groom are, "Wow, we didn't even see that happen." Those memories didn't even exist until they saw their album! That's when you know your images have real purpose... every one of them!

So, for the next wedding you shoot, start thinking about the album. Think about pages, right and left, windows, colors themes and things the bride and groom couldn't be apart of because they were busy getting ready or waiting for their queue in the back hallway. Get those shots and use them to tell a story that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

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