

WEDDING ALBUMS

Of all of the expenses of the wedding day, photography and the wedding album are often given the highest budget and therefore the highest priority. Many brides, upon receiving their diamond engagement rings will immediately start planning the day on paper (it's been planned in her heart for years already) and the choice of the wedding photographer is high on the list with location, dress, and wedding party. As photographers, we must remember that after everything settles, we have more work to do than any other vendor to ensure that the memories of the wedding day are captured and displayed just as closely as the bride imagined it. After all, the creation of the wedding album begins in the mind of the bride years before she met her Prince Charming. It is our job to get into her mind and make the dream come true.

Before the Wedding:

It is essential that you get to know your couple to create impressive images for them on their wedding day. For many photographers, this relationship begins at your initial consultation but really blooms at the engagement session. Spend time talking before and during the session, learning their story. Allow the bride to gush out all the details that the groom will allow. You will learn so much about them but more importantly they will become more comfortable around you and the camera. You want your images to capture the personality of the bride and groom and you won't see that true personality if they are not comfortable with you. Consider yourself as a close friend to them and to their marriage during this time as you may never know the impact that your images of them may have on their future as husband and wife.

The Wedding Day

On the day of the wedding you must think of yourself and your team of photographers as photojournalists *and* portrait photographers. Today's wedding photographer must have both skills mastered as the dominance of digital photography has ushered in a new generation of confident professionals who are not afraid to take upwards of 3000 images on multiple cameras at a wedding event. Many photographers will take on average one photograph every 15 seconds at a seven-hour wedding. Your images must tell the story of the day to make an impressive album. They must not only include people but all of the details that have been so carefully planned in the mind of the bride and by the budget of her parents. Keep your eyes peeled for the little details and use your skills to capture those details for use in the album as background and accent images. Be careful to collect your details during an

appropriate time slot as one eye must always be on the bride or at least the door to her room.

During the ceremony be sure to have an assistant take notes about what is being said by the minister about the couple. We make contact with the minister at every wedding and take a photograph of his or her notes and we ask that they email us the document as well. Don't count on the email though, take a picture. You can use the scriptures, quotes, and vows in the album in the ceremony layouts to create a powerful reminder of what was said along with the expressions you capture in your camera. You may also want to put song lyrics in your album design to compliment photos of the ceremony during which time the songs were playing, or being sung. Your couple may not be fond of having text in their album but give them the option and show them how it will look. Everyone needs to be reminded of their vows once in a while.

Building the Album:

After the wedding is over, don't wait long to start your pre-design. We begin designing the wedding album 2 days after the event and we work to finish it before we shoot another wedding. You want this couple and their wedding day to be fresh in your mind. It can be overwhelming to go through 1500+ images in a week and design an album but take it in steps. Here is one work flow method:

1. After downloading your images onto your work station. Make a second copy of the folder and name it "edit". Now you have 2 versions of the event. Always keep your unedited files in 2 places. If you synched your camera's clocks, the files can be arranged in chronological order. Keep them in that order so it will be easier to create an album that tells a story and flows well from page to page.
2. Go through your edit folder and delete any images that are not worth keeping – blurry, over or under exposed, eyes closed, forgot to adjust white balance, ect.
3. Now go through the edit folder again. Here are a few options on how to do this:
 - a. Divide the images by the number of layouts the couple has purchased in their package choice. Open that many images in your editing software and build your layout(s) around the best pictures in the series. Note: In order to up sell an album you must create more layouts than the client has paid for so they will want more.
 - b. Go through the entire folder and copy the best images and the important ones (ceremony, kiss, cake, limo, ect.) into a separate folder called "album". Then build your layouts around those images using the other pictures to compliment the main shots.
4. When building your album, make it the biggest size possible for the format. For example, if the couple has paid for an 8x8 album, design it as a 12x12. This creates another avenue for an up sell on size and the album company will be able to adjust the dimensions as long as the proportions are the same. You also need to make sure that all of your design elements are within the recommended margins by your album company. Each company will trim the layout on each side anywhere from 1/8" to 3/8".

You may choose to build the album in your own editing software or by using album design software. Photographers are using both methods with great results. Just remember to keep it interesting and make sure that each layout has an obvious theme. Every time the page is turned, the story unfolds. It is our goal to build an album that can tell the story of the wedding day to anyone who opens the album. We want them to feel like they were there. So many brides and their mothers are so busy and

preoccupied on the day of the wedding that they don't take it in. It is our job to see and capture everything for them so that when they look at the album, they remember some of the sights that they may have only glanced at in passing. When choosing your images, carefully consider each of them. What emotions will they evoke? Here are some key words that you want to look for in your images: joy, anticipation, happiness, relief, LOVE, future, gladness, goodness, pride (groom and fathers), adoration, excitement, fun, friendship, respect, godliness, purity, commitment, covenant, promise, innocence, admiration, wonder, beauty, and hope. Don't avoid the tears either. Many tears are shed in joy on the wedding day. Some tears are shed in the absence of a late family member. Capture this expression as well, for the memories and emotions that they are experiencing are often good memories that reflect the wonderful emotions listed above.

Once the album is finished and delivered to the bride and groom, know that you have contributed greatly not only to the preservation of the memories of their wedding day, but to their marriage. The album will be shown off to many of the "witnesses" of the day, but also to many who were not present. Your well-thought-out album design has the power to make witnesses out of those who were not at the ceremony. And more importantly, your photography and story-telling ability may have a greater impact than you may ever know during the tough times that this couple will inevitably face in the future. Next time the phone rings with a prospective bride on the other end asking about your service, make up your mind that you will provide not just photography and an album, but an insurance policy for "happily ever after"!

This article was written and submitted by Aurelia Stratton, co-owner and album designer of www.jasonstrattonphotography.com in Springfield, MO. Aurelia Stratton is a proud member of C2K Neighborhood.