

The Ultimate Posing Guide For The “FREESTYLE” Wedding Photographer

The Hottest Look In Wedding Photography

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www.ProfitableStudio.com

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Weddings

I've been shooting weddings for over 25 years as I write this. I love shooting them and find them rewarding and very inspiring. When I interview prospective couples I tell them I love shooting weddings and that I find each and every one an absolute joy. To me they are powerful events and can return more work, more profits, challenges and great images than any other area.

It takes a great deal of confidence to master what I like to call the "freestyle" approach to capturing the heart and soul of a wedding day. This comes with time, experience and a willingness to learn. Nothing will pay more than sheer persistence. Starting out years ago it seemed everyone had a cookie cutter approach to shooting weddings, and so I took on the same strategy. It seems that many still are stuck in using the cookie cutter approach and it's probably no coincidence that these same photographers are the ones that complain the most.

After so many years of shooting the same way over and over I became very jaded and burnt out. Thankfully I decided to explore newer and more dynamic ways to interpret a wedding with my camera. I got myself out of the box so to speak and decided to push the limits. What happened shortly after I quite literally dove in was nothing short of amazing. Shooting weddings became fun. They were energizing instead of drudgery. It's kind of like having children. You don't really get it until you're in it I guess. Try as I might this argument falls on deaf ears with many photographers. However for me weddings will always be a source of creativity, future business and profits. The demand for my service also increased dramatically once I started shooting with this new approach. It's the best of everything when you succeed at weddings. Great pay, great images, future spin-offs,...for me it's not even a job.

PEOPLE

It's a real people business, so you gotta like poeple, get to know them and bond with them. If you are not outgoing, confident, radiant and eager then you probably need to do one of two things. Quit and get a job in a cubicle or get good at being with people. Join Toastmasters, take acting lessons, bungee jumping, do anything to increase your level of confidence. You have to have fun at this or it won't work for you! I like to think of myself as a director, a Spielberg. Movie directors are not shy. Of course you also have to know what kind of images to capture. That's where this guide will help. I tried to show as many images that represent the freestyle approach to weddings. I also tried to explain the reasoning, strategies and purpose behind the shots. I Hope you enjoy it.

How To Shoot The Freestyle Wedding

There are three basic ways to capture a wedding:

- 1-Structured, planned and posed (I shot this way for years...)
- 2- Total, 100% photojournalism and unposed. (This works for a very small group of clients.)
- 3- Freestyle- A blend of classic poses with a twist of renaissance, photojournalism and candids, and set-up shots that look natural. (This style truly resonates with the largest segment of the buying public.)

I choose to shoot the freestyle way. It makes perfect sense, makes me happy, my brides happy, and my bank account happy. It does take some amount of work, fortitude and willingness to start shooting this way. It's a real mindset. It takes total confidence in your abilities and total confidence in your technical know-how. It's somewhat ironic that the more you know, the less of it you actually think about. Sort of free flowing and stream of consciousness. You must develop an intuitive sense of where the event is going, how to work with people and lead with confidence, technical mastery and posing.

Freestyle is all this wrapped up in one. I've had my wedding photography described to me this way: "Rob, when I look at your photos, it looks like a party. I can see, feel and know what went on that day. You see things that are there that people don't pay attention to."

Shooting freestyle involves certain criteria in order to succeed. This list represents what works for me:

- 1-No tripod- it only slows you down. If I need extra speed I simply increase the ISO
- 2-One bag, maybe two. You must travel light.
- 3-Two digital cameras and two main workhorse lenses. Typically a wide angle zoom and a telephoto zoom. I believe in buying the best lenses available. I shot with good used lenses when I started, but it was quality glass. Now I buy the latest, fastest and sharpest I can get my hands on.
- 4- Be very spontaneous. Don't worry about how you're going to pose the bride or what pose you'll use for the bridal party. Let it fall into place. Relax. Let go. Trust your intuitive and creative side.
- 5-Recognize that there are opportunities everywhere.
- 6- Use ambient light, a lot. I rarely use a flash, typically during the ceremony during the procession since the party is walking down the aisle and I want to be certain I have the shots. For every flash shot I still shoot the same, or similar shots with only ambient light. The flash shots are only used to guarantee I at least capture the sometimes fast moving aisle shots.
- 7- Ask yourself "How can I shoot this scene from a totally unexpected angle?"
- 8- Shoot a lot. Take as many images as you possibly can. This isn't to say you are using a shotgun approach, but to keep you on your toes and capture as many of those timeless and story telling images that impact people.
- 9-Have FUN!! Don't be a pain in the a**. If people are enjoying you and like your energy you have half the battle won.
- 10-Always, always, always look for photo opps. Never stop. Be vigilant and anticipate moments. Practise your art like as if your life depended on it. Feel very passionate about what you're doing!!

The samples on the following pages are from actual weddings that I've shot and they represent a cross-section of the images that I typically take at any one wedding. I do average about 500-1000 images per wedding, many of which are candid/photojournalism black and whites. I used my Nikon 80-200 2.8 and my 12-24 4.0 on over 90% of these shots. The 50 mm lens was also used. Cameras: Nikon D1X and Nikon D100.

Posed

Posed shots need more explaining:



Bright sunny day. Have couple look into the sun with sunglasses for a dramatic look. Tilt the camera



Sunny day, but put sun behind the subjects. I am lying on the ground to get this angle and tilting the camera.



Very traditional pose but a favorite still with many brides. I usually include this pose from the brides home. All natural light, parents in the background and out of focus.

Same window, very casual poses. Used a reflector under the faces.



Working with walls



Any wall will do. Use angles that recede or shoot dead on.

SHOOTING DOWN



On a picnic table



On steps



On a rock



On a bridge



On top of my van

Shooting down cont...



Weird angles

SHOOTING UP:



Must have shots

I call these the mandatory poses. They are family poses, both with and without the in-laws, siblings etc. Always shoot a pose of bride/groom with grandparents and get a shot of the grandparent(s) alone. Don't ask, just shoot it as if it's routine. Get a pose of the bride with her sisters and with each girl standing. I take these fast, no fussing but everyone has a great time. This way I get to take these shots which mean a lot and also mean reprint sales.

By shooting these quickly I get to spend more time on the more creative shots with the bride and groom and the bridal party.





Set-up shots

The following images required some set up on my part. They are posed, or “set-up”, but they have a natural and very candid look to them. Let’s look at the elements at work.

Walking shots

Very easy to do. Simply ask the bridal party, or the girls/guys, or the bride and groom to walk and talk. They could hold hands, or go arm in arm where appropriate. Instruct them to keep walking and have fun. Tell them to talk and walk fast, do not look at the camera. Keep doing this over and over. When they are a fair distance away, which is great since you’ll be using a longer lens for these shots, yell at ‘em to turn and run at you. Shoot like mad. Stop ‘em and tell them to start dancing.

Just do it and watch what happens. If nothing big happens, move on. Keep trying new and wacky ideas. You’ll get some great shots. I use an 80-200 MM Nikor AF lens for these shots. Auto focus with the servo turned on. This feature tracks objects that are moving away or towards you and is more commonly used by sports photographers. I try to open the lens as wide as possible to create maximum depth. Walking shots are always a huge hit with wedding pictures, engagement or families. They do need direction and your input to make it happen however.

Laughing shots

I’m not talking about candid shots at a wedding when you happen to catch a great inter-active moment filled with laughter. Many laughing shots are set-up. Here’s what to do. Say you have a couple of 6 year olds. Have them look at each other and stick there tongues out. Or have them say “boogers” or “poop”. Guaranteed a reaction. *...cont*

You can do the same with sisters, or newlyweds, of course not with the same words. Have them reach in instead and touch noses. Many times I'll ask a couple or a group to wait in a certain area, like as if I was about to prepare a posed shot, and then I'll go over to my camera bag and look busy. I'll wait for the opportunity. They will get bored and start talking. Eventually they'll notice me and get embarrassed and start laughing. I keep shooting.

Sometimes I bring my own sound system or if there is access to a car stereo we'll fire up some high energy music to get everyone going. This works as long as it isn't in a residential or park setting where noise might be an issue.

Full length bridal shots

...with an edge. Ask the bride to stand somewhere, say a sidewalk, walk-way, trail, anywhere the light is okay and you can get good depth. Be certain there is a fair distance between her and the background. Use a long lens. My favorite is the 200 MM setting on the 80-200 2.8 Nikon lens. I try to shoot wide, as with the walking shots. Set yourself up and compose the image. Start shooting. Don't worry, be happy. She'll look at you like "what!!??". Ask her to turn around. Keep doing this. Over and over. Ask her to spin. Make sure the bridal party is watching all this. She will get shy or really start haming it up for everyone. Ask her to squat down. Try elbows on knees. Hands under chin. Don't pose, just shoot and direct. You'll create magic. I guarantee it!!

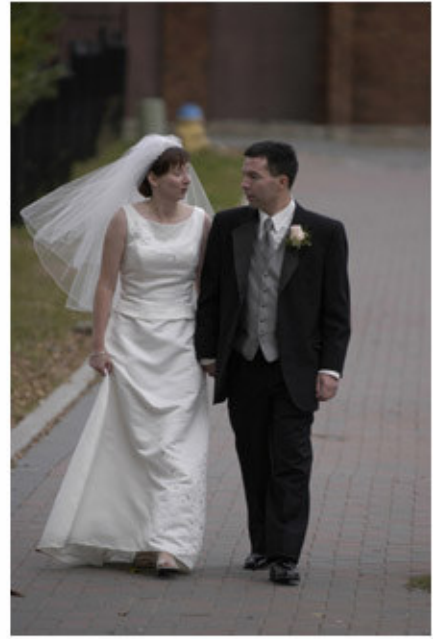
























CANDIDS



Candid shots are totally unposed. They are in my opinion some of the best shots to compliment the other shots of the wedding day. I used to shoot entirely posed and structured images but can't imagine ever going back to that way of shooting again.

These shots, when combined with the others to create a "story book" effect will add more emotion and impact to your photography than any others. You have to dig for them however. Keep a watchful eye and anticipate. Move, get to different areas, know where to go before the people you are photographing even know. Travel light and use one case and no tripod. Long lenses are great and so are wide ones. Use them all. Capture emotions or any event that tells a story. Don't be cheap. Use a lot of memory or film. I set my digital camera to half resolution for candid shots since they never go bigger than a 5"x7". I use higher speeds, as much as 6400 ISO if need be. These shots are entirely ambient light.



Great opportunities for candid shots are:

- *Brides home, everyone getting ready, people coming and going.....
- *Dad sees his little girl for the first time in her gown...
- *Bridesmaids fussing over the bride
- *Parent (dad/grandpa) sitting in the TV room and patiently waiting
- *At the church, people coming in, look for the VIP section in the front. Usually they are wearing flowers and they are important family members
- *Nervous groom waiting in the backroom somewhere
- *Groomsmen welcoming guests
- *Bride and bridesmaid arriving.
- *Shots of people, especially parents during the ceremony. Great emotions here. Use a long lens.
- *After the ceremony, lots of hugging, kissing and laughing.
- *Bride and groom right after they exchange vows. Watch them play with the new rings and look at each other.
- *Little children. Especially in the aisle. Anticipate they will turn and look right at you. Great shots!
- *Basically anywhere. Be vigilant and always on the lookout. Anticipate and be prepared.



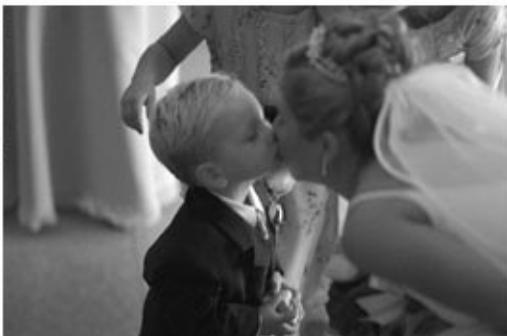








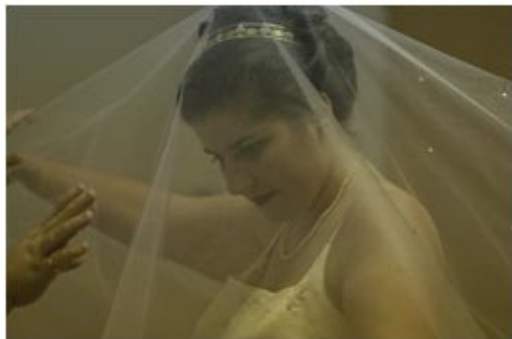














Details



Jewelry



Rings, of course



**Flowers in yard at brides home.
Tells the season and will remind the
bride of her mom or dad or whoever
plants them.**



**Wedding dress before the bride
wears it.**

Detail shots are excellent photographs to help you enhance your entire storybook approach to wedding photography. These shots will touch people at a deep emotional level and should never be underestimated. They are powerful.

Train yourself to look for every opportunity at each and every wedding. Look at the shots in this manual and use these as ideas for your next wedding. They can easily be taken on the fly and with a photojournalistic approach. Most of them are added to the album as smaller photos that enhance larger ones, or a series of photos



Something “borrowed”.



Keep an eye out for love notes from the groom.

Shoes....



Bride's home, look around the outside of the home.....



"Angle" your camera....



Musical instruments tell a story.



Love notes:



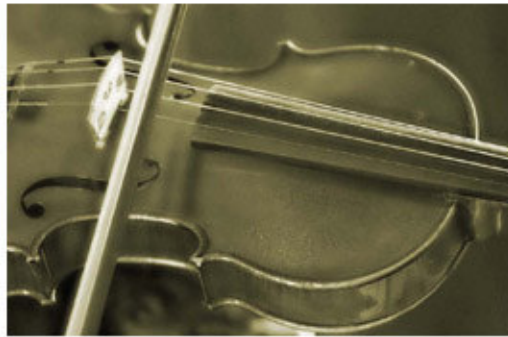


Shoot from unusual angles



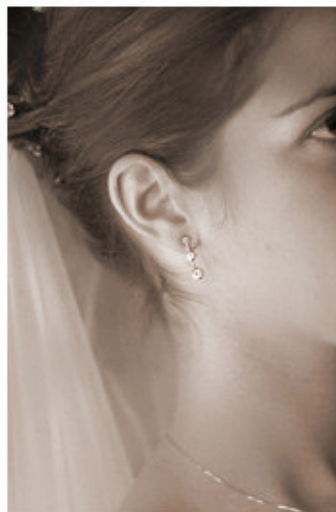
Bride's pet cat, (or dog)...





Display board at reception:











Bridal Party Shots



Bridal party shots can be one of the most memorable photo opps during a wedding. You should have a ton of fun and be fun to be with. It will energize everyone and it will show in the final images you capture. I gave up the posed look of bridal parties years ago, and have never had one single complaint. As a matter of fact everyone, even the most conservative and traditional people prefer my easy going, less rigid approach.



Be very, very, very, very spontaneous when shooting. Never get bogged down. If something isn't working, move on. You must have confidence and certainty as your allies.









Almost dark in the middle of winter.
Wide angle lens



The Bride

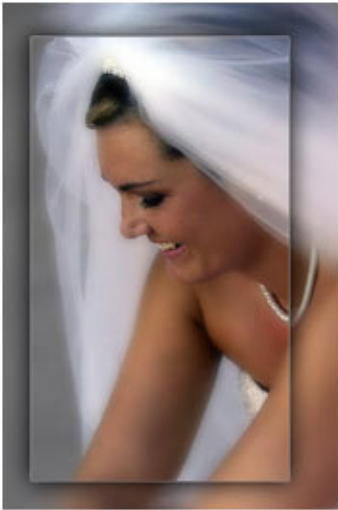
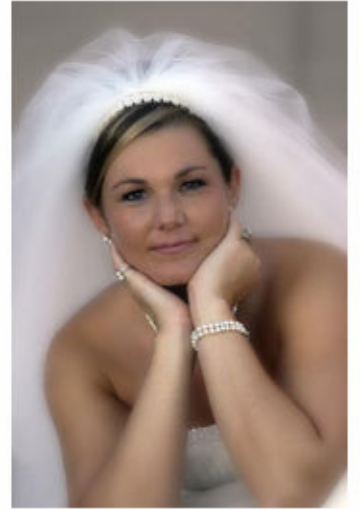


Have the bride turn and shoot from many different angles. These are not “posed” in the traditional sense. I like to shoot bridal shots fast-paced. They really enjoy the experience a lot more than the more rigid formal posed look. I am reminded of a fashion shoot when I think about the actual experience, maybe not as fast-paced but with momentum nevertheless.



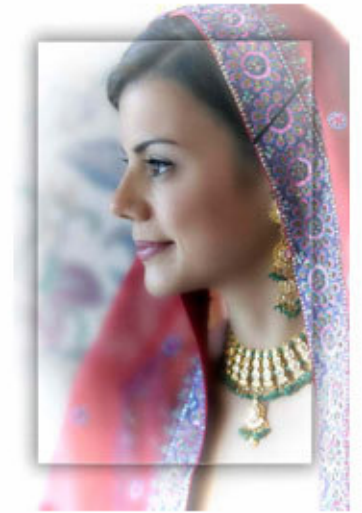
Most, if not all, of these samples were taken at higher ISO settings, often at 800 or 1600, and using natural ambient light, no tripod, occasionally with a reflector. Studio samples are at ISO 100.

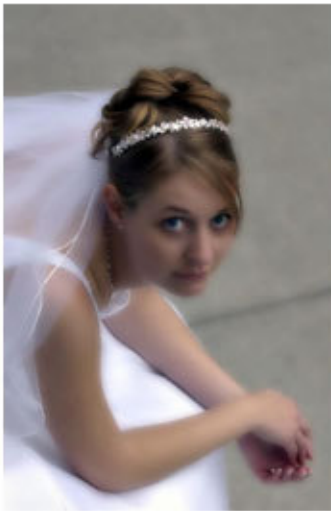


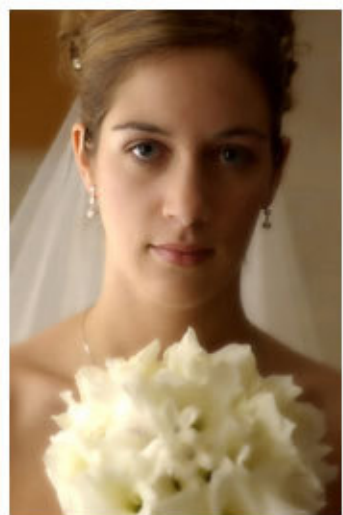
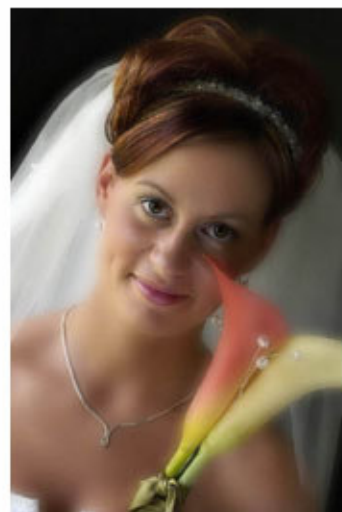
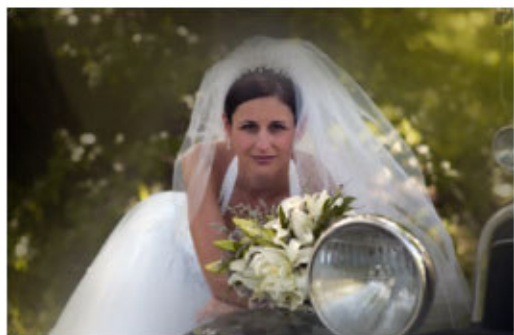


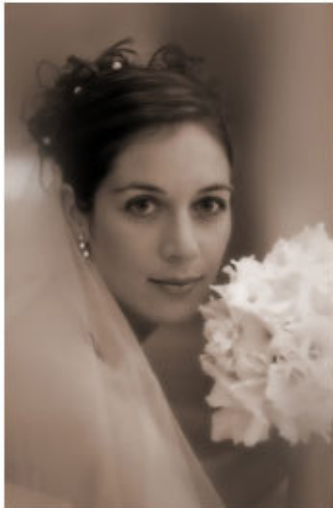
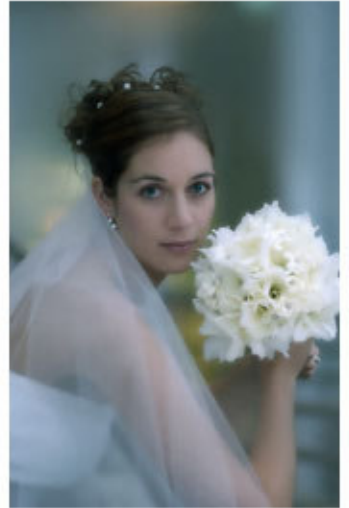
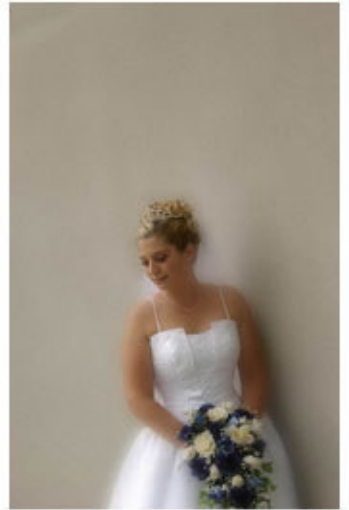


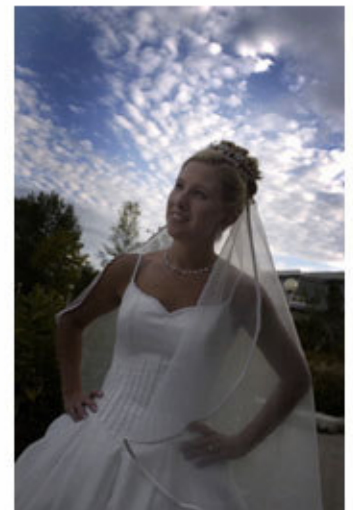
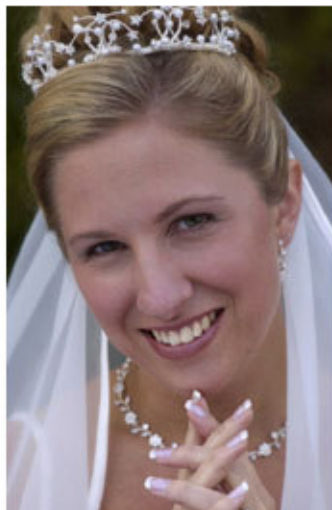
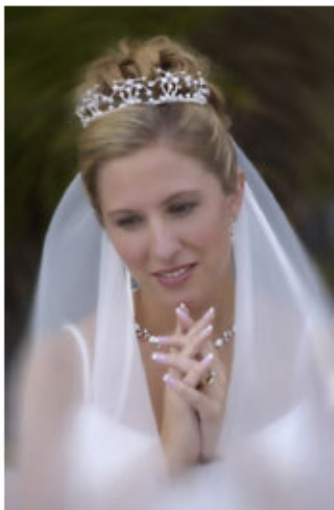












One light source and the reflector as a backdrop:





Use her dress as a backdrop.



One light source.

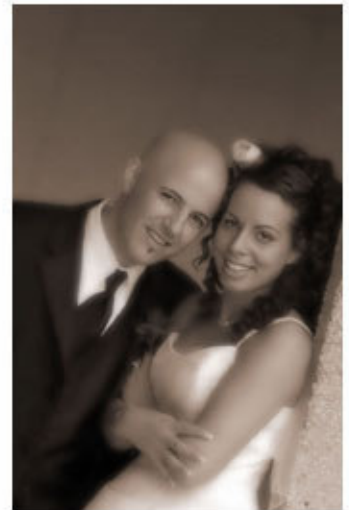
Bride and groom poses.



Somebody holding train,
just out of the picture.



Open shade, light walls all around act as a
reflector, 800-200 MM zoom



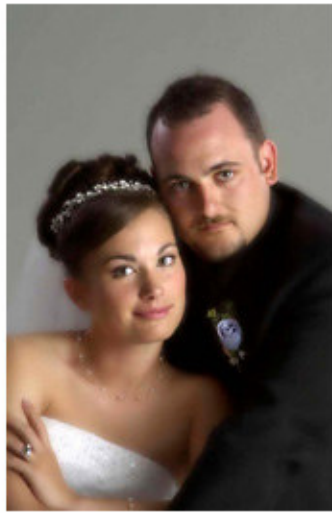
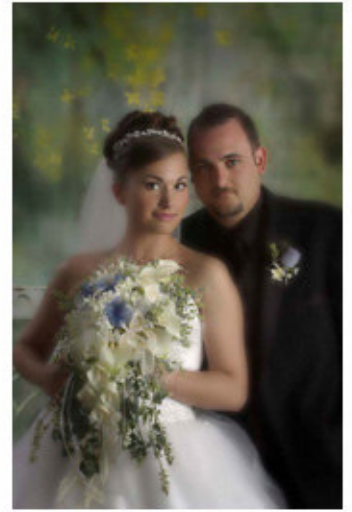
Same area, very simply poses.

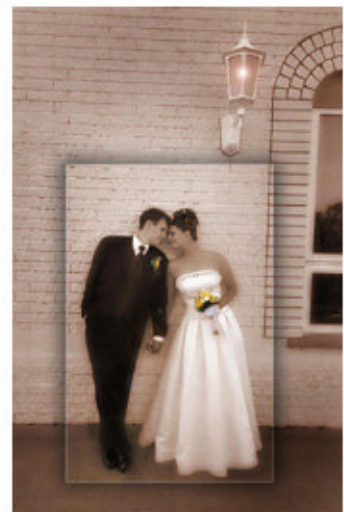


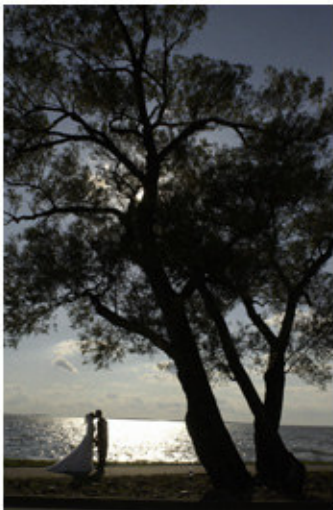
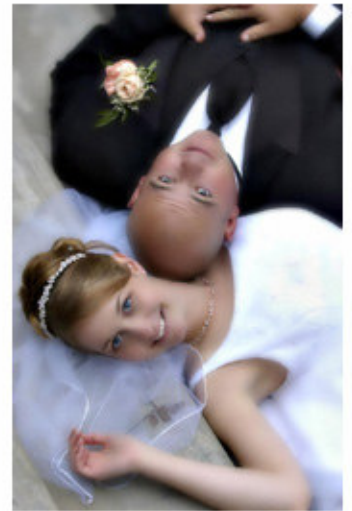
Bright open sun, play with it!! Fish eye lens.

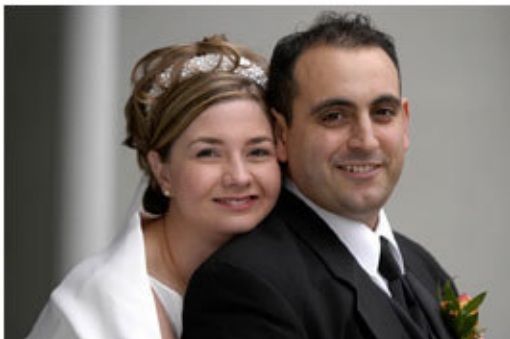
Again, very spontaneous, no hard poses or grueling demands are placed on the bride and groom. Use angles, wide angle lenses, telephoto and normal lenses. These shots are important so I like to capture variety.

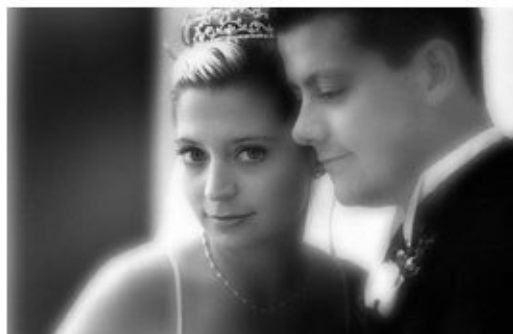


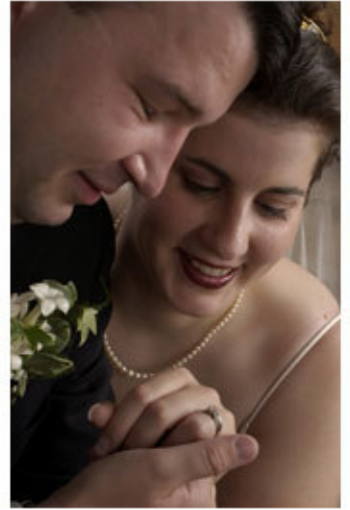






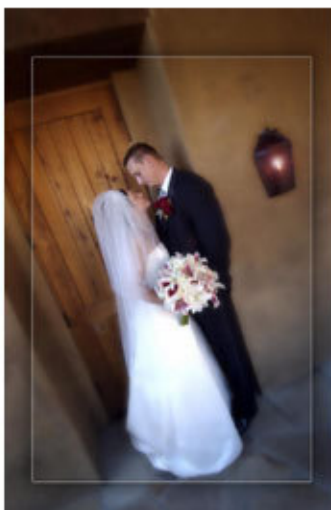






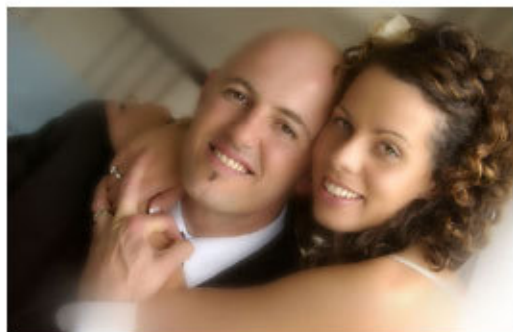
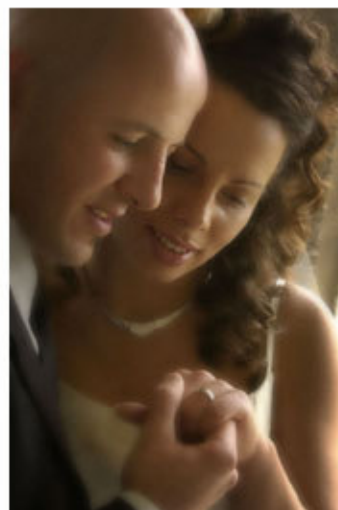


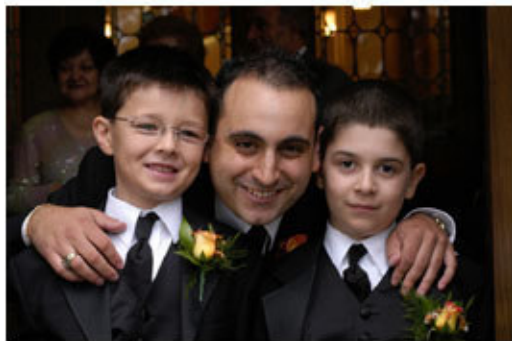
Open shade, using the bridal party as a “backdrop”. wide angle lens



Same area.







The Guys.

I like to get the guys at the ceremony location about 45 minutes before the official start of the ceremony.

This allows more than enough time to get all the shots, and in case they are a bit late showing up.

I always ask the bride to tell the guys what time they are expected, that way they will be inclined to show up close enough to the scheduled time.



12 MM lens on the D1X.



In a snow storm.

Holding the camera over my head, arms extended straight up.

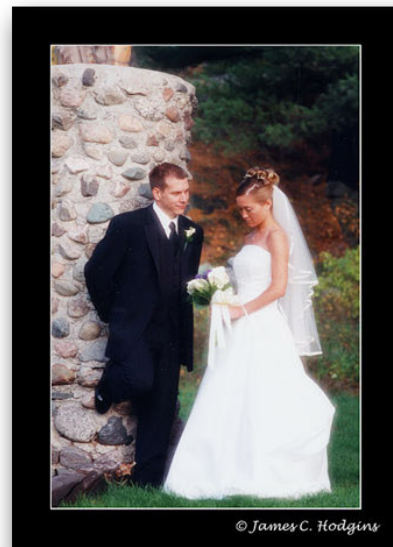
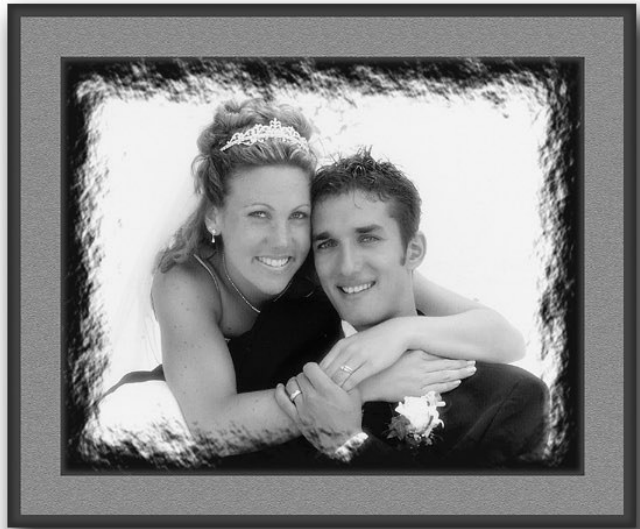


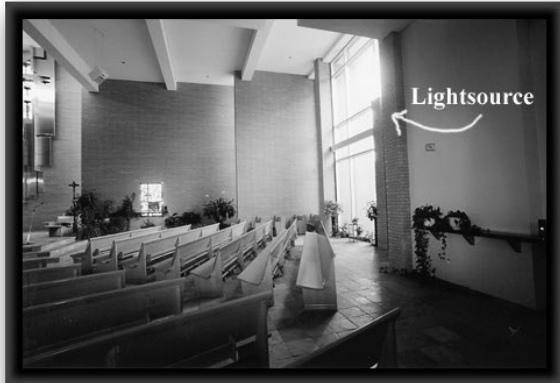
I like to get a quick shot of each guy with the groom.





Before and after shots from James's wedding after I trained him.
What a difference a year makes!!

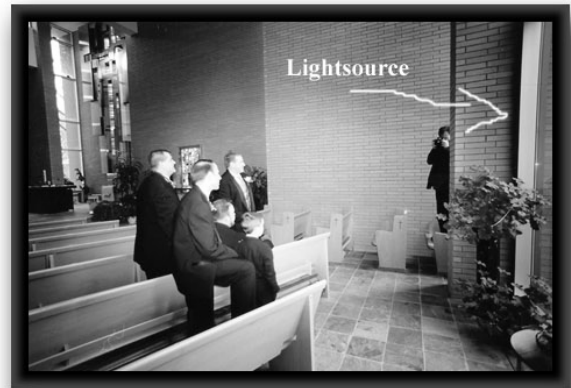
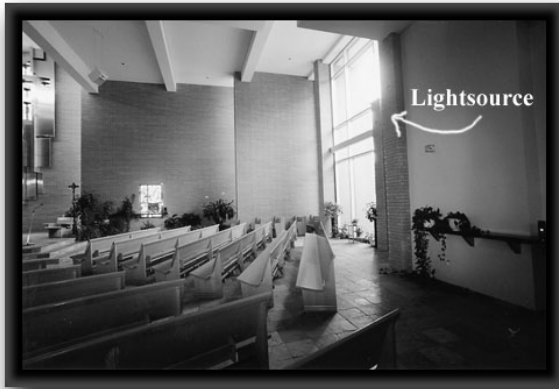




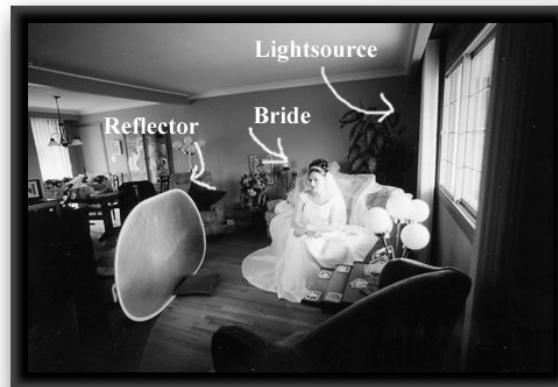
FINDING THE LIGHT

Using light on location during a wedding shoot. I rarely use flash, preferring the use of whatever is "available". This give the photos a more natural look and saves time. It actually is a sales point that I use when selling my wedding photography. I actually tell the prospective bride and groom that I hardly use flash and prefer the more natural, spontaneous approach and they agree. This also helps to manage their expectations.







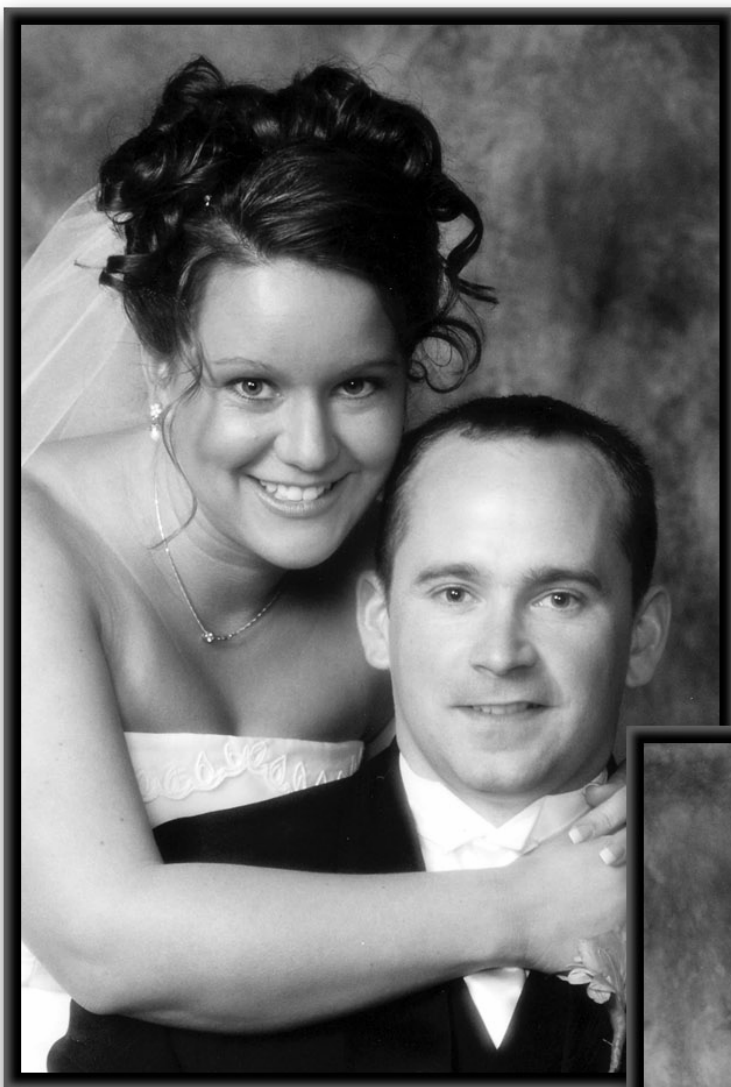






**Damm!! Stuck in a coat room
at a wedding during bad weather.**





**It worked and we even got
all the larger groups done.
Everyone was happy!**





Working with window light

“The huddle”. use a wide angle lens, flash and a reflector:



What's a full wedding look like?

On the next pages are the actual proofs that I supplied to my clients from their wedding day. These are the same images they saw.

When they arrived at my studio several weeks after their wedding day the first thing I did was asked them enthusiastically about the rest of their day and their honey moon. I tell them I had a great time photographing their wedding and I had a lot of images for them.

It's very important to be sincere, present and enthusiastic with clients, and I try hard to maintain this in my on going contact with them. I then ask them to come into the projection room where they will get to see their proofs in a slide show set to music.

When they are seated I talk a little bit about the images they are about to see. I tell them about how many images there are and the length of the show. I remind them that some are in color, some in sepia and some in black & white.

Many of the candids are in black & white and I tell them these shots look best that way. (I try to pre-emptively avoid any requests for those shots to be converted back to color– when wedding clients first come to my studio one of the first things I discuss is my philosophy on photographing weddings and how I like to capture the “heart & soul” of the day by capturing many black & white photojournalistic style candids– in case some ask for conversion back to color, which is rare that they do, I remind them about this approach).

These images are here to give you a sense of one wedding. Not all weddings are the same however. Often there are vast differences in final shots achieved and/poses, backgrounds, locations or whatever. This is the beauty of shooting spontaneously. You get to capture the personality and uniqueness of each event.

EQUIPMENT USED

- Nikon D2X resolution set to half. JPEG at high
- Nikon D1X resolution set to full
- Nikon 12-24 F4 Zoom lens (on the D2x)
- Nikon 80-200 2.8 Zoom lens (on the D1x)
- Nikon SB 800 flash (two more used at the reception) and extension coil cord for creative use and placement of flash
- Sandisk 1G flash cards stored in LowePro case attached to belt.
- Camera bag for extra batteries, spare flash cards, etc etc
- Reception shots taken with flash on camera and two extra SB 80's on stands and fired with the Pocket Wizard radio slaves.

Camera settings

- High ISO 800, 1600, 3200 in low light situations
- ISO 100, 200 and 400 for outside shots
- Occasional flash fill or flash used as main source
- Aperature priority auto setting
- Program mode used occasionally as well (using this more and more since it works so well and really frees me from the camera and allows me to be more creative)
- Auto focus 100% of the time with servo setting used for subjects moving to or away from camera

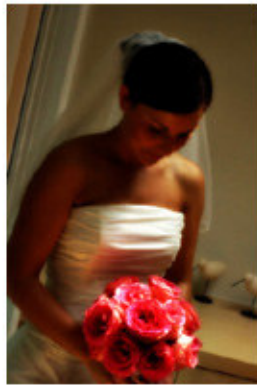


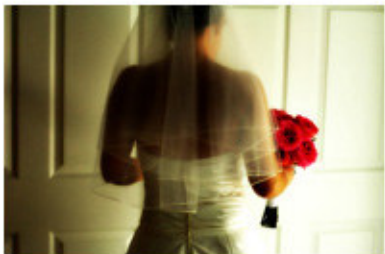
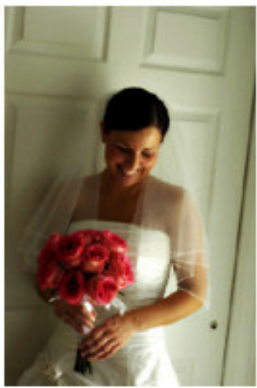




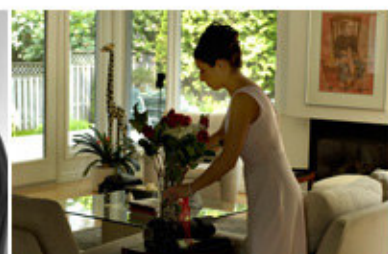
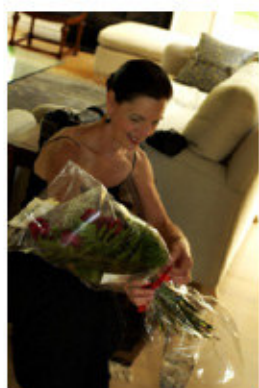


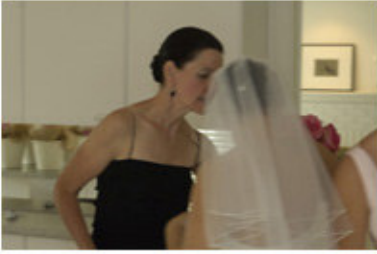




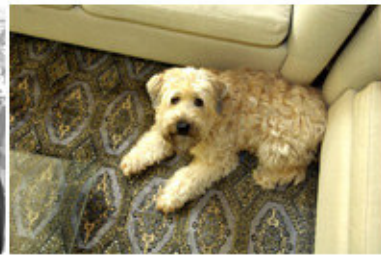






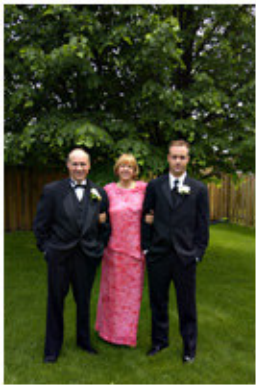


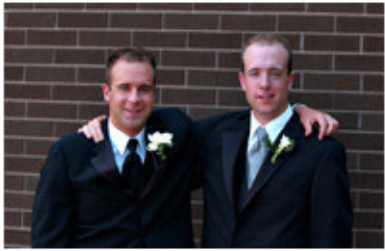




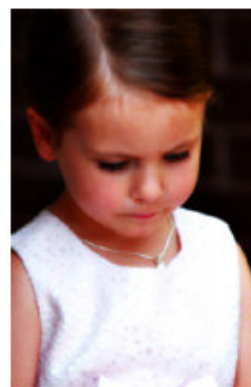






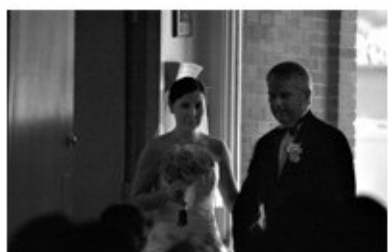




















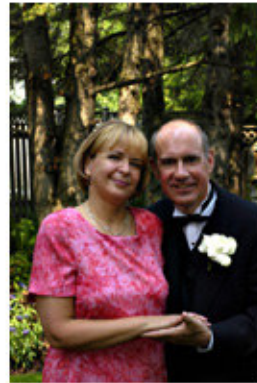
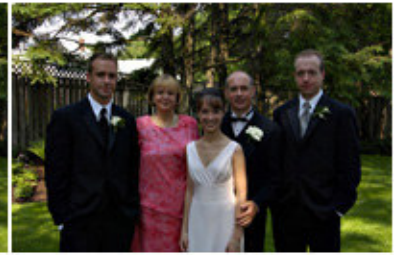
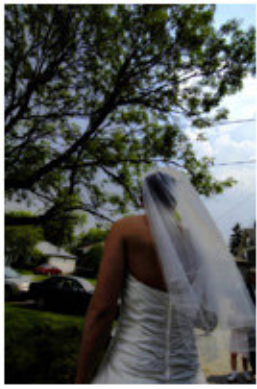


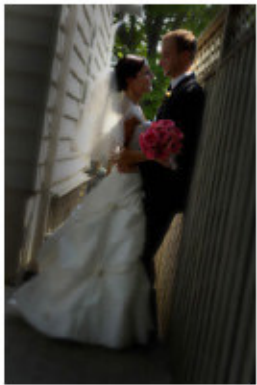
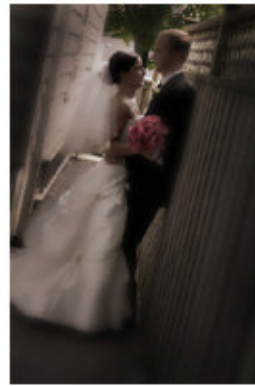


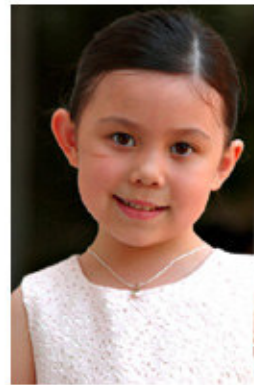




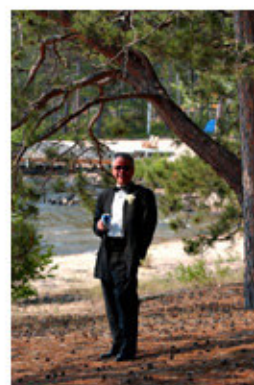










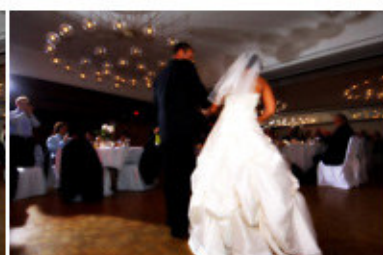
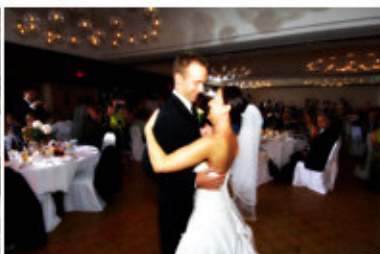














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