

# Everything you need to know about Wedding Photographers, and a little more

[By Robert London Photography](#)

One of the first things you will need to decide is what style of images you prefer. Like snowflakes, no two photographers are the same, they are all artists, the subject is your wedding and the canvas is the album. However, photographers get categorized into three basic styles. Journalistic or reportage (meaning to report or document, the least obtrusive), traditional sometimes called formal (someone who takes mostly posed or staged pictures) and finally balanced, one who combines aspects of both. There are of course variations on these groups, for instance I have been called “artistic reportage” by one editor, but it is good to start with these main groups and then work down from there as you meet different photographers.

Start if you can by looking at other friends, relatives, or colleagues albums. If you love, your friend’s album and no one is ever looking into the camera then a reportage photographer would be your best choice. If you wish your album to have mostly formal portraits of family and friends then a more traditional photographer would be better. Finally, if you are ambivalent or like certain aspects of both styles then choose someone who is balanced.

People you directly know that have recently been married can be a great resource while searching for a photographer. They have already gone through the process and will have opinions and advice to offer. Ask pointed questions. Did they enjoy their experience and what would they do differently? How long did the formals take? Was the photographer intrusive? Do they like their album? Was he responsive to their requests?

Other resources are your other wedding vendors who usually have direct experience working with many different photographers. However, be cautious of these vendor’s “recommendations” as many vendors have a reciprocal agreement based solely on financial terms. For instance, I know many caterers where to be on their “recommended list” a vendor pays a substantial amount of money each year; as long as you are competent, you do not have to be great; you can get on the list if you pay. To get a feel whether your vendor is being honest first see whether all the recommendations are big studios and not individual photographers. If they are then most likely they’re paid recommendations. Then ask the vendor a few direct questions about the photographer; if his answers are too general then he probably does not know enough about them to truly recommend them. Other resources are wedding information websites, two of the largest are [theknot](#) and [weddingwire](#). Beware most of the content is ad driven, even the editorial they produce is sold as "buy a large package and we will showcase your business in are editorial." One site that does not work on this model is [Here Comes THE GUIDE](#) they verify the vendor and create the profile with no vendor influence. There are many others out there, some directed to a geographic area, to many to

list here but beware of the advertising dollars associated to "featured wedding vendor" lists when viewing the wedding vendors.

I would not look for a photographer solely based on price or on one of the wedding websites that ask for "request for quote form." Remember you are looking for a photographer, not buying a new car. You do not want the best marketer, you want someone who will capture your memories, be a positive aspect of your wedding day, and work within your budget. Keep in mind though that this is one of the very few things that will last forever from your wedding; if you can afford a few extra dollars to get whom you want –do it. However, do not assume that the most expensive photographer is the best, I have seen many high-priced photographers that turn out average work.

Once you have selected a few photographers to interview, you will need to come prepared with a list of questions and some knowledge of the photographic process. Also, do not underestimate the importance of just simply liking your photographer, he is the one professional hire you will make who will be spending the most time with you.

The photography industry has changed dramatically over the past 15 years and specifically in the past 5. I have read numerous articles on hiring wedding photographers, and I have found most were either outdated or were too general to be of much help. I shall d-myth some of the repeated questions that I found wrong or irrelevant in many of these photography articles.

How long has the photographer been in business? Photography is a business, and experience can help. It is true that I would be leery of hiring a non-wedding commercial photographer, for although they may be great at their craft, wedding photography is a different breed from commercial work. A wedding photographer needs to be assertive, cajoling and calm all simultaneously, these are not skills necessarily needed in the commercial world of photography. That said, a photographer who has 20 years of experience taking the same bad pictures - that 20 years of experience does not add up too much. The bottom line is: if you like someone, and they have some great pictures but not much depth in their portfolio, that's okay - hire them.

Will there be backup equipment? Unless you are hiring a friend or a weekend hobbyist, any professional photographer knows to bring what is needed to get the job done and that includes a backup for everything. That is one of the reasons you are hiring a professional, correct?

Have you worked at the location before? This is the question that I receive the most and the one that seems to be very important for couples. I am not sure why; perhaps caterers are instilling this fear to get the couple to hire their own photographers, but a good photographer can work in any venue be it familiar or not. Although it is nice to know the space beforehand,

ultimately it is of little real value. Every wedding is unique and should be treated as such. If a photographer does the same shot in a particular space for every wedding, you have lost the essence of that couples moment.

Is the photographer a member of any group or association? Being a member of a photography association, unlike a board certified physician, does not mean the photographer has passed any type of quality assurance or recognition by his peers. It mostly means that he pays dues. It is neither positive nor negative; most of the great photographers I know are not members of any wedding group or photography association.

What brand of camera do you own? This used to be the acid test for a photographer; the correct answer was hasselblad. The reasoning behind this question was that this was the most expensive medium format camera. It used to be essential to use a medium format camera; for film, even 12 years ago was not up to the challenge of enlargements from 35 mm. Also, the theory went if a person were so heavily invested they must be a professional and not a hobbyist. Today, I believe 35mm is the camera of choice and digital if done right is the medium of choice.

### **Now let us move on to questions you should ask**

Who will be photographing the wedding? This is extremely important if you decide to use a big studio. I would ask to meet the photographer who is going to photograph your wedding. Also get a reference not from the studio but directly from the photographer who will be working your wedding. Ask for a reference where he has been the lead photographer. Remember you can never be guaranteed that the images you are looking at in their portfolio were taken by whom the studio says. At the very least most studios will pad a photographer's portfolio in the beginning of his career. If they are not willing to entertain your inquires, I would consider using another studio or photographer.

How much time does the package include? Some photographers have the time inclusive as to the bride's wishes, others limit time so they can do other work that same day or to make the package more affordable. If you are not hiring your photographer for the inclusive day, ask if you decide on or close to the wedding day that you wish him to extend his time, will he be able to stay and at what cost?

How long do you want for the formal photos and do you have any ideas on how to make them go smoothly? You can get a feel from the photographer here on what style a shooter he really is. If he insists on spending one hour or more, then he is very much a traditional shooter. You can also get a feel for his experience level and how interested he is in creating pictures that are special, not just a document of who was there. I personally like formals to be organized and to go fairly quickly, about half an hour, much longer and people become bored

and that begins to show in the pictures. I discuss how to accomplish this here: [How to Obtain Great Wedding Pictures](#)

What style album is included in the price and do I have any choices? Many photographers offer only one style of album, or once you have the pictures and they have been paid, will not spend time assisting you. Recently, there have been some great new choices in album design and layout. Gone are the days when everybody's album looked the same. However, designing and laying out the album can be a daunting task to take on by oneself. I explain all the available options in this article: [Modern Wedding Albums](#). If the photographer will not offer the album you want, you should strongly consider that in making your decision, For many the album is the only memory and tangible product they will have from the wedding.

Is there a charge for the negatives or files? The old school of wedding photography was to work cheap up front and then sell expensive prints and albums. Today, many photographers take a middle road and will sell you the negatives or files; others simply include it in the package. I feel that it is important for everybody to at least eventually have the negatives or files. They are part of your family history; your grandchildren will find it awesome to make a new enlargement from the original files. I heard one story of a retiring photographer who just threw out all his negatives when he closed the office. Ask how long they will store them if you cannot have them. You should include this cost, if any, in your comparison of photographers.

Do they have any liability insurance? Many caterers or venues insist on an insurance certificate; it is almost impossible to get this insurance at the last minute.

If you are having your images posted on the web, will they be handing out cards and setting up a display? This is becoming more popular with photographers. One of the benefits is that guests will not have to bother you for any enlargements they would like. Some photographers aggressively try to promote this so that they can sell as many enlargements as possible. They will hand out and place cards at every table explaining the process and even set up a small display where people walk in. The selling can be very intrusive and not part of your decorating plans. You may however love this, but beware of the implications to the flow of your wedding day. I would just set up a unique wedding hash-tag and have everyone post their wedding photos to the social media of your choice.

If shooting digital will the photographer shoot RAW or JPEG? This will take a little explaining. When a photographer shoots raw, he has the ability to correct or stylistically change the image with no loss of quality. When shooting straight to JPEG format, the photographer's options are very limited. Why would anyone shoot JPEG format you might ask? Because it is much easier and uses far less disk space, after a shoot a photographer just sends the images to the lab and if necessary the lab attempts to make any changes it can.

Beware though that if the exposure or color is more than a little off what is desired then the quality will suffer tremendously. After a wedding, I spend at least a long full day looking at each image I shot and tweaking each raw file to be exactly what I envisioned, then the computer runs for hours processing the images to the final JPEG. Many photographers are not willing to spend this amount of time.

To be sure that your photographer is being honest, ask for him to give you the raw images from the ceremony. Just say you wish to archive the raw files for use in later life, or your computer nerd friend wishes to make a special present for you and needs the raw files.

Let's talk a little more about technical aspects of photography. As I mentioned earlier there are two formats 35mm, and medium format. This holds true for both film and digital. In theory, medium format would give one a better image. For most of my commercial work, I try to use medium format whenever possible. However, commercial work is not spontaneous and is always under very controlled conditions. Weddings are very different; everything happens very fast and there is no possibility of re-shooting. I cannot say, "I missed that shot, can you please walk down the aisle again?" For me 35mm is the format of choice for a wedding. It gives me the speed in both shooting and focusing that I need to get every shot I want. Some medium format photographers will try to denigrate 35mm shooters by saying that 35mm is inferior. This is a bit old school, for unless images are developed to a very large size, extremely large for digital, the only one who will notice the grain is the trained eye of the photographer. I would however, not negate a medium format shooter, for if they have worked with that format for a long time and feel comfortable with it and you love their images, go for it.

The second most popular question is, "do I shoot digital or film"? This can be another acid test, either way, for some couples. Under ideal conditions film can still hold its own, but weddings seldom avail themselves as ideal conditions. If digital is shot with the proper resolution professional camera, with the procedure I explained before it will produce superior results to film, and that includes black and white. It does entail a certain level of computer expertise to achieve these results, so if a photographer is still not comfortable making this leap into the high end digital world, and everything else being equal, do not hold it against him. Film still looks great and continues to improve.

There are certain methods, and specific products that a photographer can use to achieve unconventional results, sometimes called "special effects." It is completely subjective whether one likes or dislikes the results. Also, certain subject matter or environments lend themselves to some looks more than others. Sometimes these effects can be difficult to master, and certain photographers will be better suited than others. Keep this in mind as you peruse a photographer's portfolio, and look for the picture effect which you would like in your album. Be critical; don't just see the effect and be satisfied that the photographer can

master this effect at your wedding. Look for more than a few samples, and try to remember between the different photographers the quality each one produced. Even with an “effect” as simple as Black and White, some photographers take a little extra time and make beautiful custom prints, while others will just accept what the lab gives them. Other effects are “sepia or brown toning,” which I use often, a “grainy” look that can be in black and white or color, and “cross-processing” that literally means to use the wrong chemistry. This effect achieves a high contrast image with very saturated color, giving the pictures the feel of an editorial fashion spread.

If shooting digital, all the above effects can be emulated on the computer with great results. Another effect is infrared photography, which is what it says, photographing with infrared energy. I personally love this look and try to use it whenever the venue lends itself. The effect is dreamy and can look very romantic. The best results are achieved in outdoor conditions with live foliage as the background, for foliage gives off a significant amount of infrared energy. The technique does not lend itself well to skin tone and particularly eyes, so direct portraits are not possible. Computer nerds have tried to emulate the effect of this film, but my experience is that the results are inferior. If you do not have the infrared energy captured in the digital file no computer tricks can create it. The film has recently been discontinued, so now I have a dedicated modified digital camera that shoots only in infrared.

### **What to do while meeting with the photographer:**

Before going to meet with different photographers it is a good idea to look through some magazines and other friends’ albums to get a feeling for what type of photographs you want, and as discussed before what style of photographer. Do not look for a specific image in the photographer’s work; your wedding may be very different in atmosphere, setting, or time of day than the one you are looking at. Concentrate instead on getting a sense for whether the work captures the overall style you desire.

Remember photography is not the manufacturing of widgets; quality is sometimes hard to define in qualitative terms. Although it is important that most of the images are crisp, have nice lighting and be thoughtfully composed, it is equally important that the images convey a story and sense of emotion. There should be a variety of angles. Not every picture should be alike. Even the purist of photo journalistic styles should not look as though the images were taken with a security camera. Look for the story behind each image; every image should make you want to see the next. If a portion of one image is soft yet the picture conveys a great emotion, then it is a great shot. Remember, a photographer can light up a whole room, technically obtaining sharpness throughout the image, have everybody centered and the image well framed, this would tell the story of what the photographer did at your wedding – not what a great time everybody had. Did the photographer capture all the little things the bride put her heart and soul into while planning the wedding; the placards, close ups of the

dress, her shoes, the flowers, and so on? The details and the people at the wedding convey the complete story, your mom crying, and grandma dancing, unforgettable moments that a great wedding photographer will capture. The album should not just be a set of pictures of the bride and groom. Do people look natural? Even posed images should show some personality.

When comparing costs, keep in mind that you are not just paying for the photographer's time on the wedding day. A good photographer works before, during of course, and significantly after a wedding to make sure the prints and albums are produced correctly. If someone is less expensive, he may not be willing to put the extra time in to make sure everything is done properly, remember my thoughts on JPEG versus RAW.

The personality of the photographer can have a significant impact on the quality of the pictures, and your enjoyment, at your wedding. Remember, a photographer who frames everything perfectly, makes sure everyone is in focus, and gets every shot on your list may seem like a great photographer; however, if no one likes him that will show in the pictures. Your album will be technically perfect yet boring, with everyone looking as if they were not having a good time, the photographer needs to be sociable at your wedding. Even the most unobtrusive photographer still has a significant presence at your wedding. In the interview use your gut feeling –do not just ask the standard questions. Is he helpful or do all the answers seem scripted? Are you being pressured to commit to a package on the spot? If he sounds as though he will run the wedding his way, without any input from you, don't hire him. The photographer is not shooting a fashion spread with hired models that he can boss around; this is your wedding, not a photo shoot. Remember to ask the references about his personality. Every wedding is stressful to some degree –you want your photographer to disperse some of that stress, not create more.

### **What to ask references?**

Was he sociable? Did your guests like him, and did he handle your family's requests well?

How intrusive was the photo process –were there many ugly tripods, light stands, and assistants standing around looking out of place?

Were there any surprises with the package you agreed on with the photographer?

Were they happy with services after the wedding?

Were there any surprises in price?

Did you have a choice in albums and was he helpful in collaborating to create the album?

If you hear a few minor negatives about one photographer, do not necessarily rule him out. This simply means you have a legitimate reference, that couples' wishes and circumstances may be very different from yours. If you feel the references you have been given are not legitimate ask the photographer for the names of the last four weddings he has done.

### **After you have made your choice**

You need to decide exactly what to include in your package. I have standard packages, but every wedding is unique, and subsequently most of my packages are customized. If your photographer is not flexible, and you feel that something is important you may wish to rethink the hire. I work primarily alone not needing a gaggle of assistants to intrude on your atmosphere. However, if you are having a fairly large wedding you should consider having a second photographer or a shooting assistant. With the extra help, if something is happening simultaneously they both can be covered, or you can obtain a completely different point of view of one event.

Insist on everything in writing, although if the photographer's contract is copiously long and sounds like a legal brief, be wary; he may be protecting himself from mistakes he has made in the past. I keep my contract as simple as possible while still putting in all the necessary information. You want to make sure that nothing is misunderstood. Make sure the contract says when the proofs will be available, the date, hours to be covered, and who owns the rights - the price and what the package includes should be clear. Many couples have been surprised that they do not own the rights to the wedding images, and subsequently are forced to buy very expensive prints forever. If you do not own the rights, include in the contract how much the rights will cost you and how much the prints and enlargements are. Are albums included in the package, and do you have a choice of albums? Are the proofs usable to frame or are they watermarked? Or do you just receive a proof booklet? What if there is an emergency and the photographer cannot make it?

The wedding photos are the primary way that you will remember your wedding, so be sure that you are comfortable with what you are getting and make sure the contract includes whatever is important to you.

Now go back to my website and read more about real life wedding advice from a photography wedding expert [Wedding Photographer NYC](#)