Creating a Modern Awesome Wedding Album

By Robert London Photography

Today's wedding album can be a very personal showcase; where albums of the past were records of the day, showing the dress, the Bride, the Groom, and Attendants. There is no one secret to creating a great wedding album, all the decisions are personal and subjective; one person's perfect album could possible bore another. The only secret is to make the album uniquely yours, no need here to please your Parents or be influenced by your friends or photographer. Keep in mind though that this is something to last a lifetime, a technique that looks unique and fun today, may look dated in ten years; think elegant – good design never goes out of style. As you begin always remember that your album should tell the story of the day. The story line is how I approach the photography; each image represents the thoughts, actions, and moment in time of you and your guests. Every wedding is unique and that should be reflected in every wedding album. Poorly constructed albums (and bad photography) look as though the images were created by the security camera, everything is documented but there is no editorial emotion. These albums are more a reference, versus common enjoyment, and emotional celebration. If you succeed, every time you look at the album –you should be moved by the experience of the wedding.

When you begin delving into the album process you will quickly learn that the hardest part is deciding which images you shall include and in what order. While debating the inclusive images (or arguing) always reflect upon the narrative; what does this image express or say? If you are having considerable trouble narrowing your images down to a reasonable quantity, remember less can be more. Also, consider that your album can be more then simply pictures by the photographer. The invitation is the most common non-picture element used, but there are many other possibilities. Were there personal printed details in your place settings or elsewhere? Personal vows jotted down on paper, guest book entries, an original sketch of the dress, anything that you, your family or friends personally brought to the day.

In the new web 2.0 and digital world there seems to be endless choices in albums and options within the album, but it really comes down to two main types, digital and conventional. Conventional albums, (which are becoming less and less available) are photographic prints mounted to a page, the same method as our Parents and Grandparents album. However, there are some options available today to give the album a more modern feel. These include modern and diverse layouts, creative covers including printed metal, and the use of black for gilding, verses gold and silver. Digital albums are computer designs, which are then printed on a press or photographic paper and then mounted and bound like a conventional album. One of the advantages to digital albums is that you can use some of your images as backgrounds; it is also easier to place more images per page. The biggest difference between the two is style - where in a conventional album if one were to use all the options at their disposal, the feel of the album would not vary too far versus using no options. In a digital album one has to choose a style from the beginning, some being heavy on design others very simple, even mimicking a conventional album. You will really need to see and touch them to have a full understanding, but you can get a good idea by going to the various companies websites; links of which are provided later in this article.

The two types are indeed very different; however, one not more impressive than another, it is truly subjective to a couple's personal taste. Although, some circumstances will lend itself towards one or the other, for instance, if you have 60 or more images, digital is probable the way to go. As mentioned it is easier to include many images in a digital album. Also with digital the second and third album are about 1/3 the price, so if you want multiple copies, say for the parents (they will need to be exactly the same) it is the best value. On the other hand, if you wish to include personal items like the invitation, they can be directly mounted in a

conventional album where in a digital album they would need to be scanned and then included as a printed image. Excluding these leanings for each type of album, my experience is that you will love one or the other. I have yet to see a couple struggle with the decision; they seem to know immediately once they have looked at the various styles and types.

The process of creating your album is as follows. For digital, the photographer designs the album or sends the images you chose to the album company and they do the design, either way you will approve the design by PDF or online. Typically, two to three changes can be made, and once approved the pages are printed, bound and shipped. On the conventional side, after choosing the images, then the album needs to be laid out - exploring and finalizing your design. This entails determining which images go on each page and in what order. Also, you will need to work out size of images, shape of mats, and any effects for the pictures, for instance black and white, sepia tone, any painterly filter effects, exact cropping etc. This can be a rewarding and fun process to do by yourself or overwhelming - you know who you are and your capabilities, but either way it is time-consuming.

There are a few companies that do offer some unique services; one is digital albums by Graphi. This company uses a printing press in Italy; therefore, the pages are comparatively thin versus boards for most other albums, (not having to be mounted). Graphi prints on a true conventional printing press, which affords the best and most consistent quality and you can choose between a bound book, album, or both - no one else can offer these services. Other companies offer some unique sizes and cover materials; covers now come in a seemingly unending variety of materials from wood, metal, acrylic etc.. all the way to hemp. The options these days seem to be endless, many album companies have separate consumer websites for you to explore, or you can see samples at your photographer's studio.

A professional album through a photographer will cost a minimum of $500 and I have experienced some as high as $4000. The average I would say is $1200. With professional albums, versus DIY you can enlist an even wider variety of cover styles including a variation of cameo styles, create a classic bound photo album or combination book, dye stamping, gilding and more. The price is significant and hard to control considering the quantity of images, materials, and manual handiwork. However, for couples who are determined and confident enough to do the manual work themselves, I have included the following information.

First some vocabulary:

Cameo: A picture within a window on the front cover. (sometimes called die-cut)
Bounding: This is what makes a book, the bounding of the pages. This is important now for there are different types and quality of bounding these days.
Leather: I mention this for there can be a wide variance in quality, some leather offerings feel like fancy vinyl while one company I use out of Spain is beautiful and in a whole other class.
Board Pages: The new photo books are just pages like paper from a book, but board pages are solid, and rigid.
Embossing: This is really dye stamping a logo or type onto the cover, it can be in a color or "blind" which is just the texture or line created within the material (relief).
Stamping: Similar to embossing but the type is just printed on the surface, not stamped so there is no relief.
Gilding: Since board pages are thick one can apply fancy paint to the edges, typically it has a high shine and glitter. The old days it was either gold or silver, now black is offered which is a more modern look.

Direct to Consumer Albums

There are some modern products available if you are okay with possible a less sophisticated album and are willing to go it alone. Below are links to some companies that I have come across that will deal directly with the couple (many will not). They offer the style of albums previously only available through a photographer. I have limited experience with their quality or service but if you are brave, it is a new option out there. A few things to have knowledge of; integration with social media sounds great but social sites downsize the images when you upload them, also when you text someone (email is fine). Therefore, grabbing images from these sites will most likely not print well in your larger albums, for print technologies need much bigger files than screens do. Unless noted all the companies do not offer embossing or stamping.

ADORAMAPIX Seamless lay-flat is their standard bounding, they offer six different textures on their photographic papers – a record I believe. Hardcover with an image, fabric, fake and real leather are the cover options. Also, you can place type on the spin which is unusual in their price point. 10 x 12.5 is their largest size and 6 x 4.5 the smallest with many options in between. Their design software has an auto-builder and template styles as options.

Wedding Albums and More What this company does is sells to you what the wholesaler "Renaissance albums" will not, for they deal with direct to photographer only. You can have matted prints with some of their designs, however these are pre-cut matts which you slip prints into and tape down, they are not professionally mounted. No embossing available but there are gilded edges and cameos. Very traditional and not top of the line but good quality with few options and lots of handy work needed from you – remember you would need to print all your images first before ordering they album, they do not print images.

Somerset Albums This company does offer professional albums but with very few choices, cameo and embossed covers are available, three sizes all square. Like most companies no mounted prints, just full page layouts on photo paper. They also offer photo books with traditional page thickness which is unique, but few options beyond that and expensive. Computer based design software. It is a very traditional look which is hard to achieve DIY.

mpix Linen or dust jacket are the only cover options and 11 x 8.5 is the largest size. So limited options for books but the company offers a vast variety of other printing products. A good mini book alternative is their accordion mini

JENNIBICK They do offer embossing unlike most of the other companies and they have unique beautiful leather covers, however they come with a set amount of thick paper pages and then you have to mount your prints onto their pages yourself using old style self-adhesive mounts or tape.

ZNO A variety of options from inexpensive to high end, some unique cover options and the design software works on a mobile app, (if your dare). Additional options available if you order through a pro photographer.

picaboo A variety of styles and price points also they offer features once not available to consumers, like double-thick board pages, foil stamping or debossing and gilded sides. However limited sizes and no square shapes offered. They are one of the few labs offering a mini book option as a standalone or direct copy of your larger album although it is a large mini book at 5 x 4.

[Modern Album Designs](#) This company is mostly a professional photographers site but they do offer services direct to consumers. This includes designing and even retouching, so if your photographer went missing after your wedding this would be a good option. Most of their offerings are in the classic sense but very upscale and modernized. A large panoramic is an option at 14 x 10.

The following companies offer press printed paper only

Most of these are familiarly known as "photo books". These are digital presses, which means - not on photographic paper or a conventional printing press, do not fear too much the quality can still be very good. My experience is that digital presses usually lack in the blacks and vibrancy, some offer premium papers to try to address these issues. However, a bonus is some also offer different choices in paper texture not available on photographic paper. When using these companies, I usually make a copy of the images I am printing and tweak these to compensate for the digital press. This will vary between companies, so some direct experience would help. Some people complain of inconsistency, being excellent one order, and average the next. If you have any personnel experience or feedback, please contact me. This reflects the big limitation of these books; there is no way to preview exactly how they will look. When I create a conventional album, I go through at least one round of reprinting a few prints before having them mounted.

I have explored all the mentioned sites and can comment on their ease of use, options and products offered, however I have limited direct experience to each company's quality. On a big plus side, I can say that although prices do differ, except for the high end ones they all offer products at a price that is hard to believe, almost worth just seeing how it comes out.

[MILK Photo Books](#) Their tag line is "simple and elegant". Hand bound, a high-quality press printed option with embossing available. You get board pages, leather and cameo options, but simple also means limited cover styles and only three sizes. Online design tools, only one bounding option which is lay-flat.

[Artifact Uprising](#) No lay-flat options, 11 x 8.5 is the largest size and 50 page minimum and dust jacket only cover. Press printed only but very reasonable for what appears as high quality from their site.

[Couture](#) This company is too cool for school, but they do have an option for working direct with consumers. I have not used them and the website is difficult to understand exactly what they offer but they do have "concierge" service and custom design offered. Hey, there are a lot of dancing models on the site so have a look!

[Smilebooks](#) They have partnered up with picaboo to use their online design software but they also have their own for download, and an app which has received good reviews. Limited options for covers, no leather and a good suite of sizes but no 10 x 10. They do have a thicker page option unlike others. They also offer full design service which is unusual for this level album but becoming more common.

[Blurb](#) There are advanced design tools, and opportunities for community book development. (if your photographer was not so good) Software was a little slow and finicky but ultimately worked well. Their latest software is web based, but some features like patterned backgrounds and flicker integration are only available with their computer based software, which is odd. "Image Wrap" is available where images and text can wrap around the spine is a unique option, very limited album sizes - though they do have a large book, 11 x 13. Their market definitely is "books" and not "albums"; however, they do have wedding themes and the software offers many options with a new mobile version out. Photo integration with Instagram, Facebook and SmugMug. However, if you are seeking to get something done quickly, there are better

options for with all those advanced tools comes a learning curve and slower software. Also, image wrap is the only cover option, on the plus side they offer proline paper which emulates photo paper.

Shutterfly Their premium books go as large as 11 x 14 but 8 x 8 is the smallest size. Leather and a cameo (they call it die-cut) is also available on the premium line. The crushed silk cover is a nice option for a wedding. Double-thick, satin-finish paper is your only option though. Online software is easy to use and is also available for ipad. They have an auto fill feature like some others which pretty much designs the book for you. A design service is also an option from them. They have so many "styles" of books and background options it is a bit overwhelming. Their spell checker option could save your marriage tho. If you wish to do a panorama they offer to upgrade to a deluxe lay-flat vs their standard bounding which is lay-flat with a seam. Facebook and Instagram integration.

Snapfish, Also has a 11 x 14 but they in addition have a 5 x 7 and 6 x 8 but no 10 x 10. Same deal with the two versions of lay-flat bounding as Shutterfly but they also offer regular bounding, be forewarned their leather bounding is not lay-flat. Three types of covers for premium line; linen, velvet with image or leather. Extra-thick premium paper with a luster-silk finish is your only option.

Presto Photo I include this lab for it is one of the very few that still offers mini books, 3.75 x 2.5. I love these they are something you could hand out to the wedding party or have several on each table at the wedding, or even send one compiled with images of the wedding and include it with the thank you notes.

Apple photos This software comes pre-installed on all Macintosh machines. Auto flow and a map page (great for a destination wedding) are now available in the latest version. Sorry pc users, unlike itunes there is no pc version. This was the easiest software to use, that has been true from the start of apple books but the program has become really easy now for they offer so few options. 13 x 10 is the largest size, 8 x 6 the smallest, no leather - photo-wrapped covers are your only option. Limited backgrounds, layout choices were good but besides the type they are not customizable. No lay-flat bounding option or paper options. By its nature this software works off your computer and then up-loads. The program was intuitive, easy, and fast, a painless quick way to get an album accomplished.

As with anything on the web, sites and services can change for the better or worse very quickly. I am confident that this list is comprehensive and accurate as of it's writing. However, this is an evolving industry, please email me Robert London wedding photographer any comments on sites you have experiences with that are not on this list, also any feedback with your experiences on sites that are on this list.

This article was last updated October 2017