

Everything you need to know about wedding photography... but probably don't.



Besides everything else that goes into your wedding to make it your special day, you searched high and low to find the perfect dress -the one you had always dreamt you would be wearing when you got married. The one that makes you look and feel like a princess! Don't you deserve photographs that show how good you looked on your wedding day? Don't you want to look back on your wedding and relive it just as vividly as you did on the day itself? There are millions of wedding photographers out there...how do you know which ones are good and more importantly - which ones to avoid? Well, let me help you with some of the more important things to look for, both good and bad when you are looking for a wedding photographer.

Digital technology has caused a swarm of wanna-be photographers to enter the market. They think it's an easy way to make a fast buck. Unfortunately, the fact that they really don't know what they are doing and can easily cause a lot of problems at a couple's wedding is second to the fact that they want to make some quick extra cash under the table. Just because you like you aunt's cooking doesn't mean you would hire her to cater your wedding does it? Well then why would you hire you uncle/cousin/friend of a friend/ or you brother's girlfriend's neighbour to photograph your wedding just because they have a fancy camera and can taken pretty vacation pictures? There is no shortage of these people who will photograph your wedding and burn the files to a DVD for \$1500 or even less. Unfortunately, most of the time the couples who go this route end up extremely disappointed in the final results. Owning a fancy camera doesn't make someone any more of a wedding photographer then sitting on the floor of a garage makes you a car.

There are dozens of little groups out there with different types of names. Some even advertise in such a way that they imply that they are industry leaders, or the trend setters, or whatever. All of these groups are simply a few friends who have pulled their marketing budgets and gave themselves a name. There is nothing wrong with that. What I find troublesome however is when they start to advertise in such a way as to imply that they have had to be accepted into the "organization" or the group is responsible for some industry standards. These groups are not independent third party organizations that are there for the good of the industry or as a way of the general public to be assured of professional quality and conduct. They only did this to make themselves sound more professional and as if they were a recognized organization.



Unfortunately in a lot of ways it's buyer be ware now-a-days when hiring a photographer. There are just so many unskilled, unprofessional and unethical people out there calling themselves professional photographers. Fortunately, there is at least one way to avoid most of them.

Where to find a good photographer:



So how do you know you are hiring a skilled and ethical photographer? Hire someone who is a member of the **Professional Photographers of Canada (PPOC)**. Their website is www.ppoc.ca Ask if they are a member of this particular association by name. PPOC is a **non-profit** association dedicated to the Canadian professional photographic industry. PPOC's goal is to help increase the quality of work its' members produce while making sure its members conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manor. Photographers had to qualify to become a member (unlike its American counterpart "PPA" - where if you cheque

doesn't bounce you are in! I'm also PPA a member but I disagree with their acceptance policy). Obviously some members are more talented then others but all have met at least minimal professional quality levels as well as have proven to conduct themselves and their business dealings in an ethical manner. Ask if the photographer has any **Accreditations** in the wedding field. Accreditations are given after a photographer has proven to be able to

produce above average professional level work in a specific field of work. These prove a photographer has at least a solid level of proficiency in an area of photography (in this case wedding photography). At the other end of the scale is the title of **Master of Photographic Arts (MPA)**. This is an industry degree that is earned over the course of years by (among other things) continually demonstrating a top level of skill and ability by consistently creating outstanding images. Most photographers work their entire career and never achieve this title that is given by their peers. At the moment only 14 photographers in the province of Manitoba have achieved this level of recognition.

Why are any of these memberships, accomplishments and degrees important to you as a bride? Simple. You don't get a second chance to photograph a wedding. To get the memories you deserve, you should hire someone who has proven their skill and ability. Weddings happen very fast and you have to react quickly to situations that have arisen on the spot. The photographer is very much involved with the timing and flow of your wedding day. When you have someone who has experience in handling the stress and pressure of a wedding day, the couple and families are much more relaxed and can enjoy the day. Not to mention you want someone who is skilled at making people look their absolute best in photographs. With proper knowledge of the human body a talented photographer can slim down people in the photographs and make sure no one has a double chin just by how they are photographed – among a host of other aspects to make people look their best. After all, there is a big difference in photographing a bride in a dress that flairs out from the waist and a vacation snapshot. I've never had a bride yet ask me to please make sure they look heavier than they really are in their photographs. Yet if someone doesn't understand the nuances of photographing a bride in a wedding dress that is exactly what will happen.



What can happen when you hire someone who photographs weddings on the side for a fast buck?



About a year and a half ago I had a couple contact me who had seen a coffee table book I had done for another couple. They said they had hired a photographer for what they thought was a great deal (\$1000) and that person photographed the wedding and provided them with the digital files and copyrights. They said the photographs were ***“not as good as they had wished”*** and were hoping I could fix them up a little. They were in fact some of the worst photographs I had ever seen! It was if the person who took them had intentionally done everything they could to damage the files. When the dress is still white, but the skin is orange...you know you got a problem! Did I mention how the photographer bragged how they had used to shoot fashion professionally on the West Coast? They were lied to by someone who

wanted to make a fast buck. In the end after about 20-30 hours of computer time we were able to salvage an OK album for them and each of their parents. They ended up paying more to try to fix someone else's mistakes than if they had just hired someone good in the first place. It's the old adage ***“you get what you pay for”***. Or is it ***“pay me now, or pay me later”***

I don't care about the technical stuff, just take my pictures!

Normally I don't talk about any technical aspects of photography with a bride, but there are a few exceptions. Most people are familiar with what's called a “jpeg” (or jpg). Most people are not familiar however with what is called “Raw”. The basic difference is this, a Raw file is simply all the information the camera captured with nothing done to it. The camera basically says *“here it is... now go back to your computer and deal*



Sample of a Jpg right out of the camera with no added artwork.

with it!” where as a jpeg has been manipulated by the camera before anyone ever sees it. A jpeg throws out information that the camera “thinks” you don’t want to use. One major problem with this is easily explained when it comes to wedding photography. The problem is the bright, white dress with all the detail work! The beads, the sequins, the lace, etc. can easily be so overexposed to the point where information being **permanently** lost in a jpeg – you can be left looking like you wore a plain white bed sheet in a lot of your wedding photographs. However with Raw a lot of that over exposed detail can be salvaged. So your dress ends up looking like the way you hoped it would when you tried it on for the first time in the store.

Colour is even more critical with digital photography then it was with film. Florescent lights, incandescent bulbs, sunlight, cloudy days, every imaginable lighting condition has a different colour to it and drastically effects the final photograph. The real problem comes in when you have mixed conditions – like florescent lighting that is near a window. When shooting jpegs you better get everything perfect for every shot before you take it because otherwise you are adjusting each one of them individually afterwards and each major color adjustment really hurts the quality of a Jpg.. While with Raw you can adjust all the colours afterwards easily without damaging the file whatsoever.



Sample of a Raw file with artwork and obvious embellishments.

You probably started thinking right after I mentioned the white bed sheet “why don’t all wedding photographers photograph in Raw format?” The answer is simple – some are lazy. Photographing in Raw is more troublesome to them. Raw files are larger (they have more information after all); they require processing by a computer before you can do anything with them – a process taking hours. A fast buck stops becoming fast when you have to put a little effort into things. So instead of the best possible images from your wedding, you end up with so-so ones because you hired someone who doesn’t take pride in their work and doesn’t want to put the effort into doing things the proper way to insure their clients get the best possible wedding images.

Awesome album verses just a bunch of 5x7s



Digital technology today allows for the most amazing albums to be able to be created! Again however, designing an album and doing even the most basic of artwork (what couple wants zits or shinny faces from the 33 degree heat in their photographs?) can easily take 15+ hours of time. So it’s much easier to say “**here are the files...good luck!**” Now a couple doesn’t know what to do, so they end up getting a bunch of individual prints printed somewhere and that’s their wedding

memories. The dress is slightly green in one photograph, a little blue in another one and a touch yellow in the next. It was a summer wedding so the sweat is beading on everyone’s faces, and your little brother’s acne is like a connect the dots puzzle. The wanna-be photographer who shot the wedding for cheap and handed over the files doesn’t care because he/she has already got their fast buck out of the deal. So, instead of an awesome album that makes you look like you stepped right out of a fashion magazine, you are

stuck with a bunch of iffy (at best) pictures.

Ok, so what if you want to get a really nice album done and you have the files? Well, somebody has to design it and do the artwork. That's not something anybody can do. You might have experience playing around in Photoshop, but this is an entirely different story. So you have to get someone else to do it for you. Anybody even remotely decent in the industry charges at least \$40 an hour (absolute minimum) and expect at least a 10 hour bill even from the quickest artwork and design person. (15 years ago you paid \$75/hour for a good airbrush artist in Winnipeg) That is just for the album design. Not even any basic artwork like getting rid of the zits, the shine on the faces, etc. Expect double that bill if you want an album designed with any creative flair and artwork to make every one look their best. That is just artwork and design time, the album itself hasn't been even ordered yet. A lot of the coolest looking albums/books available today come from over seas...Italy, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Most of these companies will not deal with the general public directly anyway; you have to go through a professional photographer. But remember, arranging all of this is your hassle, not the person who took your wedding pictures and handed over the files. They've made their quick buck and have left all the hassle up to you. So instead of going through all this hassle, you just end up with a bunch of 5x7s with no artwork done on them and the colours are kinda close – sort of.



Yes, having your wedding photographed by a talented professional photographer and having them produce an album for you certainly does cost more than having your neighbour's cousin photograph your wedding and hand over the files... There is no denying that. You also get a finished product and memories that are a 10,000 times better! When money is tight people have to cut back somewhere. But cutting back on the photography is only cheating yourself out of your memories down the road. Is having an open bar or a steak dinner instead of chicken worth doing that to the two of you? What are about your children and grandchildren? It's also their heritage you are taking away from them. You hear it all the time after a disaster.... after all the people and pets are saved it's the photographs that people are most concerned about.

After the meal has been eaten, the music stops and the hangover fades....all you have left of your special day are the memories. If a skilled photographer does their job right you can relive your wedding day on your 50th anniversary just by looking at the album they created for you. In a year the money you saved on your photography by hiring someone cheap will be long spent and forgotten. Those lousy wedding photographs will not be going away however. I've heard literally dozens of women express remorse about not hiring a good photographer for their wedding – some in tears. The couples who show their wedding photographs but feel embarrassed because they are not really any good always try to explain them away by saying what a deal they got by hiring a cheap photographer. Maybe it's just me, but my way of thinking is that no matter how little you paid for something you don't like...you still over paid. Hindsight is 20/20. It's an old saying, but one that remains true to this day: **“the bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of cheap price is forgotten.” Invest in yourself.... invest in your memories.**



Master Photographer Bruce Allen Hendricks MPA, F.Ph. of Impact Photographic Design has twice (along with numerous other awards) been named Manitoba Photographer of the Year. He has had articles published throughout North America and is a nationally recognized photographic juror. Bruce has produced seminars and lectures geared to both amateur and professional photographers.