

Choosing a Wedding Photographer – part 6

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Years ago – when I got married and long before I became a photographer – photography demanded equipment and skills the average person could simply never hope to attain. Medium format or quarter plate cameras were expensive and not at all easy to operate. In the hands of a skilled photographer the gulf between the high quality images they produced and the blurry snaps produced by consumer cameras was enormous. But that was then and this is now. Digital photography in particular has blurred the distinction between amateur snapshot and professional imaging. Consumer cameras have increasingly high resolutions, better lenses and computer-controlled wizardry over exposure, fill-in flash, face recognition, anti-shake etc etc. All the things that ‘professionals’ claimed only they had the expertise to handle correctly.

So why pay large sums of money for photography which your guests could have done for you for free? Why indeed? I’ve already discussed how many people claiming to be professional photographers have barely adequate equipment and little experience or skill. I look around at some of the offerings I see at Wedding Fairs and I despair! In amongst, and far outnumbering, the excellent work of the true professional photographers there are collections of snapshots – no more, no less – showing no technical skill, no awareness of posing, no artistic or creative awareness and no rapport with the couple or their guests. This mixture of grim, grip,n,grin traditional shots are mixed with a multitude of ‘reportage’ (i.e. caught shots showing neither thought nor skill on the photographer’s part) are plonked at random into a collage to create a ‘modern storybook album’.

AAAARGHHH!!!!!!!

Simply, if you’re happy with work like this or it’s all you can afford then use the money to buy a camera to give to a trusted guest and let her take the pictures. They can’t be worse and the chances are they will be better than what you would otherwise have paid for. And at least you’ll have got a decent camera out of it!

So what SHOULD you expect from a professional? Why are they worth the money – and a lot more? This is something I feel passionate about. I learned the hard way of the importance of good wedding photography. When we got married Carole and I were still at university and the wedding was funded purely from my student grant. So paying for a photographer was out of the question. We still remember our disappointment when the amateur photographer who took our pictures made his abject apologies about his camera ‘not working properly’. And the half dozen poorly exposed and out of focus pictures are all we have to remember our special day.

Years later, after succeeding in other much more lucrative, prestigious and secure careers, a sort of mid-life crisis made me look around for another challenge. And what could be more challenging – and rewarding – than establishing a photographic business with a difference, where the emphasis was on giving couples the photography they wanted and deserved. Not boring ‘grip’n’grins of distant relatives they never wanted to invite to their wedding in the first place, but photography which would rekindle their emotions for years to come and become a cherished heirloom. Carole and I are truly passionate about what we do and believe totally in the vital importance of having a professional photographer at your wedding. Whether your photographer’s style is traditional or a more modern, the benefits he will bring and the advantages he or she has over amateurs far outweigh the additional cost involved.

1. **Equipment** – this will be modern and in first rate condition, having regular inspections and at least annual servicing. A range of lenses/lighting control and peripheral equipment will also be available to enable the photographer to produce the very best results from any situation which develops on your wedding day. Virtually everything will be duplicated so that if an item fails then a replacement is readily available and your photography can continue unhindered. At Aurora our cameras are regularly serviced by Canon and we normally replace our camera bodies every two years. We usually take about £10,000 of back-up equipment with us to every wedding.
2. **Insurance** No, I’m not just talking about insurance for all that equipment. Far more important is the insurance for you and your guests. Professional indemnity insurance is expensive but vital if you are to have the peace of

mind of knowing that you are protected against unforeseen accidents or problems caused by your photographer's actions.

3. **Professionalism** Professionalism demands competence and trustworthiness. With a professional photographer you can have the assurance that he has the skills to make the best photograph possible in the most adverse conditions – and that he will turn up on time, fully equipped and able to do the job with the minimum of disruption and the maximum courtesy. Nothing should upset your wedding day – and employing a professional photographer is one way of ensuring that your day runs smoothly and without any problems.

4. **Technical Skills.** A professional photographer, qualified through professional organisations like the Master Photographers' Association bring the guarantee that they have reached a high level of technical ability. In perfect weather and perfect lighting conditions almost anyone can take a snapshot that will be at least acceptable. But given bad weather, awful lighting conditions and less than photogenic surroundings then the skills of a true professional come into their own. We have sample albums in the studio showing weddings that took place under some horrific weather conditions but the commonest comment we get on them is 'Gosh, you'd never know it was even raining!' A competent professional can use the lighting to his advantage and bring out the best of the wedding: an amateur would simply produce appalling photographs in the same conditions.

5. **Creative Skills** Not all venues are equally photogenic and not all couples look like Angelina Jolie or David Beckham. And even if they did, a poor photographer would make them look ordinary!

Brides pay a small fortune for their dress/hair/make-up/venue etc etc. They look the best they will ever do in their whole lives – and a good photographer will ensure that your photographs reveal you, your guests and your venue all at their very best. A good photographer interprets – he doesn't merely record, and the creativity he shows through his camera angles, his use of his technical skills and his posing abilities, all work together to show you at your very best and provide images which will rekindle pleasant memories for years to come.

6. **People Skills** Don't begin to underestimate the importance of this. Ever. A wedding is a maelstrom of emotions. Not just for the bride and groom but for everyone. Mothers in particular feel enormous stress and are usually at or near breaking point just before the ceremony. Families are complicated institutions and usually tensions exist which can come very close to the surface on a wedding day. Add to this a host of guests who don't really know each other; some of whom you have only invited for 'political' reasons – and you have a potentially difficult situation. A professional photographer knows how to get the job done smoothly and without treading on toes; he will organise the groups quickly and often without them realising what he's doing, encouraging smiles and laughter without being obtrusive, loud or offensive in any way. It's a skill not easily learned but one which will enhance your day enormously. Without it, your guests become unhappy, you become disconsolate – and your photographs become a disaster, rekindling the very worst type of memories.

7. **Peace of Mind** This isn't really another point but the summation of all I have mentioned. By hiring a professional you are removing worry. You know that your day will run smoothly, that guests won't be upset by the photographs, that equipment failure won't lead to a loss of pictures, that you will look your best, that you will enjoy the day and you will be rewarded with a stunning set of images which you will cherish