



DIGITAL *Wedding*
PHOTOGRAPHY

Capturing Beautiful Memories

2nd Edition

Glen Johnson

Digital Wedding Photography: Capturing Beautiful Memories

Second Edition

Glen Johnson



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About the Author

Glen Johnson, an acclaimed wedding photographer whose client list spans the globe, has shot more than 50 weddings outside the United States. His website, www.aperturephotographics.com, is filled with inspirational images and wedding stories as well as a lot of information for both photographers and brides.

Glen is a founding member of Best of Wedding Photography. This invitation-only group is the premier association for the world's top wedding photographers. Glen regularly provides input in the direction for the group as well as serves on the review board to choose which photographers are invited for membership.

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Thanks to my mom for being my constant cheerleader in everything I do, and thanks to my father for encouraging me in photography and for sending me to my first photo seminar, and especially for letting me steal every camera he ever owned.

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Preface

I was shooting a wedding in the Bahamas where the bride and groom purchased a “package” wedding from a large resort. The package came with a minister, a videographer, and all of the other essentials except the photographer (me), which the couple arranged separately because they wanted more than what the typical hotel photographer provides. On the day of the wedding, I did my usual photojournalistic thing until just before the ceremony when the videographer arrived. This man stepped up with a loud voice and took over the reins of that whole wedding. From then on, he and the minister ran the show completely, telling the bride and groom where to stand, when to move, where to put each hand, how to hold the pen, and even when to smile at the camera — much to my dismay. They were arranging shots for me (which I didn’t ask for) and then saying, “There you go, Mr. Photographer! That’s how we do it here in the Bahamas!”

When the first dance started, the videographer was occupied at the bar but he quickly came charging back with a drink in his hand and a napkin flying in the air behind him. He was waving his hands and motioning across his throat at the DJ to cut the music. The DJ was ignoring him so he finally just yelled, “Stop!” which of course everyone did. Then he walked out onto the dance floor and carefully placed the groom on one side, and the bride on the other, and then he grabbed his camera and motioned for the DJ to start the music again.

Only a few weeks before this scene, I witnessed another bride in the Bahamas almost subjected to the same treatment. However, she stopped all of that nonsense right in the beginning. She told the minister and videographer how she wanted the events to go, and if they didn’t want to do it her way, they could just pack up! At first, the minister didn’t want to comply, but when she told her father to ask him to leave, he changed his mind. She then proceeded to have a very quiet ceremony that went exactly her way, with no interruptions.

Those two very different experiences made me think about how those of us in the wedding business go about our business. Sometimes videographers, ministers, and we photographers forget to honor the sacredness of the wedding. We all see so many weddings that we forget this is the first and perhaps only time the bride and groom will ever experience it. Our familiarity makes us good at what we do, but it also wears away our perception of the sacredness of the event. Before long, each wedding is simply another day at work, and we are eventually tempted to herd our clients through the paces.

Thankfully, a change is swirling in the air around the wedding photography industry. The move toward photojournalism brings with it a change toward relinquishing control — a change toward allowing the bride and groom to express their individuality, creating their own ceremony within the bounds of whatever religion they choose without us “professionals” trying to force them into our perception of what a wedding should be.



If you enjoy photography and you want to develop those skills into a marketable business, there are many options in the photography world. This book will help you decide if wedding photography is the right path for you.

Is This Book for You?

This book is not a beginning photography book. You will find very little information here on f-stops, apertures, or how to operate your camera. If you need to learn beginning photography, this book is *not* the place to start, and I would add that taking on a paid wedding at such a beginning stage could be considered a criminal act. If you already feel fairly comfortable with the basics of photography, and you want to learn how to apply those skills to shooting weddings, then this is the book for you.

If you're looking for a book full of perfectly exposed inspirational images — this is not it. This is a textbook about the basics of wedding photography. Of course I'll try to squeeze in a favorite shot or two when I can, but if you want to see my own best images, check out my website where I have them on display. Many of the images in these pages were chosen from my files because they illustrate what *not* to do. As such, they are often pulled directly out of the trash, where they belong. I'm a big believer in the idea that your mistakes are your greatest teachers, and this book is full of them.

Anyone interested in learning wedding photography, and particularly how to do it with digital equipment, will find *this book* useful. Seasoned photographers looking to branch out into shooting weddings will also find it useful, although of course they won't have as much to gain as a complete beginner to the wedding photography business.

After reading through the chapters in this book, you should have enough information to feel comfortable signing on as a second photographer with a more established wedding photographer. If you can't find a mentor like that, the knowledge in this book provides insight about the thoughts, attitude, camera techniques, and business practices to give you a good solid starting point from which you can comfortably take on (preferably free of charge) those first few small weddings on your own.



Being tuned into the things in your environment is key to finding and using the beautiful elements each wedding location has to offer.

What Does This Book Cover?

In this book I take an in-depth look at the challenging and rewarding world of digital wedding photography. Whether you are an aspiring amateur or a professional looking to add weddings into your business, I provide valuable insights and information to assist you on your way to becoming a digital wedding photographer.

Part I: Understanding Digital Wedding Photography

This book is organized into three parts with 19 chapters. Part I is a general overview of styles, equipment, daily workflow, and some specifics about composing good images.

In Chapter 1 I provide a general overview of the business of wedding photography.

We must remember that the bride and groom hire us to create a beautiful record of their wedding — not to create the wedding itself. We must also remember that the purpose of a wedding is to publicly announce the couple's agreement to be bound together as a family for the rest of their lives, and contrary to what some photographers seem to believe, a wedding is *not* a photo shoot.

In writing this book, my wish is that a new generation of photographers will continue the current trend of working in a more discreet fashion through the ceremony while still enjoying unhindered creativity in the more quiet moments of the wedding day.

In Chapter 2 I provide an overview of the different styles of wedding photography and how the style is determined by your personality type and the sort of images you prefer to shoot. If you're just starting out, this chapter may give you some direction in developing your own style.

Wedding photographers have a set of unique and very specific equipment needs, as you'll discover in Chapter 3. Many equipment choices you make are simply a matter of personal preference, while others are dictated almost completely by the specific requirements of the job at hand. No matter how serious your business aspirations are, this chapter can give you a long list of qualities to look for as you shop for that perfect camera system.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the various ways to set up your camera and how all the settings are used in a wedding photography context.



Creating beautiful images requires an advanced knowledge of how to use your camera and the specific ways to set it up for wedding photography.

Part II: Wedding Photography Techniques and Concepts

In Part II I go into depth about the thought process and techniques used to shoot a wedding. Topics range from camera setup to where to stand at any particular moment during the ceremony.

In Chapter 5 I discuss how the rules of good composition are simply guidelines that help to set you on your way toward creating great art. These guidelines are valuable to all artists, but the beginner stands to gain the most from learning and adhering to them. As you master the basics, you develop a *feel* for when you can bend or break the rules and still create images that work.

In Chapter 6 I cover information on how to develop a comfortable relationship with people while shooting in the dressing rooms. Anyone getting started in wedding photography needs to know how to approach the dressing rooms so that your clients will trust you to capture

great images while still respecting everyone's need for privacy. Other topics range from what sort of equipment is needed, what settings to use, dressing room etiquette, how to arrange the room, and how to create detail shots that capture the feeling of the day.

In Chapter 7 I discuss general concepts and specific techniques that can help you deal with changing outdoor light conditions, from the bright sun of a mid-day ceremony to the complete darkness you may encounter with a late evening event.

Shooting indoor weddings requires some specialized equipment as well as a lot of knowledge about how an indoor ceremony works. In Chapter 8 I cover everything from how to put out the candles, how to set up your lights, how to avoid reflections, and how to select a good background for family groups. Reflections are discussed in detail because they are a constant threat to your indoor images and you need to know why they happen and how to avoid them if you want to shoot indoors. The dark scenes you often encounter shooting indoors present a unique set of challenges, forcing you to make decisions about whether to set your ISO high and go for the natural light look or to use artificial light and lose the natural qualities of the scene. Your personal shooting style dictates which type of images you choose to create.

The ceremony can easily be considered the pinnacle of every wedding day. In Chapter 9 I provide an in-depth look at this important time in the wedding day. Months of preparation lead up to this one moment and yet when it actually happens, it seems to go by so fast that I often find myself standing there thinking, "Is that it? Is that all of it?" Thankfully, most weddings follow a predictable sequence of events that seldom varies within the United States. This predictability enables an experienced wedding photographer to stand in exactly the right spot at exactly the right time to catch the most important events. In this chapter I share some insights and the thought processes that go into every movement that a professional photographer makes during those few fleeting moments of the ceremony.

In Chapter 10 I provide information on equipment to use as well as tips on capturing candid by learning how to see them coming. A good candid image captures a spontaneous natural moment. Candidly frequently tell a story, but more important, they simply capture people living their lives. The images are not contrived or posed. Candidly catch rare and fleeting moments of reality — often achieving a "snapshot" look by trading perfect photographic technique for speed.

In Chapter 11 I describe a few of the techniques and thought processes that go into creating a type of image that contains such elusive qualities that no words can fully describe what it is or how it should look. For thousands of years, artists have been trying to capture or create images that portray romance. Photographers, painters, and sculptors alike all struggle with the same question, "What does romance look like?" For that matter, what is romance? Like beauty, romance is an elusive trait that only the eyes of the beholder can judge. Every person knows it when he or she sees it, yet no two viewers see it in the same place.

In Chapter 12 I talk about shooting at the reception. During the hours that follow the ceremony, you will have few responsibilities and only a couple of "must have" shots to capture. There are shots of the food, the first dance, the cake cutting, and the garter and bouquet toss. The last portion of this chapter introduces some advanced flash techniques that are so much fun to experiment with that you may find yourself staying at the reception far into the night.



After the ceremony there is often time to walk around the grounds and shoot some creative images with just the couple.

Part III: The Business of Digital Wedding Photography

The last section of the book looks at the most important and least glamorous side of wedding photography — running a business. Topics in Part III include how to create your own workspace, what types of equipment you need, and what sort of products you might offer to your clients.

In Chapter 13 I offer a brief overview of the workplace options and office equipment you need to create a full-featured digital wedding business capable of handling all aspects of image processing and client contacts. The space needed may be as small and unassuming as a spare bedroom or as large as a full-featured studio, without having any effect on the style or the quality of the final product. In this chapter I look at the physical space where a wedding photographer works on a day-to-day basis, as well as the many different types of equipment and software needed to run a successful photography business.

In Chapter 14 I cover the topic of digital workflow. I break down the whole process into the major parts and then analyze the various jobs you must perform in this rewarding yet tedious part of a digital photographer's day. Each photographer must develop an organized system that allows work to flow from one task to the next as each job progresses from beginning to end. Tasks include downloading and editing the previous weekend's images, backing them up on the computer, editing out the bad ones, and finally delivering the images to the client. The workflow information you gain in this chapter can help you to streamline your business so that it functions as efficiently as possible.

In Chapter 15 you'll find an overview of the techniques used to manipulate images in Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom. These two programs dominate the wedding photography business today and mastering their use will be one of your greatest challenges as a wedding photographer.

In Chapter 16 I look at the various ways you can deliver finished products to your clients. Current options include online print sales, albums, DVD data discs, DVD slide shows, and more. The digital age is teeming with products that you can offer to your wedding clients. The choices are so numerous that the job of narrowing down to the best offerings is a difficult and time-consuming task.

Breaking into the wedding photography business may seem like a daunting task to the beginner. In Chapter 17 I discuss the major options for finding jobs and provide tips on who to talk to about finding jobs. In this chapter I also discuss how to conduct client interviews. After all, finding a client is not the same as getting one to sign a contract. Knowing where to meet and what to talk about in client interviews is vital to your ability to get the signature on that contract.

In Chapter 18 I discuss the topic of web sites. Your website is the single most important part of the advertising puzzle. If you don't have one, you don't exist. And if you have one, but you don't know how to set it up for basic search engine optimization (SEO), then for all practical purposes, your website still doesn't exist. Your website has to be attractive, and your clients have to be able to find it.

In Chapter 19 I take a look into the special requirements and rewards of destination weddings. Topics include options for marketing yourself to these clients, pricing the job, choosing the right equipment for travel, and getting there and back in one piece.



Dramatic couple shots are always challenging and fun to create. If you shoot destination weddings, the challenge is multiplied by the fact that every wedding takes place in a completely new location.

Contacting the Author

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Contents at a Glance

| | |
|--|------------|
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| Preface | v |
| PART I: Understanding Digital Wedding Photography | 1 |
| Chapter 1: The World of Wedding Photography | 3 |
| Chapter 2: Developing Your Own Style | 13 |
| Chapter 3: The Right Equipment for the Job | 33 |
| Chapter 4: Camera Settings and Digital Exposure | 59 |
| PART II: Wedding Photography Techniques and Concepts | 73 |
| Chapter 5: Composing Your Art | 75 |
| Chapter 6: Finding Beauty and Emotion in the Dressing Room | 89 |
| Chapter 7: Shooting Outdoors | 103 |
| Chapter 8: Shooting Indoors | 121 |
| Chapter 9: Documenting the Ceremony | 137 |
| Chapter 10: Capturing Candid Moments | 157 |
| Chapter 11: Creating Romance in the Magic Hour | 167 |
| Chapter 12: Jazzing Up the Reception | 189 |
| PART III: The Business of Digital Wedding Photography | 223 |
| Chapter 13: Creating Your Own Workspace | 225 |
| Chapter 14: Digital Workflow: Getting Images from Camera to Client | 243 |
| Chapter 15: Manipulating Your Images | 263 |
| Chapter 16: Creating the Finished Product | 289 |
| Chapter 17: Cracking the Secret Code: Breaking into the Business | 305 |
| Chapter 18: Show Yourself: A Website of Your Own | 319 |
| Chapter 19: Destination Weddings | 337 |
| Appendix: How-To Gallery | 361 |
| Index | 369 |

Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Acknowledgments | iii |
|------------------------------|------------|

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| Preface | v |
|----------------------|----------|

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Is This Book for You? | vi |
| What Does This Book Cover? | vii |
| Contacting the Author | xi |

PART I: Understanding Digital Wedding Photography **1**

| | |
|--|----------|
| Chapter 1: The World of Wedding Photography | 3 |
|--|----------|

| | |
|--|----|
| Capturing Weddings | 4 |
| A Challenging and Rewarding Profession | 6 |
| Using the Tools of the Trade | 6 |
| What camera should you use? | 7 |
| Personality goes a long way | 8 |
| Training your mind | 8 |
| Getting experience | 8 |
| Recording Life's Milestone with Pictures | 10 |
| Breaking Into the Business | 11 |
| Summary | 12 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter 2: Developing Your Own Style | 13 |
|---|-----------|

| | |
|--|----|
| Two Business Models | 14 |
| The Aftermarket Sales business model | 14 |
| The Creative Fee business model | 16 |
| Follow the money | 17 |
| Three Styles of Wedding Photography | 17 |
| Traditional style | 18 |
| Equipment | 18 |
| Personality | 19 |
| Services and items offered | 19 |
| The wedding day | 19 |
| After the wedding | 20 |
| Photojournalistic style | 20 |
| History and current trends | 21 |
| Personality | 21 |
| Informal formals | 22 |
| The wedding day | 23 |
| After the wedding | 23 |
| Portrait Journalism style | 26 |
| Current trends | 27 |
| The wedding day | 27 |
| Equipment | 27 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Finding a Style That Works for You | 29 |
| Giving Clients What They Want | 30 |
| Summary | 32 |
| Chapter 3: The Right Equipment for the Job | 33 |
| Choosing a Camera of Your Own | 34 |
| Lightweight | 34 |
| Interchangeable lenses | 34 |
| Fast focus | 35 |
| Fast motor drive | 35 |
| Good color | 35 |
| High ISO range | 35 |
| No perceptible shutter lag | 35 |
| Long battery life | 36 |
| Availability of a powerful TTL flash system | 36 |
| LCD screen | 36 |
| Vertical shutter-release button | 37 |
| Short power-on time | 37 |
| Choosing Your Lenses | 37 |
| Wide-angle zoom lens | 40 |
| Portraits | 40 |
| Dressing room shots | 41 |
| Dancing shots | 41 |
| Group shots | 43 |
| Medium zoom lens | 43 |
| Telephoto zoom lens | 44 |
| Low-light shooting | 45 |
| Shallow depth-of-field | 45 |
| Candid shots | 46 |
| Compression of subject and background | 47 |
| Using Art Cameras and Lenses | 48 |
| Super-wide aperture lenses: 50mm f/1.4 | 48 |
| Lensbaby | 51 |
| Infrared camera conversions | 52 |
| Deciding What Flash to Use | 53 |
| Selecting the Right Bag to Carry Your Gear | 54 |
| The photo backpack | 55 |
| The rolling box | 55 |
| The photo vest | 56 |
| Using a Tripod | 56 |
| The Importance of Backup Gear | 57 |
| Summary | 58 |
| Chapter 4: Camera Settings and Digital Exposure | 59 |
| Camera Settings | 60 |
| Color space | 60 |
| File format | 60 |
| Sharpening | 60 |
| Exposure Modes | 61 |
| Aperture priority mode | 61 |
| Shutter priority mode | 61 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Program mode | 61 |
| Manual mode | 62 |
| Metering for Proper Exposures | 62 |
| Methods of Exposure Compensation | 63 |
| Exposure lock button | 63 |
| +/- dial adjustment | 64 |
| Manual mode | 64 |
| Digital Exposures | 64 |
| Underexposure | 66 |
| Overexposure | 67 |
| What is the best exposure? | 68 |
| RAW Versus JPEG | 69 |
| Image differences | 69 |
| Minimizing digital noise | 70 |
| Manual conversion advantages | 70 |
| Cheap insurance | 71 |
| Summary | 72 |

PART II: Wedding Photography Techniques and Concepts 73

Chapter 5: Composing Your Art 75

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| The Rule of Thirds | 76 |
| Moving Into the Frame | 77 |
| Using Empty Space | 78 |
| Cropping People | 79 |
| Shooting a Bull's-Eye | 80 |
| Leading the Focal Point | 82 |
| Natural Posing | 84 |
| The Creative Portrait Session | 85 |
| Think Creative Thoughts | 88 |
| Summary | 88 |

Chapter 6: Finding Beauty and Emotion in the Dressing Room 89

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Choosing the Right Equipment | 90 |
| Wide-angle lens | 90 |
| Medium lens | 91 |
| 70-200mm telephoto lens | 92 |
| Lensbaby | 93 |
| Lighting the Dressing Room | 94 |
| Window light | 95 |
| Fake window light | 97 |
| Shooting the Guy's Room | 98 |
| Getting the Detail Shots | 99 |
| Dressing Room Etiquette | 101 |
| Knock before entering | 101 |
| Talk about the nudity issue | 101 |
| Know what not to shoot | 102 |
| Summary | 102 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 7: Shooting Outdoors | 103 |
| Choosing the Right Equipment | 104 |
| Shooting in Bright Sunlight | 104 |
| Know your camera's dynamic range. | 104 |
| Watch the histogram and blinking highlight warning | 105 |
| Shade your lens. | 106 |
| Shooting in Overcast Light | 108 |
| Shooting in the Late Evening | 109 |
| Taking Outdoor Group Photos. | 110 |
| Shooting in direct, midday sun | 110 |
| Shooting in direct, late-afternoon sun | 110 |
| Finding shade | 112 |
| Using Fill Flash | 114 |
| Backlight Techniques | 115 |
| Using Light Reflectors. | 116 |
| Background Choices | 118 |
| Including the background. | 118 |
| Minimizing the background. | 119 |
| Letting the background pick your lens | 119 |
| Summary | 120 |
| Chapter 8: Shooting Indoors. | 121 |
| Choosing the Right Equipment | 122 |
| Tripods. | 122 |
| Slaves | 123 |
| Flash (optical) slaves | 123 |
| Infrared slaves | 124 |
| Radio slaves. | 124 |
| Lighting the Set | 125 |
| Basic lighting setups for groups | 125 |
| Single small flash | 125 |
| Single main light plus on-camera flash | 126 |
| Dual umbrella | 127 |
| Indirect flash techniques. | 128 |
| Bounce flash. | 128 |
| Bounce flash + "kicker" | 129 |
| Diffusers | 130 |
| Adjusting White Balance | 131 |
| JPEG shooters | 131 |
| RAW shooters | 132 |
| Minimizing Reflections. | 132 |
| Choosing Your Locations. | 134 |
| Architectural features | 134 |
| Type of lighting. | 134 |
| Time considerations | 134 |
| The altar area | 135 |
| Summary | 136 |
| Chapter 9: Documenting the Ceremony. | 137 |
| Must-Have Shots. | 138 |
| Ceremony Etiquette. | 140 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Flash Etiquette | 143 |
| General Ceremony Information | 143 |
| Networking | 144 |
| Strange situations | 144 |
| Emotional moments | 144 |
| Working with Extreme Light | 144 |
| Direct sunlight | 145 |
| Low-light ceremony shots | 145 |
| Catching the Guests | 146 |
| Where to Be and When | 149 |
| Pre-ceremony | 150 |
| Mid-ceremony | 152 |
| End of ceremony | 155 |
| Summary | 156 |
| Chapter 10: Capturing Candid Moments | 157 |
| Seeing Candid Moments | 158 |
| Character studies | 159 |
| Face the faces | 159 |
| Watch and wait | 160 |
| Choosing the Right Equipment | 161 |
| When to use a long lens | 162 |
| When to use a wide lens | 164 |
| Summary | 166 |
| Chapter 11: Creating Romance in the Magic Hour | 167 |
| Choosing the Right Equipment | 168 |
| When to use a long lens | 168 |
| When to use a wide lens | 171 |
| When to use art lenses | 171 |
| Defining the Romantic Image | 172 |
| Deconstructing Romance | 173 |
| Creating the Photo Shoot | 178 |
| Pre (or post) bridal shoot | 183 |
| Pep talk before the photo shoot | 185 |
| Digital Romance: Creating Passion with the Computer | 186 |
| Summary | 187 |
| Chapter 12: Jazzing Up the Reception | 189 |
| Must-Have Reception Shots | 190 |
| The decorations and location | 190 |
| The food and beverages | 191 |
| The cake cutting | 191 |
| The first dance | 194 |
| The bouquet and garter tosses | 196 |
| The dance floor | 199 |
| Standard clean flash | 199 |
| Flash that shows motion | 200 |
| The grand exit | 202 |
| Other reception shots | 203 |
| Flash Basics for Shooting at Night | 204 |
| Getting the most from high ISO settings | 204 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Avoiding flash shadows | 205 |
| Camera mode | 205 |
| TTL flash difficulties | 205 |
| Flash to ambient exposure ratio | 206 |
| Ghosting | 207 |
| Flash Setting Scenarios | 208 |
| Shooting the average reception | 208 |
| Freezing fast action at night | 209 |
| Lighting large areas with little strobes | 209 |
| Cross-lighting the dance floor | 210 |
| Fun Motion Techniques | 210 |
| The twirl | 211 |
| The shimmy | 212 |
| Panning | 213 |
| Using a guest flash | 213 |
| Working with moving Spot, Strobe, and Disco Lights | 214 |
| Spotlights | 216 |
| Videographer lights | 216 |
| Lights in your contract | 217 |
| Shooting with Candle Light | 218 |
| Reception Advice for the Bride | 218 |
| Light the reception carefully | 219 |
| Don't rush the bouquet and garter tosses | 219 |
| Dance to the photographer | 219 |
| Meals for the Photographers | 219 |
| Summary | 221 |

PART III: The Business of Digital Wedding Photography 223

Chapter 13: Creating Your Own Workspace 225

| | |
|--|-----|
| Workspace Options | 226 |
| Studio | 226 |
| Office | 226 |
| Home office | 227 |
| Designing Your Workspace | 227 |
| Wall colors | 227 |
| Seating | 227 |
| Lighting | 228 |
| Conducting Client Interviews | 228 |
| Digital projector versus flat-screen TVs | 228 |
| Digital projectors | 228 |
| Flat screens | 229 |
| Music | 230 |
| Viewing area | 230 |
| Interview-free bookings | 231 |
| Setting Up Your Office | 231 |
| Essential computer hardware | 231 |
| Operating system | 231 |
| Computer size | 232 |
| RAM | 234 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Hard drive | 235 |
| RAID options | 236 |
| CD and DVD burner with software | 237 |
| Graphics card | 237 |
| Central processor | 237 |
| Computer network | 238 |
| Monitor | 238 |
| Office printer | 241 |
| Essential software for photographers | 241 |
| Other essential equipment | 242 |
| Internet service | 242 |
| Fireproof safe | 242 |
| Summary | 242 |
| Chapter 14: Digital Workflow: Getting Images from Camera to Client | 243 |
| Understanding Workflow | 244 |
| Wedding Workflow Overview | 244 |
| Part 1: Shooting the Images | 245 |
| Preparing for the shoot | 245 |
| Charge batteries | 246 |
| Format your memory cards | 247 |
| Confirm wedding day details with the bride | 248 |
| Prep your cameras | 249 |
| Pack your gear | 250 |
| Shooting the pictures | 250 |
| Transferring the images from camera to computer | 250 |
| Download problems | 251 |
| Fixing corrupted memory cards | 252 |
| Creating backups | 253 |
| Part 2: Processing the Images | 254 |
| Import and convert to .dng format | 254 |
| Organizing the good and deleting the bad | 254 |
| The selection process | 255 |
| Deciding what to show the client | 256 |
| Color correcting the “keepers” | 258 |
| Renaming the files | 259 |
| Outputting RAW images to JPEGs | 260 |
| Archiving the finished files | 260 |
| Producing the final products | 261 |
| Delivering the final products | 261 |
| Summary | 262 |
| Chapter 15: Manipulating Your Images | 263 |
| Non-Destructive Imaging | 265 |
| Destructive Imaging | 266 |
| Lightroom Tips and Techniques | 268 |
| The user interface | 268 |
| Tool palette tips | 268 |
| Adjusting color balance | 269 |
| The Color Sampling tool | 269 |
| Personal preference | 269 |

- Using the Sync control 270
- Making and using presets 270
- Moving the histogram 272
- Using the Adjustment sliders 273
- Using the Adjustment tools 274
 - The Crop tool 275
 - The Spot Removal tool 275
 - The Red-Eye Correction tool 276
 - The Gradient tool 276
 - The Adjustment Brush tool 276
- Photoshop Tips and Techniques 276
 - Working in layers 277
 - Understanding masks 278
 - Adjusting levels 278
 - Changing brightness and blending with Layer modes 280
 - Sharpening images 282
 - RAW file sharpening 282
 - Non-RAW file sharpening 282
 - Working with High Dynamic Range Images 284
 - Capture techniques 284
 - HDR software choices 286
- Summary 288

Chapter 16: Creating the Finished Product 289

- Proofs 290
 - Paper proofs 290
 - Digital proofs 291
 - Slide shows on CD 291
- Prints 292
 - Purchasing prints from a lab 293
 - Making your own prints 293
 - Printers 293
 - Printer color calibration 294
 - Bulk ink systems 294
 - Paper choices 295
- Image Files as a Finished Product 295
 - Specify Home Use Rights 296
 - Other files to include with your finished images 297
- Albums 297
 - The album contract 298
 - The design stage 298
 - Client review and input 299
- Videos 300
- Studio Management Software 302
- Summary 304

Chapter 17: Cracking the Secret Code: Breaking into the Business 305

- Networking 306
 - Networking with the locals 306
 - Networking with other photographers 307
 - Networking with coordinators 308
 - Networking during interviews 309

Advertising 309
 Magazines 310
 Wedding websites 311
 Wedding shows 312
 Printed materials 313
 Finder’s fees 313
 Interviewing Clients 314
 Qualify the client 314
 Interview location 314
 Points to cover 314
 Presenting the contract 315
 Vendor recommendations 316
 Vendor clubs 318
 Summary 318

Chapter 18: Show Yourself: A Website of Your Own 319

Fundamental Concepts 320
 Internet service 320
 Domain name 320
 Website host 321
 Search engines 322
 Two Ways to Create Your Site 322
 Build your own site 322
 Hire someone to build a site for you 323
 The Construction Phase 323
 Make it search engine friendly 324
 Links and navigation 324
 What to include 325
 Software for creating your website 326
 Template websites: blessing or curse? 326
 Copying from other photographer’s websites 327
 Slide-show options 328
 SEO: How to Get Found 328
 SEO Techniques 330
 Keywords 331
 Title tag 331
 Links 332
 Anchor text 334
 Page text 334
 Make Your Site Search Engine Friendly 334
 Images 335
 Flash 335
 Frames 335
 JavaScript 335
 Robots.txt and Sitemap.txt 335
 Summary 336

Chapter 19: Destination Weddings 337

Reality Check 338
 How to Find the Jobs 341
 Your website 341
 Wedding coordinators 342

Paid advertising 343
 Web..... 343
 Magazine..... 344
Travel Arrangements 346
 Airline travel tips 346
 When to purchase tickets 346
 What to do if you miss a flight..... 348
 Taxi travel tips 348
 Bus travel tips 349
 Recording your travel expenses for tax purposes 349
Health Issues 349
 Travelers' diarrhea 350
 Dangerous critters..... 350
 Dangerous people 351
 First aid kit..... 352
International Travel Paperwork..... 353
 Obtaining foreign work permits..... 353
 Crossing U.S. borders 354
Specialized Equipment for Travel 354
 Carry-on camera case..... 355
 Gear in the suitcase..... 356
 Carry-on backpack..... 356
How to Calculate a Fee 358
Two Reasons to Do Destination Weddings..... 359
Is It a Job or a Vacation?..... 359
Summary 360

Appendix: How-To Gallery361

Do It Again!..... 361
Anticipation 362
Experimentation..... 363
Awareness..... 364
Textures..... 365
Light..... 366
Predict the Light..... 367
Warp Speed..... 368

Index369

P A R T

Understanding Digital Wedding Photography



Chapter 1
The World of Wedding Photography

Chapter 2
Developing Your Own Style

Chapter 3
The Right Equipment for the Job

Chapter 4
Camera Settings and Digital Exposure

1 The World of Wedding Photography



Wedding photography varies from other types of photography in that you must move from place to place throughout the day, constantly searching for tiny important details to record, and constantly trying to catch your clients in the act of doing something interesting. You'll be expected to create beautiful images at times when they may not appear to exist. The pressure to create art on demand (whether you're in the mood or not) can feel quite overwhelming — especially if the people or the settings don't inspire you. And the pressure mounts even higher when you have to set up and compose twenty group shots with a hundred thirsty people who have only you standing between them and the bar. However, all the external pressures are nothing compared to that internal nagging fear that you have to get it right. Unlike other types of photography, with wedding photography you don't get a second chance to do it over.

Capturing Weddings

Telling the story of an entire wedding day with still images is not something that can be distilled into a simple formula that you can repeat over and over. No two weddings are alike, and even if you go back to the same location over and over again, every day has different light and every wedding has different people and different customs. You can't just sit down the night before to plan your workday or make a list of the images you want to create. You have to be ready and able to handle all sorts of conditions quickly and without help from other people (see Figure 1-1). Your equipment must be reliable and self-contained, and you must have backups of the most critical pieces of equipment, such as the camera body and the flash. Further, everything you use must be fairly portable so that you can easily move it from one location to another during the day without causing much fuss.



Figure 1-1: This first dance took place in a very dark indoor location. You can make it look well lit if you know how to mix your flash to get the foreground, while adjusting your ISO and shutter speed to get just enough of the background.

If you are considering diving into the world of wedding photography as a career, or even as a part time job, you will soon learn that this job is not just about creating a few artistic images

on the wedding day. Much more important, wedding photography is a performance art. Those who do it well glide through the day with grace and confidence as they anticipate and capture hundreds of tiny moments of the day. Each picture becomes a fleeting glimpse of everyday events preserved in a way that brings out a hidden beauty that was simply not accessible to the average person until it was captured and then revealed through that particular photographer's vision. And each image is far from a random event captured in a haphazard manner. Each image says something important about the day (see Figure 1-2). And each image is crafted very purposefully; sometimes with the goal of including all the essential pieces of the story; sometimes eliminating all but a single detail; sometimes capturing the light in a specific way; sometimes playing with a shadow; sometimes showing motion; sometimes capturing an emotion. Later, when the best images are viewed together as a slide show or in an album, the collection captures and distills the emotion and the story of the day down to the absolute essentials.

The art of wedding photography is in seeing beauty in everyday life.



Figure 1-2: These items are examples of things you might find in the bride's dressing room, but they were not arranged like this. I gathered them up and placed them here. Teaching you to see opportunities like this and then capture them with your camera is the goal of this book.

A Challenging and Rewarding Profession

The world of digital wedding photography can be both challenging and rewarding. You set your own hours during the week and then work on the weekend at what is probably the grandest party a couple will host in their entire lives. You get to be a “fly-on-the-wall” for one of the most important and emotional days of a new couple’s life, inconspicuously following every move the bride and groom make from the time they arrive in the morning until they leave at night. If you become good at it, couples won’t hesitate to pay you large sums of money and fly you around the globe for your services.

As glamorous as the job may sometimes sound, in reality, the digital wedding photographer spends long hours sitting in front of a computer, editing images, building a website, working on album pages, answering e-mail messages, burning discs, and much more. The actual wedding shoot is only a small fraction of the job.

A common industry adage about photography is, “You can be the greatest photographer in the world and still starve; or you can be a mediocre photographer and make millions if you’re good at running a business.”

I’ve had young people ask me what sort of college classes they should take to prepare them for a career in photography. My advice is to take classes in this priority:

- Business management

- Advertising

- Website development

- Computer technology

- Art

- Photography

Yes, photography appears last on the list. This is because without a strong basis in the other skills, your photographic abilities are useless.

Using the Tools of the Trade

The tools of the trade are few. As businesses go, wedding photography requires a relatively small cash outlay to get the few pieces of high-quality equipment necessary for the job. Learning how to use the equipment is the real challenge, because, fortunately for photographers, having the best camera in the world won’t make you a good wedding photographer, and having the fanciest computer won’t get your color correction right, nor will it build beautiful albums. Many excellent wedding photographers use old, beat-up cameras with far fewer settings and capabilities than the high-end cameras many wedding guests will have slung around