

THE PAPAZZO

Finding the right wedding photographer is far more complicated than just point and click. **BY ERIN GRAHAM**



RIGHT ANGLES
De Manio shoots weddings using a photojournalistic style.

When Genevieve de Manio got married 10 years ago, her aunt photographed the festivities—a decision the Carlisle-based wedding photographer regrets today. Now she regularly quotes the father of one of her brides: “The food will be gone tomorrow, but the photographs are forever.” Not sure where to start? Read on for guidance from a woman who learned the hard way. >>

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photo by Cosner Photography

Why do so many brides hate their wedding photos? Brides want to look like models on their wedding day, but let's face it, not everyone is. I think many brides are disappointed when a photographer doesn't meet their expectations on both the wedding day and, equally important, the day they receive the album. To avoid this, a bride should be aware of the options each photographer offers—different approaches to shooting style, a photographer's personality, and specific approaches to the many details of the wedding day. Basically, figure out what you're buying before you put down a deposit.

What's a common mistake photographers make? Not knowing when to offer direction in situations that require it, or knowing when to fall back and let events unfold naturally. I hear stories about control-freak photographers who try to dictate events, even yelling at guests to achieve a desired shot.

Is it important to hire a photographer who specializes in weddings? Yes, because anticipation is so incredibly important when it comes to shooting great candid images. Experience will increase the chances that he or she will be in the right place at the right time to capture that once-in-a-lifetime moment. They'll also know to fill in gaps between individuals, button Uncle Earl's middle button (and undo the top), straighten your little brother's hair, and arrange the bridal party according to height.

Are there more good photographers than bad? Let's just say that there are few exceptional wedding photographers. Too many photographers think that tilting a camera on an angle will somehow make a wedding photograph look magical.

What are the best bloopers you've caught in photos? Two of my favorite wedding photographs capture jaw-dropping reactions to a bride's newly bestowed jewels: female ring-envy exposed.

What sets a great photographer apart? A great wedding photographer must possess three qualities: an outstanding eye for artistic composition,

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technical expertise, and a sensitivity and passion for the emotional life of a wedding day. Let's face it, eight to 10 hours of straight shooting with little or no break is exhausting. If you don't have a photographer who loves what they do, you'll see it in their final work.

How should brides choose the spot to take photographs? Gazebos are the worst—too cheesy! Don't choose a background structure that will compete with you and your wedding party. Have your photographer pick a location with even light; your father will not pay for photo-

graphs showing a dapple of sunlight on his bald forehead.

What's the best and worst thing about being a wedding photographer? The best thing is sharing in the celebration. I have the honored position of recording this important event for generations to come. The bummer is not being able to share these special moments with my husband—he takes care of the kids while I shoot. I'm a hopeless romantic.

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

DE MANIO OFFERS THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF ASSEMBLING A GORGEOUS GROUP SHOT.



WHAT NOT TO DO: The location for this shot is not ideal. The dampness of the boardwalk makes the group look as if they're standing in water. Also, their closeness to the water's edge feels tenuous.

The group's arrangement is chaotic. Everyone is facing different directions, and people in the back are covered up by people in the front.

The bride and groom are lost in the mix. Although the bride's veil helps locate her, it hides her face, shoulders and dress.

A few hand-placement no-no's: The woman on the far left is holding her toddler's crotch (ouch!). Who belongs to the mystery hands holding the boy in the front row?

I would have encouraged the grandparents to stand with the group (if possible), so they do not inadvertently become the focus of the portrait.

The dead tree limb at the top of the frame should be cropped out.

Avoid the horseshoe-shaped arrangement of this portrait. It means that the individuals on the ends will appear larger and more prominent than the bride and groom in the center.



WHAT TO DO: Stagger the men and women so that no one is hidden. And rather than putting all the men on one side and all the women on the other, I recommend mixing the group so that not all the black tuxedos are at one end and brightly colored dresses at the other.

Arrange individuals away from the bride and groom in ascending (if the couple is short) or descending (if the couple is tall) order.

Make sure the women's bouquets are held at relatively the same height.

Angle everyone slightly toward the center (in other words, not facing different directions).

Choose a spot where the sunlight is behind the group—you don't want everyone squinting and straining to keep their eyes open.

Key advice: Before the big day, prepare a list of the group combinations you want photographed, and designate one person to corral all the key players. Otherwise, you'll end up wasting a ton of time looking for Uncle Larry, who's downing Harvey Wallbangers at the bar.