

Identifying a highly skilled wedding photographer

Article © Stuart Kasdorf CPA
www.stuartkasdorf.com

Note: Please email me if there are important questions not addressed in this document: stuart@stuartkasdorf.com

Contents:

[Introduction](#)

[The Big 5: Style, Quality, Service, Customization, Packages](#)

[Techniques and Tips on Quantifying the Big 5](#)

[A Final Tip](#)

Introduction

Expect to invest 15 minutes to read through the following document.

If you had to prioritize the items on your wedding 'must have' list, is good photography among your top three items? If not, then reading the article is not for you. If yes, then I hope this article can assist you in recognizing the highly skilled photographer for your special occasion.

In any purchase decision there are always businesses that claim to be 'high quality' and 'best quality', but some of their claims are easily refutable, especially if we, as sophisticated buyers are familiar with the products being offered. Most people however, do not purchase photography very often, and the decision can be difficult and stressful. I hope this article can assist you in your decision, and clarify the issues for you. Although somewhat lengthy, after reading through the issues, you will be much better at recognizing a highly skilled wedding photographer.

Goals: to make this document useful for buyers of great wedding photography. We will assist in defining a system that assures you will get the highest quality photographer and service oriented studio possible.

The photographs of your family, your wedding, your children, and other important events will be a treasure of intense memorable feelings and a joy to revisit throughout your life – but only if your photographer has the talent and skill to focus, shoot and capture and deliver those defining moments.

For many couples selecting your photographer is one of the most important wedding planning decisions you will make. Other than your memories, no other part of your wedding will last as long as the photographs. It is the job of the photographer to capture these moments for your lifetime.

The Big 5 - Style, Quality, Service, Customization and packages

The hallmarks of a highly skilled wedding photographer

1. Style (and the wow factor): While you are visiting the photographers, try to determine if their photography is unique, or are they offering the usual, unimaginative images. This is probably the easiest area to define by the untrained eye. Uniqueness alone however does not define good style in wedding photography. Great wedding portraiture requires a delivery of solid traditional portrait poses and lighting that will appeal a generation from now. The portraits of family should respect that families value, and there is likely a need here for solid and traditional portraits. There should be a few less trendy images of the bride and groom along with some more artistic portraits. The photographer that references these issues in the complete wedding they show you might qualify as having good style. There is one more test in the style department, it's the wow factor. Do the images presented impress you enough to say to yourself – 'wow!'

2. Quality: Are the color images bright in color, and the B&W images punchy in contrast? Are the images sharp and well defined? What is quality portraiture? Great wedding portraiture includes images of the bride and groom that are enjoying one another. Several different images with a variety of gazes are important. Are there some images looking at one another, looking at the camera position, smiling and comfortable? What are the eyes of the 'subject' saying? Are there several of just the bride, and just the groom? Are there classic poses, well lit with the bride and mom and dad? Do they represent grandparents and family well?

Make sure that the potential photographer shows you complete coverage from several weddings! If they show you an album of 30 of their best images from 25 weddings, it tells you they will create at least one good image for you! If they can show you several complete

weddings that look great, this is much more difficult to accomplish, they can be regarded as considerations for your project.

3. Service: It is sometimes quite difficult to access if you will get good service from your photographer. References will help but you need to ask specific questions about the service they experienced. One of the greatest challenges the photographer/studio is faced with is meeting a schedule to have your project finished. For proper finishing of your portraits, there is often 7-10 hours of finishing and project organization for every hour of photography. Photographers new in business likely will underestimate this time, not finish your project properly, vastly extend the delivery times and frustrate you in the process. Does the photographer offer to meet with you in advance of your wedding to go through details?

4. Customization: Refers to the flexibility of the photographer to deliver images unique to you, and incorporate some of your ideas. Customization refers to the packages offered and if they are truly interested in tailoring them for you. It also refers to the service at the ordering stage and if they have the ability to deliver an album that is unique in it's layout and incorporates some of your ideas. How involved are you allowed to be in album design? The album layout and design should reflect the personality of you the buyer and not 'slapped together' by some automated approach.

5. Packages: Proofs vs. Finished work:

- ✚ What goes into the development of a great wedding album?
- ✚ What are some tools used to deliver a great wedding album?
- ✚ What method do you use to assist in choosing and planning album portraits?

Assuming there is still two photographers you are still 'courting', the ability to actually design an album well will become more apparent when you investigate what is offered in their packages; proofs or finished portraits. Telling your wedding day story can be very effective through a properly designed album. If your desire is to tell your story with an album, some important questions should be answered. Is a finished album part of the original goal for the photographer or an afterthought? Do the packages they offer include an album of finished work? Many years of experience designing great albums has shown that there are three stages to consider.

- ✚ photographing with the album 'in mind'

- ✚ digital 'proofing' (works well to assist at this stage with album layout)
- ✚ album assembly (album 'design' should not happen here)

The use of digital 'proofing' can greatly assist you and your photographer in the layout and design of your album. The use of computers and LCD data projectors allow several people to participate in this process. Digital 'proofing' can also allow you to see images smaller and larger in context with other images.

Techniques and Tips on quantifying the big 5:

Check references

Attempt to get references for the photographer you are considering; make sure they are referrals from people that have had actually experienced that photographer. The professional photography association is a great place to get some great references along with friends and acquaintances. Try to discern the difference from the 'great experience' of a friendly photographer and the positive impact of great images made by a professional (and friendly) photographer.

Visit Several Studios to interview the photographer

Does their style of photography suit you? Is what you are seeing original in any way, or is it similar to others you have seen? What is the attitude expressed by the photographer and staff? Are they helpful, and if you hire them, do you think they will solve any problems (that may come up) for you? Look for the details – are they neat in appearance? Is there studio clean and tidy? (If the appearance of the studio is a reflection of the photographer, what are the details telling you?) Can the photographer provide you with letters of referral from recent customers?

Questions to ask the photographer:

- ✚ What makes your photographs better or different than anybody else's?
- ✚ Have they handled events of your type and size before? (This would particularly apply for non-traditional functions. Photographing a non-traditional wedding is more difficult for a photographer without specific experience.)

- ✚ What are the reasons you think we should hire you?
- ✚ Ask if the photographer carries back-up equipment. Also, make sure the photographer has a ready replacement who can photograph your wedding if they become ill.
- ✚ What are your policies regarding delivery times?

Has the photographer addressed your personal concerns satisfactorily?

Credentials

Membership in a professional association, certification or a photography degree shows a certain level of commitment to the profession.

- ✚ Are you a member of your professional association? (avoid the 'professional' that operates independent of educational development and peer development opportunities)
- ✚ Have you ever received awards for your photography?

Finished Portraits

So the photography is great, but why is it important for the photographer to have the support of a production team to finish my photography?

Packages – How do I determine what I would like?

Most photographers offer packages, and some are quite confusing. The solution:

- ✚ decide what you would like photographed, (ie: ceremony and portraits)
- ✚ decide what you might want to end up with (ie: album for Bride and groom)
- ✚ Ask if the photographer will adjust the package even AFTER they show you the photography. How can you really know what you will like prior to seeing it?

Basic Photography options include:

- ceremony
- the portrait session
- reception

Basic Finished photography will include

- an album for the bride and groom
- some gifts for family and friends

By purchasing the photography and a selection of finished work prior to your wedding (i.e.: package), you might have more

purchase leverage. Contrast this with a photographer offering 'proof' packages. The photographer will expect you to return at some point and make additional purchases, usually at their highest rate. Package buying is often better for the consumer, if you can adjust to a particular package or have one created for you.

Pricing Considerations

Why are the good photographers so expensive?

While price is important, it should not be the determining factor in choosing the photographer for you. Only the 'greenest' photographers compete on price because they do not have a great understanding of the amount of work required to produce brilliant work in a reasonable amount of time. If and when problems occur, they cannot afford to remake an image or custom retouch a problem. With reference to the **Big 5** (service section), the amount of hands on work after the photography is enormous. Most photographers know what they are worth. Below are some tips that will assist you in the area of pricing if you have not yet determined your photographer.

Try to compare apples with apples. Pick a package (from one of the photographers) that is the closest to suiting you. To get a better understanding of the photographer's rates, ask the other photographer to price the same package arrangement. The difference in the price versus the quality and level of service are now your only considerations. Let's pretend the difference between the more expensive photographer and the less expensive photographer is \$600.

- 📌 What does the more expensive photographer offer for the difference?
 - 📌 What does the more expensive photographer offer that is better or different?
 - 📌 Is your project worth the extra 'insurance' money for a better experience?
 - 📌 Is your project worth the extra 'insurance' money for better quality or style?
 - 📌 Is your project worth the extra 'insurance' money for better service?
 - 📌 Is your project worth the extra 'insurance' money for better customization?
 - 📌 Are there any additional charges not mentioned?
-

A final tip for working with your photographer:

Communication. Make sure that your photographer has a clear understanding of your expectations. Take the time to sit down and discuss the services provided and the fees involved. This helps avoid any future misunderstandings.

Professional Associations

Canada

Professional Photographers of Canada www.ppoc.ca

USA

Professional Photographers of America www.ppa.com