

strike a pose



YOU HAVE THE BEAUTIFUL DRESS, THE FABULOUS BOUQUET, AND THE HANDSOME GROOM, BUT IT CAN STILL BE ALL TOO EASY TO GET DISAPPOINTING PICTURES FROM YOUR BIG DAY. MAKE SURE THE CAMERA FLATTERS YOU WITH ADVICE FROM SOME OF SOUTH WALES' MOST RESPECTED PHOTOGRAPHERS **Words: Hana Colloid**

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU BOOK

With so many things on your mind, you may forget to ask the most vital questions of potential photographers, and end up booking one who's not right for you.

Swansea-based photographer Nic Cleave (www.nicleave.com 01792 429201) says: "The first question you need to ask is whether the photographer has a complete wedding album you can see. Couples should see a whole wedding the photographer has recently finished, and make sure they are happy with it. Any photographer can take a few good shots, but it's covering a whole wedding beautifully that takes skill."

Peter Ellis (www.ellisphotography.com 01633 267580), who works from studios in Newport, agrees. "All you have left at the end of the day are your pictures so you want to make sure they are of good quality. Ask to see a whole wedding, not just his greatest hits."

The possibility of equipment failure is an issue of paramount importance. Memories are no substitute for 30 pages

of glossy goodness. An experienced photographer should have back-up equipment on them and more in the car.

You need to find out when your coverage will start and finish. Will the photographer be with the bride in the morning or start at the church? Will coverage stop mid-afternoon, or will the photographer stay with you right through the evening?

Mark Bradwick (www.markbradwickphotography.com 01446 772999), who's based in Cowbridge, says it's also important to know how many photographers will attend. "Quite often there are two photographers to capture different images at different times, which builds up for a full coverage and makes sure those special moments aren't missed," he says.

And remember, this is Wales, so you should find out if your photographer has a back-up plan in the event of rain.

NATURAL OR TRADITIONAL?

Increasingly couples are opting to have natural shots taken, rather than the

more traditional, posed pictures. Most photographers today will do a mixture, but you need to discuss the intricacies with your photographer. "Every bride goes through every emotion. The best way to photograph is to show it as it happens so we don't tell her how to walk up to the church," says Mark Bradwick. "And people miss the bride and groom if you take them away for an hour."

Peter Ellis says: "We combine the two styles because Mum wants a traditional framed picture for her wall but the couple also want fun pictures." He warns against those photographers who charge more for doing both. "A wedding's a wedding and that's that. It should all be included."

Essentially, how you want to be photographed is down to you. Make sure you avoid photographers who will spend all day bossing your guests around.

COMMON MISTAKES

Working purely on the price of a photographer is one of the most common mistakes made. There's no point

spending thousands of pounds on your guests, the venue and your dress if you're not going to invest properly in capturing it all. Most things you have spent money on will not last longer than the day itself, but if you want to be able to look back on your photographs in 50 years' time, you should get the best your budget will allow.

Don't leave it until the last minute to book a photographer either. There's a lot you need to discuss with them and they will essentially be a guest at your wedding, so it's a good idea to build up a relationship with them.

THE END RESULT

From the traditional handful of frames in an album, to storybooks containing up to 200 images, the choice is yours.

Mark's advice is to go for a display that won't look tired in two or three years. "Go for something more traditional, which you'll still be able to look at in 10 years, rather than something gimmicky, otherwise it won't stand the test of time."

The storybook is the most popular form of display at the moment, as it allows you to tell the story of your wedding day through a mixture of formal and natural photographs. But there are also a variety of packages available from most photographers, allowing you to buy a smaller collection for parents, etc.

Of course, people often want to buy one of two pictures to be framed, and digital technology has even produced a frame showing a slide show of selected pictures: a favourite for mums.

The average number of photographs for a storybook album is anywhere from 80 to 200 with average prices ranging from £1,000 to £3,500.

ENGAGEMENT/PRE-WEDDING SHOOT

If you're still not feeling 100 per cent comfortable in front of the camera, many photographers now offer an engagement or pre-wedding service. This gives you time to get to know your photographer's working style and gives them a chance to get to know you too.

Mark says: "I don't know many people who like having their photograph taken so they should spend time getting to

know the photographer and what they are going to go through."

Photographers will either be with you at your engagement party, or will spend time, often at the wedding venue, getting you used to the camera and ironing out any idiosyncrasies before the big day.

Mark remembers one such example where a man blinked whenever he had

his photograph taken inside but did so less outside. Because he had spent time with the couple beforehand, Mark was able to make sure he took more photographs outside.

"We encourage couples to keep in contact while they're planning, just so they build up a relationship with us and they feel more comfortable on the day," says Nic. ■

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Pictures by Nic Cleave