

A romantic wedding photograph of a couple in a field. The groom, on the left, is wearing a light blue suit with a matching bow tie and is kissing the bride on the cheek. The bride, on the right, is wearing a white off-the-shoulder wedding dress and holding a large bouquet of white and pink roses. The background is a soft-focus green field with trees in the distance.

LA VIE EN ROSE

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO
TIMELESS WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE

LVERPHOTO.COM

@LVERPHOTO

V
L E
R

LA VIE EN
ROSE

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS



CONTENTS

6-7	.....	WELCOME
8-9	.....	INTRODUCTION TO WEDDINGS
10-12	.....	THE MOST PHOTOGENIC WEDDING VENUES
13-15	.....	CHOOSING YOUR VENDOR TEAM
16-17	.....	HOW CAN A WEDDING PLANNER HELP YOU?
18-19	.....	GETTING READY: THE SECRETS TO A RELAXING WEDDING MORNING
20-22	.....	DETAILS: THE LITTLE THINGS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE
23	.....	BEAUTY TIPS FROM A HAIR & MAKEUP PRO
24-27	.....	IS A FIRST LOOK RIGHT FOR YOU?
28-31	.....	CHOOSING LOCATIONS FOR YOUR WEDDING PORTRAITS
32-35	.....	TACKLING YOUR TIMELINE
36-39	.....	HAVING FUN WITH YOUR WEDDING PARTY
40-41	.....	FLORAL MAGIC: WORKING WITH YOUR FLORIST
42-44	.....	WHAT TO DO IF IT RAINS
45-47	.....	MAKING THE MOST OF FAMILY PORTRAITS
48-49	.....	UNFORGETTABLE PORTRAITS: JUST THE TWO OF YOU
50-51	.....	DECOR & DETAILS: YOUR RECEPTION SPACE
52-53	.....	THE GRAND FINALE: WHAT TO EXPECT FOR YOUR RECEPTION & EXIT
54-55	.....	PRESERVING YOUR WEDDING DAY MEMORIES
56-57	.....	GETTING YOUR WEDDING PUBLISHED: THE INSIDE SCOOP
58-59	.....	INTRODUCTION TO ENGAGEMENTS
60-61	.....	DETAILS, INSPIRATION & PLANNING
62-64	.....	TIME & PLACE
64-66	.....	CREATING THE LOOK: ENGAGEMENT SESSION STYLE
67	.....	MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS



TO YOU,
The newly engaged
COUPLE,

Congratulations, friends! You've made the decision to become one. I am so happy for you, and I'm thrilled that you're here! Weddings are my joy & passion. My deepest desire for your wedding day is that it that reflects your unique personalities & style in the most beautiful way and, of course, for you to have the best day ever.

I'll be honest: I have a wealth of knowledge about all things weddings. Unless you also happen to work in the wedding industry, you probably don't have all this knowledge readily available! With the arrival of Pinterest and growth of the wedding industry in the last 10 years, there is now an infinite sea of information that you might quickly find yourself drowning in. This guide will give you gentle direction and inspiration to help give your ideas wings and your plans grounding.

After years of answering engaged couples' wedding questions, experiencing a huge variety of wedding days & learning what works and what doesn't, I've prepared this magazine with you in mind.

So, what will you find here?

1. Excellent tips for preparing for your day in advance so you can enjoy a relaxed, joyful wedding day to the fullest extent.
2. Do's & Don'ts for every part of the wedding planning process.
3. Our favorite styles & trends for creating classic, elegant & beautiful portraits.
4. The best advice from other leading wedding industry vendors.
5. Our very best advice on creating & styling a day that is beautifully you.

Friends, we want you to have fun with this process. Enjoy it and make it your own. And we'll be with you every step of the way!

WITH LOVE & WARM WISHES,

Hannah Bjorndal

LIVER FOUNDER

INTRODUCTION

WEDDINGS

If it's not already clear, our priority and mission at LVER is for you two to have the most relaxed, enjoyable, perfect wedding day with the most beautiful, authentic photographs. We walk through every stage of wedding planning with you. We make sure that you're comfortable and confident in every decision and that your priorities are not only heard, but catered to and met in every way! This style book is not meant to be a replacement to our step-by-step process with our amazing couples, but instead, a way for our couples (along with other non-LVER couples!) to gain perspective, learn and be guided in the direction of their dream wedding.

This section covers just about anything you'd want to know about weddings - everything from planning your portraits to advice from our favorite wedding pros.

Each article covers different topics, all of which we've been asked or spoken to couples about over the years. We want your wedding to be amazing, and we want you to have everything you need to make your dream wedding (and photos!) come to life!

Much of what you'll read in these pages may be familiar, particularly if we are far along in your wedding planning process. If you're not working with the LVER team, we hope this section allows you to plan for incredible photos, even without us! Read some, all or just a few select articles with an open mind and a readiness to learn something new about weddings!

-THE LVER TEAM



THE MOST PHOTOGENIC VENUES

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHILE VENUE-HUNTING



WEDDINGS

If you've already hired us, you've more than likely also already chosen your wedding venue. Maybe you'll skip right over this section, or maybe you're curious. Even if you've already booked a venue, this article will help you find it's most photogenic angles!

Architecture & Character

This is probably what you noticed first about your venue, right? The beautiful qualities that make your venue unique are also the same qualities that make it photogenic! Personally, we're inspired by beautiful, ornate architecture, particularly architecture with an old-world European feel. In Washington, D.C., we have a LOT of these types of buildings! In general, if the architecture of your venue sticks out as beautiful to you, then it will also likely be photogenic for photos!

A truly photogenic venue will have character and dimension that extends from the outside in. High ceilings, lots of ornate detail, unique design and dimension contribute to beautiful photos.

Windows, Ceiling & Walls

Three characteristics that make all the difference: windows, ceiling & walls. Assuming your venue is partially or entirely indoors (although we do love a gorgeous all-outdoor setup!), these 3 factors shape how the light is reflected throughout the space. The most photogenic venues have lots and lots of big windows, high ceilings and light or white-colored walls. Together, this contributes to a beautiful and well-lit space!

Bridal Suite

Some of the loveliest wedding venues have the darkest and ugliest bridal suites - so much so that many brides will choose to get ready at a different location! But the most photogenic wedding venues - the ones that have got it all - also have a gorgeous place for the bride and her maids to get ready.

So, what makes a photogenic bridal suite? Firstly, a lot of space. The larger the room, the better. This gives your girls a lot of room to spread out (and hide their mess from the camera). It also allows the photographer enough space to back up and get full-length photos. Moveable furniture is a huge plus in any bridal suite, because it gives the photographer the flexibility to move things around a little bit as you put on your dress and finishing touches. Clean, empty rooms in neutral colors make for the best and prettiest getting ready photos!

Another essential to the photogenic bridal suite is large windows. A lot of brides get a little bit nervous about the windows while getting ready - what if someone can see inside? However, most bridal suites are not in a space that is very publicly visible. Also, you can always pull on your dress in private, and stand in the windows for the final buttons & zips!

Finally, when it comes to bridal suites, the more neutrals, the better! A room with a lot of light and/or neutral colors creates a blank slate where your details make it come to life. White or light-colored walls also reflect lots of clean light that will make you glow!

WEDDINGS



The Carpet

Have you ever seen a ballroom or hotel suite with, like, horrendously ugly carpet? Maybe it's a royal blue, gold and red pattern that looks 50 years old. Perhaps it's a forest green country club carpet with little golf tee's all over it (yes, I've seen this). Honestly, if you've noticed the carpet in the first place, it's probably not pretty. The most photogenic wedding venues have light, neutral-colored carpet that does NOT make a bold statement or, even better, stone or white-tiled floors! The light, neutral color reflects light beautifully and won't detract from your unique decor.

Outdoor Features & Views

Lastly, the most photogenic wedding venues have stunning outdoor locations. Whether it be a gorgeous mountain view, a rooftop view of the city, or a big, colorful garden, an outdoor space where you can shoot beautiful portraits is the crowning achievement of a photogenic venue. These spaces are usually unique to other venues - recognizable and distinctly their own. They have a character that ties together with the rest of the venue, and they are private enough to not have random people in the background!

WEDDINGS

YOUR VENDOR TEAM:

A GUIDE TO
CHOOSING THE BEST
IN THE BUSINESS

Your wedding day should be all about you two. It's a day that should not only reflect your unique style & personalities, but also a day where you can truly relax and enjoy all the special moments. The team that puts it together is your key to a beautiful day that is relaxing, enjoyable, and all about YOU! There is a LOT that goes into choosing each individual vendor, but these guiding principles will help you select a team that fits your unique needs . . .

WEDDINGS

CHOOSING YOUR

Start with a Conversation

You probably have some wedding vendors that you're already excited about, and other categories in which you have no clue where to even start looking. Regardless of how confident you are about hiring the person, you definitely want to have a real conversation before you book them - either in person or on the phone. Hearing them speak and talk about their work will sometimes seal the deal, and other times be a dealbreaker. Specific things to look for: is the vendor interested in your specific needs, or does he/she assert to know the "best" way to do things without hearing your opinion? Is he/she excited to get to know you personally, or does the meeting feel cold? And lastly - do you *like* him/her? It sounds silly, but there are some really talented vendors that you might just not like as a person. If that's the case, it's 100% OK to walk away!

Having a conversation never means that you have to book them, so don't feel guilty saying no afterwards if something didn't feel right!

Choose Team Players

Even though you're hiring separate companies, your vendors will work together on the day of the wedding. Creating a flawless wedding day is 100% a team effort. Unfortunately, there are vendors out there (some of whom are very accomplished!) that are not team players. Inflexibility or a negative attitude towards other vendors are a red flags that the vendor is not a team player.

A good litmus test for this is simply telling the vendor about your priorities. For example, you might tell a caterer, "we'd like our photographer to be served dinner when we're served, so that they don't miss anything important." If the caterer puts up a fight or suggests that vendors are "always" served after guests, this is a sign that he/she is very set in a specific way of doing things and will likely not be a team player (for the record, all the best caterers know to serve their vendors when the bride & groom are eating!).

You can always ask your other vendors what they think about the company or individual. Often times, certain vendors will have gained a reputation - positive or negative - which will help shed light on what they are really like to work with! We have a trusted list of recommended vendors, but we also have worked with many others whom vary widely in positive or negative experiences. Other vendors will give you their honest opinion. They are, after all, going to have to work with that vendor, too!

VENDOR TEAM

Don't Skip the Planner

Wedding planners are often seen as one of those “optional” wedding vendors. Not every couple chooses to have one, and many couples utilize on-site coordinators instead. We will be the first to tell you that hiring a wedding planner is one of the BEST decisions you can make!

Honestly, we could write an entire article on this topic alone! To put it concisely: a great wedding planner will bring your vision to life without any stress on you. Many couples think that if they're super organized and have good taste, they can do it all on their own. They falsely believe that a planner will choose the style and ideas for the day. While you may be able to do a lot of organizing and detail creation on your own, don't forget that you're also the person being celebrated! There are so many things you simply won't be able to do on your wedding day. Also, a wedding planner has access to other vendors (rental companies, wholesale decor, dessert specialists, etc.) that are either more expensive or entirely inaccessible to non-professionals. An excellent wedding planner will help guide and direct your vision to make it a cohesive, beautiful and totally stress-free event.

Find Trustworthy Opinions

A positive review from a friend can go really far, but just because she loved them doesn't mean you will, too. It's all about compatibility. Do you have similar taste to your friend? Did she have a wedding you admired? Do you have the same temperament or similar personalities? While recommendations from a friend can be a huge advantage, it's still so important to have that initial phone call to see if you feel the same.

Of equal importance to your friends' referrals are other couples' opinions of the vendor. Do a quick search online - Google, WeddingWire & The Knot are all pretty reliable sources for reviews. You can also ask your vendor for the names & contact info of other couples who worked with him/her. You'll be getting the names of some of that vendor's favorite clients, so if you don't hear absolutely fantastic reviews, proceed with caution!

Choosing vendors is a difficult task, which is why we've started to provide a list of recommended vendors to all our couples! Throughout this guide, you'll be hearing the best advice from some of our favorite vendors!

HOW CAN A WEDDINGPLANNER HELP YOU?

"Kaitlin is one of our go-to wedding planners in the Washington, D.C. area. Her eye for design paired with her fantastic customer service makes her one of the best in the industry. This article will help you choose a wedding planner who fits you!" - the LVER team

BY KAITLIN PRZEZDZIECKI

of Cheers Darling Events

Our job as your wedding planner, designer or coordinator is to execute your vision and wedding day as smoothly as possible, with no stress to you. The best time to bring on a wedding planner is eight to fifteen months prior to the wedding - whenever you begin the planning process (the sooner, the better!).

A planner will help you make the best financial decisions for your wedding day, ensuring your budget is spent in the right places based on your vision - so it is important to have us on your team before you make decisions on venue, photographers, caterer or band vs DJ!

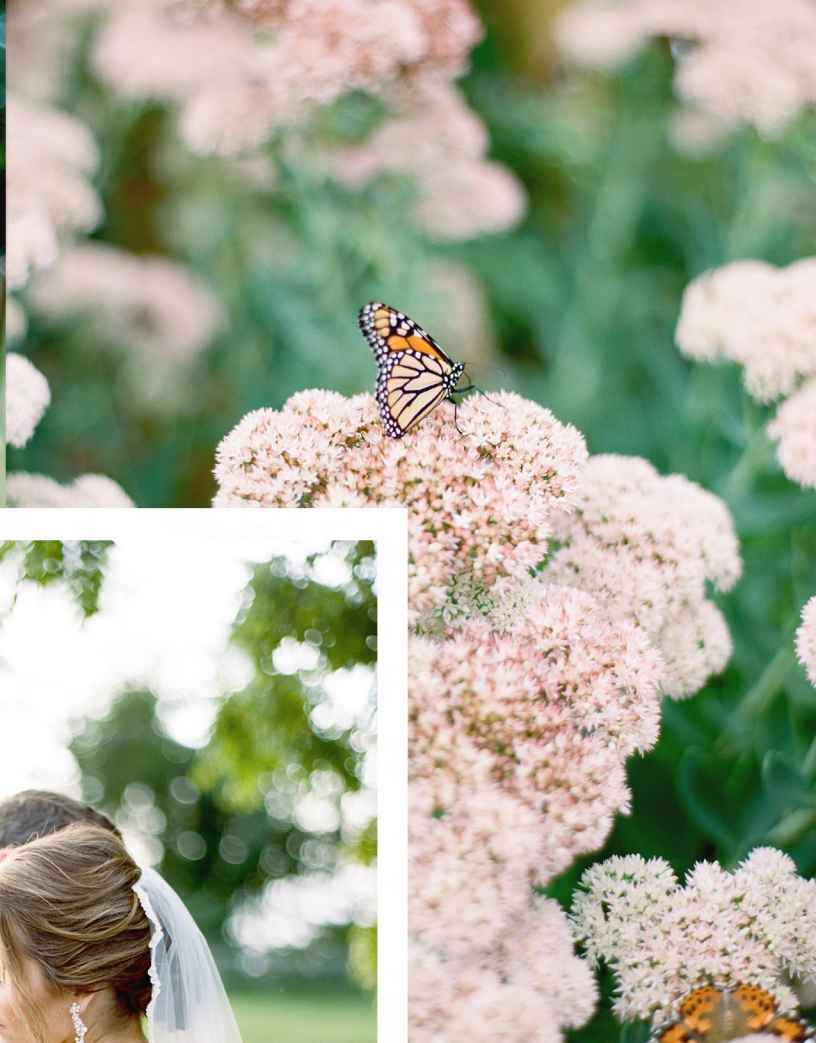
The most important part of our job? Executing your wedding weekend! We work with you in the months, weeks and days leading up to the wedding weekend to ensure no detail is forgotten about. We review your vision for the day, confirming everything from the hair and makeup timing, the portrait list and order of events for the reception to ensure time is allotted for all your important photos throughout the day.



Your planner works directly with each vendor to ensure they arrive on time, provide the services required and allow you to sit back, relax and enjoy the wedding day. The biggest misconception about a planner is that you do not need one as the venue coordinator will handle the details. The venue coordinators job is to ensure the venue is issue free for your day, whereas a planner will handle the coordination with all vendors and details - confirming flowers are correct, the cake design matches your sketch, your veil is on at the right time and your bridal party is lined up in the correct order all while cueing the ceremony music.

My biggest piece of advice while looking for your wedding planner? Find someone who you can trust, allowing yourself to fully trust your planner to guide you through the entire process will make your day feel even more special. Your planner will work with you to build your perfect vendor team, manage your budget and bring your design vision to life - all while you are enjoying the planning process without worry!

See some of Kaitlin + Hannah's combined work on the next page!



GETTING READY: THE SECRETS TO A RELAXING, BEAUTIFUL MORNING

What do you envision when you think of your wedding morning? Most couples dream of a morning filled with leisurely, relaxing activities, time with their family and closest friends, and maybe even a refreshing sparkling drink. That sounds really good to us, too! Capturing the beautiful in-between moments during your wedding day is such a joy for us. In this article, you'll find best advice for creating a relaxing, beautiful wedding morning.

The Space

If you're getting married at a hotel or resort, we recommend getting ready in the honeymoon suite or another large, spacious suite at the hotel. So, consider booking two nights instead of one. There are so many advantages to this! You'll get a great night sleep, all of your packed bags for the honeymoon will already be where they need to be, you won't have to travel at all on the morning of your wedding, and of course, you'll have an absolutely gorgeous space for photos!

As you decide on a room to book, consider space and light. Prep photos look so much nicer with a clean, simple background and lots of natural light. Look for neutral walls and furniture as well as lots of large windows with open space around them. These elements will completely transform your photos.

If you aren't getting ready at a hotel, all of the above considerations still apply! Find a space that has tons of natural light and neutral or white walls and furniture. Clean and simple is best - the more color and clutter in the room, the harder it will be to take beautiful photos. The number one priority is big windows!

Since we will be utilizing the space around the windows, plan to keep this area clear of any clutter - food, water bottles, bags, etc. Ask your bridesmaids to be mindful of this and consider keeping their bags in a closet or other room. This will not only create less clutter for photos, but will make you feel relaxed and organized in the process!

Getting Ready

If you've been in a wedding before, you know that the first part of the day, when everyone is doing hair & makeup, can be the most stressful! How to avoid the stress? Plan extra time for hair and makeup. Even if you've done a trial and have talked to your hair and makeup team, plan at least an extra 30 minutes! Almost all of the weddings we shoot have had either hair, makeup or both go long. If you don't plan for this, it can throw off your entire day from the start! If you plan accordingly, the worst that can happen is that we're ahead of schedule.

Usually, the best getting ready photos are when hair and makeup is nearly finished. Those last moments of makeup and hair touch-ups are when you're looking your best, and also when we start to snap getting ready photos! If you and your girls are wearing special robes or shirts, this is a great time to capture the moment, right before the dresses go on! You'll all look and feel your freshest, and there won't be that one bridesmaid feeling silly because her hair and makeup hasn't completed yet!

WEDDINGS

Changing into the Dress

After you've finished hair and makeup and everyone is ready, the bridesmaids should pretty quickly change into their dresses. This usually takes longer than expected or there is a bridesmaid that is MIA, so make sure your girls know in advance that it's important for them to be dressed and ready by a specific time. You don't want them to miss the moment when you put on your dress! Your mom will also want to be dressed for this moment. Definitely tell her this in advance, since moms sometimes get sidetracked with other details of the day and don't realize they also need to be dressed and ready early!

Finally, it's time to put on your dress! A quick trip to the restroom is always a good idea right beforehand - while your ladies are finishing getting dressed. We don't take any photos until your dress is pulled all the way up (you're welcome!). You can maintain privacy as you get into the dress, and then we'll position you in the prettiest spot in the room for the final buttons & zip. Usually, it's nice to have your mom or maid of honor help you into the dress and do the major buttoning. After that, you can have all your girls gather around and assist with fluffing the dress and putting on your shoes. You'll put on finishing touches - like jewelry and perfume - and then soak in the finished product in the mirror!

First Look with Dad

One final consideration for getting ready: a first look with your father or other significant family member. While this is definitely not required, a lot of brides really cherish this special moment with their dad, and we totally recommend it! We'll pick a place with the best lighting and space and have your dad turn around until you enter the room. When you are a couple steps away from him, he'll turn around! It's a really sweet moment and allows you to take in another special part of your day!

What About the Groom?

The guys matter, too! All the rules of lighting and ideal space also apply to the guys getting ready. However, it's typical that the guys don't have as nice of a space to get ready in since it takes less time and effort for them! If this is the case, consider having the guys put on their finishing touches (jacket, bow tie, accessories, shoes) in a different spot. If they aren't getting ready in the same place as the girls, they can even wait until they get to the venue and choose the nicest available room!

The getting ready part of the day isn't always considered when couples think about photos. But, we hear so many couples say that these moments are very important to them! Following these guidelines will help create the most beautiful and relaxing environment for perfect photos!





DETAILS:

THE LITTLE THINGS
MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

WEDDINGS

If you've been browsing other couples' wedding galleries, you've probably seen those fabulously styled wedding invitations suites that look super beautiful. From the perfect envelope, to the ribbon and gossamer, to the sweet little items around it - it all works together and it all looks absolutely beautiful. What you don't see is the preparation behind such a beautiful image. While it isn't a super time-consuming or expensive task, there are a few small things you can do to prepare your details so that they look their most beautiful all together. These are the details that will be a cherished part of your wedding day memories, and preparing in advance will allow you to have the most gorgeous images to remember all the special little details.

3 TIPS FOR PHOTOGENIC INVITATION SUITES

Your wedding invitation suite is so special - it's the literal information about your wedding day and it represents you as a couple! No matter how simple or complex you plan to make it, you'll want to remember and preserve your wedding invitations. It's for this reason that we always make sure that we have the invitation suite when we gather all the details to photograph at the beginning of your wedding day.

There are a few simple things you can do that make a huge difference in the way your invitations photograph:

Provide Two Copies

Giving us two copies of your invitation suite allows us to use fronts, backs or inserts simultaneously, multiple envelopes, and generally have more space to be creative.

Don't Mail It

Don't actually mail the envelope off to us or someone else. It may seem obvious, but don't send your extra copies through the mail! They often will get a little bit bent or dirty, so just order 2 extra copies when you place your order!

A week before the wedding day, we send couples a reminder check list of all the little things they might want to include for their detail photos. We also ask that they gather these items in a box or bag a few days in advance, so that they're safely prepared for us all in one place when we arrive on the wedding day! However, we won't necessarily know all the things that are important to you, so this article expands on what we believe truly makes detail photos beautiful & unique.



Address the Envelope

One of the invites you provide me should be addressed and stamped. If you don't have someone professionally addressing the envelopes for you, consider having someone hand-address just this one in calligraphy or script to make it look extra-beautiful! Make sure it's addressed to either yourselves or your parents - not us! You do not want our name in your photos!

Adding Florals

One of the best ways to add personality to your detail photos is to provide your photographer with a few fresh stems. Most florists are more than happy to deliver a few extra flowers for these detail photos, and extra greenery also goes a long way! Be sure that your florist is making her delivery early enough so that the photographer can utilize the flowers. We generally photograph details at the very beginning of the day, as soon as we arrive, and many other photographers do the same thing. If your florist is arriving shortly before the ceremony, the timing might not work out. If you can't get your florist to deliver early enough, consider saving some flowers from your rehearsal dinner or even grabbing a small bunch at Trader Joe's a few days before! They really do make all the difference!

Styling Materials Matter

As artists, we're always thinking about how to photograph something in the most creative and beautiful way. When it comes to detail photos, we bring my own little kit of styling materials to enhance your detail photos. It's never anything that takes away from the actual details - just some ribbons, lace, and fabrics that add texture and depth to the image. However,

some couples actually go the extra mile and pick out these items for themselves! Samples from bridesmaids' dresses, lace from your mom's or grandmother's wedding dress, ribbon that matches your colors, or a pretty ring box that accentuates your diamond are all great options. You may want to consider this, too, as you are preparing items that will make your day unique and

It Should Be Personal

Ultimately, what makes your wedding unique is that it's all about you two: your shared life & experiences. It's the smallest details that often make a wedding the most unique. As you gather up materials for the detail photos, consider what little objects & trinkets represent you two - both individually & as a couple. I've had couples give me antique photographs of relatives who have passed, family heirlooms (loquets, rings, good luck charms, etc.), customized wax seal stamps, custom ring boxes, hand-written vows, and more. Even if these little things aren't specifically a part of your wedding day, think about including the things that represent who you are!

BEAUTY TIPS FROM A HAIR & MAKEUP PRO

BY AMY WILD

of Vintage Veils

Everyone wants to be a happy, glowing bride in her wedding photos, and hair and makeup is a huge confidence booster! Polished bridal hair and makeup fill you with confidence that shines through your smile. You will feel like the best version of yourself and you will be completely flawless in your most special keepsake - your wedding photos!

Choosing Your Hair & Makeup Team

You'll want to choose wisely when selecting your hair and makeup team for your wedding! Skill and personality is the winning combination, and a great professional will have both. Our company has high standards for the artists that work for us: both for their technical skills, but also for their attitude and character. We pride ourselves on being joyful, punctual, professional, kind and innovative. You can depend on us to ease any tension and bring a light-hearted atmosphere to your wedding day. Steer clear of vendors who lack social media or online presence, a great portfolio or that have low (or no!) reviews.

It may surprise you, but it's most beneficial to book your beauty vendors a year in advance! This is the most common mistake couples will make. We book quickly and also want to work with you on timing, details and style. Be sure to book us as soon as you can!

Understanding the Process

The most common misperception that our clients make with us is setting their expectations high in regards to hair & makeup inspiration photos on Pinterest (Google, etc.). Inspiration photos can be wonderful and helpful, but often times details like hair length, face shape, eye color, etc. can be deceiving. Be sure to schedule a hair and makeup trial with your beauty team so they are able to assess your desires and photo references, leaving you stress-free! Vintage Veils truly works well with all styles and we constantly crave wedding diversity, so we'll work together to find a style perfect for you!



As you're working with your photographer and planner on the schedule, don't forget to leave plenty of time for hair and makeup! This is one of the most important aspects to remember when you are deciding whether or not to use a professional beauty team. Be sure to leave enough time so that you are able to enjoy a stress-free getting ready process. You will also want to consider time for adjustments, touch-ups and for getting into your gown before your first look or photos!

On the day of your wedding, we'll want a great space to work in to give you the best results. We love natural light and lots of space! Large windows, sufficient outlets and room to get your bridal party ready in are so important! When it comes to bridal beauty, lighting plays an integral role in how your beauty team styles your hair and makeup.

One final note: it's your wedding! Have fun! Make sure you take time for yourself and enjoy special days with your friends and family without the stresses of wedding planning to bog you down. Don't forget to simply relax with your significant other, after all, you're in this together. Planning a wedding should be fun - no matter how big or small - and the memories you make leading up to the big day are just as important as the day itself.

IS A FIRST LOOK RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you're not already familiar with the term, a "first look" is when a bride and groom see each other privately before their ceremony. This is done away from all the guests, wedding party & family so that the moment can be shared between just the two of you. It is intimate, emotional and romantic: an extra-special "reveal." While it's not for everyone, a first look is, in our opinion, one of the best parts of the wedding day and we're excited to share why!



AS SEEN ON HILL CITY BRIDE

“SHOULD WE DO A FIRST LOOK?”

4 REASONS IT WAS RIGHT FOR ME

BY HANNAH BJORNDALE

Easing Your Nerves

While I'm not a particularly shy or introverted person, I was nervous about walking down the aisle. I didn't like the idea of 200+ people seeing a deeply personal, emotional reaction to me seeing Evan for the first time that day. It just felt wrong for so many people to see something that felt intimate.

A first look gave us a chance to enjoy that emotional, intimate moment without everyone watching. We cherished that private moment to ourselves. My nerves disappeared entirely. During the ceremony, I was still a little nervous, but my excitement and joy outweighed the nerves because we had a private moment to ourselves beforehand.



Relaxing & Enjoying the Day

You already know a wedding day can be stressful if not well-planned. Even a really well-planned wedding can be stressful if the schedule is tight. The time between the ceremony and cocktail hour is generally very short, and making sure everyone is where they need to be can take a toll on you. The last thing you want on the day of your wedding is to be stretched for time.

When you choose to have a first look, you control how much time you have. You can see each other whenever you would like. For my own wedding, we did all of the bridal party photos, family photos, and some of just the two of us all before the ceremony. Honestly, it was the most stress-free day imaginable, and that was totally because nothing at all was rushed! We were so carefree all day long!

*“A FIRST LOOK GAVE US A CHANCE TO ENJOY
THAT EMOTIONAL, INTIMATE MOMENT
WITHOUT EVERYONE WATCHING.”*

WEDDINGS

Looking Your Best

Let's be honest: you are going to look absolutely stunning on your wedding day. It's basically guaranteed. Therefore, any photo taken of you is going to be gorgeous (guys, too!). However, as time goes on, makeup fades, hair starts to fall flat, you shed a few tears, and you just generally aren't as fresh! A good makeup artist and hair stylist can work to keep your look together all day, but chances are, you aren't going to be looking as fresh after the ceremony as before.

This shows up in your photos. Taking photos before the ceremony allows you to look your freshest and your best. Additionally, you'll be way more relaxed because you have more time, and relaxed and fresh is definitely more beautiful than stressed and sweaty!

Celebrating at Cocktail Hour

While this isn't important to all couples, many want to attend their cocktail hour. Enjoying the casual time together with friends is fun and can add more relaxation to the day. If family photos, wedding party photos, and photos of just the two of you are all happening after the ceremony, there's no way you are making it to cocktail hour! If you want to be at your own cocktail hour, plan on doing a first look!

The decision of whether or not to have first look is entirely up to you. I'll never force you to do a first look and completely respect your decision one way or the other. It's going to be fun no matter what! If timing is a concern and you really don't want to do a first look, consider a pre-wedding session or day-after session. If you're interested in learning more about either one of these options, let me know!



CHOOSING LOCATIONS FOR YOUR
WEDDING
PORTRAITS



WEDDINGS

You want beautiful portraits and we want to create beautiful portraits for you (so glad we are on the same page!). A huge factor in making your portraits beautiful is picking the right place for the portraits. But many couples don't actually know what to look for in a perfect location, and many times, if not discussed in advance, our photo location options will be limited. Once again, planning in advance is going to allow you to have the most beautiful photos & the most relaxing wedding day!

The key to a beautiful portrait: light. The very first thing we consider when selecting locations for photos is the available light. Obviously, light will vary depending on the time of day & year, the weather, and objects in the path of sun, among other factors. All these factors affect the light and must be considered when setting up the perfect portrait. Luckily for you, we're the photographers! Composing and preparing for the shot based upon the light is our job. However, choosing the place, in general, is ultimately up to you and many of our couples even have an ideal image in their head of how they want their photos to look. This information will help prepare you to make the best decisions and have realistic expectations as you choose photo locations.

Location & the Sun

If you've already had an engagement session, you likely know that the best and most flattering light is around sunrise and sunset. Even on a cloudy day, the light is lower in the sky and all-around more beautiful for portraits. However, many wedding day timelines don't really work around sunrise or sunset, so planning accordingly is super important!

The most important thing to consider if any of your portraits are in the middle of the day (not in the 1-2 hours before sunset) is shade. Shade is essential for beautiful photos at this time of day. The sunlight is far too harsh and will create hard, unflattering shadows.

So, how do you know if it's good shade or bad shade? Ideally, the shaded area is not too dark, and there is plenty of open space in front of where you'll be standing. For example, outside a tall, light-colored building in a city with large, spacious city streets is a great option. The height of the light-colored building will provide shade from the sun and, because it's a light color, it isn't too dark in the shadows. The broad, open streets create additional lightness. Another example of great shade is a few leafy trees. Having significant height means that the sun will be blocked, even if it's in the middle of the sky. Having a couple trees will provide enough shade for your entire wedding party to fit without being too dark (like a woodsy area with densely-packed trees).

This time of day is, by far, the hardest to plan for, so any good photographer (us included!) is going to give you tons and tons of help and direction in choosing a specific spot. Visiting potential locations, taking photos, and sending them to your photographer in advance is always a good idea!

Now, let's talk about the best case scenario. Ideally, the majority of your portraits (wedding party, family & just you two) will happen around sunset (or sunrise! we've done it all!). This time is also known as "Golden Hour." Shooting in direct sunlight is possible at this time, but we still suggest finding a location that has the possibility of shade (even smaller amounts than suggest for middle-of-the-day photos) for the best results. As the sun gets lower and lower in the sky, we'll be able to take advantage of being in the direct sunlight.

If you do plan for the majority of your photos to take place in the middle of the day, we highly recommend saving 15-20 minutes of portraits of the two of you for sunset. One hour before sunset is the ideal time. We have no doubt that these will be your favorite photos of you two!



Key Elements of Locations

As you start thinking about your photo locations, there are a few key elements that will truly make the photos pop. Some of these are elements you'll recognize from some of our best work, but other elements are subtle enough that you'd likely never have guessed could make a difference!

One of the first things we look for when scouting for a photo location is reflected light. What is reflecting light all around us? Usually, buildings & the ground. The best reflected light is colorless and bright, i.e. white surfaces! White buildings, no matter what material they are made of, reflect beautiful light. Being based in D.C. and Naples, FL, we're super lucky to have tons of white marble buildings all around us! Light grey & cream are also great building colors. This will keep your skin looking beautiful, bright and even in photos. The ground in front of you is also important - white or grey pavement, stone or bricks are ideal! Look for buildings that have these characteristics as you think about locations for your portraits.

Open spaces, as mentioned before, are also very important to look for. When we say "open spaces," we aren't talking about a huge field with nothing but tall grass in it. I'm talking about spaces that are bright! City streets can be so beautiful, but if there is not enough open space between two buildings, it will be too dark! Remember that we'll be facing you two towards the open space so that lots of soft light is on your faces. If you're looking at less urban areas, think about spaces that are speckled with trees, or indoor spaces that have high, white ceilings and big windows. If you're in a nature-heavy spot, look for those light-colored pathways or roads as an anchor point where you'll stand, rather than in the grass!

Lastly, and this is particularly true for weddings in wide-open country venues, we always look for something to "ground" the portrait. If everything in the background is grass and trees, we'll look for a building, a pop of color in a garden, mountains, or even a distant fence or barn to bring character and depth into the background. If this is your type of wedding venue, think about what background might have these characteristics for the best possible portraits!

WEDDINGS

Elements to Avoid

Even more important than the best characteristics of a photo location are the things to avoid. We've limited this list to the things that truly ruin photos - the things we avoid at all cost! Definitely take this list seriously as you plan out your photo locations. You will be so glad you did!

First, we've got to address the elephant in the room: red brick. Red brick is, by far, every wedding photographer's worst nightmare. Surprised? Here's why: red brick reflects ugly, bright red light onto the subject's face, causing skin tones to look bright orangey-red. The worst part is that this really cannot be photoshopped or color-corrected to look natural. Red brick sidewalks or a nearby red brick building are no-no's - you'll absolutely want to avoid it. Luckily for all of you red-brick venue-lovers, there is an exception! When it's in the background, far behind you, red brick is totally OK! But, many red brick buildings also surrounded by red brick sidewalks or other red brick buildings, so make sure to check that your location does not have these elements and you're good to go!

Generally speaking, the strategy is to avoid anything that is going to reflect a bright color on your skin, and brightly colored buildings, paths and sidewalks are the common offenders. Additionally, if you're surrounded by a lot of green - grass, trees, plants, etc. - this can cause a yellowy-green tint to your skin. This is why we always look for those light-colored sidewalks and pathways in nature-heavy areas. They will reflect a bright, neutral color light on your face to counter-balance all the green!

Finally, you'll want to avoid "black holes" - dark places that cause dark shadows on your face or in the background. These areas are usually spots with lots and lots of shade - think densely packed trees or the woods, really dark-colored buildings, large, open doors to dark rooms, and even dark-colored interiors of venues. In almost all of our work, you'll notice a lack of very dark spaces. This is something we're very conscious of when shooting, and will often recompose an entire photo just based on one of these dark black holes in the background!

Obviously, this is a lot to digest! As your photographers, we'll be scouting out your venue in advance to make sure we find a perfect spot for all your photos, so you don't have to stress about it too much. Ultimately, we've got your back! Just keep these factors in mind if you are set on any specific locations or backdrops for your photos!





TACKLING YOUR TIMELINE

Let us just start by saying that a strong timeline is the single most important aspect in having a stress-free, relaxing wedding day. Knowing exactly when & where everything is going to happen throughout your day should be decided months in advance. For those of you who are Type A, this is probably music to your ears. For those that love spontaneity and hate planning, bear with us. A wedding day timeline benefits everyone!

In this article, we're going to focus on planning your timeline according to wedding photos, which, surprisingly, will dictate the timing of much of your day. However, there are a lot of non-photography elements of a timeline that are also important. If you're working with a wedding planner, they will create a wedding day timeline for you that will outline every part of the entire wedding weekend, including vendor coordinating. We highly recommend at least hiring a day-of coordinator to help you manage this!

WEDDINGS

The Non-Negotiables

Before we can make any decisions about timing for your wedding day, you'll need to look at the non-negotiable elements of your day's timing. Have you booked an official start and end time for your ceremony? Does your reception require you to end at a certain time? Are you 100% against a first look? These factors should be at the forefront of your mind early on, as they will dictate the rest of the timing for your day.

Make a note of these timing constraints and then look at how much time is left before, after and in-between. This will give you a general idea of how much time there is for photos and other activities at each part of the day.

Another non-negotiable is the sunset. Check the sunset time for your date and make a mental note. Keep in mind that all portraits should end before this time. If your ceremony is at sunset, then you'll need to finish all your portraits before the ceremony, meaning that a first look is necessary (this is rare!).

When possible, we suggest that couples wait on setting an exact ceremony & reception start time until after we have a conversation about the timeline. This way, couples can make timing decisions based on their personal preferences photo-wise. For instance, if you're 100% against a first look, you should have a ceremony that ends at least 1-2 hours before sunset. However, we know from experience that many couples have to pick these times when they book their venue, often before they book me (so keeping the rest of this article in mind will be helpful to those of you who have already set these times!).

Deciding on a First Look

After reviewing your non-negotiables, the next thing to consider is a first look. As mentioned previously, it is occasionally necessary to do a first look if you want portraits of you two, your family and the wedding party. However, most weddings have the flexibility to do portraits before or after the ceremony. In this section, we'll explain how each may affect the timeline for your wedding day.

Let's start with a wedding day that does not have a first look. If you're not having a first look, then there are some portraits that will have to wait until after the ceremony: the full wedding party (group photo with all bridesmaids & groomsmen), family, and bride & groom. These three combinations generally take about 60-75 minutes total, not including travel time between locations (if your ceremony & reception are taking place in different locations). As you decide on whether or not you'd like a first look, take this timing into consideration. Your cocktail hour will need to be a little longer than 1 hour, and you two will likely not be able to attend. Some wedding days have a larger gap of time between the ceremony & reception, but most wedding days do not. It's important that you know this information early on, so that you can make a decision based on your priorities!

Next, let's talk about wedding days that do have a first look. With a first look, there is more flexibility in when to schedule portraits. You can do absolutely everything before the ceremony, or we can split up portraits based on how much time you'd like to spend at your cocktail hour (or alone!) before your reception begins. Usually, we suggest finishing all wedding party photos before the ceremony to leave more room for portraits of just you two afterwards. You also have the option to do family portraits beforehand, which can make the rest of the day more relaxed. Having more portraits before the ceremony does mean an earlier start time, which will mean you'll need to be ready earlier, too. Both of these options offer different advantages, and ultimately, it's up to you to decide what sounds better!

Knowing When to Finish Getting Ready

We get this question from almost every couple we work with: When should we finish getting ready?

It's an important question, isn't it? You'll definitely want to have a clear answer in mind well before the wedding day! While some of the answer depends on your decision about a first look, there are some general tips to follow, even before you make that decision!

Typically, we plan some portraits before the ceremony regardless of the first look decision. Bridal portraits, groom portraits, photos with the bride & bridesmaids, photos with the groom & groomsmen, and/or some family photos will probably be before the ceremony no matter what. As a general rule of thumb, it's wise to plan to be completely finished getting ready at least 2 hours before your ceremony (although we will nail down the specific timing as more details come into place!). If you're doing all of your portraits beforehand, then you'll likely need to be ready 3-4 hours before the ceremony begins!

As the timeline begins to form, we'll give you an approximate time to get into your dress (!!!) and then we'll make a final decision shortly after that! We always plan for something to run late and suggest planning plenty of "buffer" time in case this happens. This way, even if you're running late, you won't have to stress or rush!

Things You Might Forget

The photos that couples most often overlook in timeline-planning are detail photos. Even though the timing for these photos is often overlooked, the photos themselves are important to most (if not all) couples with whom we work. Remembering to factor this in to your hours of coverage and timing for the day should be on your list of priorities!

There are two different sets of details on which we focus: bridal details (which we will style ourselves with the items you give us) and ceremony & reception decor (which we'll photograph as styled by your wedding planner, coordinator, florist, etc.). We always plan an hour at the very beginning of the day for the bridal details. This includes your wedding dress, shoes, invitation suites, bow ties, jewelry, and a lot more. An hour may sound like a lot of time, but to style all the details, move your dress to a pretty spot to photograph, shoot all of it, and return it neatly to you is surprisingly time-consuming! These detail photos are done at the beginning of the day because many of them are items that you'll be wearing.

Ceremony details are usually photographed shortly before the ceremony begins, after the bride and her bridesmaids have gone away to hide from guests. When possible, it's best to plan these photos for 30-45 minutes before the start of the ceremony, so that guests are not in the photos. The reception space also requires time in the room without guests, so we also recommend that you plan about 15-20 minutes in your wedding day timeline for us to photograph this space before guests are allowed in to your reception.

Obviously, this all is a lot to think about! All of our couples receive full photo timeline planning from us throughout the process, but keeping a few of these factors in mind early on can help you plan so that all your top priorities are met!



AS SEEN ON: CARATS & CAKE

WEDDINGS

SAMPLE TIMELINES



WITH FIRST LOOK

12:30pm-1:30pm: Bridal Details

1:30pm-2:00pm: Bride Dresses

2:00pm-2:15pm: First Look



2:15pm-3:15pm: Wedding Party Portraits (All)

3:15pm-3:30pm: Family Portraits

3:30pm-4:00pm: Ceremony Details

4:00pm-4:45pm: Ceremony & dismissal

4:45pm-5:15pm: Bride & Groom Portraits

5:15pm-6:00pm: Cocktail Hour, Reception Details

6:00pm-10:00pm: Reception

WITHOUT FIRST LOOK

12:30pm-1:30pm: Bridal Details Photo

1:30pm-2:00pm: Bride Dresses

2:15pm-2:45pm: Bride & Bridesmaids Portraits

2:45pm-3:15pm: Groom & Groomsmen Portraits

3:15pm-3:45pm: Reception Details

3:45pm-4:00pm: Ceremony Details

4:00pm-4:45pm: Ceremony & Dismissal

4:45pm-5:00pm: Family Portraits

5:00pm-5:20pm: Wedding Party Portraits

5:20pm-6:00pm: Bride & Groom Portraits

6:00pm-10:00pm: Reception





HAVING FUN WITH YOUR WEDDING PARTY

Wedding party photos are usually one of the most joyful parts of the day. You'll have all your special people around you and it naturally results in a lot of smiling and laughing. We highly encourage joking and laughter throughout this time - it's a priority to us that everyone has fun! After shooting wedding parties for years, we've learned that there are a few small things that make a big difference to how this part of the day goes!

You may have a lot of bridesmaids and groomsmen who have been in weddings before, or you might have a ton of first-time wedding party members. Regardless, they will probably start forming expectations about what the day is going to be like for them! When it comes to photos, the more they know in advance, the better. Wedding parties who have been given specific instructions about when to arrive at each location, when to be ready, how long photos will take and where they'll take place are usually the wedding parties that are happiest and easiest to photograph. Additionally, if wedding party members have kids, make sure they have arranged someone to watch them for the entirety of photos (even if the kids are flower girls or ring bearers - TRUST US on this one!). Communicate the photo schedule several times to your wedding party and confirm everything one last time at your rehearsal the night before. This is a great job for a maid of honor and best man!

It shouldn't be your job to make your wedding party happy on your wedding day (and occasionally, there is just one bridesmaid or groomsmen that is really uncooperative, but this is rare!). But planning for your party to have a really fun day can also make your day way more fun! During wedding party portraits, we suggest doing something little that will make them more comfortable or at ease. This could mean bringing along hand warmers or wool wraps if it's a cold wedding day, finding a nearby place with shade on a hot day, and maybe even bringing some drinks for everyone to enjoy - champagne toast, beer or even hot coffee can be such a nice touch and keep everyone happy!

One thing to avoid: serving food during photos. You don't want to worry about food in your teeth, chewing during photos or too much interrupted time to break for food. Many times, caterers will bring hors d'oeuvres right as we begin wedding party photos. While it's a very kind gesture, it ends up delaying the wedding party from being in the photos and actually going to the cocktail hour. Ask your caterer to hold off on this, or only deliver food to the two of you (after the wedding party is at cocktail hour). This makes for a smoother and faster transition! You won't regret it, and your wedding party will love how quickly we finish photos!

PLANNING A WOW-WORTHY CEREMONY



WEDDINGS

We have been to a huge variety of ceremonies, folks! Some as a guest, and many, many more as a photographer. We will be the first to tell you that the most important part of your wedding day should be your ceremony. Putting a lot of thought and effort into what you are committing to the other person is what matters first and foremost. With that in mind, let's talk about all the pretty little details that can create the most romantic setting & wow-worthy ceremony!

Ideally, you're reading this before you've picked a ceremony site. However, most couples already have a general idea of where the ceremony will be before they book a photographer, so we've broken this article down into sections based on the type of ceremony site you may be considering. And if you're in between two of these options, hopefully this will help you make a final decision!

Churches & Chapels

This is the most classic and iconic place to get married, isn't it? A church often holds the most sentimental value to couples and can be the centerpiece that determines where and when everything else happens. If you're planning your ceremony in a church, you probably already know which church, which means my advice here will only go so far. However, there are little things you can do to the space to make it look extra-special.

So, first: what is the ideal wedding chapel or sanctuary? Photo-wise, the most beautiful churches for weddings have lots and lots of natural light and no brightly colored carpets or pews (no red, green, etc.). White walls are ideal, and a chapel that has a lot of wood is lovely if there are large, bright windows. If it's possible to turn all the lights off without it being too dark, definitely do it!

Mixed lighting is very unflattering - not just on camera, but also to the eye. Open all the curtains and let that natural light in for the most beautiful photos without overhead lights!

While we highly encourage couples to pick a ceremony site that holds significance to them, we strongly encourage against the big, dark, auditorium-like churches with no windows and dark walls. It's nearly impossible to make these spaces bright or elegant, and we will 100% need to use a flash. Unless you don't care much about your photos from the ceremony, don't have a ceremony in a church like this!

If you do decide on booking a church, speak with the coordinator about typical procedure. Can you open the curtains entirely to let light in? Can you turn off any overhead lights to avoid mixed lighting? What are the rules for photography? It's really important to get this information before you book, so that you know what to expect photo-wise. Some churches do not allow the photographer anywhere near the front of the ceremony, which makes it impossible to get a shot from the front of the bride walking down the aisle. Some churches require the photographer to stay seated in one seat during the entire ceremony, which will mean very limited photos and angles. We're flexible in all of these situations, but if you have a specific photo that you're dreaming of, knowing church rules in advance is essential!

Finally, when you've officially booked your ceremony, it's time to think about decor. Many churches and chapels have natural charm and elegance, so decor should be tasteful, simple and match the style of the room. Floral arrangements at the front of the room add a beautiful depth to the space, and so does candlelight. It's a great idea to ask your florist to help you plan the decor. Get his/her input, particularly if they have worked at the church before!

WEDDINGS

Outdoor Ceremonies

There is so much to love about an outdoor ceremony! Plan it correctly, and it's the most beautiful setting to say "I do." Plan it poorly, and you may be disappointed with the end result (particularly the photos!). There are a few basic tips when planning an outdoor ceremony that will make a big difference in your photos.

As you've heard us talk about a lot in this guidebook, natural light is the very first thing you should consider when planning your outdoor ceremony. If it's sunny on your wedding day, where will the sun be? Will it be in your guests' eyes? Will it be in YOUR eyes? Will it be at sunset, or in the middle of the day? Is there any shade? All these factors are things to consider as you plan your ceremony!

A sunny, summer day at 2pm is not only going to be hot, it's also going to have blinding, unflattering light. In DC, the sun sets close to 9pm during the longest days of the year. In the winter, the sun can set as early as 4:45pm. That's a huge range! In SWFL, the range isn't quite as large, but it still varies significantly throughout the year. The best time to have your outdoor ceremony is within the 2-3 hours before sunset. This leaves enough time after the ceremony for golden

hour, yet takes advantage of the sinking sun so that the light is not too intense. If the ceremony has to be outside in the middle of the day, there are a few options that will help make it beautiful! We'll talk more about that later!

The angle of the ceremony set up to the sun is also important. Again, you don't want you or your guests to be blinded the entire time! The best angle for the sun is when the couple is backlit at the altar. This means that the sun is shining at your guests, but it's not directly behind you two. Off-center to the right or left of the altar is the perfect location for the setting sun during a ceremony! No one goes blind, and you two will be beautifully backlit!



Another consideration in planning your outdoor ceremony is the surrounding setting. Many times, venues have a set location where ceremonies take place. Sometimes this is great and the spot is perfect, other times, not so much. Light shade from trees & natural surroundings create a really lovely, soft light which allows more flexibility for middle-of-the-day ceremonies without the harsh light.

When you've figured out the light situation, you can pick the location and start planning the details. Surprisingly, many beautiful outdoor locations can end up looking rather plain without any decor. We highly recommend some kind of decor at the alter - whether it be a floral installation, an arch, draping, or a combination of any of these. Some ceremony views are stunning and speak for themselves, but even these can always be enhanced by flowers along the aisle, candles or other tasteful additions to create a lush, beautiful space. And the bonus? You can also use the alter as a backdrop for portraits!

Inside Your Reception Venue

Lastly, you may be planning a ceremony inside your reception venue (possibly as your Plan B - check out pages 42-44 for more information about this!). Indoor reception venues vary so widely compared to the last two options, and so understanding how to make the space beautiful also varies widely! There are a few guiding principles that will help in any situation.

Evaluate the size of the ceremony space. How many chairs can fit comfortably in the space? Are there room along the ends of the rows or multiple aisles? Is it going to feel squeezed? For indoor spaces, the bigger, the better. Tight, squeezed spaces not only photograph poorly, they are also uncomfortable for guests! Additionally, if there isn't a lot of space at the end of the rows, it will be harder to get close enough to photograph major moments, like the processional, vows & kiss.

If these moments are important to you, definitely be sure that there is a path for a photographer to move from front to back easily without having to go down the center aisle!

Next, think about the light. Are there big windows? Will there be natural light? Is your ceremony before or after sunset? The biggest rule for indoor ceremonies is not to mix light. This means that if there is natural light (windows) then there shouldn't also be overhead lights on. Talk with the ceremony coordinator in advance to be sure that you can avoid this mixed light. Your skin tone will thank you!

Lastly, consider the color & style of the space. If the floors or walls are anything but neutral-colored, this may clash with your colors! Think about this well in advance so it's not a problem later on. Most indoor spaces can benefit from additional, tasteful decor. Flowers are always a good idea. A lush installment in front will add life to your space and can totally transform a ceremony. Candles and greenery along the aisle and at the front also create a beautiful mood.

Things to avoid? Anything fake. Fake candles and fake flowers are a bad idea for any part of your day, but particularly the ceremony. If your venue doesn't allow open flames, ditch the candles entirely and stick with florals. Can't swing the cost of all the extra flowers? Consider using lots of greenery - like smilax or eucalyptus. You can always ask your florist to help you decide what's best for the space, too!

There is clearly a lot to think about when it comes to planning a beautiful and photogenic ceremony. Again, we'd like to add that the ceremony and your vows absolutely should be a focus for you two! That's what the day is all about - committing to one another for life! The thing that ultimately makes a ceremony wow-worthy is when a couple has thoughtfully considered the gravity of this commitment. The emotions and joy that comes from this are priceless!

FLORAL MAGIC: WORKING WITH YOUR FLORIST

BY AVERY SNIPES

of Ash to Oak Floristry

Flowers have the ability to set the aesthetic tone of your entire event and tie together the story you are telling on your wedding day. Knowing this, we consider it an honor when a bride trusts us with her wedding flowers. When we arrange for a wedding, we know we are playing an important role in completing the dream and vision for that day.

Choosing a Florist

Unless you have experience in the world of floral design, it is hard to grasp the amount of thought and time that is dedicated to each client. Behind the beauty and creative design is a lot of decision-making, planning, research, and even mathematics! Being a florist is hard work, but we couldn't love it more. We want you to have an incredible experience with your florist, too!

First, how do you know if a florist is a good fit? Choosing the perfect florist for your day involves a mix of personality and creativity. Look for a florist who cares about your vision, listens to you, and is honest with you. We recommend avoiding vendors that do not value your vision, or that are heavily commercialized. We are big fans of the small business community and have found a more professional and personal touch with smaller or boutique vendors.

At Ash to Oak, we strive to work with integrity, honesty, and we always bring our A-game. We seek to provide beautifully crafted floral arrangements that are uniquely tailored to the vision of each client. We love dreaming alongside our clients and discovering how we can make their day everything they had hoped for. Taking time to understand our brides matters immensely in our design process. We want each bride to feel heard, understood, and celebrated as they work with us. Be sure to find a florist that cares about you, your priorities and your vision!

This also works conversely - be open and honest with your florist. We work for you and value your style, ideas, & opinions. Any thought, concern, or question is something we are happy to work through together!

If you're wondering when to book your florist, the answer varies. Most clients book our services between 6 months - 1 year in advance of their wedding. Those looking to take advantage of our à la carte services have more flexibility and tend to book closer to their wedding date.

Floral Style

Personally, we do not hold fast to one particular style of floral design or wedding. Instead, we create by learning about who you are and what you love, and we work to emulate that unique beauty in your wedding flowers. Some of our favorite styles include whimsical, romantic weddings, classic, elegant weddings & English garden-style weddings, but again, we welcome any and all ideas from our couples!

Finally, we love the way photography works in conjunction with floral art. Have you ever seen a photo of a flower arrangement or a bouquet that makes your heart skip a beat? There is something heartwarming about a bouquet of full, lush blooms. The photos of your wedding day are visual memory that you keep for years to come. Ash to Oak seeks to honor and enhance these memories by providing stunning and uniquely designed wedding flowers. We think there is something magical about how flowers don't last forever, but are there just for a brief time to bring you joy. In wedding photos we see that magic last just a little bit longer.





AS SEEN ON: RUFFLED

WHAT TO DO IF IT RAINS

Particularly if any part of your wedding is outdoors, the fear of rain has likely crossed your mind a couple times. Many couples worry about rain on their wedding day. And while there is no way to control Mother Nature, there are some very practical steps you can take to prepare for the best day ever, regardless of the weather!

Plan Your Plan B

If you can't control the weather, the next best thing is to have a killer backup plan! Most couples don't put a lot of thought or effort into a backup plan, and that's if they've even thought of one at all. Because we're hoping for clear skies and sun, the thought of planning for less-than-ideal weather stresses couples out, so they avoid it entirely. But, the truth is, this ends up causing couples WAY more stress in the month before the wedding! Even perfectly beautiful wedding days sometimes have weather forecasts of rain & storms up until the day before the wedding. Case in point: make a Plan B if any part of your day is outdoor, including portraits (which, if you're working with me, will be!).

Portraits in the Rain?

We recommend that every couple, in every season, plans at least a short amount of time outdoors for portraits in natural light. Our opinion is the more natural light, the better. If possible, we will do all formal portraits (family, wedding party, bride & groom) outside to take advantage of beautiful natural light.

During the wedding planning process, many couples ask us: "What happens if it rains? Will we still take photos outside?" To which we always answer: What a great question! If it rains on your wedding day, this does not mean we have to ditch the outdoors and natural light. But it does mean that there needs to be a plan in place before the day-of!

The truth is that rainy day light often produces incredibly beautiful portraits. The soft, diffused light highlights skin beautifully, if used correctly. However, you don't want to get rained on on your wedding day, especially if portraits are before the ceremony. You also want a beautiful location that you love, not a last-ditch effort at the outdoors.

Choosing Rainy Locations

Even if you already have started making your Plan B, the next logical question is what type of places are ideal for portraits on a rainy day? There are a few key elements to look for in the perfect rainy portrait spot (which are going to sound familiar if you read pages 29-30).

Option 1: Covered, Outdoors

The first recommendation we make for couples' Plan B portrait location is an outdoor space that is covered. However, not all verandas are created equal. If you choose a covered outdoor location, make sure it has high ceilings (2+ stories are ideal) and lots of white or cream-colored space (floors, walls, ceiling!). Red brick, dark wood or colorfully painted walls will reflect ugly light on your skin and should be entirely avoided!

Also, be sure that the space is larger enough to fit all the people who will be in the photos. If you have a wedding party with 18 people, it needs to be a really large space. Sometimes, really large covered spaces (like gazebos) end up being very dark, even when painted white. The taller the ceiling the better! And remember that the ceiling and ground reflect just as much light as walls, so again, stick to bright, neutral-colored spaces!

Option 2: Clear Umbrellas

Another option has a lot of caveats, but it is well worth your consideration! If it does rain on your wedding day, we can always continue Plan A with the assistance of clear umbrellas. Some venues even have these on site! This works best when there is shelter from the rain nearby, the rain isn't too heavy and there are pathways (instead of having to walk through the grass). We love shooting in the rain with umbrellas, so if you're up for it, so are we!

Option 3: Indoors With Large Windows

The third option we recommend to couples making a rain plan is a large, indoor space with huge windows. Again, this space will ideally have high ceilings, white or light-colored walls and floors, and lots of natural light. It also needs to have a lot of space to fit your wedding party.

Let's be honest: many wedding venues do not have a space as described here, so a lot of couples will end up just saying "oh well" and continuing to make their venue space their Plan B. But *you* are smart and are making your Plan B really far in advance. This means that you can research nearby areas and find the very best option for Plan B. We highly encourage you to look at any and all nearby options that fit any of the three options.

No matter where you're getting married, you will want a beautiful space for portraits. Even if you ditch the wedding party and just have portraits of the two of you taken at a third location, you will not regret it. Couples love the photos they see on our website and social media because of the way we use natural light, which is why we work with my couples to find the most ideal spots, rain or shine! Consider these factors as you search, and let us know if you need any help or feedback!



WEDDINGS

Ceremony & Reception

About half of all ceremonies that we photograph at HBP are outdoors, which means half of our weddings each year have the potential to have a last-minute change of plans. Outdoor wedding ceremonies are generally really beautiful. The combination of natural light, nature, stunning views and how the venue has landscaped and decorated can create a truly beautiful scene. As a photographer, we absolutely love outdoor ceremonies!

But, there is always risk involved. If you're absolutely in love with your outdoor ceremony location, you might have already started worrying about the weather. The very best thing you can do is find a second, weather-friendly location that you also love. It may seem obvious, but a lot of couples skip the research on their backup location.

There are so many possibilities - a beautiful chapel, an outdoor, covered space, or even a tent are all great options. Your venue may also have some options - spots that may not look that pretty at first glance, but can be transformed with a little planning! It may feel like overkill to make two separate ceremony plans. And in some ways, it is. You're only going to need one of those two plans. But even if you have a perfectly sunny day, you will be so glad you made a Plan B leading up to the wedding day every time you check the weather!

It's a little more unusual, but if you're having an outdoor reception, you absolutely need a really strong Plan B!

Typically, outdoor receptions have some type of covering, whether it be a large tent, covered structure or partially-indoor party. So, unless you're planning a wedding in the deserts of Las Vegas (and if even if you are, in which case we hope we're working together because I love the desert!), then you should come up with a specific, detailed and solid plan of exactly what to do in the case of inclement weather.

Even with a LOT of planning months in advance, this can be an overwhelming and stressful level of work!

Any time there is an outdoor wedding ceremony or reception, we highly recommend working with a wedding planner. It is worth every penny to have someone else running the show and helping you make the very best plan for all different types of weather situations.

Prioritize your Plan B, make it important early in the planning process. Think through what your perfect day would look like if there was rain, and make arrangements far in advance so that, if needed, you can make it happen! And work with a wedding planner so that those details can be implemented by a professional who has made rain plans many, many times!



MAKING THE MOST OF FAMILY PORTRAITS

Our second shooters and interns have heard us say it many times: family portraits are most commonly the most stressful part of the day for a couple. One of our top priorities when working with engaged couples is to eliminate any and all stress from their wedding day, particularly when it comes to photos!

However, your fiancé's mom or a rogue uncle with a camera can sometimes throw a wrench in the plans unexpectedly. Not to worry! There are ways to avoid all of this. It just takes a little bit of careful planning and clear communicating with the people who matter most . . .

WEDDINGS

First, let's talk about you two: what family photos do you want? Maybe you don't even know how to answer this question. Before you get anyone else involved in family photo decision-making, have a conversation as a couple. You'll actually receive a questionnaire from us which includes a family photo checklist with all the different family combinations to choose from. Look at this together - which photos really matter to you? Do you really need a photo with each of your five siblings individually, or do you just want a group photo with all of them? Think through the family photos that will mean the most to you - that you'll frame and cherish for years. Don't over-think it, either. The checklist is long, that doesn't mean you need every one of those combinations. We suggest choosing a maximum of 10 different family combinations. Once you select these options, stick to them as a couple.

We strongly advise couples that extended family - aunts, uncles & cousins - should not be included in this first portrait list. If these photos are important to you, then save them for the reception. It's much easier to get a bigger group together by having the MC makes an announcement than it is to get everyone together right before or after the ceremony. Bands & DJs are generally happy to make this announcement for you, especially during dinner or before dancing and formalities have begun. You'll save yourself time and a huge headache by doing it this way!

Many times, parents will want some say in the family photos. This is totally understandable and reasonable, and we suggest letting your parents share their requests after you two have had a conversation and made your own decisions. At this point, you can respectfully hear out your families and then take these considerations in to account when you two are alone. Clear communication in advance is key with your family members. Let them know exactly what photos will be taken on the wedding day (better yet, send them the list!).

Remind them a few days before the wedding of this pre-determined list. Make it clear that any additions to the list will have to happen during the reception, when extended family photos are taken. Generally, family members are a joy to work with when they know what to expect. Set clear expectations and make decisions as a couple, away from the rest of the family.

When it comes to the setting for family photos, we recommend following the same principles as for wedding party & portraits of the two of you. Think about the light & location. However, there are a few additional considerations to make your day more relaxed. First, pick a spot that is close to the ceremony site. Because we're dealing with a large group of people, it's usually much easier and more smooth to plan the location very closely or right at the ceremony site.

If you're planning for family photos directly after the ceremony, then they need to know. Again, clear communication is key to a stress-free day. Let your families know exactly where they need to be. Make sure that they know not to linger with guests (there will be plenty of time for that right after photos finish!). Wedding planners and coordinators will often guide the wedding party and family directly to a "hiding place" right after the recessional, until guests have exited your ceremony. We cannot recommend this highly enough! Not only does it get things moving quickly for photos, but you also get a sweet, private moment with all the people who matter the most to you right after the ceremony concludes. Finally, you may also want to assign a "wrangler" from each side of the family. A loud, assertive brother or sister is ideal for this position. Ask them to make sure everyone is accounted for right before photos begin, and have them quickly gather anyone who wandered off.

Lastly, let's talk about children. If you have nieces, nephews or any immediate family members who are under the age of 10, photos can be a challenge! After having to sit still for an extended period of time at the ceremony, children are usually not excited to have their photos taken. This absolutely does not mean that you should exclude them! However, we do suggest that we don't spend more than a minute or two trying to get little ones to smile or behave. Kids will be kids, and the more you try to get them to act like an adult, the less they'll actually listen! You'll be more relaxed and enjoy your family time more if you have the realistic expectation that kids might not behave for photos.

Has all of this made you a little nervous about family photos? Don't let it. We share all of this so that you'll be able to avoid any potential family stress. As long as you communicate clearly and have a plan, your family portraits will be a breeze!



JUST THE TWO OF YOU

UNFORGETTABLE PORTRAITS



WEDDINGS

Our time with just the two of you is often one of the most relaxed, enjoyable moments of the day. The goal during this time is to allow you two to enjoy the excitement of being husband & wife, share hugs & kisses and celebrate your relationship. We'll approach this time from an editorial perspective, giving you light direction and posing, but also allowing you to relax and enjoy each other's company. This will allow us to create the authentic, artistic, beautiful images that you'll love forever and ever!

Location

Because this might be the only time all day that the two of you are alone (except for us!), we strongly encourage you two to plan on spot that is away from guests, family and the wedding party. This doesn't necessarily mean leaving your venue, but venture out a little further on the venue's property.

It's important to us that you communicate your ideas and favorite spots for portraits in advance so we can do our research and pick the very best spots with the prettiest light. We'll ask you about this long before the wedding day, and you can always change your mind if you come up with a new idea! As we research your venue, we'll be looking to find the most beautiful scenery with the most flattering light. While both factors are important, we'll always prioritize light over backdrop. Depending on the time of day, some locations that seem like they'll be beautiful are actually harsh and unattractive to photograph if there is direct sunlight (we've already talked about this on pages 29-30). If you have any questions about whether or not a backdrop would work, just ask!

Timing

If you're having a first look earlier in the day, we'll plan on stealing you away for 10-15 minutes during golden hour to get those gorgeous, glowing images you've seen on my website. This will often be right before or during cocktail hour, or it may be during dinner at your reception! If you decide against a first look, you'll need to plan more than 10-15 minutes after the ceremony for photos of just the two of you.

We ask couples to plan 30-45 minutes for their portraits total. This may be split between the first look time and golden hour, or it may all occur at the same time, after the ceremony. 45 minutes is usually a little more time than needed, but because they are some of the most important photos of the day, we plan extra cushion time so you can relax and not stress if anything else runs late! This also allows you time to prep and be ready for your grand entrance to your reception.

Above all other photos during the day, this is the time that you should guard and protect the most. Don't squeeze it in to other parts of the day and don't shorten it - trust us, you'll regret it if you do!





DECOR & DETAILS:

Within the first few weeks of being engaged, you probably saw more wedding styles than you thought possible on Pinterest. Choosing colors, style, theme and design is overwhelming, and bringing your vision to life may seem daunting and even impossible (which is why we highly recommend a wedding planner!). Within this guidebook, there are tons of amazing style tips for your wedding day, yet we couldn't come close to covering it all! In this article, we'll be sharing general ideas about what makes a reception space look beautiful, regardless of any specific vision or theme.

Let's start with what we have: you venue space. It may be a big, white tent. Maybe it's a historic mansion with a large ballroom. It could be indoor, outdoor, city-chic, rustic, modern, historic, industrial - the list goes on. Before you even begin to plan the decor, you must consider what would and would not fit with the style of your venue space. It sounds obvious, but it's a surprisingly overlooked detail. Making a visit to see the space right before deciding on a more specific theme or style for your wedding is a great idea to get inspired - and be sure to bring your wedding planner along, too!



YOUR RECEPTION SPACE

After you've established the style and mood of your wedding venue, you can narrow down the style of your decor, too. This is a great time to start envisioning a color palette. It doesn't need to be anything too specific - just a few general colors you love and that would look gorgeous in the space. Personally, we're a huge fan of a lot of neutrals & greens with small pops of color. Take a week or two to continue considering your color palette, and when you've finally decided on it, don't stray from it. Too many different colors or styles will clash and confuse your guests. Choose your theme, style & vision for color, and stick with it.

Next, our very favorite detail at any wedding: floral design. Flowers can dramatically transform a space from plain or drab to stunningly beautiful. Communicate with your florist about your vision early on and ask his/her opinion about how to decorate your reception. Flowers don't end at bouquets and centerpieces, and the possibilities for reception florals are endless. Our favorite floral additions to a reception space are hanging installations & lush table garlands. If a beautiful reception space is important to you, don't skimp on the flowers!

Like any creative endeavor, the little details are often what make a wedding stand out, making it unique and special. Personal touches of your favorite things included in desserts, wedding favors, your guest book, or centerpieces give your wedding distinction and unique beauty. We love when couples include menus, escort cards, seating charts, table numbers, and other small details because the wedding feels so much more personal. Get creative and include elements that are meaningful to you as a couple and as individuals. Again, these are general concepts, not specific ideas. We recommend working with a planner to bring your style to life, particularly if you have a vision for style but are overwhelmed with how to bring it to life!

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention some details that should be avoided. Lighting should be carefully considered. Avoid colored uplighting (it photographs terribly!). We also recommend avoiding cheesy signage. Most of those phrases are cliché or over-done. Totally not unique or personal!



If you DIY anything, do a test run before investing in the project as a whole. DIY can easily look DIY, if you know what we mean! And, it can often be just as expensive as hiring a professional! Before you invest in a DIY project, make sure it will look exceptional.

Reception decor is a lot to think about. Maybe you've helped a friend with her wedding or have been to lots and lots of weddings before your own and have a really clear idea of what you want your wedding to look like. However, most of us don't! If you want a truly breathtaking reception and are concerned about pulling it off, a wedding planner is definitely the way to go!

We're also always on call to give advice or input on any or all of your wedding style concerns and encourage all our couples to share their ideas with us!

THE GRAND FINALE: WHAT TO EXPECT FOR YOUR RECEPTION & EXIT

Our Reception Philosophy

At the reception, we will shoot truly documentary-style and capture the moments as they happen. We typically don't take posed photos of guests at each table or individual couples unless it's requested, so let us know if this is something that is important to you! It's also great to know in advance if there are any VIPs that you definitely want candid photos of - we can make a note of them and be sure to capture them dancing & socializing.

It's important to us to capture all the highlights of the evening. It's also important to us that your guests feel relaxed & comfortable when the camera is around, which means we're careful and selective about when the camera flashes. Particularly in the last hour or two of the evening, we tend to take fewer photos on the dance floor. At that point, most, if not all, the guests are in several photos that we've already taken. We wait for special moments (grandma on the dance floor, the bride dancing with her new father-in-law, somebody doing a ridiculous dance move) to shoot, patiently waiting without overwhelming guests. We mention this to couples because sometimes there are special moments to watch for toward the end of the evening. We don't want to miss a thing, so let us know what you have planned (particularly if it's a surprise to others) so we can be ready at precisely the right moment!

Planning Your Exit

You may be doing a planned exit with sparklers, confetti or something else fun. If this is the case, please be sure to let us know! We'll be able to get things set up a few minutes before you leave to be ready for your grand exit.

Sparklers, in particular, take a little extra planning to truly achieve beautiful photographs. Believe it or not, the sparklers you purchase make an enormous difference! 36-inch "smokeless" sparklers are the absolute best option. They last much longer, are safer and don't create a giant cloud of smoke. You'll also only need one per guest.

Obviously, your venue will need to approve the sparklers, but you will also want to be sure to find an open space that will be safe for the exit. The very last thing you want happening at the end of your wedding is your hair or dress to catch on fire or someone get sick from the smoke (we've seen both!)). A big space will give guests plenty of room to spread out and keep their distance from you two as you exit. Also, we strongly recommend designating a family member or friend to be a monitor, making sure anyone who is intoxicated does not receive a sparkler. Again: you don't want your dress or hair to catch on fire!

WEDDINGS

Some great sparkler-alternatives include throwing glitter or confetti, white balloons with glow sticks inside, streamers, pom-poms or flower petals. There are so many beautiful ways to plan an exit, and you definitely don't need sparklers to achieve gorgeous exit photos!

You will definitely want 4-6 guests to help you with your planned exit, especially if you're using sparklers. These helpers should assist in getting guests out the door and lined up, creating two long rows on either side of the pathway. The pathway should be pretty wide, especially with sparklers, so that no one is in danger of being burned! You will also want to be sure to have several lighters (4-8 is a good number, depending on the number of guests) so that your helpers can spread out and help light sparklers as quickly as possible.

Many venues will have designated staff members that are accustomed to helping with wedding exits, so be sure to check with your venue coordinator in advance to see if this is the case!

If your wedding will be ending after we leave for the evening, that's no problem! There is no need to pay for extra hours just to get those shots - it's actually very easy to get those photos without waiting until the end of the evening! We'll have you gather up your wedding party & parents right before we leave, and you'll do your exit as planned with this group of people. We'll shoot the whole group, and you won't even be able to tell it wasn't the end of the evening! This is a great idea even if we are staying until the end of the evening, because it allows you to do a quick exit test-run and the most important people end up front-and-center in the photos!



PRESERVING YOUR WEDDING DAY MEMORIES

Considering we're photographers, maybe it's obvious that your use of your photos matters immensely to us. But in our modern age of technology, couples often totally miss out on making the most of their beautiful wedding day photos (and for the record, we highly recommend all forms of online & social sharing!).

There's a lot of ways to use your wedding photos and it may be difficult to narrow down what you'll actually love versus what you see offered online. You can use your photos to create a photo album, wall art, a box of prints, and more. Personally, we think the two best ways you can use your photos are to remember your relationship & tell your love story. Remembering may involve a large, framed print in your bedroom or a small print of your husband on your desk at work (we've got both!). Telling your love story might mean a lengthy wedding album or a simple box of prints on your coffee table.

Regardless, you'll want to both cherish the memory privately as a couple, and share the story with the people you love most. Think about what makes the most sense for you and act on it shortly after you receive your photos from your photographer. The best time is when you're newly married, excited about the wedding day and ready to share!

Every photographer is different in what they offer and allow photo-wise. Our personal philosophy is that couples deserve printing rights to their photos - so basically, you can do whatever you want with them! We offer custom-crafted wedding albums, prints & books, but you're more than welcome to use your own printing services to create something unique! We'd love to work with you to create something beautiful and worthwhile.



GETTING YOUR WEDDING PUBLISHED: THE INSIDE SCOOP

Your wedding day is a huge deal, and many couples desire to share it with the world! Particularly because we've been published many times before, couples often ask us if their wedding will also be published! While we make every effort to photograph the wedding beautifully, gorgeous photographs only go so far in getting a wedding published. If you're a couple who's hoping to see their wedding in a magazine or on their favorite blog, this article will outline all my best tips for making it happen!

So, what are publications looking for? Before we dive in to any of the specifics about your wedding day, the first thing to consider is what exactly a wedding publication is looking for in a potential wedding feature. And we've found that most people have no idea! Common guesses: a bunch of amazing portraits of the couple, really beautiful people, a really expensive reception, the list goes on. The truth is that publications are looking for things that will inspire other couples - their primary readers. So what, exactly, are these inspirational things? Details.

Details - unique details, to be specific - are the key to getting published. Publications generally ask for 100-150 photos from a wedding to consider for publication. Of these photos, they ask that 80% be detail-focused!

That means 80% of the photos submitted are not really focused on the couple, but the details that made the wedding unique! This really is shocking to many people-focused photographers. After all, the wedding is ultimately all about the couple, so you'd think their portraits would be the most important! And while a handful of stunning portraits are important to a publication, they aren't the essential aspect of what makes a wedding publishable.

PLACES WE'VE BEEN PUBLISHED:

STYLE ME PRETTY

MARTHA STEWART WEDDINGS

RUFFLED

GREY LIKES WEDDINGS

WASHINGTONIAN

WEDDINGWIRE

WHAT'S UP WEDDINGS

CARATS & CAKE

WEDDINGS

You may be wondering what details, specifically, *are* important. The short answer is all of them. And the more, the merrier! A unique color palette, lots of floral installations, wedding invitations & paper goods, signage, ceremony set-up & decor, venue selection, interesting featured cocktails & desserts, bridesmaids & groomsmen apparel, your wedding shoes . . . the list goes on! Publications love to see a lot of unique, inspiring details because it gives their readers something fresh and new. Readers and viewers of wedding publications are mostly engaged couples, so the publication wants to be the go-to source for the newest, freshest ideas! Make your wedding unique with tons of personal details to give it the best chance of being on the front page of your favorite magazine or blog!

Personal touches on a wedding day don't stop at the visual details. Wedding publications also love personal stories! How did you meet? Why did you choose your venue and date? Why did certain personal details mean so much to you on your wedding day? Telling your story is a great way to add personality to a submission and wedding publications will love it!

Working with Your Photographer

Usually, photographers & wedding planners will submit their couples' wedding to publications for you. There are a few specific things that couples can do for their photographer that make it so much more likely that their wedding will end up on their favorite publication!

First, your photographer needs time to photograph all those details we mentioned previously. As we work through your timeline planning, you may be tempted to cut out the time planned for these detail photos. If getting published is a priority to you, don't do this!

Make sure to leave us plenty of time to shoot your bridal details before the ceremony, your ceremony details, and your reception details before guests are let in to the space! If this is a time concern, ask your planner or venue about getting the ceremony or reception space set up early so that we can photograph it long before guests arrive or cocktail hour begins.

You'll also want to provide your photographer with a full list of vendors who worked on your wedding day - down to the designer of your wedding dress, calligrapher, and shoe brand. The more vendors, the better! We send all of our couples a separate form where they can fill out this information, so be sure to take the time to remember all the people who made your day special when you complete this form!

As always, we highly recommend hiring a wedding planner for your wedding day! The majority of weddings we photograph with a full service planner are published because planners know how to bring the details together and also how to prepare them to be photographed.

Finally, it's worth noting that every publication is different. Submission guidelines, style preferences, and publication schedules will vary depending on the publication itself. If you're interested in doing all the work to submit to a publication on your own, be sure to let your photographer & wedding planner know (so they don't submit to other publications) and carefully review the submission guidelines.



INTRODUCTION ENGAGEMENTS

An engagement session is a time for you to celebrate your relationship & get comfortable being in front of the camera together. Beautiful photographs and feeling confident about your wedding day are the result!

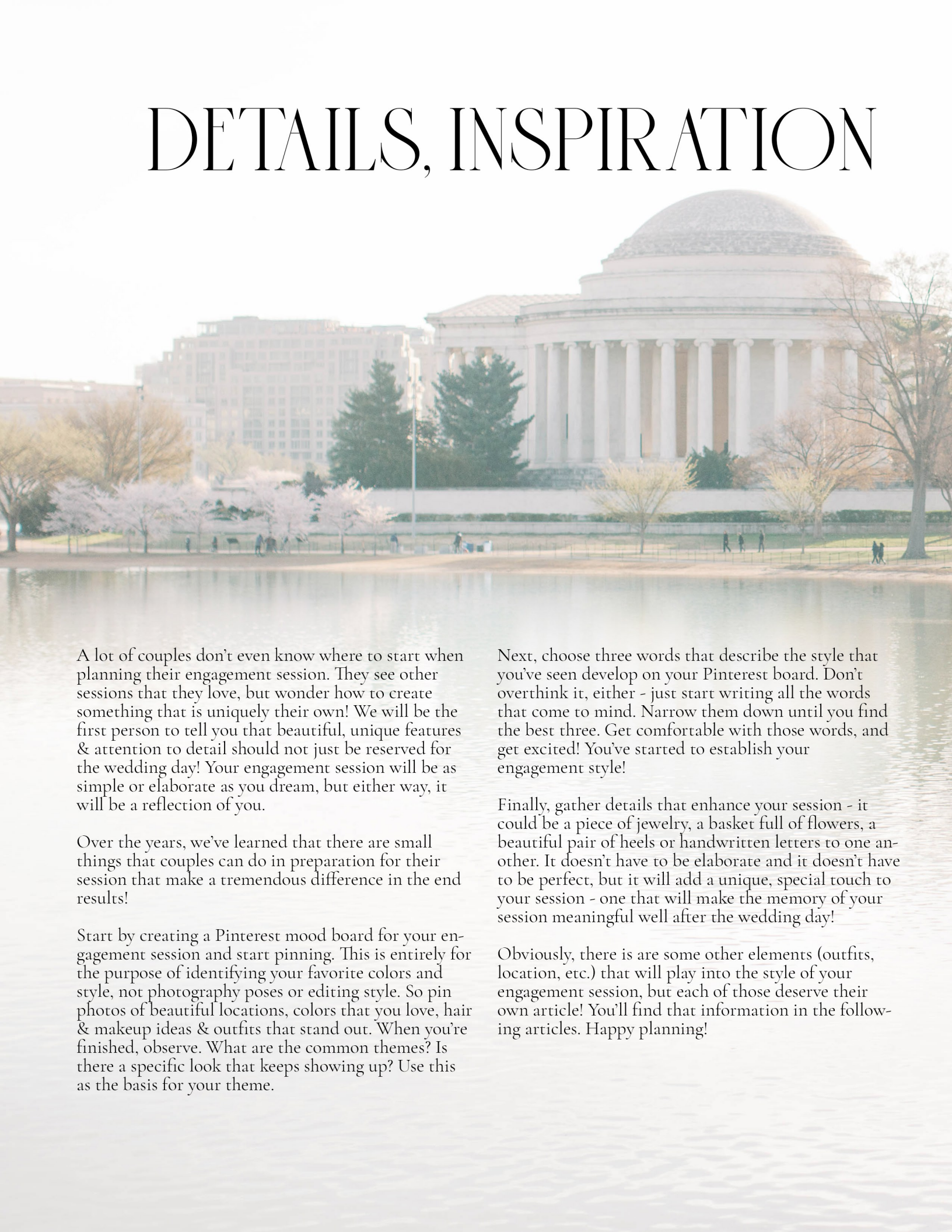
Our engagement sessions are relaxed and full of laughter. While your wedding day may be filled with those same elements, your engagement session is a time completely free of any other pressures. Because our schedule is flexible, we'll plan your session around sunrise or sunset - whatever you prefer. This will give us the most beautiful light! We encourage all of our couples to pamper themselves on the day of their engagement session, too. Take the day off from work, go to the spa, get your hair & makeup done, go out for a fancy date night afterwards - whatever it is that helps you relax & feel beautiful, this day is all about you two!

The session is also a chance for us to get to know each other. Let's be honest: having your photo taken professionally is probably not something you do regularly, and it might feel a little weird at first! Well over half of all our couples tell us that they're nervous at the beginning of their session. It's our priority that you feel 100% comfortable and confident in front of our lens on your wedding day, so this session will shake out any lingering feelings of discomfort or nerves about photos! We'll get to know your personalities & photo preferences, and you'll get to know us and how we work.

Afterwards, we love to hear feedback from you! Which of your engagement photos are your favorite? What were you most comfortable with? Was there anything that felt uncomfortable? All this feedback (and more!) will help us plan for the most perfect wedding day for you.

-THE LVER TEAM

DETAILS, INSPIRATION



A lot of couples don't even know where to start when planning their engagement session. They see other sessions that they love, but wonder how to create something that is uniquely their own! We will be the first person to tell you that beautiful, unique features & attention to detail should not just be reserved for the wedding day! Your engagement session will be as simple or elaborate as you dream, but either way, it will be a reflection of you.

Over the years, we've learned that there are small things that couples can do in preparation for their session that make a tremendous difference in the end results!

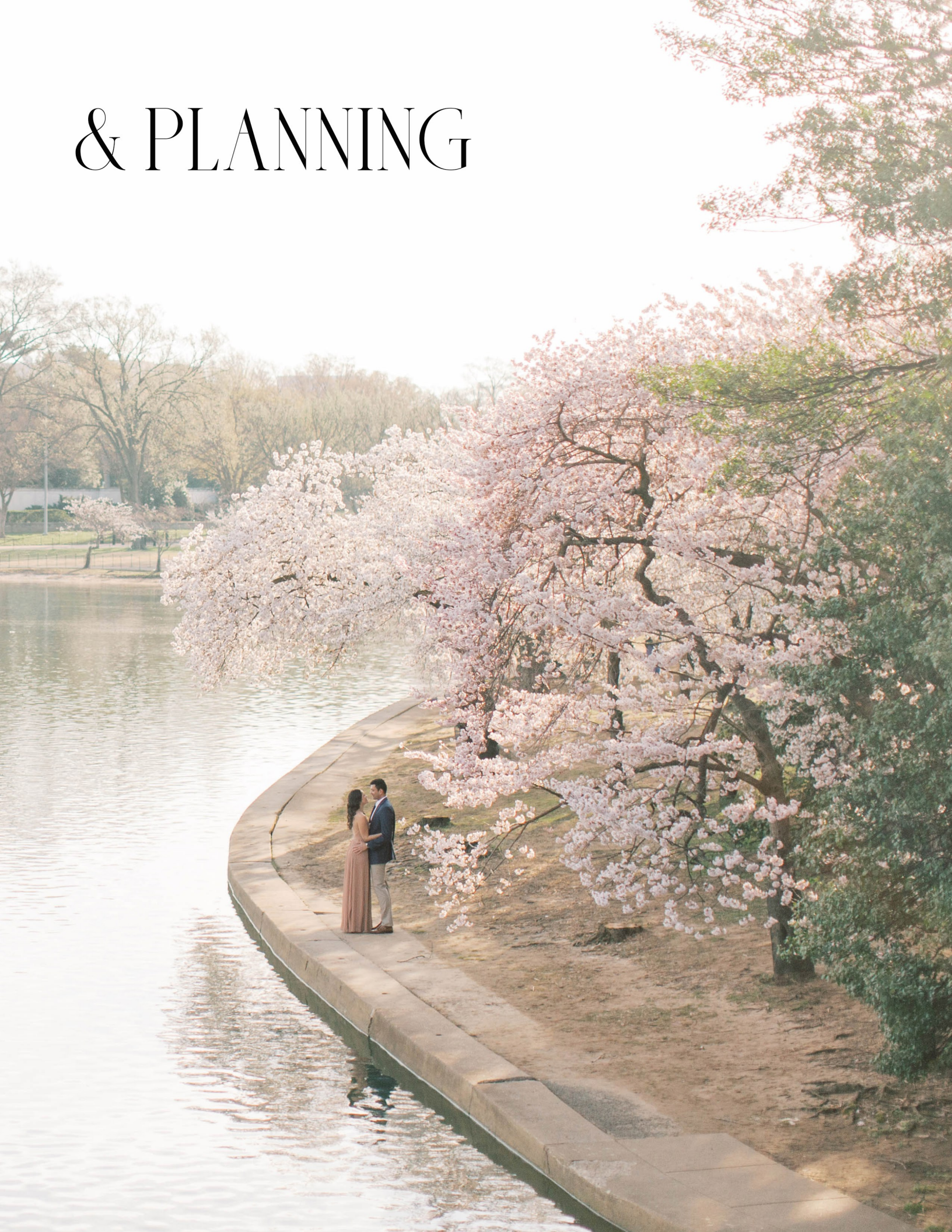
Start by creating a Pinterest mood board for your engagement session and start pinning. This is entirely for the purpose of identifying your favorite colors and style, not photography poses or editing style. So pin photos of beautiful locations, colors that you love, hair & makeup ideas & outfits that stand out. When you're finished, observe. What are the common themes? Is there a specific look that keeps showing up? Use this as the basis for your theme.

Next, choose three words that describe the style that you've seen develop on your Pinterest board. Don't overthink it, either - just start writing all the words that come to mind. Narrow them down until you find the best three. Get comfortable with those words, and get excited! You've started to establish your engagement style!

Finally, gather details that enhance your session - it could be a piece of jewelry, a basket full of flowers, a beautiful pair of heels or handwritten letters to one another. It doesn't have to be elaborate and it doesn't have to be perfect, but it will add a unique, special touch to your session - one that will make the memory of your session meaningful well after the wedding day!

Obviously, there are some other elements (outfits, location, etc.) that will play into the style of your engagement session, but each of those deserve their own article! You'll find that information in the following articles. Happy planning!

& PLANNING



ENGAGEMENTS

TIME & PLACE

What Time is Best for an Engagement Session?

First thing's first: the best and most flattering light is at golden hour - the time right after sunrise and right before sunset. As mentioned, we'll schedule your session around this time so that you receive the most beautiful images possible.

There is no advantage light-wise to one over the other. However, sunrise sessions are a great option for locations that are tourist-y or busy because they are usually empty in the early morning. They are also the best option in the hottest months of the year, when the temperatures in the evening can be uncomfortably hot. Sunset sessions are great for couples who are absolutely, 100% not morning people. They are also the best option in the coldest months of the year, when morning temperatures are too frigid for outdoor photos!

Many couples wonder about what season is best to schedule their session. Every season has its own beauty to offer. If you have a long stretch of time before your

wedding and are not under a deadline or time constraints, we suggest choosing the time of year with elements that you would like to incorporate in your photos. Think about the dress, atmosphere, and props that make sense with your vision (more on outfits in a few pages!). If you find yourself with a limited amount of time and only one season as an option, no worries. Again, every season is beautiful in its own way and has so much to offer!

In DC, autumn is the most popular time of year. May and June can also be quite busy. In SWFL, the winter is most popular. If you're hoping for a session at a busier time of year, it is a good idea to get a date on the calendar earlier, and also be open to a weekday session! Most of our fall engagement sessions happen on Mondays-Thursdays because our weekends are entirely filled with weddings! Keep this in mind as you are planning your session.

Depending on the weather on the day of our session, we may move the session a half-hour earlier or later than originally scheduled. For that reason, we will have you schedule 2 full hours for our session. We will use the extra half hour, before or after, for your pre-wedding consultation.

Not all couples plan on using their engagement images as a part of their wedding details, but if you are, you will want to plan your session timing accordingly. Our turn-around time for engagement photos is 2-3 weeks, so it's a good idea to book your session at least one month before you need your photos!



ENGAGEMENTS

Choosing a Location That is Uniquely You

As you think about which locations may be best for an engagement session, refer back to your Pinterest mood board. Did you pin a lot of images with beautiful architecture & white marble? Or maybe you pinned images with a lot of colorful flowers and greenery? Your mood board is your best friend! Refer to it as you narrow down your options.

Another detail to consider is when you've decided to schedule your session. A beautiful, colorful garden will probably be rather brown & dead in the winter in DC, so it may be best to choose a different option for your winter session. Likewise, if what you love the most about a location is the warm fall colors of the trees but your session is in May, keep in mind that that location is going to look way different than the image you pinned! It sounds so obvious, but it's actually a very over-looked detail that could leave you feeling a little disappointed if not considered in advance!

Use your photographer as a resource as you start picking locations. Share with us your vision & dreams for your session, and we will provide you our best recommendations for locations. We can also give you the heads-up on locations that require a permit or locations that we can get into because of our personal network! Together, we will find the perfect place to carry out your vision.

One last element that can add depth and sentimental value to your session: including an activity. It doesn't have to be complex. Maybe you love drinking wine together - bring a bottle & two glasses, and we'll (subtly) pop a bottle of champagne for a photo. Or he got you flowers for your first date - bring a little bouquet and we'll incorporate it in your photos. Some couples even go to significant locations - like the coffee shop where they went on their first date, or the dreamy overlook where he proposed. We're not one for over-doing it with dramatic symbols, but don't be afraid to add this sentimental element to your session!

Finally, don't let yourself be limited to the ideas you have seen friends or family members try for their own engagement session. The very best, most beautiful (and fun!) sessions are unique and creative. And if you're feeling stuck, let us know. We'll brainstorm together!

For additional information on what elements create a beautiful photo location, check out the article on pages 28-30!

CREATING THE LOOK: ENGAGEMENT SESSION STYLE

Choosing what to wear and how to coordinate with one another is probably the biggest challenge that couples face when planning for their engagement session. Your wardrobe suddenly seems so much smaller and more limited, doesn't it? The good news is that there are so many ways to make outfits, old & new, look fantastic in photos. Our suggestions in this article will assist in sparking some ideas and also discourage you from common mistakes!

The Basics

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of outfit-planning, you should once again consider the details you already have in place. You'll want to make a final decision on location before nailing down outfits, because the backdrop of your photos will affect the outfits & style you choose! Think about the vibes & general colors of the location you've chosen. Is there a lot of white stone & regal architecture, like at the D.C. Memorials? Are there tons of intricate details, a variety of buildings & vibrant colors, like the streets of Old Town Naples? Is there tons & tons of natural greens, like in a garden or park? Think about what is surrounding you and use this as a base to gauge what kind of outfits will look best. Your Pinterest mood board will also be your best friend as you look for inspiration!

Look back through the ideas and photos you pinned. You might just find the perfect outfit inspiration here! As we mentioned in a previous article, use this engagement session as an excuse to pamper yourself! Buy a new outfits, splurge on hair & makeup and get your nails done!

In general, think this out in advance and play with different options. Talk to each other and make decisions beforehand so that you are both happy and comfortable with your choice! And, of course, make decisions based on what you feel best in! Feeling comfortable & confident is essential!

Colors & Patterns

We get so many questions about what colors to wear! Luckily, there are a few essential rules that will contribute to making you look extra-beautiful.

Start with the basics: neutrals are your best friend. You don't have to be completely monochromatic, but using neutral colors as a base is a great way to start! Black, nude, white, cream & grey are favorites. Cool colors like navy, emerald, dusty blue & burgundy compliment beautifully. Pale pastels are also a great option!

Colors to avoid: solid shades of neon, hot pink and bright purple! While there's nothing wrong with these colors in and of themselves, these tons tend to reflect ugly light onto your face & skin. You can use small pops of these colors (like below!), but don't wear them as your base!



ENGAGEMENTS

Next, Textures & Patterns. When we were newer photographers, we thought patterns were a no-no for photos, but we were so wrong! The addition of textures & patterns to your outfit is actually the best way to create a look that has depth and style. We highly encourage couples to choose a mixture of patterns, textures & solids for the outfits. Don't be afraid to pick a dress with floral print or a bold, patterned tie.

Finally, bring it all together with both outfits in mind. The key? Coordinate, don't match.

Looking back at that Pinterest mood board, you might notice that there are a handful of colors that show up a lot. Choose a basic color palette (a few neutrals & one or two pops of color) and stick to these and make sure you coordinate.

Apparel Options

There are a lot of options for type of clothing! It might feel a little overwhelming - especially if you're like us, and you love SO many different styles!

So before we go any further, we want you to think about what flatters your body type most. More than likely, you already know what you do and don't feel great in. Keep this in mind when making selections. Again, you want to feel comfortable & confident!

Next, let's talk about formality. Should you go fancy or totally casual? Many couples wonder about this. There's good news - you can do more than one outfit! We often suggest that couples choose two looks: one that is more formal, and one that is more casual. We're still going to encourage you to go a little more stylish than your day-to-day life for both. But, this will give you options for two different looks!

For formal outfits, we love flow-y dresses & long skirts. The movement of these pieces photograph beautifully, always! Some of our favorite boutiques: Anthropologie, Reformation & Madewell have beautiful options. You can also rent a variety of dresses from stores like Rent the Runway or the Black Tux for guys. Long, flowing dresses pair beautifully with a coat & tie for the guys. Suspenders & a bow tie are also great options!

For casual outfits, we love sundresses, rompers & jumpsuits. This is a great way to still be ultra-stylish without having a super-formal look. Guys, dark jeans & a stylish oxford (short or long-sleeved!) make a great pair. Keep it fashionable - choose stylish pieces that coordinate well.

Make sure that you two are on the same level of formal vs. casual. If he's wearing a suit, you should probably wear a dress! Coordinating your formality is equally as important as coordinating colors!

We can't let this section end without giving you some suggestions about what to avoid: super baggy clothing, bold logos, ill-fitting jeans, short, tight party dresses, clothing that shows bra straps & underwear lines, polo shirts, sneakers & college/sports team apparel (it sounds like a better idea than it is. But feel free to bring along a jersey for one photo!).



Adding Dimension: Details & Accessories

One word: accessorize. Both girls & guys should think about adding unique touches to your outfits. For girls: earrings, necklaces, scarves, bracelets, or even a hat are great ways to add dimension to your outfit. For guys: watches, tie clips, pocket squares and belts will polish your look. It may feel a little over-the-top, but this session is your opportunity to be a little bit more stylish & detailed in dress than usual!

Ladies, pick a stylish pair of shoes to wear! If you can't find the right pair in your closet, borrow a friend's or treat yourself to a new pair! Seriously, this is the best excuse to buy yourself that pair of heels you have your eyes on. Pretty shoes make sure a huge difference in your photos! Guys, the same goes for you. An old, worn pair of shoes will stick out in photos. Pull out your favorite Cole Haan's and complete the look in style.

Still unsure of how to accessorize? Bring a few of your favorite options along to the session and we'll decide together!

Hair & Makeup

Obviously, you want to look your very best for your engagement session! When it comes to hair and makeup, we recommend hiring a professional! Some brides schedule their make-up & hair trial on the same day of the shoot. Or, try a more casual look for hair and softer look for makeup. It's amazing how pampering yourself in this way can not only make you look our best, but also boost your confidence! Our favorite look is dark lashes with minimal color and beautifully trimmed and defined brows!

Now, for the guys. You also have some prep work to look and feel your best! First, facial hair. It is a must to have well-trimmed facial hair. A beard or mustache is great if it is nicely groomed. Subtle five o'clock shadow can also be sexy and natural. Don't come to the session with messy scruff or unattended neck hair! You also may want to go for a haircut a week or two before your session. Getting a cut the day before the session is a little risky, so schedule an appointment at least a week in advance so your hair has a little time to grow and you have time to choose how to style it.

All these tips are meant to help you look and feel your best! Rules are meant to be broken, so above all else, be yourself!



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT PHOTOS

You might already know exactly what you want to do with your engagement photos, but for many couples, they aren't sure how to make the most of those beautiful images! Even those who have planned to use them for one or two things may not realize how many ways these photos can be used in the time before (and after!) the wedding!



Wedding Website

If you're reading this magazine, let's face it: you're probably a Millennial (ugh, we hate being stereotyped!). But, apparently we Millennials love technology & the internet. In the last few years, wedding websites have become an assumed part of the wedding planning process, and for such a good reason: they're convenient, easy to access, and a beautiful way to share information about your wedding day! You've probably seen wedding websites done really well and also really poorly. In general, the key to a website that looks great is beautiful photos. We suggest choosing your website after you receive your photos, so that you can match style & color to the images. If you've already selected a website template, you may want to consider the color & style of your site when picking out outfits and locations for your engagement session. A classic blush & gold website may clash with a red dress or other bright colors, and a flowery, fresh website with lots of green & white may look strange with the city as a backdrop for all your photos.

Wedding & Reception Details

With every personal touch you add to your wedding day, you make your celebration more unique and more you. Using your engagement photos as a part of your wedding day is a super-personal way to make the day stand out. A few tasteful, framed images on a gift table or guestbook table is a great way to personalize the space. A sign-able photo guestbook allows guests to see a glimpse of your relationship and also leave you a personal note. Incorporating your images in subtle, tasteful ways adds dimension & personality to your decor. It's also a treat for your guests - the people who love you the most and want to see your face!

Instagram & Wedding Hashtags

While we're not telling you to post every single photo from your session to social media, posting a couple photos throughout the wedding planning process is a great way to get your friends & family excited for the big day! The biggest advantage to this early posting is that you can begin to use your wedding day hashtag (if you're planning to have one!). Even with a big sign or announcement about the wedding hashtag on your wedding day, many guests will miss the memo. Using it regularly in advance will not only get guests excited for the day, but also help them remember your fun hashtag!

Furnishing Your Space

Whether it's at home or in your office, ultimately, your engagement photos should be getting you two excited about your wedding day! With all the stress and tedious challenges of planning a wedding, sometimes the excitement starts to wear off. Remind yourself of the reason behind it all: you are getting married to your soulmate! We highly encourage all of my couples to have a framed photo someplace where they will see it regularly. It's a sweet reminder of the union that is to come, and also a reminder of what matters the most!



LVER