

Expert advice David Brown



"Photography has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. My father was a rep for Yashica in the Seventies, so I always had plenty of opportunities to try out camera gear as I was growing up. My 'professional' career started when I was 16 – I was commissioned to photograph all the teachers in my school.

My first wedding commission happened quite by chance: shooting at a firework concert in Wiltshire. I was approached by someone who evidently thought I knew what I was doing; she asked me if I could photograph her friend's wedding in two weeks' time. I made it clear I had no professional wedding experience and I would only charge to cover my costs, but I would love to take up the offer. I already knew the basics of portrait lighting and I went away and read as much as I could on wedding photography. The couple loved the pictures and it gave me a basic portfolio."



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■ [Above, inset] David Brown's perfect positioning and timing allowed him to catch this moment, which will no doubt remind this bride of how she felt at that instant for the rest of her life

Shot details: Canon EOS 5D with EF 24-70mm f2.8 L USM lens at 70mm, f2.8, 1/30sec, ISO 1600

Brown prefers to use natural light wherever possible in his photography, although some wedding photographers do use their flash guns to work occasionally; if you're faced with a scene for example, you'll need a little artificial light to bring the detail in the foreground. The best external flash guns are versatile tools that boast features like TTL metering and articulated heads, which allow you to bounce flash off ceilings and walls for more flattering results. Attaching a diffuser to the Stofen Ormi Bounce (www.stofen.com) helps to soften the light further, reducing harsh shadows for more even lighting. Use the shadows to determine your exposure, then dial down your flash by a stop or two for flattering results.

Being a wedding photographer requires plenty of self-confidence; you need to be adept at taking control of the situation in order to get the shots you need. If you're using wide-angle lenses to take candid shots of the wedding party from a distance, all you need to do is remain unobtrusive and record moments as they happen. When it comes the 'formal' wedding photos, however, you'll need to take a more active role, as Brown describes: "Most couples demand a photographer with both portraiture and 'news' skills when it comes to recording events."



■ [Above] Scout out unusual locations close to the wedding or reception venue in advance, and whisk the couple away for a few minutes to create some unique images that they'll treasure

Shot details: Canon EOS-1D Mark II N with EF-70-200mm f2.8 L USM, 70mm, f4.5, 1/8000sec, ISO 400

As well as being expected to create a number of set-piece pictures, the radar is always on when it comes to spotting opportunities throughout the day. And no matter how good your photographs, your manner is one of the keys to success. Gone are the days of the Sergeant Major photographer who orders his subjects about. You will need to be quick and polite, but firm and "unobtrusive." Have cue cards with the list of formal shots the bride and groom have requested, so you don't lose track of what needs to be done, but be sensitive to what's going on around you – if you've completed your list of 'required' shots of the newlyweds, but they want to try a few different ideas before heading back to the reception, be open to change.

Look at other photographer's work for inspiration, keeping notes, tearsheets and sketches of any poses or compositions you'd like to try. Practise photographing willing subjects – your own family, for example – whenever you can, to build upon your experience and increase your confidence when it comes to subject direction. Brown adds: "There is a big difference between working with one subject and two. When I am shooting the bridal portraiture, it is down to me to get her to smile or relax, or to take a quiet moment of reflection. With a couple however, you

simply need to get them to interact with each other – a look, a smile or a conversation between them – and be ready to record the results."

The most important thing – above all else – is that everyone enjoys the day. If you're well-prepared and brimming with confidence, it'll make the whole process of photographing the wedding far smoother and more enjoyable for those involved, as Brown elaborates: "One of the keys to photography is the understanding of light. I look for soft and directional light – a window or a doorway with no direct sunlight is perfect. I try to avoid situations where the main source of light is coming from above (top light) as this can be unflattering, causing shadows in the eye sockets known as 'panda-eyes.'" Although informal situations – like pre-and post-wedding shoots – might allow more time to experiment with light modifiers like reflectors and diffusers, the wedding day itself is not ideally suited to this style of working, as Brown reveals: "I'm not a fan of using diffusers or reflectors at weddings, as time is almost always at a premium, so the simpler my shooting setup, the better."

Finally, Brown highlights the importance of carrying spare kit with you, leaving us with some sage advice: "One of the most important things you need as a professional is to carry backup equipment – you get one chance at a wedding and things can go wrong with cameras. And sure enough, they did on my very first wedding. My camera just stopped working about halfway through the day. I tried a new battery – no go. I had packed my Dad's old Canon AV1, and that saw me through the rest of the wedding." Be prepared for anything, and you'll be well on the way to making a living out of creating memorable images that will be treasured for years to come.

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