



George Pomilio
PHOTOGRAPHY

A GUIDE FOR ENGAGED COUPLES

How to Find Your Wedding Photographer



START HERE

You only get one set of photos.

When the flowers are gone and the cake is eaten and the last song has played, the photographs are what's left. They're the thing you'll hand to your children. And they are, for most couples, the single hardest vendor decision to make — because unlike a venue or a band, you're buying something that doesn't exist yet.

Every portfolio looks beautiful. Every photographer is friendly on a call. Prices swing by thousands of dollars for what appears, at a glance, to be the same service. It's genuinely difficult to tell the difference from the outside.

This guide is meant to fix that. It walks through what actually separates one wedding photographer from another, what those differences cost, and how to tell — before you sign anything — whether the person in front of you can deliver the day you're imagining.

HOW THIS GUIDE IS BUILT

The first half is for couples just starting to look, and covers the vocabulary and the trade-offs. The second half is for couples down to a short list, and is built around the specific questions to ask and the answers worth listening for.



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STAGE ONE

Getting Oriented

Before you compare anyone, it helps to know what you're comparing. This section covers style, light, coverage, and cost — the four things that explain almost every difference between two photographers.

Start with the feeling, not the price.

The most common way couples begin is by collecting quotes. It feels efficient and it is almost always a mistake, because price only means something once you know what you're buying.

Start somewhere else. Find eight or ten wedding photographs — from anywhere, from anyone — that stop you. Put them side by side and look for the pattern. Are they bright and soft, or rich and shadowed? Is the couple looking at the camera or lost in the moment? Are they close-up and quiet, or wide and cinematic? That pattern is your taste, and it's the most useful piece of information you have.

The reason this matters: **a photographer's style is close to unchangeable.** It's the product of a decade of instinct about light, timing, and editing. A superb photographer whose work is bright and airy will not deliver dramatic, editorial images because you asked nicely, and the reverse is equally true. Nearly every disappointed couple hired someone skilled — just someone skilled at a different thing.

DO THIS FIRST

Build a folder of images you love before you contact anyone. When you meet photographers, show it to them. A good one will tell you honestly whether that's their work — and the honest "that isn't quite what I do" is worth more than a yes.

Once you know the look, everything downstream gets easier. You'll stop comparing photographers who were never really comparable, and your short list will get shorter fast.

The four styles, and how to spot them.

Photographers describe their work in a dozen different ways, but nearly all wedding photography falls into four broad approaches. Most work is a blend; what matters is which one leads.

LIGHT & AIRY

Soft, bright, pastel, low contrast. Almost always natural light. Feels gentle and romantic. Depends heavily on good weather and good windows — it's the style most affected by a grey day or a dark reception room.

DRAMATIC & EDITORIAL

Rich color, deep shadow, sculpted light, magazine framing. Requires added lighting and deliberate posing. Produces the images families react to out loud — and takes more time, more equipment, and more skill to pull off.

DOCUMENTARY

Unposed, observational, journalistic. The photographer stays back and records the day as it happens. Wonderful for emotion and story; thin on the polished portraits most couples also want on the wall.

NATURAL & TIMELESS

True-to-life color, classic framing, light direction. Ages well and rarely looks dated. The safest choice, and the one least likely to produce a single image that stops a room.

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION

Which of these you want isn't the whole question. The better one is: **can this photographer do more than one?** A wedding day contains a bright morning, a dim ceremony, a golden hour, and a dark dance floor. The strongest galleries move between approaches as the day demands.



The same couple, the same dress, the same hour of the same day will
look like four different weddings in four photographers' hands.

The lighting difference nobody explains.

This is the single largest technical gap between photographers, and it almost never comes up in a consultation.

Most wedding photographers work with two light sources: whatever the sun is doing, and one flash mounted on top of the camera. That setup is fast and portable, and it's entirely adequate. But it has a ceiling. The sun does what it does, and a flash pointed straight forward from the camera flattens a face and throws a hard shadow on the wall behind it.

Off-camera flash is the alternative. Instead of one light fixed above the lens, several lights are placed around you — behind, to the side, angled up — and fired wirelessly. That's how you get light that wraps and shapes a face, a background that glows instead of going black, and a portrait that holds up at 24 inches on a wall. It's also how a photographer keeps working after sunset, in a dark church, or in a reception room with terrible ceilings, instead of losing the look when the light runs out.

The catch is cost and effort. It's more gear to own, haul, and set up, and it takes real practice to place lights quickly without holding up the day. Which is exactly why it's a reliable signal: a photographer who does it well is a photographer who has invested in the harder path.

HOW TO CHECK

Look at their night and reception work specifically. Are the backgrounds alive, or is everything swallowed in black behind a bright couple? Is there light coming from more than one direction? Ask directly: *"Do you use off-camera flash, and can I see a wedding where you did?"*

How much coverage you actually need.

Most full wedding days need **ten to twelve hours**. Micro weddings may only need four. The right number comes from how your day is actually structured — one getting-ready location or two, travel between them, whether you're doing a first look, how long the ceremony runs, the size of your family photo list, and how much of the reception you want documented.

TWELVE HOURS

For multiple locations, longer travel windows, larger guest counts, or a church ceremony without a first look. Also the choice for extended reception coverage and extra time for creative portraits — the whole day, prep through the last dance.

TEN HOURS

Enough for most weddings, but only if the timeline is built right. It covers getting ready, a first look, the ceremony, family photos, the wedding party, portraits, and every key reception moment. **Ten hours planned well will always beat twelve that aren't.**

FOUR HOURS

For micro weddings and intimate celebrations — one location, a short timeline, the ceremony, portraits, and limited reception coverage.

THE TWO PLACES TIMELINES QUIETLY FALL APART

- **Travel.** A fifteen-minute drive on a map can be an hour on a Saturday afternoon. Fifteen extra minutes built into every leg is the difference between arriving early and arriving flustered — and rushed portraits show.
- **Family photos.** A list of fifteen groupings takes about thirty minutes, and forty-five when people aren't where they're supposed to be. A tighter, optimized list keeps it moving and buys the time back for portraits.

WORTH ASKING

Whether they'll recommend a number based on your actual day rather than a package — and whether they'll build the timeline with you and study your venue ahead of time.

ON TIMING

Rushed photos look rushed. The calm in a photograph almost always started as time built into a schedule.



What actually drives the price.

Wedding photography spans an enormous range, and the spread is not arbitrary. Four things account for most of it.

01 TIME YOU DON'T SEE

A ten-hour wedding is many times that in work. Consultation calls, timeline building, venue research, the finishing of every single image, secure backups, and the design of whatever you print afterward. The day itself is the visible part of a much longer job.

02 EQUIPMENT AND REDUNDANCY

Professional bodies, fast prime lenses, multiple off-camera lights and modifiers, and — critically — a full backup of all of it. Cameras that write to two memory cards at once. This is insurance you're paying for and hope never matters.

03 THE FINISHING

A photograph isn't finished when the shutter fires. A chef's skill isn't only in choosing good ingredients, it's in what happens after — and photography works the same way. A signature style, applied consistently across a thousand images, is real artistry and real hours.

04 HOW MANY WEDDINGS THEY TAKE

A studio booking two or three weddings on a Saturday spreads its costs and sends whoever is free. A photographer taking **one wedding per day** carries the whole cost of that date, and gives it undivided attention and a fully rested pair of hands.

THE REFRAME

Don't ask what a photographer costs. Ask what the difference between two quotes actually buys — and whether it's a difference you'll see in the pictures. Sometimes it isn't. Often it's lighting, editing, and attention, and those you'll see for the rest of your life.



STAGE TWO

Choosing

You have two or three names and they all look good. This section is about telling them apart — what to look for in the work, what to ask, and what should give you pause.

How to look at a photographer's work.

A portfolio is a highlight reel — the best forty frames from years of work. It tells you a great deal about taste, and less about what a whole day in their hands looks like.

So look for the **full wedding stories** they publish. Most established photographers feature complete weddings on their site or blog, start to finish. That's where consistency shows, and it costs you nothing but an afternoon to find.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- ☐ Consistency from the first frame to the last — does the quality hold at hour nine?
- ☐ Difficult conditions handled: a dark church, harsh midday sun, rain, a black-walled reception
- ☐ Real emotion, not just posed smiles — reactions, tears, the parents watching
- ☐ The details actually covered: rings, shoes, invitations, the room before guests enter
- ☐ Flattering, varied posing rather than the same three setups repeated
- ☐ Every guest looking like themselves — good skin tones across every complexion in the room
- ☐ A wedding at a venue like yours, or at least a venue of similar character

ONE MORE THING TO FIND

Look for a wedding photographed in bad weather, and one photographed after dark. They're the fastest way to learn whether someone's beautiful work depends on a beautiful day.

Twelve questions worth asking.

Ask these on the call. The italics are what a strong answer tends to sound like.

1. Will you personally be photographing my wedding?

Yes, always. Not an associate, not a rotating studio shooter — the person you meet is the person behind the camera.

2. How many weddings do you take in a day?

One. More than that means shared attention and a tired photographer by your reception.

3. How many hours would you recommend for a day like mine?

A number that comes from your timeline, not from a package. Most full wedding days land between ten and twelve hours.

4. Will you help me build the photography timeline?

Yes, and well before the week of — with realistic travel time and a buffer built into every leg.

5. How do you approach a dark ceremony or a rainy day?

Specifics rather than reassurance: the lighting they would bring, and an indoor plan they have used before.

6. How much direction will you give us?

Enough that you never wonder what to do with your hands, then a step back so the real moments happen.

7. How far in advance do you book?

Popular Saturdays go one to three years out. If you love someone's work, ask early — dates don't come back.

8. How many images will we receive?

Tied to your coverage. Around one hundred finished images per hour is a strong benchmark.

9. How soon will we see them?

Two to three weeks is exceptional. Some galleries take three months.

10. Can our images become an album or wall art?

Yes — and ideally designed together with you, rather than ordered off a menu.

11. What does the payment schedule look like?

Spread across your engagement in comfortable installments, not one intimidating number.

12. Can we talk before anything is quoted?

A complimentary consultation, where they learn your day first and build the coverage around it.

LISTEN FOR THIS

The content of the answers matters. So does the shape of them. A photographer who answers precisely, without deflecting, three weeks before you've paid them anything is showing you how they'll communicate for the next eighteen months.

One more thing worth weighing: the person you meet on the consultation should be the person behind the camera on the day. Continuity is not a luxury — it means your photographer already knows your family dynamics, which grandparent needs a chair, and what you were most nervous about.



The moments you'll care about most in twenty years are the ones
nobody asked for. They get caught by someone who was watching, not
posing.

Red flags.

None of these are automatically disqualifying. All of them deserve a direct question before you sign.

- **No reviews, or only star ratings.** Detailed reviews tell you how someone behaves under pressure. Their absence is information.
- **Slow or vague replies now.** Communication does not improve after the deposit clears. It's the clearest predictor you have.
- **A quote before a conversation.** A number sent before anyone has asked about your venue, your timeline, or what matters to you is a guess dressed as a price.
- **No contract at all.** Everything you've agreed to should be written down somewhere you can both point to.
- **"We'll assign a photographer closer to the date."** You're booking a brand, not a person, and you won't see their work until it's yours.
- **Thin wedding experience.** Portraits and weddings are different jobs. Weddings move fast, change light constantly, and don't repeat.
- **A price far below everyone else.** Occasionally it's someone building a portfolio, which can be a genuine opportunity. Usually it reflects something you'll notice later.

What booking should feel like.

By this point you've narrowed it down, and the last thing to weigh isn't the work at all. It's the experience around it — because you'll be living inside that experience for a year or more before a single photograph exists.

A CONVERSATION BEFORE A NUMBER

The best process starts with a complimentary consultation, not a price list. Your venue, your timeline, how many locations, what you care most about — coverage built around the answers rather than a package you're asked to fit into.

ANSWERS THAT COME BACK QUICKLY

Replies within a day, from the photographer rather than an inbox. That rhythm before you've paid anything is the clearest preview of the next eighteen months.

PAYMENTS THAT FIT A WEDDING BUDGET

A deposit that holds your date, then the balance spread across your engagement in installments. Photography shouldn't be one intimidating number due at once.

PLANNING THAT STARTS EARLY

A timeline built with you, a family photo list gathered in advance, the venue studied before the day. The calm you see in a beautiful wedding gallery almost always began months earlier as a plan.

AND ONE PRACTICAL NOTE

Photographers who take a single wedding per day book further out than anyone else in your vendor list — often one to three years. If someone's work has stayed with you, reach out well before you feel ready. Dates don't come back.

What happens after the wedding.

Most couples never think about this part until they're living it, and it's roughly half the experience.

THE WAIT

Anywhere from two weeks to several months, depending entirely on the photographer. Two to three weeks is exceptional, and it usually means a studio that isn't overbooked — the same discipline behind one wedding per day.

WHY FINISHED MATTERS

A finished photograph is the point. It's where light is refined, color is brought to life, and a thousand images from one long day come back looking like they belong together. That consistency is the photographer's signature, and it's most of what you're choosing when you choose them.

SEEING THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME

The nicest version of this is a private reveal — sitting down together to see your images full size, rather than opening a link alone on a laptop. It's also when you decide which frames belong on a wall and which moments belong in an album.

GETTING THEM OFF THE SCREEN

Most wedding galleries are viewed a handful of times and never printed. An album or a framed piece is the difference between having photographs and living with them. Ask whether your photographer offers fine-art printing and handmade albums — a discount canvas fades within a few years, while an archival piece looks the same in fifty.

The final checklist.

If you can tick every box for one photographer, you've found yours.

- ☐ Their existing work already looks like what you want — you're not hoping they'll change
- ☐ Their work looks consistent across every wedding you've seen, not just the best frames
- ☐ Their reception and low-light images are as strong as their daylight ones
- ☐ The person you met is contractually the person photographing your day
- ☐ They take one wedding per day
- ☐ They'll build your timeline with you, and they study your venue beforehand
- ☐ They've told you specifically how they'd approach rain or a dark ceremony
- ☐ They learned about your day before they quoted it
- ☐ Your finished gallery arrives in weeks, not months
- ☐ Reviews are detailed and consistent, not just numerous
- ☐ They responded promptly and clearly at every step so far
- ☐ Albums and fine-art prints are available, and designed with you
- ☐ You felt comfortable. You'd be glad to spend ten hours with this person.

THE LAST ONE MATTERS MOST

Your photographer is beside you for more of your wedding day than anyone else, including the people you're marrying into. Skill gets them onto the short list. Whether you feel easy around them decides the list.



Award-winning wedding photography across New Jersey, New York, and Long Island.
Off-camera flash artistry, signature edits, and one wedding per day.

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