

## The New York Times

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# 7 Tips for Great Wedding Pictures

By **Roy Furchgott** May 1, 2011 6:23 am

If the Royal Wedding hasn't yet made you aware of just how mundane wedding photos can be, June is coming soon with fresh opportunities for clichéd group shots (“Smile! Smile, everybody! Smile!”)

Denis Reggie, a wedding photographer, takes a different approach, with outstanding results. Over his 30-year career, his unobtrusive style, which he calls “wedding photojournalism,” has led him to shoot now-iconic images of the Kennedy-Bessette wedding, as well as the nuptials of Chelsea Clinton, Vera Wang, Emilio Estevez and many others.

Here's his advice for getting shots fit for a king, or at least a prince.

1) **Overlook the obvious.** Typically, wedding photographers plan for the classic — you might say clichéd — wedding moment, like the bride walking down the aisle. Mr. Reggie looks for a detail that tells the story in a new way. “Maybe it's the mother clenching her hand to her chest, watching her husband walk the bride down the aisle,” he said. The only way to find those shots is rapt observation. “Look for the unexpected,” he said. “The reason so many people don't get those real moments, is they are busy trying to orchestrate them, ‘Come over here, you're here, turn this way.’”

2) **Be unobtrusive ... somewhat.** While the inconspicuous style would seem to lend itself to long lenses, Mr. Reggie says that is seldom the case. “Weddings are

inherently crowded spaces, so while a long lens can be great for a garden wedding, they are not the ultimate tool for capturing people shoulder to shoulder, trying to get a glance at the bride's sparkly ring.”

For most shots he moves in close with a fast, flattering 50-millimeter lens. With his camera's less-than-full-size sensor, that is the equivalent of a 65-millimeter lens on a 35-millimeter camera. The wide angle is only for special situations. “They are not flattering to the human body” he said. Another tip is to prepare for low light, setting your camera's light sensitivity – the ISO – as high as you can without getting too much speckled “noise” in your images.

3) **Work fast.** A key to capturing those real moments is not trying to force them. Mr. Reggie does take classic group shots of the wedding party, but, “I think it's an 11-minute process,” he said. “Eleven minutes is about all people can tolerate.” Any longer and people begin to look bored and stiff. While he relies on old etiquette books to determine who stands where in the group shots, it doesn't pay to be too fussy. “In terms of ‘perfect,’ of adjusting every bowtie, I'd rather have it real. In some of the best shots the bride's slip is showing.”

He prefers to give just enough direction to relax his subjects. “There is an art to making people comfortable,” he said, which includes speaking in an “almost Alec Baldwin” sotto voce. “I draw on psych 101 to make someone comfortable using compliments. ‘My gosh these are lovely photos.’” he said. “Don't ask them to ‘turn here, you move there.’”

4) **Use a flash — carefully.** “I do use flash, it is necessary at many weddings, but I can't remember the time I have pointed a flash at a human being,” Mr. Reggie said. He bounces his flash off a wall — sometimes as far as 30 feet away — to achieve a painterly effect. “To have the side of the face nearest the camera in shadow is so dramatic,” he said. “It renders a Vermeer-like window lighting.” He relies on technology for this effect. His Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, as with many high-end cameras, does a series of calculations when the flash is pointed in a different direction from the lens: It adjusts the flash for the right exposure and the camera analyzes white balance, so that light bounced off a red wall won't tint the bride's white dress pink.

5) **The eyes have it.** Shooting in low light often results in a low depth of field, meaning only a limited area of the photo can be in focus. The most important thing to have sharp is the eyes, Mr. Reggie says, but remember how depth of field works. If your camera has, say, one foot depth of field in a certain shot, one third of the depth of field — four inches — is in front of the spot you focus, and two-thirds — eight inches — is behind that focus point. If shooting a couple where one is closer to the camera, “Aim a third of the way behind the nearest point you want in focus,” he said. “Maybe it’s her shoulder, maybe it’s his boutonniere. That is most likely to get both sets of eyes tack sharp, even though the focus wasn’t on either of them.”

6) **Edit hard.** Because he is looking for the unexpected, Mr. Reggie keeps his eye to the camera and shoots a lot of images, an average of 3,500 for his typical 10 hours at a wedding, he said. He will edit it down to about 700 shots. “I’m fine with an 80 percent edit,” he said.

7) **Photoshop lightly.** Mr. Reggie is not a fan of creating radiant lighting effects and model-perfect skin using post-production techniques. “Photoshop is salt and pepper, not the steak,” he said. “Photoshop is at its best when the use of it is not evident.” He uses it for emergency repairs only. “Maybe I have a wall sconce behind the head that looks like a Viking headdress,” he said. “I hate to modify reality, but when a moment is perfect, I don’t want something to distract.” He prefers to use Adobe’s Lightroom, which allows fewer drastic corrections.

Most of all, Mr. Reggie said, keep in mind you are recording an event, not orchestrating it. “You are the historian for Volume One of this young couple, that will be looked at for dozens of years.” If you miss a moment, you can’t get it back—and you shouldn’t try to. “I like to never ask anyone to ‘do it again.’ If I miss a kiss, let it go,” he said. “I think people know if it’s real or staged — it shows in the eyes.”