





Wedding of the Photographer Year

Such is the talent of South African photographers, that many shoot weddings all over the world. It gives me great pleasure to showcase this talent throughout the *Bridal Library Guide* and present the images of our Photographer of the Year
— Ryan Graham

Before starting let me share with you the criteria for this competition and I do so because I believe these criteria should be used when choosing a photographer for your wedding. Beautiful pictures combine a mix of soft lighting, timing and personalities which, for most fashion photography, is carefully controlled. The wedding photographer does not enjoy this luxury and to get this right at every wedding requires both natural aptitude and years of wedding experience. Nonetheless all photographers will, in time, collect a portfolio of outstanding wedding pictures. Making sure that your photographer will rely on skill rather than luck is the trick. This is how to go about it.

Our brides submit their photos—we don't let the photographer choose because we don't want to see only his best pictures. I suggest that you ask to see the photographs of at least two weddings during the month of your wedding. Ask to see ALL the photos given to the couple. The digital age allows the photographer to take thousands of pictures but bad images cannot be fixed. After this, allow the photographer to share his best photos with you. If these are much better than the pictures that you asked to see, thank him and leave. You should not gamble with your photographs.

We like to see the full day's activities—from dressing to décor to dancing. This requires that the photographer cope with changing light conditions which is always the biggest challenge, particularly if it is overcast and your wedding starts late. The photographer should be able to shoot well in poor light without a flash—even at night.

We look to see that the tone of the wedding, either formal or fun, is reflected in the pictures and reflects not only the couple's personality but also the character of the wedding. Each photographer will have his own style. This is your personal choice. However, two weddings shot by one photographer should be as different as each couple.

We look at the informal pictures—these are the most difficult to take. Did the photographer catch that tear of joy falling from Mum's eye or the smile of triumph from the matchmaker? Are the family and friends a part of the wedding story. There is no reason why these pictures should not be excellent.

Some of the pictures should be so special that even if you hadn't met the subject you would feel compelled to get to know that person better. Think of Mona Lisa.

We do ask the cost of the package because it is so relevant. The good wedding photographers are never amateurs and an excellent balance of cost versus quality should be expected. The very best photographers, however, have a God given gift that puts their images in a class of their own. Quite obviously these photographers are in high demand and will be expensive. (This is not always the case should you choose to have your wedding in an off-peak period).

In conclusion, you will not find brilliance in a cheap package. Even the gifted photographer needs experience to achieve consistently high quality images. Be careful not to trade mediocre images for fancy add-ons. The best album in the world can never compensate for poor pictures.

Finally, although this is not relevant to our choice you are advised to put quality ahead of personality. If the photographer's images are compelling, you can be sure he knows how to work with people. Remember, you are paying for wonderful images, not choosing a best friend.

To put all into perspective though—remember that good memories are not good photographs. The best photographs in the world cannot make great memories. Only a great experience will give you glorious memories.

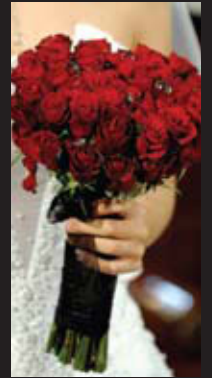


**Willa & Belinda Steynberg
— Friday, 18th April 2008**

We met on the Melody Cruise Ship. Little did we know that just a year later we would be getting married. Shortly after finishing my degree we planned a week long holiday in Durban. Only when we got to the airport did I discover that we were actually booked on a 10-hour flight to Thailand. What a surprise! Willa arranged a romantic dinner on our balcony—I was surrounded by roses. After dinner Willa got down on one knee and proposed.

Read more of their story on http://www.oakfield.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=177





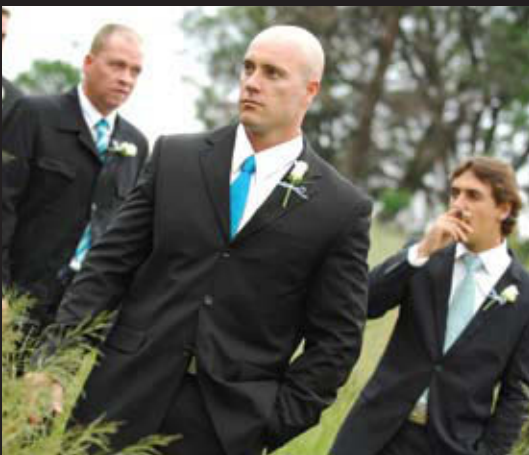
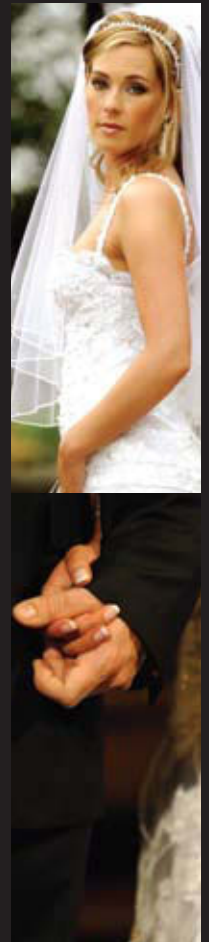




**Tracey & Brett Harrison
—Saturday, 17th November 2007**

Brett and I have known each other through family and friends for about 12 years but we only started dating in June 2005. We went away regularly on family holidays and enjoyed the occasional breakfast together—never knowing that one day we would be husband and wife.

Read more of their story on http://www.oakfield.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=177





WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR



Ryan Graham is one of the most sought after photographers in South Africa. With his remarkable blend of still and video imagery he is able to capture the heart of the wedding. We interviewed him for some pointers:

How long have you been a wedding photographer? Does it require any specialisation?

I have been a wedding photographer for nine years. I started shooting fashion then moved to extreme photography, then slowly into wedding photography by chance. I had a lot of couples approaching me wanting to capture their wedding in a fashionable way. I guess fashion style wedding images are popular but only wanted by unique types of couples.

The best wedding photographs seem to be an art rather than a skill—what is your opinion on this?

This really comes down to confidence with yourself and your ability. You need to see the images in your mind before you capture them, so I guess imagination plays a big role too. Good knowledge of photography and your equipment makes a big difference in the final images so skill definitely plays a part.

Is there such a thing such as the perfect venue for wedding photographs?

A combination of beautiful venue, time, type of wedding dress and the couple will make for good photographs. I have shot couple images at locations that most people would overlook, dry, barren and lifeless places and the couple really know what I'm looking for in terms of posing and they turn out to be amazing.

Sepia, black and white, colour—how on earth do you decide? Is this a decision for the bride and groom or does the photographer decide?

Most couples I find would rather me do this. Although I shoot the entire wedding in colour to start, the artwork is really only put together after the wedding behind my Apple. But a lot of the images are actually shot in black and white in my mind on the wedding day. The style of the wedding, the wedding dress will determine if I will use sepia or not.

What are the three most important aspects for the couple to consider in choosing a photographer?

Speed. Confidence. Agility. These I do believe are crucial in my work. I hear so many ridiculous stories in some wedding magazines saying that "you must be able to relate to your photographer", "he must gel with you" etc. Quite frankly I think that when you get your pictures after the wedding and you never see your photographer again none of that will ever have mattered.

Clearly not all couples are photogenic—how does the photographer manage to get amazing pictures of the bride and groom?

I think lighting is the most important. Couples should do their homework and "help me to help you" as quoted in the movie *Jerry McGuire*. This is true for my couples. I usually ask them to pose in front of the mirror and see which look they best like. This sounds a bit cheesy but it does work. Confidence is key. Don't worry about the dress. I have so many brides that don't plan according to their venue. They have these long big dresses and they don't want to get it dirty on the photo shoots. The dress really is for one day and photos for a lifetime.

What is the place of videography in the wedding story?

I started my video company three years ago and it's really exciting. I am happy with the artwork we are producing for couples. I think that it is important to have—you just can't recreate the emotion of your wedding in pictures alone.

Any advice for the bride on the day?

Get a good make up artist, be energetic and enjoy yourself. Make sure the aisle is wide enough for you and your father to walk side by side.

**You can also see more of Ryan's work on his blog:
www.ryangrahamphotography.wordpress.com**