



Picture Perfect

Insights from an accomplished wedding photographer

Weddings are among life's most significant events. Unless you're eloping, chances are you and your fiancé or your parents—or all of you—will spend quite a bit of money on your marriage. Family and friends who are special to you will be there. You will have spent countless hours planning and carrying out your vision: from flowers, to your dress, to the venue, to your first dance and on and on. You've dreamt about this day and now it's all coming true.

Despite all the dreaming, the planning and oftentimes, the stressing, your wedding will be over quickly. For most couples, the day goes by in a blur. So it makes sense to document your wedding, and to document it well. The most basic way to capture the laughter and tears on this momentous day in your life is by taking pictures. And that's where photographers come in.

The Bride and Bloom sought the help of award-winning photographer Cherie Steinberg Coté of Los Angeles-based Cherie Steinberg Coté Foto to better understand the things brides should keep in mind when searching for a photographer who will take truly great pictures of their wedding day. We saw Cherie's work and absolutely loved it. On these several pages, images taken by Cherie's company provide one example of what brides can look forward to if they choose the right photographer.

From our conversation with Cherie, we were able to learn more about her and glean ten insights we felt should be shared with all brides.

1. It's an important decision

Your photographer will be the one who captures the moments of your day, be they big or small, general or detailed. He or she will be the one who chronicles the day's events: from the women and men getting ready, to the ceremony, to the reception. For most couples, they want a photographer who will not only take pictures in which everyone looks good, but who will take pictures that are meaningful to the couple and capture the mood, atmosphere and feeling of the wedding. This allows the couple to relive the emotions of their Big Day through their pictures years later.

Couples should be very careful in choosing their photographer, since there is no guarantee they will like the results. "I hear the story so much," says Cherie. "Oh, my cousin's cousin had a wedding and she got her pictures back. She hated the photographer and she didn't get any pictures that she liked!" I hear that over and over again. And I just get so sad, because I just couldn't even imagine a couple getting married and coming out of that experience and not having any pictures that they like," says Cherie.

Spend the time and energy to find the right photographer for you. It's an important decision that will affect how your wedding will be captured and conveyed to you, your family and friends.

2. Passion

For most people, the more passionate they are about their jobs, the more care and excellence with which they will perform them. Photographers are no different. Photographers who are passionate about their craft have an edge: they endeavor to take great pictures not just to please the couple, but because taking great pictures is in their blood.

For Cherie, her passion for capturing images started when she was taking a photography course in college. "I was fascinated with the camera. I really wanted to know how this piece of machinery worked. Basically, when I had gone in the darkroom and I saw this image come up, I was struck by lightning. When this image from a piece of photographic paper just simply appeared, I thought it was the most magical thing I had ever seen. I just really wanted to be a photographer from that moment on. So I quit school the next day and I went to work as a photographer's apprentice."

Of course, dedication and zeal can be displayed in a number of ways and you should look for clues as you choose your photographer. For Cherie, her insatiable appetite for pictures at all hours of the day illustrates her own fervor. "I sometimes go to bed at night and it's like 3 o'clock in the morning. And I'm like, 'When is it going to be 7 o'clock already?' Because I can't wait to get up and get to my computer and look at the pictures I shot yesterday. I love looking at pictures. I can sit and look at pictures all day long. It's almost like a junkie [laughing]. After I'm done preparing my pictures, then it's like, 'Ok that's done, what do I do now?' And I want new pictures. I want more pictures."

3. Talent

Passion is great, but the path to taking beautiful pictures goes only so far if a photographer lacks talent. Talent is a special ability or aptitude that one is born with. One who lacks natural abilities may be able to learn the skills and techniques for taking great pictures. But like anything else in life, it will be easier to do something—and do it well—if you have a natural ability to do it and can obtain good results without torturing yourself. In all probability, a photographer with passion and talent will take better pictures than one with passion and no talent.

One of Cherie's gifts is being able to instantly take in the image that she's shooting. Her eye allows her to adjust the smallest of details to get the right shot. Explains Cherie: "I'm real particular, even down to the 'Where's your finger located?' And I see all that in a flash. I see all that really quickly. If the foot is leaning the wrong way, if the hand is not soft enough, I see all of it in a split second. And I don't know where that comes from. That really just is. It just was there; it's not something I developed."

Natural aptitude will probably be a difficult thing for most couples to discern from a photographer, especially if they're basing their decisions on a relatively short consultation. Hopefully, you'll be able to get some indication by looking through the photographer's portfolio.

4. Artistry

Ultimately, a wedding is a beautiful event and we all want our pictures to reflect that beauty. So as you are looking through a photographer's portfolio, decide if you like the extent of the photographer's artistry embedded in the images. Whatever "style" a photographer leans toward, the images can all be artistic in their own ways. For example, if you are looking for a photographer who shoots in a documentary style with mostly candid shots, those candid shots should still appeal to your aesthetic sensibilities. The last thing you want is a bunch of candid photos in which everyone and everything looks bad; that is what most of us are trying to avoid for even "everyday" photos, let alone wedding pictures.

The photographer who is also a consummate artist will help make your photos as beautiful, exciting, dramatic or happy as they can be. Find an artist and you will have a greater chance of getting pictures back that you'll love.

5. Direction without looking directed

Chances are you will want a variety of shots to capture your wedding day: candid, details, portraits and group formals, for example. For the latter types of shots, you are depending on your photographer to arrange everyone and everything to get the best photos. For most people, they are not in front of the camera all too often, so the photographer's orchestration will be crucial.

You will want a photographer who is able to take charge when taking charge is needed. Even better if the directed shots look so natural that they appear undirected. This is what Cherie seeks to do in all of her photos. "If I had to sit around for six hours and wait for something to happen, that's not going to happen. People hire me because they want me to direct the situation. And I will do that. And I will make it look like it wasn't directed, but I directed it," says Cherie.

6. Chemistry

Vitally important is the chemistry you have with your photographer. Your comfort level of being in front of the camera and of the person behind the camera will make a difference in the look of your pictures. Cherie's clients have been fortunate to work with a photographer who can draw the best out from them. "I think they pick me because I'm a lot of fun when I shoot. I really make people laugh and I make them feel comfortable. If I have a gift at all, I think that's what my biggest gift is," reflects Cherie.

For some photographers, the chemistry (or lack thereof) between them and a bride can make or break their working relationship. "I have to feel this bride emotionally to be able to go there and do the job, because I'm an emotional person," explains Cherie. "I'm professional but I'm still emotional. I



want to kind of be best friends with this girl by the time I get to the wedding. If that doesn't happen, I've had to turn down many, many weddings in my life. I've sent them to other people because I felt they would do better with another photographer or because the connection wasn't there."

Cherie also advises couples to get engagement photos taken with their wedding photographer, as this gives the couple some practice in front of the camera before the Big Day. "The bride and the groom get in front of the camera at the engagement session and they feel what it's going to be like. Within ten to fifteen minutes, they're like, 'Hmmm, I can do this.' By the time I get to the wedding, I bring them back to the engagement session mentally and I say to them, 'You can do this. Just do it.' And they do it."

7. Photographic style

You should determine whether you like the style of your photographer's pictures. Are they romantic, fun, dreamy, photojournalistic, edgy, sexy, conservative, lively or dramatic? The list can go on forever, and the adjectives that work for any particular bride are uniquely hers. Most photographers don't neatly fit under any one label, but many will have their own preferences and hopefully you'll find one whose preferences match yours.

We asked Cherie what her "style" was. She replied, "People have asked me that before. I don't know. I see something pretty or something cool or something nice. I just shoot." Thinking about it some more, Cherie continues, "I shot girls for many years. I shot portfolios for models. I think that is one little twist on the whole program that I have: that I did shoot a lot of models for portfolios and I had to be very detailed."

Perhaps we can all get a feeling of Cherie's style by looking at the pictures on these pages. Whatever style a photographer has, the most important thing is simply that you love it.

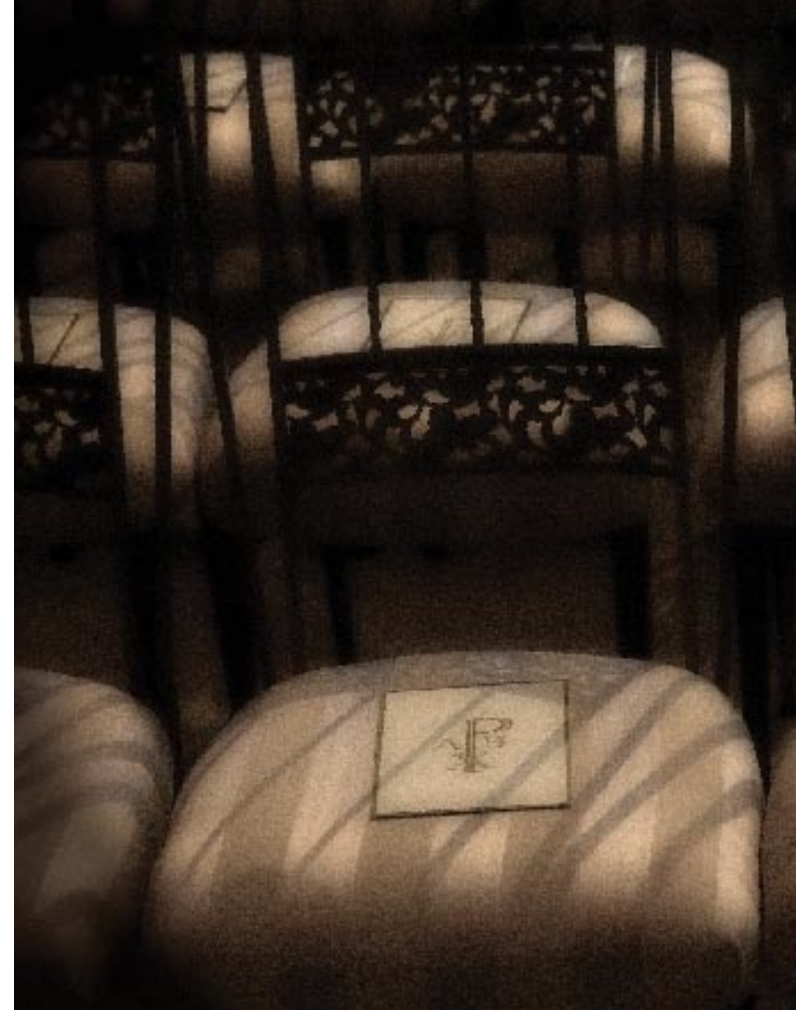
8. The right training

A photographer's skills are in large part shaped by his or her experiences and training. For great wedding pictures, you'll want to find someone experienced as a wedding photographer, because the skill set of a wedding photographer may differ greatly from that of other photographers. For example, take studio photography. As Cherie explains, "Shooting a wedding is a completely different animal. I could do a lot of stuff in my studio. But you take a studio photographer that has everything controlled and the lighting that they need and all that, and you put them in a wedding? They will not be able to shoot that wedding. It really takes years of practice to shoot a wedding."

Cherie also shed some light on the hectic responsibilities of the wedding photographer. "Wedding photography is absolutely, I feel, one of the most challenging types of work," asserts Cherie. "You have to be a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a technician, a comedian, an organizer, a planner . . . I mean, it goes on and on and on. It really does. And then after the wedding, you have to be a Photoshop expert, you have to be a computer expert . . . this is one of the only businesses that I see a photographer having about a hundred different hats to wear. People don't really understand how much effort goes into what we do. And it's a lot."

9. Searching

Like any other important decision, in choosing your photographer you should do your due diligence. Meet with several photographers and talk with them, see if there's chemistry and whether you like



the images in their portfolios. Find out about their experiences and whether they've shot at your venue. Compare and contrast. You may find that it was your third, fourth or fifth photographer whom you liked most, so it pays to look around.

10. The unquantifiable

Like a painting or a sculpture, can one quantify the value of a beautiful photograph? Hardly, especially since the photos from your wedding will capture one of the most personal days in your life. These are memories that are forever. Just as difficult it is to assign a value on a beautiful floral, decor or dress design, so it is to assign a value on a breathtaking, moving or inspiring picture. Though most couples have budgets, your wedding photos will be priceless. As Cherie points out, "This is it. This is all you're going to be left with."

You will work hard in putting on the wedding of your dreams. Select your photographer based not only on price, but also on passion, talent, artistry, chemistry, style, expertise and the ability to bring out the best from you, your fiancé and everyone at your wedding. You owe it to yourself to choose a photographer who will preserve the memories from your Big Day in the best way possible. 🌸

ABOUT CHERIE STEINBERG COTÉ FOTO

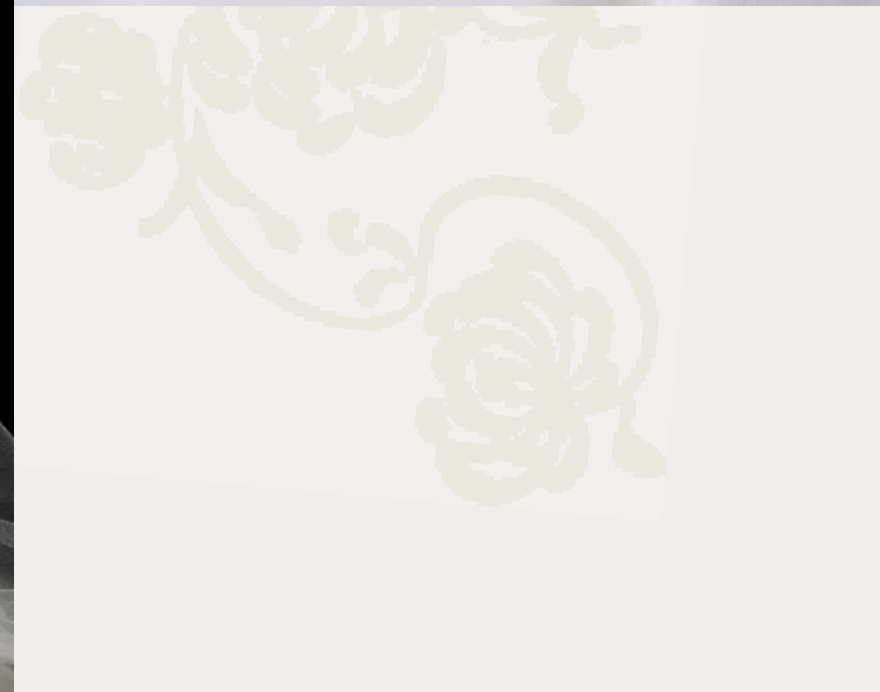
Critically-acclaimed and award-winning photographer Cherie Steinberg Coté has a passion for worldwide travel and for capturing extraordinary images. Originally from Canada, she is the founder of Los Angeles-based Cherie Steinberg Coté Foto. Her images appear in countless publications and the magazine Nikon World has written about Cherie's style and techniques. In each issue, Nikon World writes about the work, in its words, "of the world's great photographers."

Cherie's quality of work, coupled with her dynamic and creative personality, has made her a much sought-after wedding, portrait, glamour, corporate and event photographer in the Los Angeles area. She can be available for assignments for any client worldwide.

More information about Cherie Steinberg Coté Foto can be found at www.cheriefoto.com. There, Cherie shares some of her favorite photographs, as well as a host of invaluable suggestions under "Cherie's Bridal Tips." Cherie invites all brides to read about and benefit from these ideas.



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