

OKSANA MANSOUR

STORY WITH MANY CHAPTERS

BY CECILE M. SCOTT

The art and business of wedding photography was an inadvertent yet serendipitous opportunity for photographer Oksana Mansour. "I was apprenticing with a commercial photographer learning lots about lighting techniques both in and out of the studio," Mansour says. "A couple who had heard about me from a Ryerson professor (who taught at the school where I studied) approached me to shoot their wedding. I didn't want to disappoint them."

"The wedding day is a story with many chapters," Mansour says. "Moments of drama that need angles and an avant garde look, a bit of formal that includes posed and candid, a bit of romance that shows the affection that a couple feels for each other." But before the actual wedding day, a photographer needs to put solid effort into planning the shoot, which includes meeting the couple; getting a clear understanding of what they are looking for, before, on, and after their special day; scouting the venue; checking the weather; getting a confirmed up-to-date agenda for the day; and, of course, taking a detailed inventory of your gear, with an eye to being prepared for all possible situations. "It's really important to get to know the couple before the wedding day and to develop a plan based on the couple's dynamic. Take the time to interact with them and hear their story. Trust is important," Mansour advises. "Ask yourself, what is unique about this couple? What is their story, and how do you want to tell it?"

A lot of wedding photographers go through a multi-page checklist of "must have" wedding pictures and poses, but Mansour shoots with a different mindset. "I find I do my best work when I can think without a template. I am free to see things that I'd never see if I was working to a checklist."

One of the most important aspects to be prepared for and flexible with, is shooting to, with, and around light sources. "When shooting outdoors I prefer not to have sun. Open shade is much

softer. I don't want harsh shadows caused by the sun," Mansour says. The place where the couple exchange wedding vows, be it a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, can provide a wealth of uniquely beautiful, ambient light-inspired images; whether from streaming shadows or reflections from stained glass windows, light provides a host of symbolic spiritual metaphors.

It is important for the wedding photographer to put some thought into the final product: how are the images going to be delivered, in what format, and what are the couple's wishes about viewing, printing, and storing their images? Along with delivering the images to the couple through a link on her website, Mansour likes to create coffee-table books unique to the couple's story. "The end product can be delivered in hard cover, soft, laminate and in different colours; big books for the wedding couple; smaller ones for the wedding party. The choices are endless."

During the wedding day, it is important to be aware, and in the moment, especially when shooting digital. It is all too easy to click and delete, click and delete, relying on the end processes of the computer to make the image into what was intended. "Avoid becoming a digital technician creating Photoshopped images to compensate for moments or moods that were not captured. Digital makes it easy to click then edit out after the fact. Thinking becomes secondary. Take the time to think about the shot you want," Mansour advises.

A wedding day comes with its share of challenges to control, or at least manage: weather, timing, last-minute changes, and missing members of the wedding party who've gone off to find the bathroom or the bar, or who have found the bar too early! And there are occasions when you have to be firm in your role as the day's director of photography, using a good dose of humour, patience, and people skills.

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