

# A Day In The Life



Ewen Bell follows the trail of confetti to document a wedding day from the perspective of the photographer.

**I**F YOU THINK SHOOTING A WEDDING is simply about photography, you're in for a surprise. Putting aside the challenge of running a business or marketing your services (see Barnaby Aldrick's article "Get Involved" on page 10 for more on that), the challenge of the wedding day itself is as much about your personality as your technical skills. After spending a day with David and Carmen Lange on location, I have a new appreciation for the depth of talent and experience required to make a success of the job.

## A Good Hair Day

Macedonian music blares out across an otherwise peaceful suburban street while wedding guests dance in the sunshine. The groom's kith and kin have gathered at the family home in preparation for the big event, and the boys are letting their hair down a little before the serious stuff begins.

Across town, the girls are working hard at getting their hair up. Carmen Lange is with the bride and bridesmaids, while her husband, David, is on the job with the lads. As we drive down the street at 10am, the music can be heard from several blocks away. If the neighbours didn't previously know there was a wedding on, they will now.

From the moment David arrives he's thrust onto the action. There's always something worth shooting, so it's *go go go* to make the most of his talents; he has to be 110% prepared in advance because there's not a minute to waste.



■ Perfect match  
Husband and wife team David and Carmen Lange

## "The weight of responsibility on a wedding photographer is enormous"

What I realise in these first few moments is just how much knowledge David has gathered on the couple. He rattles off a dozen questions with the groom, rechecks what has changed in the schedule since their last conversation, and just keeps re-running elements of his plan. He's fully engaged in the day, so much so you'd think he planned the wedding himself.

The actual Big Day is the culmination of months of work. David and Carmen have met with the couple several times to sound out whether their personalities will work well together. Different people want different things from a wedding photographer, so you just have to make sure there's a good match and that everyone can communicate well with each other.

Then there are the engagement photos, a casual but romantic set of images that helps to establish understanding and trust between photographer and betrothed. Everybody learns a little through the process and the level of understanding between David and the groom is palpable.

## People person

Knowledge of the family and the people who will truly give this wedding character is essential. David steps out of studio mode and gears into photojournalism for a few minutes. He wants to document the entourage and something of their personality. Not just the final result of well-



■ Grooming the groom  
Subtle moments make details

dressed lads looking a million bucks, but the round of beers at 11am or the uncomfortable realisation that nobody in the room has ever tied a Windsor knot.

At the end of the day the bride isn't getting married to a plastic wedding cake figurine; she's about to spend the rest of her life with a bloke who knows more about sedans than suits.

In some ways, the antics of being a photographic subject helps to relieve the nerves of the boys. They relax a little with each pose, making the transition from anxious lads to confident men. The camera becomes part of the theatre. David even helps tidy a few loose threads and straightens the ties. It's a reminder of how important it is to pick the right personality for your wedding, someone you can get along with.

And while David works hard to be on the inside of the process, he also needs to find a way to hide in plain sight. A photographer can't get in the way or redefine the day. They're there to document the wedding as it really is. Knowing when to step in and nudge your subjects a little, and when to step back and keep out of the firing line, is the product of experience.

This is why choosing the right wedding photographer goes beyond simply reviewing a folio of images. Finding a good match of personalities, between the photographer and the happy couple, will ensure a better outcome for everyone.

Aspiring wedding photographers should equally note: not every potential client is the right client for you. If there's a bit of tension or challenge with communication style from your early meetings, then both you and they may be better served to wave goodbye at the outset.

## Attention to detail

Capturing these moments before the ceremony will be some of the most important pieces in the final story. Little moments like watching the flower girls arrive at the groom's house are special – even more so when one of them wanders into the neighbour's yard and starts digging up mulch with her clean hands.

Detail comes in the form of subtle moments and precious items. David spends some quality



■ The boys  
It's not all about the bride



■ Sealed with a kiss  
Set shots take preparation and planning to pull off well



## DYNAMIC DUO

Melbourne-based husband and wife photography team David and Carmen Lange are the talent behind Whitepoint Photography. Carmen is known also for her intimate studio sessions that range from bawdy to boudoir, while David complements the wedding gigs with commercial photography around town. [Whitepoint.com.au](http://Whitepoint.com.au)



time shooting the rings and cufflinks to a standard you might normally expect in the studio. His kit is as much about lighting as it is lenses, with a bright flashlight to throw subtle highlights onto macro shots and a choice of flash heads to boost the light when working indoors.

David has to work fast in between the groom's schedule, grabbing those morsels of detail when he can. Ultimately, the success of the day comes down to a few key moments. Not just the big shots that will sit on mantle pieces for half a century, but those tension-charged minutes when everybody suddenly gets stressed.

**THE DETAILS**

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Word arrives that the limousines are running late and the groom is a little behind. Some women are escalating the stress levels; others get on with sorting out solutions. Even the

air-conditioning can't keep up, and inside the little bedroom we've got eight guys suiting up and it feels like a summer heatwave.

This is one of those moments when David has to keep it all under control. A queue of relatives waits in the hallway to start the procession of presents. The groom's mother is about to cry. David needs to maximise the shots while minimising the drama.

In the years to come, no-one will remember that a car was 15 minutes late, but they will blame the photographer for not nailing shots of the groomsmen. David lets the women discuss the problems and shunts the lads out the back to grab their portraits. These key shots are not just items on a checklist, they're essential pieces of what will become an enduring record of the day.

**Get me to the Church**

Family tradition dictates that well-wishers of the groom exchange their presents and receive something in return. It's now after midday as the groom and his mother accept the kindness of their guests, one by one, and outside the dancing starts up again. With all the gifting completed, and the limousines still on the way, the mood gets festive. More than a few beers have already been enjoyed, the sun is out and the Macedonian dances give David plenty of material to work with.

When a pair of black Chryslers finally arrive, the emphasis changes. We're no longer shooting a party, it's now a wedding once more. Despite their relatively small contribution to the day, people sometimes spend more on the wedding cars than the photographer. David has made a habit of documenting the lavish excess of exotic convertibles and luxury black saloon cars, and while the bride is the one travelling in the stretch limo today, David is still shooting right up to the last second of the groom's departure.

With the groom safely on his way to church, the bride will have received a phone call that she too can hit the road. David's partner, Carmen, will have a little more bling to bounce around with as she rides in the back of a stretch limousine with the gorgeous-looking bride and her three lovely maids. The anticipation and excitement inside that limo is something the bride has waited a lifetime for.



■ The kiss  
One big moment not to miss



■ Organised chaos  
Cover the action from all angles



**"A queue of relatives waits in the hallway. The groom's mother is about to cry"**



**“Every click of the shutter is a potential interruption to the solemn nature of the event”**

the shutter from the mirror bounce. On the down stroke of the shutter-button, the mirror is gently bounced out; David pauses for the right moment with the shutter held down, then on the up stroke the shutter is near silent as it grabs the frame.

**I Just Did**

The vows, the kiss and the signing of the registry are typical of the structure facing a photographer once inside the church walls. It's not the right time to be putting too much of your own artistic stamp on the day, and neither are the mandatory family shots that follow the ceremony.

All the friends and family need to be cajoled into a structured shot with the minimum of fuss. Depending on the desires of the bride and groom, there's usually very little latitude permitted to make this stuff fun and carefree. If the bridal party is in good spirits then the photos will reflect their joy, but usually just getting the father-in-law to stand still and look in the right direction is a major victory.

David and Carmen have picked out a shaded corner of the church and have a chunky strobe light in place to pop highlights into the scene. The longer this process drags out, the less enthusiastic any bride will be to pose for the really special scenes later in the afternoon. At one point Carmen asks the bride to smile, and she declares very seriously that she already is. That wasn't the smile she'll want to remember her wedding

day with, so Carmen asks, "Can you give us a different smile, please?"

There is no greater test of your people skills than trying to direct a young bride who has been on her feet for two straight hours. Given that the limousines have been running late, the church wants to make room for the next wedding and the father-in-law keeps standing on her dress, you can imagine that a pushy photographer might get more than he or she bargained for.

David remains patient and simply works through the shots. He knows that once they leave the church he'll have less than three hours to grab a few special shots in the city. And so begins the next challenge.

**Stepping on the Sun**

David and Carmen have been running since 8am. The closest they've had to a rest stop was driving to the church. Their next respite is driving into downtown Melbourne to photograph the wedding party against some lovely locations.

I take my own break at this point, and as the mercury hits 32°C, I grab an ice-cold drink over a late lunch. When I reach the steps of Melbourne's Parliament House, the wedding party has been posing for shots for over an hour. The groomsmen are suffering the most, with their layers of garments slowly cooking them in the sun.

I take a look at a few frames on David's camera and the results are clearly worth all the sweat and fears.

This isn't the ideal time of day for portraits, with harsh light and high angles on a mid-summer's day. But if the client wants genuine photos from the actual wedding day, then technique must be employed to conquer

church with an abundance of natural light. The sparkle of strobe lights is acceptable as a bride makes her entrance, but once the priest takes command of proceedings, David prefers to keep a very low profile.

David explains to me a feature of the Canon 1D MkIV that I'd overlooked: a stealth shutter mode that dampens the mirror and isolates

Weddings are about two people getting married, but everybody will be looking to the bride. It's her vision of beauty, her choice of dress and her treasured feminine charms that make a wedding refined. When was the last time you saw a wedding photo in which the groom was more striking than the bride?

While David has been fixing ties and ripping tags off suits, Carmen has been documenting the elegance of dresses and make-up. The transformation from the anticipating woman to a graceful bride is always something remarkable. I'll have to wait until after the wedding to see what Carmen's photographic engagement has produced, but we don't have to wait at the church very long before we get to see the bride ourselves.

David steps into the church a few minutes before 1pm, before most of the guests have arrived. Over the next 20 minutes, the cars complete the journey from the homes of the bride and groom. He grabs a few candid moments with flower girls and makes one last check of the chapel where the ceremony will take place.

**The Ceremony**

This is the most challenging part of the day, with ceremonial respect and tight confines making it difficult to nail. This situation is the opposite of shooting the groom getting ready, as you're movements are restricted dramatically.

Every click of the shutter is a potential interruption to the solemn nature of the event.

Now that the bride and groom are together at the church, the tag-team duo of David and Carmen has also come together. Carmen arrives in the bridal car and has little opportunity to chat with her partner. They each know their tasks and have pre-determined who will shoot what. A closer-knit team would be hard to imagine, being husband and wife themselves and having worked for years to know how best to work in tandem.

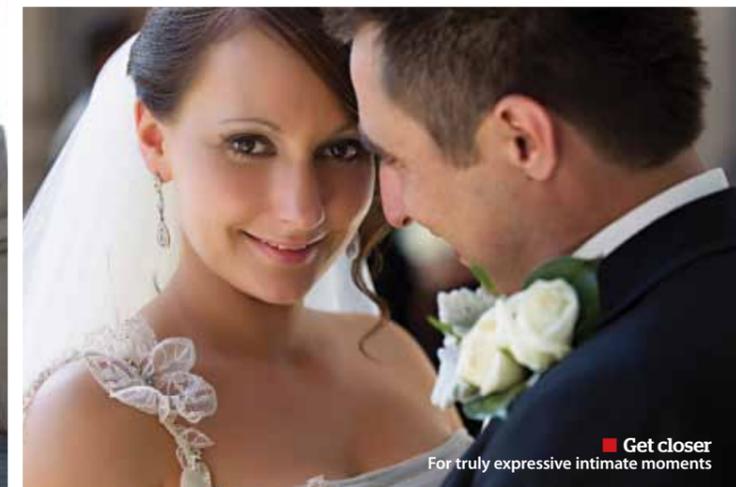
While Carmen heads upstairs to the balcony with a longer lens, David takes care of the action close in. Together they can cover much more territory, with less fuss and better results. For the rest of the day their resources and reach are two-fold, with four cameras and a dozen lenses between them.

Both take care to negotiate the church softly, avoiding anything that might draw attention away from the bride and making an effort stay out of frame for the videographer. Avoiding being in the way of guests is equally important. They've scoped out the location in advance and identified a few things to avoid. Interior lights or a darkened doorway in the wrong place can throw out the balance of your composition, so you want to know where to stand to maximise your subject and background.

Flash is minimised, thanks to the high ISO performance of modern DSLR gear and a lovely



**Get creative**  
A windy veil doubles as a prop



**Get closer**  
For truly expressive intimate moments



**Step by step**  
The wedding day shot list falls one image at a time

**BREADTH OF EXPERIENCE**

Working in many areas of photography will make you a better at shooting weddings, whether it's studio portraits, boudoir fantasy or photojournalism. Variety of experience and perspective produces results when applied to the restricted realm of someone's wedding day.



■ Bold and beautiful  
Great location + execution = memorable moment

**“I’ve no idea what the lovely couple paid, but they got more value than they could ever really know”**

As conditions vary during the day, a degree of flexibility is essential for updating the shoot plan. David gets lucky on the steps of Parliament and manages to get in and out before a flood of other weddings arrive. Down on Hosier Lane, the crowds catch up – but ultimately have to wait their turn. One of Carmen’s great strengths is setting up the bridal party for a set shot. She does a lot of studio portrait work and that experience shines through again and again. She knows how to pose people to look their loveliest.

With the clock ticking and the sweat dripping, her depth of experience is an asset. A great location isn’t enough; the photographer has to work it and make something special from the moment. On a sizzling summer day in Melbourne, the quicker these moments happen the better.

**Being Receptive**  
With the mega-moments in the can, David and Carmen have one last task: putting the reception into the set. Inside a large reception hall, the light is low and flat, the least appealing conditions thus far. These environments push flash systems to their limits, and our wedding photographers employ small and large strobes throughout. Even with recent advancements in ISO performance, there still isn’t enough ambient light to shoot a lot of winners.

Light is more than just a quantity anyway; it’s the character of light that matters most. A few well-placed flash heads off-camera lend dimension to the scene – and, combined with high ISO settings, yield a soft transition between artificial and ambient.

The big entrance for the newlyweds, the cutting of the cake and the bridal waltz are high on the list tonight. Candid images of guests are not. Carmen explains that people eating food is never a great shot, so it’s better to skip the dining tables. Some clients want the photographers to stay until the very end, but for most it makes sense to call it a night once the dancing begins. David would rather get home and start downloading the cards onto disk.

At the end of their 14 hours on the job, they’ve amassed 3779 RAW images, taking up about 89G of storage.



the conditions. David and Carmen add a little magic with judicious use of an ND filter, slowing down the light and reducing the intensity of the glare. It’s a technique that works well with careful post-processing and adds some character to the images that evoke the feel of film.

David has an eye on the clock and really wants the entourage to move downtown by 5pm. He has a particular series of shots lined up to take advantage of the fine weather and changing angle of the sun. This is particularly important for a smooth-running day: knowing your locations really well and having a list of options up your sleeve – to suit both the weather and the bride.

**Planning for serendipity**

The number of opportunities to capture poignant moments of subtle and unplanned charm are few. Flower girls do cute things in the course of a wedding, but only so often. Most of the time they want to bicker with siblings or play with religious icons that are easily mistaken for toys. A sprinkling of candid images will be important for the final result, but the best shots will be well planned and meticulously executed.



■ It’s a wrap  
Experience and skill is worth every penny

For the purpose of quoting a wedding job, they calculate around three hours of post-processing for every one hour of shooting. In reality they may need a lot of additional time to finish the job to their standards, particularly if the range of light across the day was highly variable. With four cameras and a dozen lenses in the kits, even grading the images to a consistent colour tone is a huge job already. If you include the layout for a wedding album and a little retouching to ensure all the girls have perfect, blemish-free skin, you’re looking at eight full days at the desktop. The scale of the job is extraordinary, far beyond the simple day of the wedding or even the pre-wedding shoots.

**The Final Shutter**

The weight of responsibility on a wedding photographer is enormous. A faulty memory card or performance problem with a lens can result in a special moment lost. The camera gear must perform flawlessly many thousands of times over in the

course of a day. The demands placed on the wedding photographer for technical skill is matched only by the creative expectations of the bride and groom.

And you only get one chance to get it right. I recall David’s words from earlier in the day, as we watched the two black Chryslers roll up outside the groom’s house: most couples spend more on the wedding cars than the photography. After watching David and Carmen at work, this seems a little silly. Arriving at the church or reception in a lesser car won’t change the day one little bit. Your choice of photographer will impact a lifetime’s worth of memories.

Digital technology has advanced the ability of wedding photographers to shoot the event, but has also raised the bar for expectations. I have no idea what the lovely couple on this wedding day paid for the professional services of David and Carmen, but I’m betting they got more value than they could ever really know.