What Happens On My Wedding Day - Ashton Lamont

Peter offers all day photographic coverage as standard. But what does this involve? Its second nature to Peter as he shoots lots of weddings but he appreciates that most people don't get married very frequently! So here's a detailed explanation of the day:

Things normally start with some "getting ready" shots. Don't worry - its not boudoir! It'll feature the bride, bridesmaids, mum, and anyone else who's present! The style is pure reportage (though formal images may be shot on request). Its best to commence once your hair and makeup are underway and the excitement and electricity have started to build. Hair and makeup retouching, details of your dress, shoes, tiara, and flowers, and the girls having a few drinks all look great in your album and on your DVD. If you have young bridesmaids and pageboys all the better! Remember this is not a time for posing; its a time for you to be yourself and enjoy the buildup. The photography usually starts about two hours before the ceremony - any earlier tends to be too early and most clients prefer that they are well on the way to becoming the "finished article" before the photos start. Even two hours may be too early if you are getting ready at the same location as your ceremony (e.g. a country house hotel).

If you plan to have some formal photos once your preparation is finished please ensure you factor sufficient time into your timeline.

Peter may also shoot the groom and bestman in their preparations - working out how to iron a shirt, tie a cravat, and so on. Or the groom relaxing with his dad - probably the only time this will be shot in years. Or maybe some shots of them having a quick stiff drink at the local hostelry if thats their plan.

Then its off to the ceremony venue to shoot guests arriving and the groom and bestman taking up their positions.

Peter discusses the photography rules with the person in charge - the vicar, registrar etc. Its best to do this on the day face to face rather than beforehand. Its common for some restrictions to be placed on photography the most likely being "no flash photography" (note Peter uses specialist lowlight equipment which makes flash unnecessary in all but the darkest of venues). The worst case scenario is that photography has to stop from the point where the bride enters until the point where the bride and groom make their grand exit (except for a restaging of the signing of the civil register). The best case scenario is that photography is permitted right through the ceremony, allowing the photographer to record your vows, ring exchange, first kiss, guests reactions etc. Other restrictions may apply such as the photographer must not move or the photographer can only shoot from the back of the room. If you plan a church wedding and ceremony shots are vital for you, you are strongly advised to check on the rules with the relevant authorities before booking that church. If you plan a civil wedding you cannot be sure since the rules vary from one office to another, from one individual to another within each office, and even from one day to another with the same individual! Fortunately outdated inconsistent and pointless restrictions are becoming less common.

If you have a limousine Peter will shoot its arrival, and yourself in the car and your exit. Then your progress to the entrance to the venue itself, probably flanked by your dad.

Then its time for your grand entry. You may enter first followed by your bridesmaids or last after your bridesmaids. This part is reportage style - no posing. If you can remember please do everything nice and slow as you'll look better, and please allow a gap of two or three metres between the bridesmaids and yourself to allow a clean shot.

Peter shoots every part of the ceremony, subject to any restrictions as described above. This includes any special readings, musical performances etc. The civil register is signed by the bride and groom and by the witnesses towards the end of the ceremony; that cannot be photographed under any circumstances. However immediately afterwards it is always restaged for the camera. Peter shoots the bride, the bride and groom, and then where permitted the bride groom and witnesses. At that point most officials invite the guests to come forward to shoot their own pics. Then the ceremony restarts and shortly afterwards the bride and groom sweep out making their grand exit. Photography can usually recommence at this point even under the strictest of limitations. A civil ceremony is often over within 20 minutes, and a religious ceremony in about 45 minutes.

If your venue is a hotel you are likely to be offered a bucksfizz or suchlike as soon as you are outside. Then be prepared for lots of congratulations and photo requests from your guests as they join you.

Peter recommends that he takes some formal shots even if you really don't see the point right now. Your older relations will like and expect them and you may appreciate these few images in the future. Its usually best to do these about 10 minutes after the end of the ceremony, before your guests have the chance to wander off. The "essential formals" need only take about 20 minutes. Peter recommends a shot of the whole wedding party, followed by various combinations of bride and groom with sets of parents, followed by bride and bridesmaids, followed by groom with best man and ushers, followed by a few special requests (e.g. bride with college friends, groom with granny etc). Be very mindful when planning your "essential formals" that your guests will expect you to mingle and will not appreciate being asked to hang around for long periods waiting their turn to be photographed.

If your ceremony and reception are at different locations you may wish to have the formals shot at one or the other or a mixture of both. This may be governed by the weather forecast or the remaining hours of daylight.

Peter also recommends that some classic romantic shots are taken of the bride on her own and of the bride and groom together. Again this can be done at any location including a third local location that may be particularly photogenic or have some special meaning for you.

Read more about it in the Ashton Lamont formal photos article.

If you are having confetti, then that follows next - though there are no strict conventions and it can be anytime including the evening. Peter can co-ordinate the confetti shower with the guests on request. You should check with your venue whether any restrictions apply to confetti. It may be confined to certain areas, or limited to biodegradable materials (rose petals look great!), or not allowed at all.

The period between the end of the ceremony and the start of the reception is known as the cocktail hour - though you'll want it to last longer than an hour! Please make sure you allow sufficient time for your formal photos and to socialise with your guests. Its a great opportunity for reportage photography. Peter also takes the opportunity to shoot the interior of the reception room - details of the decorations, the favours, the cake, the presents and cards etc.

The afternoon reception - (as distinct from the evening, and sometimes known as the "wedding breakfast") may be a sitdown buffet or a full meal. Your venue will have a duty manager who acts as a master of ceremonies. You may have a "receiving line". This means that once the master of ceremonies has called for the guests attention the bride and groom and sometimes the parents line up at the entrance and greet each guest. Alternatively the MOC may simply ask the guests to take their places - there is usually a table plan at the entrance. In both cases once the guests are all seated the MOC will ask all to rise as you make your second grand entrance of the day and take your positions at the top table. The MOC's duties may be performed by a toastmaster.

Photographic coverage usually stops at this point for a little while as most guests do not wish to be photographed whilst eating. Semi-formal "table shots" may be made on request - guests temporarily break from their meal, form a semi-circle around their table and grin towards the camera - but this is now quite unusual.

Cake cutting is a traditional highlight of the reception - though by no means is it always done. Bride and groom take up positions behind the cake and guests are invited to photograph them. Most venues prefer you not to actually cut the cake as they like to do this themselves, especially if it is to be served as a desert. There is no set moment for the cake cutting - it may be after the main course, or just before the speeches, or even during the evening.

Speeches usually follow at the end of the reception though occasionally they are made before the meal. The father of the bride, the groom, the bestman, and increasing the bride as well will make speeches. From a photographic viewpoint the longer the speeches last the better. Peter aims to shoot character images of each speaker plus the audience reaction so it is ideal if at least one of the speakers can perform for at least 5 minutes.

A bouquet toss may be made at any time. It is fairly uncommon now.

You will probably schedule a first dance shortly after your evening guests start to arrive. Peter shoots this using specialist lowlight capable camera bodies to capture the lights and the atmosphere. Peter continues to shoot action on the dancefloor until photographic coverage comes to a natural conclusion about 20-30 minutes later. He may stay for fireworks depending on the time you have scheduled.

If you like to micromanage your day be assured Peter will do all he can to work from your supplied shotlist and timeline. However many clients give Peter no special instructions at all and he will shoot in a style that he knows will be a great hit. Why not have a look through the online Client Area and sample Galleries?