

SMART PRACTICE

# THE THREE-HOUR FABULOUS BRIDAL SHOOT

*Setting up a bridal fashion shoot is a smart way to gain experience of working with people and getting the most out of locations, and it will also give you a selection of great images to show to future clients*

WORDS & PICTURES ANNABEL WILLIAMS



**IMAGES** Take plenty of shots; this is your chance to experiment. And while you're shooting the bride alone, rope in the groom to help you, as I did here, getting Trevor to hold a reflector for me.

**P**ractising some fun shots with a bride in her wedding dress can be the ideal preparation for undertaking a wedding shoot for real. Most brides love an excuse to put their wedding dress on again, knowing that there is far less pressure this time around, so you could contact one of your previous clients to invite them along for a shoot. If you can't persuade anyone, you could always borrow a dress and ask a friend to model for you.

When you don't have all the pandemonium of the actual wedding day going on in the

background, it's amazing what you can achieve within a three-hour time frame. It's very unlikely, in any case, that a couple would let you spend three hours on the day itself taking them away from their guests for a photo session, but if you can persuade them to get dressed up again and do another shoot at a later date, they are sure to love it!

From the photographer's point of view, it will give you valuable extra experience and loads of ideas for pictures you can take when you're in a real wedding-day scenario with maybe just 15 minutes to get all the shots you need. As

a bonus, you'll also get some great images to use on your website and to blog about.

I recently borrowed a designer wedding dress from vintage clothing shop Grace Boutique, and knew that I would be able to have some fun with this. I then approached Sophie and her new husband Trevor to see if they would be willing to be my models for the day.

As with every wedding shoot I do, I made sure that I checked out some promising locations before the day of the shoot and from there I made it all up as I went along! I had four places in mind: a fabulous green-painted →



door I'd spotted in a nearby street, a church set amongst an amazing line of trees, some derelict buildings next to a school bus depot and the beach in the evening sunlight.

### Green-painted door - warm-up shots

I selected this location because the colour and texture of the door appealed to me, and also because it was on a quiet side-street. This was important, because it enabled me to start the shoot and to get Sophie into the swing of things without the embarrassment of us all being watched by passers-by.

I always spend the first half hour or so shooting my safety shots, which allows my model to get into the shoot and to realise that they don't have to do much; they don't have to pose, they just need to follow instructions. This always helps to relax them for the shots I'm planning later on, where it will be essential that they are really into the shoot.

After warming up Sophie, it was time to bring Trevor into the frame. Initially, I let him simply watch the proceedings to give him time to gain more confidence. I often find the guys aren't all that keen on doing these shoots, and are doing it to keep their partners happy, so it really helps to let them see that they won't be made to pose, just to follow directions from me. It was a warm day, so I asked him to take off his jacket to make the shots less formal, but in other situations I might have photographed him in a suit.

### Off to the church

I'm not suggesting for a second that you should do a shoot like the one I set up outside the church on a real-life wedding day; you'd probably get some very funny looks! I used this area because I loved the symmetry of the doors and the trees, and was inspired to see what would happen if the bride was running along in front of them. In the end, it took several takes to get this right. I just asked Sophie to do it over and over again, while I changed my position, and did various things to improve the shot. Sometimes you just learn what works by trial



“ The trick is to make the pictures look ‘natural and spontaneous’ ”

**LEFT Spontaneity, playing things by ear and taking every chance you're offered can all pay dividends. The beautiful light on this wall was an opportunity not to be missed.**

and error. Next, we started twirling in the dress. This is something I love doing when the dress has lots of layers of tulle, because you can get some really natural, spontaneous-looking shots, even though they might happen to be entirely set up. I love the fact that when you're setting up moving shots like these you never quite know what you're going to get.

Now, I know it's unlikely that your bride is going to run around laughing naturally and twirling her dress, so this is something you need to set up, and then you have to take lots of shots as it happens. The trick is to make the pictures look 'natural and spontaneous', even though they're not! I usually end up using just a few that have been taken when she's moving;

many will be thrown out because they will be blurred or out of focus. That's why it's important to keep changing your angles, zooming in and out, altering the way she runs, and so on, to create variety. Just firing off lots of shots of the same thing will not produce the best results. Every time you take a picture, think about what's happening, and see if you can change something to get a different effect.

All the time I'm taking pictures, I'm constantly asking her to 'laugh up to the sky' or I might say 'big laugh now!' Because she's having fun and is confident it's going to look good, she will do it, and I'll encourage her by telling her that it looks fabulous. If she's still in doubt, I'll show her a shot I've taken on the back of the camera, so she can see what I'm trying to achieve. I make sure this is a well-composed, well-lit shot, though, otherwise that particular approach could backfire. ➔

SMART PRACTICE



**IMAGES** Taking your time on a shoot like this lets you experiment, leaving you with plenty of tried-and-tested ideas for the big day when time constraints could limit your creativity.

**Random sunlit wall**

While driving to the next location, I spotted a wall that was being lit by amazing sunlight. I had no idea what would happen, but I just wanted to experiment, because the light looked so unusual. It was one of the busiest streets I've ever shot on. It wasn't a location I would usually have chosen, because of the traffic, but once I saw that light, I just had to try and shoot a picture, while trying not to get run over! I'm not suggesting everyone should go out and shoot in a busy street; I just want to show that sometimes a lucky spontaneous find like this can pay dividends.

I'm a great believer in playing things by ear and just seeing what works out, and it's quite usual for me not to know in advance whether something will work for me or not. It's just a case of trying things out and experimenting. If it works out, then great, but if not, then no one will know! Even if you're on a live professional job, don't be afraid to try things like this. If you're not happy, just tell the client the truth: that it's not working and you're moving on somewhere else, otherwise you can be sure that they will be asking later to see the pictures you've shot!

**Derelict buildings**

This was the area I wanted to use all along - everything else was practise leading up to this

place! I don't like to start out in my favourite location, because if the subjects are not relaxed then the shots won't look as good. By the time we get to the place I have the best feeling about, I want my subjects to be absolutely loving the experience, and feeling totally chilled with the whole shoot.

Don't be afraid to experiment with composition. Move your camera so the subject is in different parts of the frame, zoom in and out, alter your angle and turn your subject's head to create variety. By this time I was getting totally carried away, and had practically forgotten about Trevor! So we took the decision to whip his top off and then did some more 'together' shots.

Never one to waste an opportunity, I decided to take a few shots of Trevor on his own to make full use of this amazing location.

Sophie and Trevor were particularly fond of the LOVE sculpture in New York, and had brought a miniature version along with them that they wanted to include in a picture. We did a few shots including this, and then I asked them to dance. Dancing always makes people laugh because it feels so silly at first, but it creates very natural, fun-looking shots, and spontaneity is what it's all about.

**To the beach**

In the early evening, the beach was the perfect place to finish up, particularly as the sun was starting to set and the colours were becoming warm and saturated. There is nothing like the glow of sunlight at the end of the day: it's just

beautiful golden light, which makes the skin tones look incredible. This was a time to relax and to just play around a little. Sophie does ballet and so she showed us a few moves, and I took advantage of the fact that she was able to leap high in the air in a wedding dress!

Overall, it was a great session, rewarding and enjoyable for all of us, which is exactly the way it should be. You should be setting up these kinds of sessions on a regular basis, to give yourself more shooting experience, to get the feel for directing clients in a sensitive and positive way, and to generate ideas that you know you'll be able to call on when you're involved in a more demanding, real wedding situation. If you have only 15 minutes with a subject on the big day, you can simply pick out the couple of scenarios that worked the best for you, and you'll have the reassurance of knowing that you've done it all before and can relax a bit. **PP**

**MORE INFORMATION**

[www.annabelwilliams.com](http://www.annabelwilliams.com)

Watch a film on the shooting of these images: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuqC4Kol5cl>

**Many thanks to:**

- Trevor and Sophie DeVooght for being our models.
- Star Grace of Grace Boutique ([www.graceboutiquekw.com](http://www.graceboutiquekw.com)) for loaning us Sophie's fabulous wedding dress, which was created by Belinda's Designs Haute Couture ([www.belindasdesigns.net](http://www.belindasdesigns.net)).