

THE GUIDE

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THE WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

Richard Payne takes an edgier approach
to capturing those once-in-a-lifetime moments

Somebody's getting married... The Guide brings you the best in wedding food, fashion and all things fabulous



Against the grain

Everyone's a photographer, right? Wrong. Especially when it comes to your wedding photos. Local photographer Richard Payne tells **Victoria Purcell** how he does things a little differently

Ask photographer Richard Payne what makes a great wedding photo, and you'll get a different answer every time. You certainly won't hear 'the kissing shot'. That's because, in the true sense of the word reportage, he's there to capture the whole story: the emotion; the mishaps; the guests letting loose on the dancefloor...

"There's a great shot I took at the Clarendon [in Blackheath]," recalls Payne. "The bride was eight months pregnant; it was a hot day; she couldn't get her shoes on because her ankles were all puffed up; she had a child already, screaming with the grandparents in the background. So when she got her shoes on, she sat up, puffed her cheeks out, and I took the picture."

"It's not a wedding picture; it's a great shot of somebody getting ready at a wedding. I call it my rock 'n' roll shot. I try to get great, memorable pictures of



Clockwise from far left: Payne's 'Art Contact' (a huge collage of prints); runaway bride at Eltham Palace; 'the kiss' at Eltham Palace; the band at a Syon House wedding; Payne hard at work



a wedding unfolding, in my style.”

And that style is edgy, for Payne combines the modern concept of reportage with true photography heritage – shooting on film, in black and white. The resultant prints, full of grain, depth, light and character, make for emotive, timeless images.

“Of course there’ll be the posed time, the family shots, but for me the reportage is the main bit. It’s one of the reasons I shoot wide – there are things going on in the background. And I tend to stay late... for the dancing.”

Payne, who lives in Lee Green with his wife and two kids (“I like London, and this is as near as you can get and still have a heath like that on your doorstep”), then spends hours in the darkroom, developing each image by hand. His wedding books are leather-bound in a classic chocolate brown – no frills, no chintz – each image framed by

the original keyline, or black border, from the negative. So where did this passion for film come from?

“Back then we shot all film, I was brought up on it,” he says. The period Payne refers to is when, fresh out of Harlow College about 20 years ago, he was recruited to assist renowned celebrity photographer John Stoddart on a *Loaded* shoot with Anna Friel. He had seen Stoddart’s work in magazines, and liked his style – black and white, gritty – and had the guile to call him up to enquire about working with him.

It was the beginning of a glamorous career, assisting Stoddart on shoots with the likes of Hugh Hefner, Pavarotti, Sinéad O’Connor and Pierce Brosnan, back in the days when photographers were flown New York, Miami or LA for a week to get *that* shot.

Payne worked in a similar vein for about 10 years, assisting and conducting

his own shoots (“That’s when my style came together, got quite edgy and strong”). But since assistants don’t make much, he started to supplement the magazine work with weddings.

Throw a couple of kids into the equation, at a time when the magazine industry became more competitive and fees took a hit, Payne started to focus more on the wedding market, and his reputation for high-end work grew.

“When [photography] went digital, and I was getting into a lot more wedding work, I went to some shows to see what was out there, and I couldn’t believe the quality – it was like a sausage factory, everything looked the same and the quality was terrible. It was the first stage of digital, with people turning the images black and white, and I thought, ‘why are people doing that?’

“Even now, though digital is much better in colour, I still don’t think the books and the black and white processes for digital have got much better, whereas my hand prints... it’s like vinyl; put a record on and it still feels nice and warm, compared to an iPod. You get a nice new press and it still sounds different. And my prints still look different – it’s grain, it’s depth, it’s tone. I don’t think you get that in digital.”

And finally, I couldn’t resist asking: who shot Payne’s wedding photos?

“I did them. We got married in Vegas a while back and we really couldn’t do what we would have liked to have done at that stage of my life, so we said ‘Let’s have a holiday and get married’. I took a little film camera, and six rolls of black and white, gave them to my friend and said, ‘It’s on auto, don’t worry about it, just keep pointing it everywhere’. The success rate was low but I got a little book of 20 images that tells our story.” And there it is – the purist approach to reportage.

richardpayneweddings.co.uk