

4



ISO 400
1/30 sec.
f/4
80mm lens

Getting Ready

WEDDING STAGE 1

Anticipation. Excitement. Nerves. Beautiful hair, gowns, shoes, and jewelry. Is it any wonder that “getting ready” is one of my favorite parts of the day? But, in addition to all the lovely moments with the bride and her bridesmaids, there is much to do in the time before the ceremony: detail shots of personal flowers such as bouquets and boutonnieres, family and guests arriving, bride and groom seeing one another for the first time, and more. As with every aspect of the wedding day, you need to have a plan—and then be prepared to change it as needed!

PORING OVER THE PICTURE

I love the serene expression on the face of this bride as her mother and bridesmaid try to solve some puzzle regarding the buttons on the back of the dress; it seems as though nothing could shake her calm.

I tend to shoot a lot of verticals, but the graceful extension of her arms prompted me to turn my camera for this shot.

It's easy to blow out highlights in the gown with directional window light. Be sure to check your exposure.



● In this case, the colors in the room would have distracted from the emotional impact of the image, so I chose to shoot black and white.

● The room was fairly small, but a wider lens helps convey a feeling of open space.



ISO 400
1/40 sec.
f/2.8
28mm lens

GETTING STARTED

The bride's room is usually where I begin the wedding day coverage, and after all the preparation and planning for the day's shoot, it always feels great to finally get started. I ease into the situation, often concentrating on various detail shots first, staying alert for special moments between the people who are there, and thinking ahead to how I'll handle the moment of the bride getting dressed.

PUT THEM AT EASE

The first thing I do upon entering the room is greet everyone and introduce myself with a smile. *Remember:* People aren't accustomed to being photographed in a candid way and they may be intimidated. Part of your job is to help everyone feel comfortable with your presence. The good news is, this will result in more natural, authentic images.

SHOOT THE DETAILS

The second thing I do is locate the dress, and—putting on my “stylist” hat—scout for a good spot to hang it for a photo. A beautiful armoire, a canopy bed, a curtain rod, the back of a door, outside on a patio overhang...there are many possibilities. I always, *always* check with the bride to make sure that she's comfortable with my removing the dress packaging and relocating the dress, and I'm obsessively careful when handling it! Before moving the dress, I grab a towel from the bathroom and wipe down any surface that will touch the dress, and I make sure that whatever I'm using to hang the dress is sturdy enough to support the weight of the gown—wedding dresses can be really heavy!

I shoot both the front and back of the gown, and sometimes I need to use a fairly wide lens to include the whole gown in the shot (**Figure 4.1**).

Next, I move in for close-ups of any wonderful lace, ribbon, or beading details; simple folds of sumptuous fabric as it hangs; the row of tiny buttons up the back (**Figure 4.2**). When shooting these details, watch your exposure—if you're using an automatic exposure mode such as Aperture Priority, the light color of the gown can trick the camera's meter into underexposing the image. This isn't a disaster, but you'll save some time in post-processing—and the image quality will be better—if you take a moment to make sure it's exposed properly in-camera.



FIGURE 4.1

The side-lit armoire was a perfect spot to hang this dress. I used a wide focal length on my 24–70mm lens in order to get the entire dress in the shot.



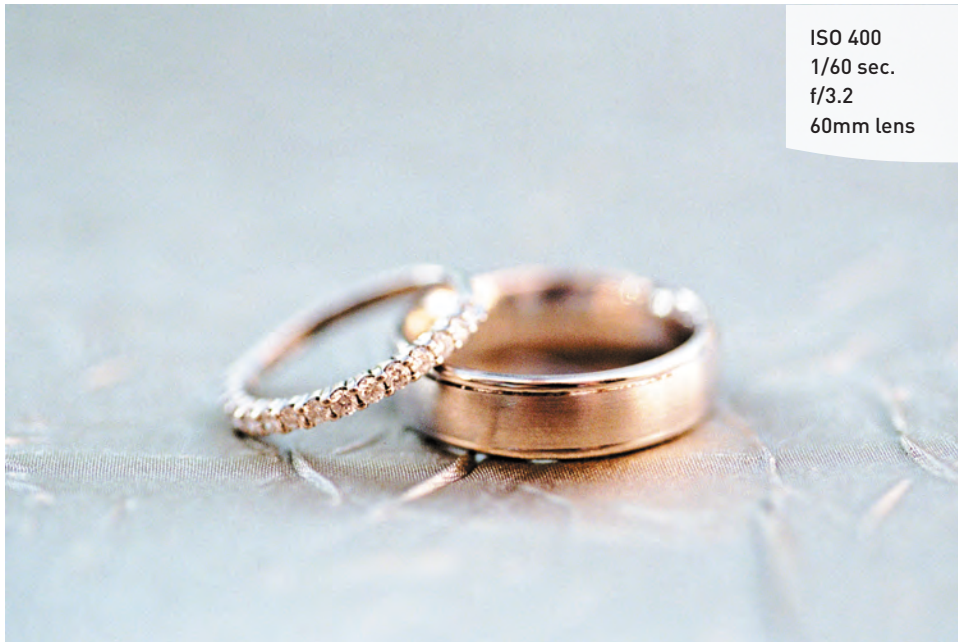
FIGURE 4.2

For detail work, I sometimes use my 35mm lens on an APS-sensor (not full-frame) camera. The sensor makes the 35mm lens look like a 52mm lens, and it focuses in very close. It also has a wider aperture (f/2) than my macro lens (f/2.8), so it's especially good in darker situations.

Once I'm finished shooting the dress, I very carefully return it to the place where I found it (while breathing a small, private sigh of relief!). Then I look for all the other accoutrements, such as shoes, jewelry, handkerchief, and so on, and I find nice spots to photograph each of these items. The possibilities are endless! Shoes look great placed on a window ledge, hung on a pretty doorknob, or placed daintily on an ottoman or a freshly made bed. Jewelry can be artfully arranged on a wooden table or on a pretty bedspread or throw pillow. If the rings are available to shoot, they can be placed on the jeweler's box they came in, on a spread-out scarf or pashmina shawl, or simply in an outstretched hand. If you have a macro lens, now is the time to use it—especially to get wonderful close-ups of the rings (**Figure 4.3**).

FIGURE 4.3

I used my 60mm macro lens for this close-up of the rings. Notice how narrow the area of focus is. The slightest bit of movement while shooting would throw off the focus, so I took a few shots to make sure that I got one that was perfect.



For these types of details, I shoot with a fairly wide-open aperture, somewhere in the $f/2$ to $f/4$ range. This creates a shallow depth of field that gives the images a wonderful softness and helps the subject stand out from the slightly blurred background. Be careful, though, and keep an eye on your depth of field (use the depth-of-field preview button on your camera to check it). It can sometimes be too shallow, with only the tiniest sliver of the image in focus—and not always the part you intended.

Depth of field becomes more shallow the closer you get to the subject, so this effect is more pronounced when using the macro lens for very tight close-ups; sometimes I need to use a smaller aperture (such as $f/5.6$ or $f/8$) in these situations to ensure that my depth of field isn't too shallow! The slightest movement when you're shooting can also move the focal point to an unintended spot, so be mindful and hold still when releasing the shutter.

FOCUS ON FLORALS

Personal flowers such as bouquets and boutonnieres are often delivered to the bride's room during this time, and you'll want to capture some solid shots of them while they're at their freshest. I move the flowers close to a window or take them outside if possible; a shady or backlit spot is perfect for capturing beautiful, natural color. I shoot a wide variety of images: all the bouquets lying together, each one individually, and very tight close-ups of the prettiest blooms. Once the ladies have picked up their bouquets, I shoot them again as they're being held. I also reshoot the boutonnieres on the guys' lapels. I adore shooting the flowers, and I can never get enough (Figures 4.4 and 4.5).



FIGURE 4.4
Shoot the bouquets en masse for impact. I used a wide-open aperture to create separation between the bouquet in the foreground and those beyond.

Keep the other wedding vendors in mind as you shoot the florals and decor. Your responsibility is first and foremost to your client, of course, but you should also strive to capture images that showcase the work of your colleagues at the wedding. Afterward, the planner, florist, designer, rental house, caterer, and so on will be thrilled to receive the images. Not only will they share those images with future, potential clients, but they'll be more likely to refer you, knowing that you'll take the time and care to create images that show their work in the best possible light.

FIGURE 4.5

I shot these wonderfully creative boutonnieres individually on the lapels as well, but I loved the look of them taken all together.



SEEK OUT THE SWEET MOMENTS

Of course, at the same time that I'm diligently capturing all the details, I'm also paying attention to the bride and the others in the room. I frequently jump back and forth from still-life work to candid shots of the bride getting ready, the bride having her hair and makeup done, bridesmaids and family members hanging out or busy with their own preparations, and so on. Be sure to shoot everyone who is present in the room, and, of course, give a little extra emphasis to mothers and other family members (**Figures 4.6 and 4.7**). I prefer to hang back from the action as much as possible—particularly at this part of the day when we're in such close quarters with one another, everyone is still getting accustomed to my presence, and nerves may be running a bit high—so I use my zoom lenses and shoot as unobtrusively as possible.



FIGURE 4.6

There is so much to do before the ceremony, but always stay alert for sweet moments like this one, shared between a bride and her mother. I abandoned the shoes to hustle over for this shot; my 70–200mm lens got me close enough without intruding on the scene.



FIGURE 4.7

I swung around in front of my subjects to capture this. It's a touch blurry because I was moving very quickly and my shutter speed of 1/60 sec. didn't quite freeze the action, but it works because it captures the emotion of the moment.

GETTING DRESSED

Up to this point, I have been very unobtrusive, but I do insert myself into the situation a bit more when it comes time to put on the dress. I want to capture the moment in a timeless, beautiful way, and it helps to think about where the bride should stand and how exactly I intend to capture it. I plan it out in advance so that when the time comes to shoot, my focus is on capturing the genuine emotion that is expressed by the bride and by those around her as they see her in the gown for the first time.