

A romantic photograph of a bride and groom kissing on a boat. The bride is wearing a white lace wedding dress and holding a large bouquet of white flowers. The groom is wearing a blue suit and has a beard. They are sitting on a wooden boat with blue water in the background.

THE
WEDDING
EXPERIENCE

A Guide for all James Stokes Photography Couples





W E L C O M E

Hello Friends! This is such an exciting time for you! I'm sure your mind is racing with all that needs to be planned. It's all very exciting, but it can also be somewhat overwhelming. You're planning the day that you've been anticipating your whole life and yet you only get one shot at it! By the time you get the hang of it, the planning is over! Our goal as wedding photographers is to make this one aspect of the planning process simple. Photography is more than just images, it's a real part of your day. Not only do you deserve beautiful images, you also deserve an amazing photographic experience. The goal of this guide is to help you plan your wedding day in a way that will allow us to provide you with the BEST experience possible. Since we're official, the next step is to plan your engagement session and then start chatting about wedding day details as we get closer to your date! We're beyond excited to be working with you!! Katie and I cannot wait to get to know you two during your engagement session. It really is like a conversation with a camera! Canoes are optional.

M E E T T H E T E A M

As you know, Katie and I work together as a husband and wife team on the wedding day! This is our full time job and we absolutely love doing this together! What you may not know is that we have another key player on our team and that's our dear friend and Associate Photographer, Courtney. Together, we are JSP



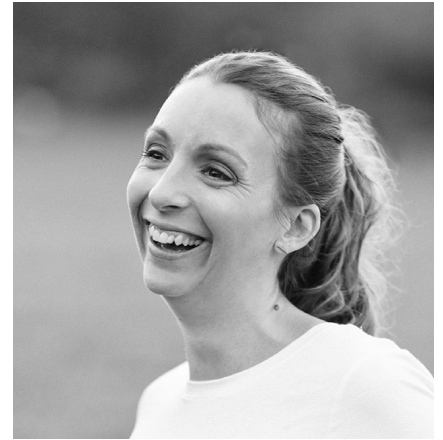
JAMES

This is me! I'm in charge of a lot of things... except folding laundry and cooking. We started this business when I was still in college, and I can't believe we get to call this our career! I'm the lead photographer and communicator. However, Katie is the one who makes sure we arrive on time and have all of our travel plans in place! My strengths are in the creative side of things. I'm the dreamer of the crew and so I'm constantly coming up with new ideas while Katie and Courtney try to make sure I'm being realistic! :)



KATIE

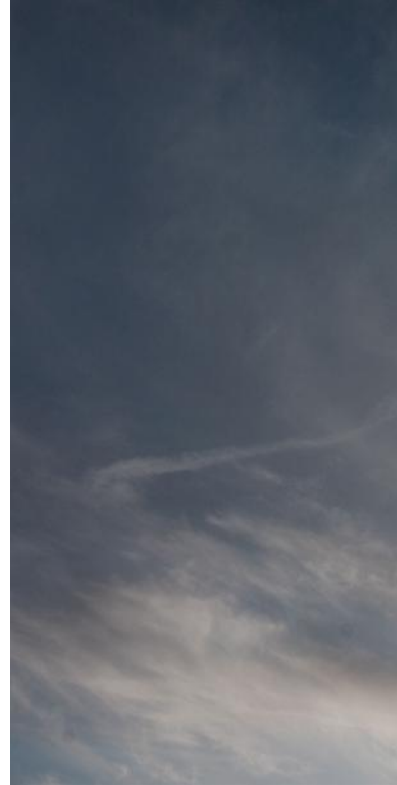
Katie is the reason I'm not crazy! She keeps so much straight in our home and on the back end. She takes care of travel plans and all the organization behind the scenes. Working together started for us in 2008 and we haven't looked back since! We love our days at home with our kids. Katie is almost always driving... because unfortunately, that isn't one of my strengths either! Katie is such a go-to gal on the wedding day. Besides being an incredible second shooter, she's always there to help with wardrobe malfunctions and ensures everything runs smoothly.



COURTNEY

Courtney joined the team officially in 2017 and we're so happy she did! Her superpower is being a mom while killing it as a lady boss herself. She has been training alongside us and has learned our shooting style while bringing her own unique view and approach to weddings. She embraces the fast pace of wedding days and enjoys capturing candid moments. Courtney has been a professional photographer since 2012. She enjoys being behind a camera rather than behind a computer which makes her a perfect fit for the team!
hello@james-stokes.com

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YOUR ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Now that you have picked a date, a photographer and probably a venue as well, you can celebrate! Those are some of the toughest decisions in wedding planning and you can cross them off your list! Hooray!! Now on to the fun stuff.... like your engagement session! I include engagement sessions in our two most popular collections because I truly believe that they are a VITAL part of the entire process. During your engagement session, you'll have the chance to get to know me, experience how I shoot and how I handle posing and lighting. This session will make a HUGE impact on how the wedding day flows. I'll arrive on your wedding day already knowing how you two interact, what your best poses are and how to photograph you in a genuine way! What I will learn about you during your engagement session is invaluable! You will feel like such a pro on your big day because of the great practice you had during your engagement session, and that's how it should be!

Your engagement session can be scheduled anytime before your wedding day. I normally suggest booking it at least 3-6 months in advance to avoid stress. Because our weekends are filled with weddings, I shoot engagements on weekday evenings, normally from 5-7pm depending on the light and the time of the year. In the winter months, 3-5pm is a normal time frame for an engagement session! As you start to plan for your engagement shoot, you will need to start brainstorming about location ideas. I LOVE it when couples pick a location that is special or sentimental to them in some way! If you can't think of anywhere specific that you would like to shoot, I can help you decide on a location! As long as the light is great, I can make ANY location look awesome! I shoot at farms, campuses, downtown alleys and even laundry mats! I'm serious! Do not shy away from crazy ideas! The more creative, the better! Be sure to keep reading to find out more about outfit ideas and inspiration!



ENGAGEMENT PREP

It's always a little intimidating to have your picture taken even if it's just a photo on an iphone that is taken by a friend. We still want to look nice, make sure nothing is in our teeth and that our hair is behaving! I realize that preparing for your engagement session can be a little overwhelming. Here are some tips for outfits and accessories that will make the shoot preparation a little more manageable!



- Don't try to MATCH...try to pick outfits and accessories that coordinate instead. If everyone wore the same exact color at their e-shoot, how boring would those images be?

- Don't be afraid to be BOLD! Accessorize and make your outfits your own! Scarves, bold necklaces and fun shoes are always welcomed!

- MOST PATTERNS are actually ok.... however, graphics are not favorable for portraits. If you're wearing a pattern, make sure it's not overwhelming and distracting.

- Be sure to check out my Pinterest boards for more outfit inspiration if you're having trouble!

- Empty your pockets! Literally. You don't want to have key chains or phones showing through your pockets. (This is for the guys especially!)

- Most often, couples like to have one casual, everyday outfit and then one outfit that is dressier! This will give your shoot two totally different "looks". I recommend beginning with the dressy outfit first!

- Make sure you're comfortable in what you're wearing. And ladies, if the top is super low cut, that will limit the amount of angles I can shoot from.

- BE ON TIME! The sun is only out for so long! The later you arrive, the less time we have to shoot! And nobody wants that!

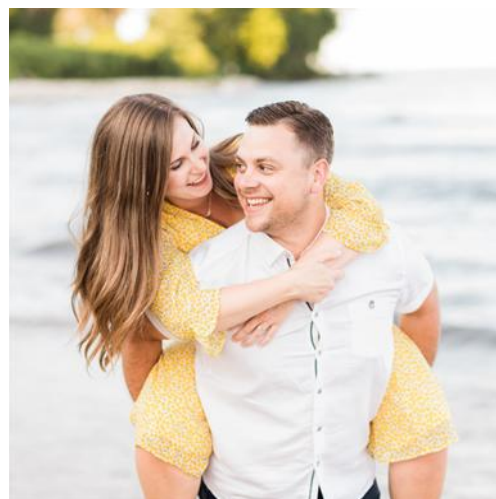
- Clean the ring! I love to shoot a few rings shots while you change outfits! The cleaner the better!

- Relax! You don't have to be a pro at this! I'm going to help you along the way and it's going to be a blast! Enjoy this time together, and make a date out of it! Plan dinner afterwards and celebrate!!





OUTFIT INSPIRATION





ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Approximate Start Times

WINTER

Dec-Mar 3-5pm

During December through Mid-March you can plan on your engagement session taking place around 3-5pm. However, the time changes in Mid-March and so that will make the start time one hour later.

SUMMER

Jun-Aug 6:30-8:30pm

Summer engagements, just like all engagements, take place two hours before sunset. This will hopefully mean that the shoot will be during the cooler part of the day.

SPRING

Apr-May - Varies

The sunset time drastically changes throughout the course of these two months and so our shooting times change as well. You can plan on approximately 5:30-7:30 in April and 6:00-8:00 in May.

FALL

Sept-Nov - Varies

The sunset time changes drastically during these three months. In Sept, you can plan on 5:30-7:30 until the third week and then you can plan on 5:00-7:00 until Mid- Oct. After the first week of Nov, 3:00-5:00pm.

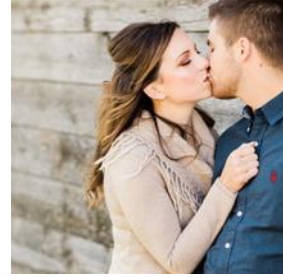
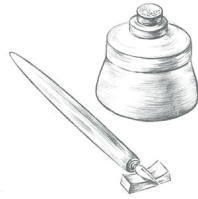


LOGISTICS :

- We photograph engagement sessions on weekday evenings because our weekends are dedicated to photographing weddings!
- We love shooting at gorgeous locations. We recommend two locations max for engagements. A general rule of thumb is the more locations and outfits, the less images, but the more variety you'll have!
- We can do sunrise sessions if necessary! We require sunrise shoots for those who want to take portraits in a very crowded location like downtown areas.
- We love to travel to our shoots! However, if we have never been to your desired location, we may need some advice on where to park!



PREPARING YOUR GROOM



PREPARING YOUR GROOM

If you're a bride that is a little anxious about how your groom is going to react to this whole "picture" thing, you're not alone. We receive so many emails from brides who are worried that their groom won't be into it and I have great news for you.... you both are more photogenic than you think! We are constantly surprising couples by discovering their hidden modeling skills and our most common response from our JSP Grooms is "That wasn't as bad as I thought! It was actually fun". Boom! Mission accomplished! When the groom says that taking pictures was FUN, we have done our job well! Your engagement session is supposed to be fun and relaxed, not forced or awkward. As you prepare for your shoot, there are a few things that you can do

to help your groom know what to expect. First of all, I highly recommend sitting down with your guy and showing him 2-3 of your favorite engagement sessions that I have photographed. Spend some time together scrolling through a few blog posts, this will allow him to gauge what his expectations should be. I also recommend that you allow for plenty of time to get to your shoot! There is nothing worse than when a couple shows up late, and they have been arguing in the car! That is definitely going to put your groom in a bad mood! Last but not least, remember to have patience with him, and don't assume that he's not going to have a good time... I think you'll be surprised how much you will both enjoy your session!



YOUR
WEDDING
DAY



SAMPLE TIMELINE

Bridal Details 2:30-3:15



Every bride loves having those beautiful shots of her bridal details. It's an important part of the story and we love having some time to shoot the dress, shoes, jewelry, invitations, etc. These shots allow us to get warmed up for the rest of the big day. We normally like to allow at least 45 minutes for this part of the day. Katie and I photograph details together and Katie will photograph the girls while they are getting ready.

If the groom is getting ready nearby, James will begin photographing the boys close to 40 minutes before the first look since it always takes them less time to get dressed!

After the details have been photographed, it's time for the bride to get into her dress! This is a big moment! We'll usually ask the mother of the bride and all of the bridesmaids to be dressed by the time the bride is ready to get into her dress. This ensures that everyone will look nice in those images. After the bride is in her gown, she can put on her jewelry, veil, shoes, etc. and we will shoot some additional bridal portraits!

First Look 4:00



3:15-3:45 *Bridal Prep*



This is one of our favorite parts of the wedding day! We will find the perfect location for our couple's First Look prior to the getting ready portion of the day! Don't stress about that one bit! We will make sure the location is private and as secluded as possible.

Here's the page that can be somewhat intimidating! The TIMELINE! I know this isn't the most exciting aspect of the wedding day, but this is the one thing that can make or break your photography! These next two pages will outline an ideal wedding day working off of a 6pm ceremony timeframe. This ideal timeline is also based off of a wedding day that includes a first look. 75% of our couples choose to do a first look, and you can read more about that option a few pages over! Remember that all wedding days are different, and your timeline may differ due to travel times and unique situations.

Portraits 4:15-4:45



After the bride and groom take their time with the First Look, we will begin taking a few romantic portraits of the two of them while the initial excitement is still present! We will find the locations for these shots as well! Remember, the LIGHT determines where we shoot and so I can't decide on portrait locations until the day-of. As we shoot these portraits, the bridal party can start making their way to us for Bridal Party portraits! If you're going to have formal transportation, please share your travel plans with your driving company to ensure that James doesn't have to give directions on the wedding day.

Bridal Party Portraits 4:50-5:20



..... great shots of the guys and girls both separately AND together! After bridal party portraits are complete, the bride will go into hiding so that early guests don't sneak a peek, and the ushers will begin their duties.



Now it's time for Bridal Party shots! We buffer in extra time throughout the day just in case we have some unexpected things that hold us up! One way to make sure we stay on schedule for bridal party portraits is to have someone put the boutonnieres on the guys BEFORE they arrive for portraits. During Bridal Party portraits, Katie and I will make sure to take some.....



5:30-6:00 *Bride in Hiding*

THE TIMELINE CONTINUED...

Reception Details 5:30-5:50



If the reception is in the same location as the ceremony, we will use this time to shoot the reception decor UNTOUCHED. If the ceremony and reception are in different locations, we recommend having a cocktail hour outside of the main reception area if possible so that Katie or I can grab some great shots of your reception before the night begins and guests start laying down purses and coats on their seats! Katie will often leave the Bridal Party Portraits to ensure this happens ahead of time. Especially, if portraits take place after the ceremony.

It's time to get married!! Most ceremonies are 30 minutes long. If your ceremony is longer than 30 mins, we'll make adjustments to the timeline! Cherish these moments! Your ceremony will pass by so quickly!



Ceremony 6:00-6:30

Family Portraits 6:40-7:10

Family formals normally take place immediately following the ceremony. It's best to save all of the family formals until after the ceremony because ALL family members will be present at that time.



We'll need about 30 minutes for family formals and I will send a questionnaire before the wedding where you can list out the shots that you want. I recommend shooting portraits outdoors if possible so that they resemble more natural family portraits, especially if the ceremony location is dark!

A Few Golden Hour Portraits

7:15-7:30



7:00pm is the BEST time of day for portraits in the late spring, summer and early fall! This is when the sun is glowy and golden. We love having a few extra minutes with the bride and groom to take a few “Just Married” portraits right after family formals or after dinner!

Reception Begins!

7:30



This is when the bridal party lines up for introductions and the party begins!! By this part of the day, our timeline isn't as strict. We work off of the natural light and so after the sun is set, portrait time is over and we begin focusing on the reception events!

Our Collections Start with 8 hours of coverage so that we can be present for the main events of the reception and about an hour of dancing! If you're interested in having your exit photographed, there are several options for this! You can either add additional coverage or plan a faux exit with just your bridal party! We have had GREAT success with this and the party never stops!



The Exit

10:30

APPROXIMATE TIMES:

DETAILS & PREP : 1.5 HOURS

FIRST LOOK & PORTRAITS : 30-40 MINS

BRIDAL PARTY : 30-40 MINS

FAMILY FORMALS: 30 MINS

EXTRA PORTRAIT TIME : AS MUCH TIME AS YOU'LL

GIVE US!

WEDDINGS & SEASONS





Portrait & Timing Tips for: WINTER, SPRING, SUMMER & FALL

WINTER

Winter weddings are gorgeous! However, they do take some additional planning simply because of the sunset time. The hard part about a winter timeline is the fact that the sun sets around 4pm. This means that all of your portraits have to be done before then! This isn't a problem if you're having a late afternoon wedding. However, if you're planning on having a late evening wedding, you may have a bit of down time from 4pm until the start of the ceremony. You will also need more coverage time as well.

SPRING

Spring weddings are wonderful because they are the perfect temperature! However, I recommend having plenty of Claritin and Zyrtec on hand just in case allergies start to flare up during portrait time. Spring weddings normally mean the potential for some blooms! If we happen to find any type of blooming tree or plant, it will be worth it to give us a few minutes for portraits with it! You'll LOVE the result!

SUMMER

Summer weddings are amazing! I love that there is so much daylight! In some months, the light will last until 8:30pm! So, if you're having a summer wedding, you'll need to plan on having a few minutes to slip out of the reception for your sunset portraits! You will NOT regret this! This is the absolute best light of the day and you're going to want to have portraits during this time period. Usually these portraits happen during dinner or open dancing so that no one even notices that you're gone for a few minutes!

FALL

Fall weddings are my favorite! We love the temperature and the colors! Most of my fall brides worry about color, and I just want to encourage you that all I need is one tree with some color in order to make it look like fall! A little bit of color can go a long way!! Your portrait time will vary depending on your wedding date! We'll be sure to discuss this when we approve your final timeline!



PRE CEREMONY



Let the day begin!

This portion of The Wedding Experience really sets the stage for the entire wedding day. The next few pages will share tips and tricks that will ensure a seamless morning of bridal preparation and beautiful portraits!



GETTING READY

It's the morning of your wedding! Hopefully all of the little details are taken care of and you're relaxing with your best friends while your hair is being done. If certain items haven't been checked off of the to-do list, it's time to hand them over to someone else. Delegation is a key part of a stress-free wedding day. I know it's hard to hand over the decorating duties and all of the last minute things that need to be done, but it really is important to relax the morning of your wedding. The rest of the day is going to be fast paced and filled with a lot of emotions! Take advantage of this down time! There are a few things to consider about the "getting ready" portion of the day. Do you want to share a "first look" with your dad or any other person who plays a huge role in your life?

Will you and your groom be exchanging gifts during this time? If so, who would you like to deliver them? Are there certain women in your life who would appreciate seeing you get into your gown? Some brides want very few people around for this moment. Other brides love having aunts and grandmas present! It's totally up to you! A few other things to consider.... as you get ready to put your dress on, refrain from putting any jewelry on. Katie loves shooting all of those final steps once you're in your gown! Speaking of the gown, if your gown is on a plastic hanger, try to make a note to bring a wooden or our custom hanger along for picture sake. If you forget, no big deal! I'm a pro at finding wooden hangers at venues! Keep reading along for more "getting ready" tips to help you prepare!

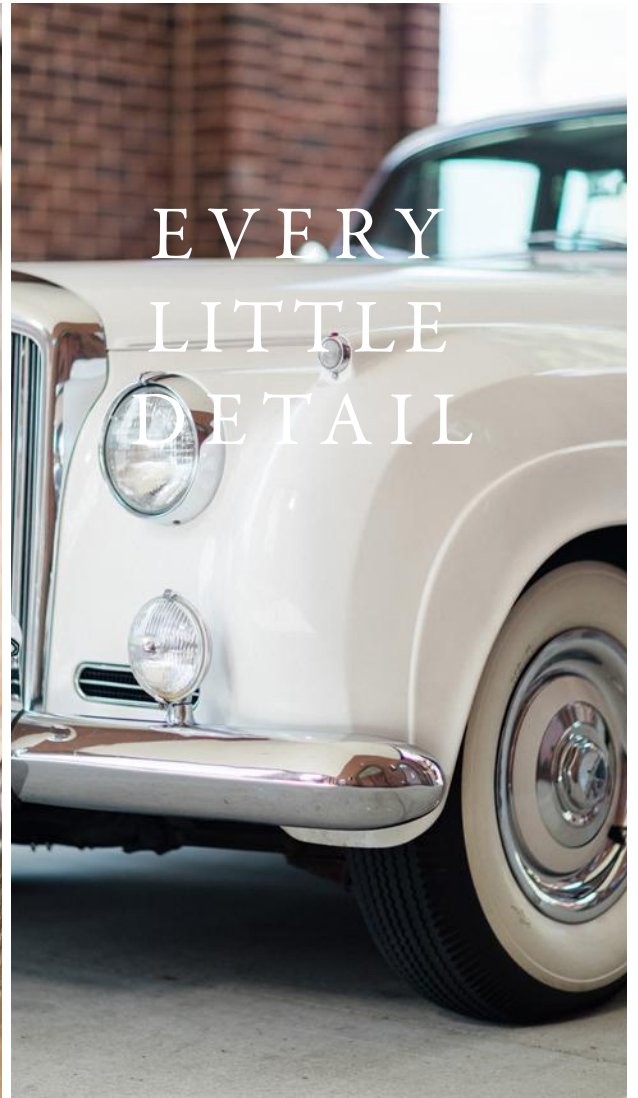




A photograph of a room with a large window, a patterned rug, and a floral arrangement. The window is the central focus, showing a view of a green lawn. The room has light-colored wood flooring and a patterned rug. A floral arrangement is visible in the top right corner. The text "THE WINDOW EFFECT" is overlaid on the image.

THE WINDOW EFFECT

By having just a simple window in the bridal prep area, we're able to create beautiful portraits with soft light. We prefer natural light so the more windows, the better!



THE DETAILS

The whole day begins with the DETAILS! This is one of my favorite parts of the wedding day, because it allows us to prepare and get my creative side warmed up for the rest of the day! We photograph a bride's details in a way that matches and showcases the style of the entire wedding day. So, in some ways, the details set the stage for the look of the whole wedding and we love having ample time to stylize, and shoot everything from the dress, to the jewelry, to grandma's handkerchief! To the right, you'll find a list of the most common details that we shoot. We ask brides to gather any details they have before we arrive so that I can walk in, say hello, give you a big hug and then begin with all the goodies! (Please assure your mom that we will take GREAT care of the dress, we promise!)



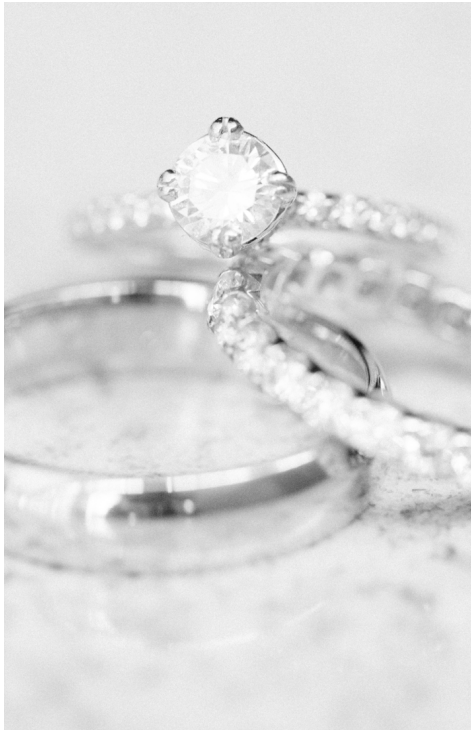
WHAT TO BRING



- dress
- veil / hair pieces
- rings (all three)
- shoes
- bouquet & bout
- jewelry
- perfume
- invitation suite x2
- print collateral
- borrowed & blue
- floral extras
- hanger
- ring box
- perfume bottle



DAY-OF REMINDERS





GATHER the goods.

If possible, collect all of your details before we arrive so that we can begin quickly and have more time for some “getting ready” shots, bridals, & groomals too!

EXTRA elements.

Sometimes, depending on the theme and “look” of the wedding day, there may be some extra elements that you could include when you gather your details. For example, if you’re having a country themed wedding, you could include a piece of burlap or lace. If you’re having a rustic themed wedding that includes some wooden elements, maybe save a small piece of wood for me to use when I’m shooting your rings and jewelry. This REALLY makes for beautiful, consistent album spreads!

KEEP all three rings.

The most common detail missing when we arrive are the rings! Moms, officiants and planners will tell you to hand over your wedding band to the best man before the day begins. However, it’s actually better to hand it over during the bridal party portraits so that I can shoot some great ring shots in the AM! If you forget, no worries, I can always shoot the ring shot at the reception if there is extra time!

BRING the bouquet.

Don’t forget the Bouquet! Have the bouquets and bouts delivered to the bride before the first look so that she can have her bouquet in her portraits. No worries, if it’s hot, we’ll be sure to keep it in water as much as possible before the ceremony!

When you're planning a wedding day timeline, the best advice we could give is to ADD CUSHION TIME! Sometimes the most simple things can take an extra 20 minutes and then all of a sudden, the whole morning is thrown off. We have seen "getting the bride in her dress" take almost 40 minutes because of a button malfunction. It's a smart idea to add in an extra ten minutes here and there so that we have some wiggle room to work with! This way, if one part of the day gets thrown off by 20 minutes, I can help you compensate that time in other areas. There are so many different things to think about when you're planning a wedding day, and so here are some tips for the preceremony timeline! I realize that every single wedding day is different and so not all of these tips will apply to every wedding day schedule. Something else to consider is that not EVERYTHING will go as planned, and I promise you, that is completely normal!!



BOUQUETS AND BOUTS

You will need your Bouquet & Bouts for your First Look! Have them delivered to the room where the bride is getting ready.

TRAVEL TIME

Be sure to think about the travel time and TRAFFIC to and from your getting ready location and your venue!

HAIR & MAKEUP

We encourage brides to have at least their makeup done before we start because who wants a ton of shots without their makeup on?! Nobody.

GROOMSMEN PREP

James will photograph the guys getting ready if they are getting ready in the same location as the bride or within 10-15 mins.

TIMING TIPS



GETTING IN THE DRESS

Katie will instruct you to get into your dress close to a window and it would be lovely to have your bridesmaids dressed when you're getting in your gown!

CREATE A CUSHION

A 10 minute cushion every now and then is a GREAT idea! It's amazing how fast time slips away the day of!



THE BRIDAL BOUQUET

There are so many expenses when it comes to wedding planning. Many brides have to prioritize what they want to invest in. I just want to give a little tip that can save money and make a huge impact on the way your images turn out. If you're having trouble making a decision about your florals, here is what I suggest. I recommend making your bridal bouquet a big priority! When I'm photographing a wedding, if the bride has a gorgeous bouquet, I can make the entire day look like there were beautiful florals everywhere! I can use the bridal bouquet to spruce up bridal details, reception details AND even bride and groom portraits as well! The bridal bouquet is a focal point for me when it comes to your photography, and so I highly recommend getting your DREAM bouquet and investing less on the bridesmaids bouquets since they will not be photographed nearly as much!

VEIL OPTIONS

Since 75% of our couples opt for a First Look, we have options for the bridal veil! I recommend that the bride only wear her veil when she comes down the aisle and I recommend this for three different reasons. 1. This is something new for your groom to see when you're walking down the aisle! 2. A lot of times, during a First Look, the groom is so excited to see his bride that he accidentally pulls the veil out when he throws his arms around her! And 3. Saving the veil for the ceremony ensures that I will get some "Just Married" portrait time with the couple because EVERY bride needs to have a "Veil Blowing in the Wind" shot of their own! This isn't a rule that we ask all brides to follow, it's simply a suggestion that we make after having photographed over 150 weddings!



YOUR FIRST LOOK

Your first look is an amazing part of your wedding day! If you aren't sure about this tradition, the next few pages will explain why it would be a romantic addition to your wedding day celebration that not only adds to the experience but also reduces stress. Please know that we would never want any of our couples to feel pressured to go with this option. However, we do want to make sure that we share all of the benefits of a first look, because there is a reason so many of our couples do this and LOVE it!







THE FIRST LOOK

By Katie

We simply love first looks and there is a reason for this. They're AWESOME! However, not everyone is aware of how awesome they are, because they get caught up in how "non-traditional" it is, and they immediately write it off. I can talk about those brides because I was one of them! I wanted a REACTION. I wanted James to be so surprised and overcome with joy when I walked down the aisle that he bawled at the first sight of me! Isn't that EVERY girl's dream? Who doesn't want that reaction? However, James and I decided not to have a first look on our wedding day back in 2007. We were both so nervous! We look terrified in our photographs. We wish we would have done things differently.

After experiencing my own wedding and shooting over 200 others with James.... we've come to this conclusion. Some brides love "traditions".... but what a bride REALLY wants when it comes to her groom seeing her for the first time, is a REACTION. Those who are not interested in a First Look usually think that by seeing each other beforehand, they will lose part of that reaction. They also assume that it will not be as emotional or as intimate as it would be if they were coming down the aisle. What I have found (this is starting to sound like a research paper!) is so ironic! Everyone knows that wedding days are a bit stressful for the bride and groom.

The whole day is focused on them, they need to look their best, they need to be on time, the groom has no idea what side the boutonniere is supposed to go on and little by little... the tension grows.

It's before the ceremony and the gravity of what is about to happen starts to sink in and the calm, collected groom who was playing golf just a few short hours ago is now starting to feel a little anxious. So what happens next? The groom waits in a little room somewhere for his cue from the coordinator. It seems like it's taking FOREVER. Finally, the coordinator leans her head in and hurries the groom to get ready. With clammy hands, the groom enters the ceremony and what does he find? he finds anywhere from 80-300 people and they're all looking where? Right at his face... because everyone has expectations and anticipation about his first reaction. This is the farthest thing from a private, intimate moment. Sure, it's SO powerful and SO wonderful. ... or at least it should be. Walking down the aisle should be one of the BEST PARTS of your WHOLE wedding day!! It's magical!! But when I walked down the aisle... James was a nervous wreck... If we could go back now we definitely would have done a first look, but we can think back fondly at the 20 and 21 versions of ourselves and laugh. It didn't matter that we looked like deer in headlights, we had each other.

Grooms normally become incredibly nervous on wedding days.... even if they seem cool and collected and maybe even with a first look.

For most grooms, the nerves kick in before they see their bride because when they see her, everything becomes VERY real! So when the nerves start creeping up, instead of keeping the groom in a secluded space until his time to enter the ceremony, what if you took him to a private place... no people, no on-lookers, no distractions.... and you let his beautiful bride, the love of his life, quietly call his name and have him turn around to see her for the first time. He would turn around and finally get his first look at his stunning bride and not only would he get to see her... he could embrace her... cry with her.... kiss her... and ENJOY that moment with her for as LONG as they wanted. As she shows him her dress, twirls a few times and then asks him what he thinks... his nerves start to diminish. After all, she's the one who can make him most comfortable anyway.

Because they aren't on a time crunch... they casually move into their romantic portraits. No one is around, the coordinator isn't announcing "15 minutes left", and there is no pressure. It's just the two of them and their photographer, in this case, US,..... capturing the excitement and the joy of their wedding day. This is their time to be TOGETHER...and to be ALONE. When does that happen on a wedding day? Without a First Look.... it doesn't. After their romantic portraits are done, they meet up with their best friends. Their bridal party joins them and because they still have plenty of time to spare... the bride touches up a little makeup while the boys act like boys. After a few minutes the bridal party portraits begin and they're FUN. They're FUN, because there is time to make them FUN.

There aren't any guests waiting impatiently at the cocktail hour and there isn't a DJ coming to find the photographer to get a time check. It's wonderful!

After portraits are done, the girls and guys separate and prepare for the ceremony. The guests begin to arrive and the ushers are in place. Pretty soon it's time for the processional music to begin and one by one, the bridesmaids make their way down to the front of the ceremony. As the groom clasps his hands... they aren't clasped out of nervousness but excitement. The music builds, the mother of the bride stands and all of the guests follow her lead. The groom looks up, and here comes the BRIDE!!! His best friend, his companion, his sweetheart.....she's stunning.... ABSOLUTELY stunning. The closer she gets, the bigger he smiles.

Now let me put a disclaimer on here before we continue...my clients are not required to do a First Look by any means! We used to feel bad for sharing this option with couples who were against it, because we didn't want to push anything on them. However, we've seen the benefits of a first look over and over again, and so we only share this because we want the BEST for our couples!! It's totally ok if couples choose not to share a first look! It's just our preference to do one for many reasons.... Keep reading to find out more of the benefits of sharing your first look privately! For brides not interested in a First Look, lets start chatting soon about how we'll create a special timeline to fit everything in!





FIRST LOOK | *Why it's Worth It*

40% MORE PORTRAITS

You're investing a lot into your wedding photography. With a first look, you'll receive 40% MORE portraits of the two of you... and those are the images you will decorate your first home with! (Believe me, our house is PACKED full of our portraits!) With a first look, you make the most out of this large investment and get the most for your money.

ENJOY THE SURPRISE FREELY

You actually get to have intimate time on your wedding day with your man. Most brides don't realize that when you come down the aisle and totally SHOCK him with your gorgeous-ness... he can't even tell you how amazing you look. He can't touch you, embrace you or even SPEAK to you. You have to wait until 30 minutes later when the ceremony is over for him to react and tell you how amazing you look. And after 30 minutes of the ceremony, the reaction isn't the same as the initial first glance.

EXTEND YOUR DAY BY 3 HOURS

First Looks allow you to extend your wedding day. Normally the wedding day would start when you come down the aisle, then the ceremony would end, you would rush through portraits so that you're not late for the introductions and then it's reception time. With a first look, your wedding day is extended by almost 3 hours! Instead of being rushed for your bridal party portraits... you actually get to enjoy them and have fun hanging out with your BEST friends on your wedding day. The WHOLE first half of my client's wedding albums are filled with images just from this time together before the ceremony.

YOUR ONLY ALONE TIME

First Looks allow you to be TOGETHER and alone on your wedding day. Normally portraits are a little rushed after the family formals, and it can be hard to really get back into that "lovey dovey" mode.... especially with family around! When you have just shared your first look, you're READY to love on each other, and I always capture some super sweet images during those moments! A second time this can happen is just before sunset. We can pull you out while your guests tables are being cleared for 15 minutes and come away with some lovely images and additional time ALONE!

DIMINISHES NERVES

You get rid of your nerves! I'd say, literally 1/2 of my couples who have decided to do a first look, the grooms were not fans of it at first. However, because they have never experienced their wedding day before, they didn't know how nerve racking it can be. I have testimonials from so many grooms who initially weren't a fan of the first look... but afterwards admitted to being SO much more relaxed and ready for the ceremony!





FOR THE BRIDE

FIRST LOOK

EXPECTATIONS

Bride's, if you have never seen your man cry or get emotional, you can't expect him to be overly emotional on your wedding day. Some guys just embrace their brides and never cry.... and that's OK. Some guys show very little emotion when their bride is coming down the aisle and that's ok too. Just enjoy this amazing day, and try not to put any expectations on him. If you take this advice to heart, I could potentially be saving you a lot of disappointment on your day. One thing we have noticed after shooting close to 150 weddings is that the stress and nerves that come with a wedding day can sometimes make it hard for some grooms to truly express their emotions. It's just a lot to take in all at once. This is a great reason to share a first look and also a great reason to give some grace to your guy! Sure, you deserve to feel beautiful, but my encouragement to you is to enjoy this time together, no matter what his reaction is like!

FROM A GUY'S PERSPECTIVE | *By James*



Our wedding was very traditional. It was in the church I grew up attending and where my grandfather and great grandfather preached. We wanted to do everything in our power to make our family proud. We're also a pretty traditional couple or at least we were. I was so nervous the morning of our wedding I took a nap while my groomsmen went and got ice cream on the 100 degrees July back day in 2007. IT WAS SO HOT and I chose to wear black. Bad idea. It was also too big. Rookie move. Anyway, on our wedding day gentlemen, we want to not only look sharp but feel comfortable.

Quick hint, shoes make all the difference and don't stand on a roof top wearing black shoes and no sunglasses. You don't want to be squinting in any pictures.



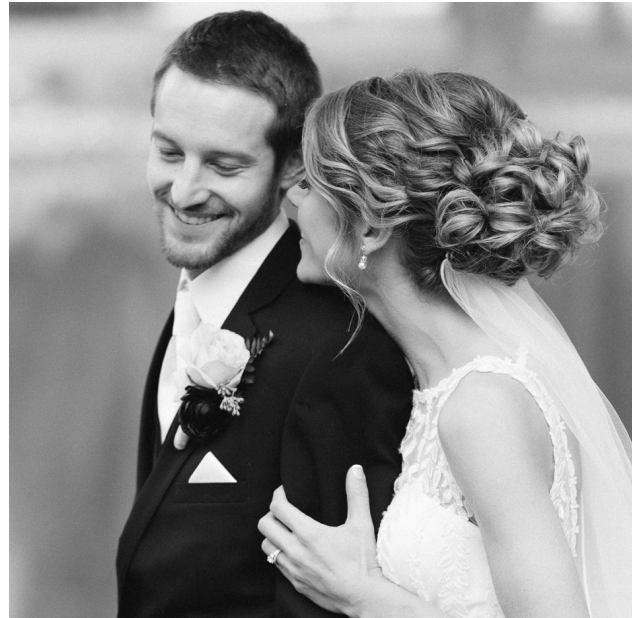
Anyway, on our wedding day gentlemen, we want to not only look sharp but feel comfortable. Quick hint, shoes make all the difference. Sometimes there is not enough antiperspirant in the world to keep me from sweating. While Katie and I didn't get the first look, a part of me wishes that we would have. I didn't realize how nervous I was going to be. Apart from nerves, I wish we could have just had that time together before the ceremony to check in with each other. The night prior to our wedding day I was with my buddies and I missed some phone calls from my betrothed. Long story short, she was not happy and the next morning things were less than perfect.

Our marriage license had been missing just a few hours prior, we had family drama (there is always some type of drama), and on top of all that we had a two-year-old who just wanted his mother and was not loving all the attention, he was getting. That made two of us. I much rather be behind the camera if I am being honest.



Over the years, we have photographed hundreds of weddings, and a good portion of them have had some form of first look. I would much rather lose my junk in front of my beloved than the entire church even though I usually cry at weddings anyway.

Growing up, I dreamed of having a Braveheart style wedding. The one where you run off and get married by a priest in the Highlands of Scotland (kilt optional). There was something so intimate about there only being the three of them. Our families and our fiancé have different options on this all together and we often don't get the last vote. This is one of those decisions you may have put your foot down on long ago. I respect that and we won't try and talk you out of it. Whatever you decide will be the right decision for you.



Lastly, feeling present is going to be one of those marriage conversations your likely going to have a few months into your marriage. For whatever reason, men are easily distracted or preoccupied with just about anything else other than what is right in front of us. Am I right? However, on your wedding day, **THIS WILL NOT BE THE CASE**. She will have every ounce of your attention and for good reason. She is the most beautiful person in the whole world. If you're not a crier that's okay, she likely already knows that, but she wants to wow you. Make every effort to wow her in return. I am here to help you feel genuine and comfortable and make sure that regardless of first look or no-look or and whatever you decide.





The Daddy / Daughter

FIRST LOOK

This is for all of the brides who have a sweet spot in their heart for their dad. I have to admit that Daddy/Daughter first looks make us a little teary. For a lot of dads, this is when everything feels real and it hits him... “My baby girl is getting MARRIED!” These are precious moments to photograph and I highly encourage any daddy’s girl to make time in their timeline for this moment. It doesn’t take long at all! The hardest part is making sure dad shows up on time! If dad doesn’t show up on time, the whole timeline can get thrown off, or we’ll have to skip the daddy/daughter first look. Another sweet idea we’ve seen is having the father of the bride escort the bride to her first look!





THE CEREMONY

Here it is! The moment everyone has been waiting for! The music is playing and the guests have been seated. Ushers make their way to the back of the church, and the coordinator is lining up the bridesmaids while giving the musicians a 5 minute warning. The bride is about to walk down the aisle to the love of her life..... and if she's like most girls, she's dreamed about this moment for a long time! Vows will be shared and promises will be made... this is what it's all about!! In a world full of wedding blogs, Pinterest and bridal magazines, it's easy to be overwhelmed and consumed by the "prettiness" of the event. While details do matter and planning is necessary, it's important to never lose sight of the real purpose of this amazing day!

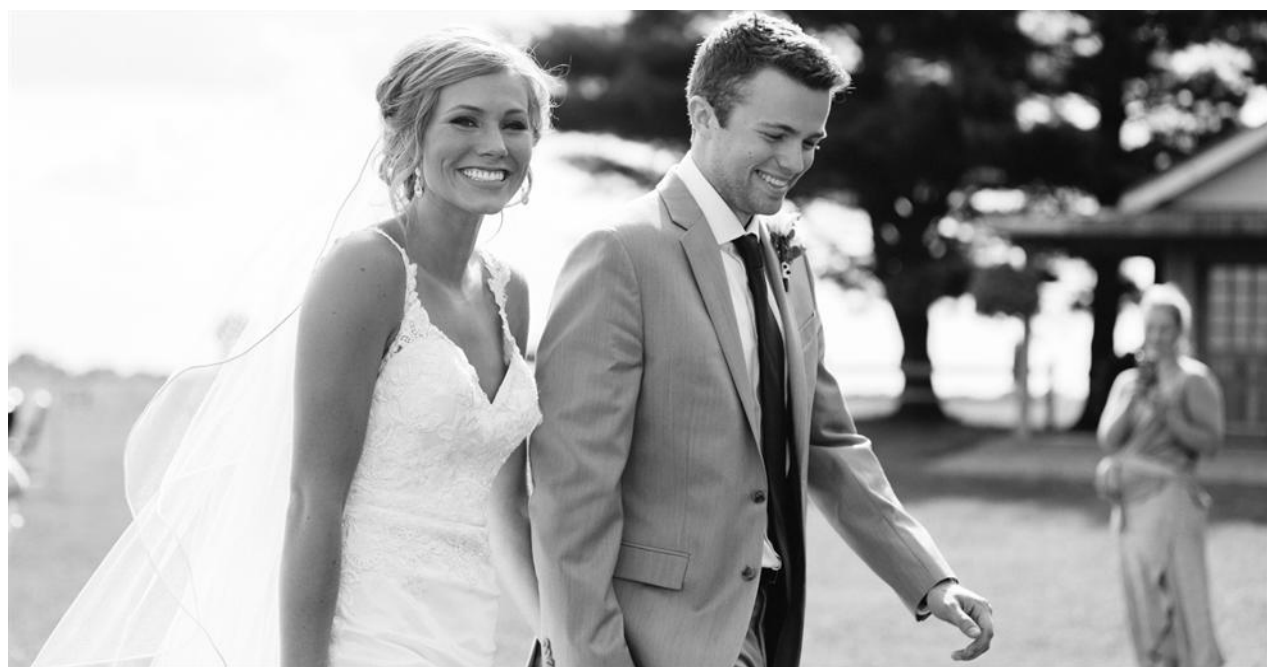


LIGHTING

Ceremony lighting is really important. If you get married outdoors at 12pm, the lighting will be extremely harsh and not only will there be harsh lines of light on your faces, you will also be squinting. I suggest planning an outdoor ceremony 2 hours before sunset if you are having a FIRST LOOK. If you are not interested in sharing a first look, then I would suggest having your ceremony 3 hours before sunset to ensure that you will have plenty of time for all of your portraits afterwards. The lower the sun, the more romantic the lighting. If you are having an indoor ceremony, it is always best to have EVEN lighting at the altar. If there are two spotlights on the bride and groom, I will not be able to expose the rest of the bridal party. It is better to have soft, even light across the whole altar.

ORDER OF SERVICE

I have seen so many couples do so many AMAZING things during their ceremony. I've photographed couples washing each other's feet, symbolizing that they want to serve each other for the rest of their life. Some couples share in communion while some light a unity candle. I've seen sand ceremonies, rope ceremonies and the signing of the family Bible. The options are limitless!! As you plan your ceremony, make sure you design it to be exactly what the two of you envision it to be. This is your day!! If you have the freedom to be creative, then by all means, be creative!! One of our favorites is the feet washing ceremony or praying together right after you become man and wife! Whatever you decide, make it your own. There really aren't any rules anymore.



PROGRAMS & DETAILS

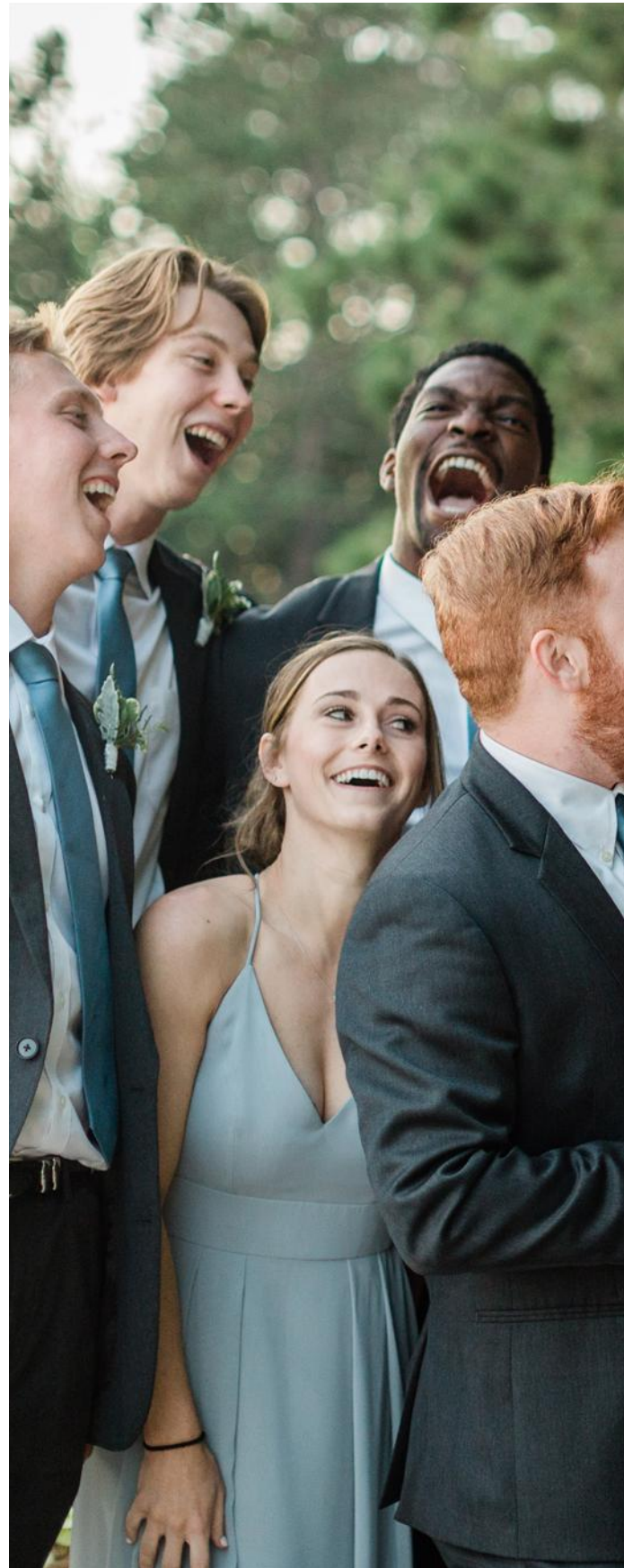
The BEST advice I have for the program-making process is to remember that not EVERY guest needs a program! We printed a program for everyone attending our wedding but quickly realized that most families only took one. We ended up with over 200 extra programs! Yikes! Also, before ordering your programs, have SEVERAL people check it for spelling and grammatical errors. Programs and the ceremony decor are things that the bride can plan in advance but then delegate the actual job of setting it up to a friend or coordinator. The last thing a bride needs to be doing the morning of her wedding is running around setting up floral arrangements! This leads me into my next column!

COORDINATION

Hiring either a full event planner or just a day-of coordinator is SO important!! Brides realize very quickly that if they do not have someone in charge of the coordination of the day, that responsibility will automatically fall on the mother of the bride, the photographer or the BRIDE! When a photographer is in charge of the timeline and the coordination of the day, the images will suffer. All of my most stressful wedding situations were caused by a lack of organization and coordination. It's so important to make this a priority. If you need any recommendations on wedding coordination services we would love to share some of our favorite vendors with you!

DESTINATION *Weddings*

If you are planning a destination wedding, a lot of the details in this guide will not apply to you! Your details, your timeline and even your preparation for the big day will be much simpler. However, it is a good idea to start thinking about a few key components of the day such as: your ceremony time and your ceremony/portrait locations (some destination weddings require some planning to find portrait locations without tourists in the background). Be sure to check the sunset time at your wedding location before settling on your ceremony time. As your wedding day draws closer, we'll begin to chat about the timeline of the day and the travel arrangements. Get excited!! This is going to be amazing!!







Sample List for

FAMILY FORMALS

Katie and I absolutely love meeting our couple's families on the wedding day! Family formals are normally our first interaction with them and so we love to have a game plan for this part of the day! Eight weeks before the wedding, you'll receive a questionnaire from us that will ask you to list out the family formals you want us to capture. Here is a sample family formal list to help you start preparing what shots you need. We do have to limit the family formal time in order to ensure that we have plenty of daylight for your romantic portraits. However, any large family group shots that we don't accomplish during family formals, we can be sure to capture at the reception!

B&G with Bride's Immediate Family

(Parents, Siblings, Grandparents, Nieces, Nephews)

B&G with Bride's Parents

B&G with Bride's Siblings

Bride with her Parents

Bride with Mom, Bride with Dad

B&G with Bride's Grandparents

B&G with both sets of Parents

B&G with Groom's Immediate Family

(Parents, Siblings, Grandparents, Nieces, Nephews)

B&G with Groom's Parents

B&G with Groom's Siblings

Groom with his Parents

Groom with Mom, Groom with Dad

B&G with Groom's Grandparents

B&G with all family members if time allows

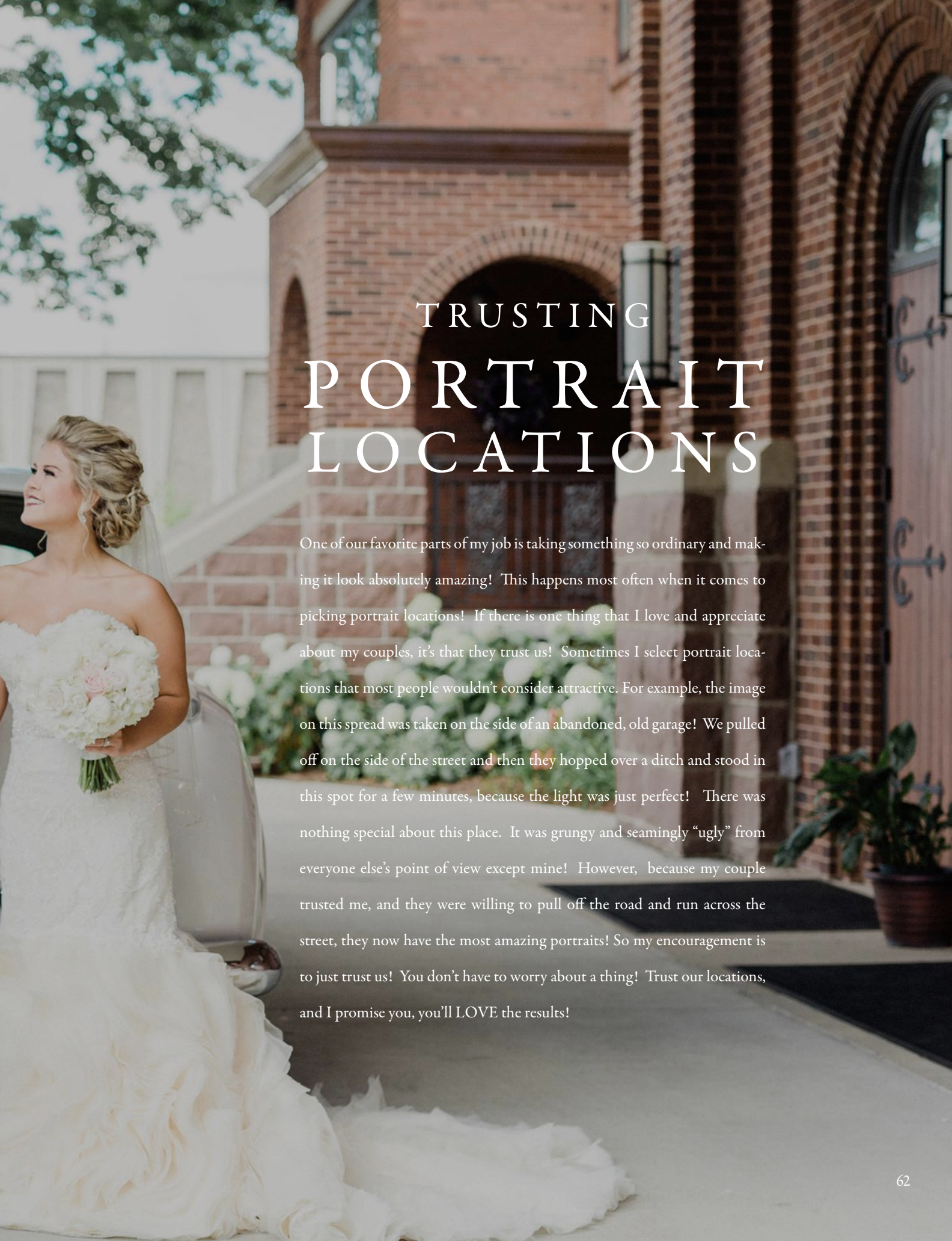


ROMANTIC PORTRAITS

If we're being honest, all of the wedding day images are important, but the real favorites are almost always from my time with the Bride and Groom! These romantic portraits of just the two of you will be the images that you frame beside your bed or over your mantle, and they will also be the images that will fill your album for generations to enjoy. These images are always our favorite not only because of their beauty, but because this is such a sweet portion of the day. For this brief moment in time, you will be alone with your groom on your wedding day. You will have a chance to love on each other and really connect before the craziness begins! Romantic portraits are normally done before the ceremony (after the "First Look") and then we LOVE shooting a few "just married" portraits after the ceremony as well! This is when the light is low and golden! It's such a romantic time for bride and groom portraits! If you're not interested in a first look, we will make sure to include a lot of time after the ceremony for these portraits!







TRUSTING PORTRAIT LOCATIONS

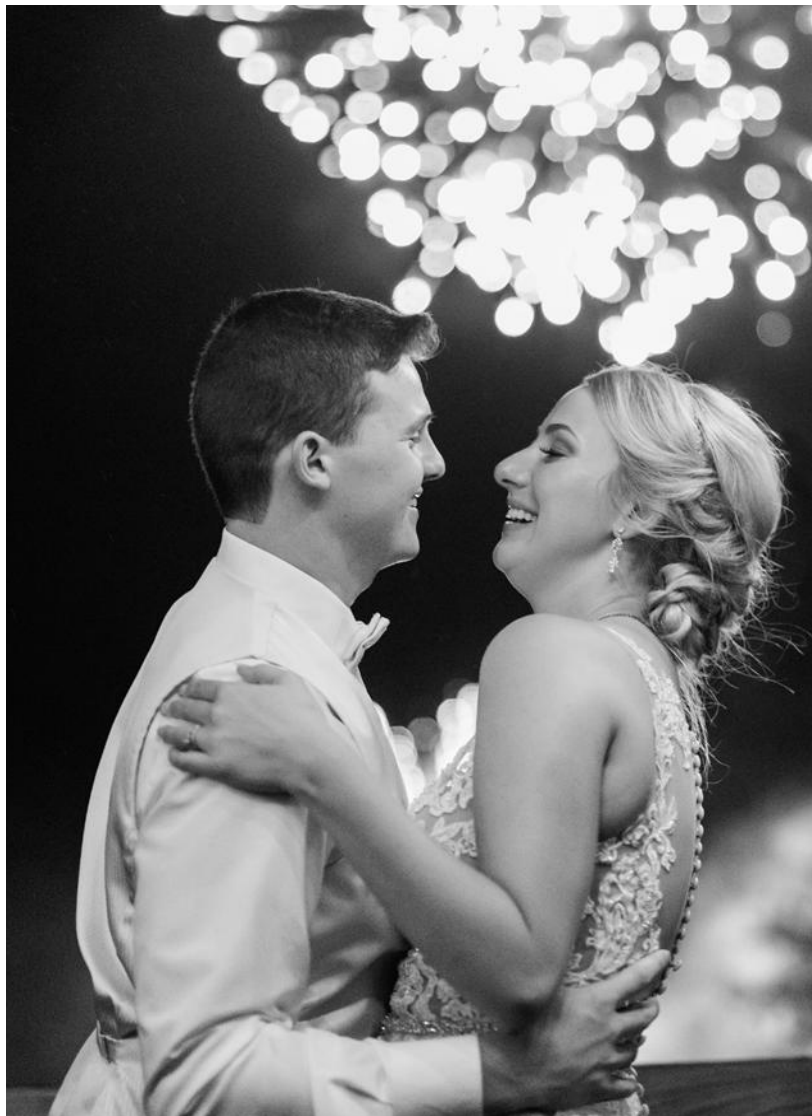
One of our favorite parts of my job is taking something so ordinary and making it look absolutely amazing! This happens most often when it comes to picking portrait locations! If there is one thing that I love and appreciate about my couples, it's that they trust us! Sometimes I select portrait locations that most people wouldn't consider attractive. For example, the image on this spread was taken on the side of an abandoned, old garage! We pulled off on the side of the street and then they hopped over a ditch and stood in this spot for a few minutes, because the light was just perfect! There was nothing special about this place. It was grungy and seemingly "ugly" from everyone else's point of view except mine! However, because my couple trusted me, and they were willing to pull off the road and run across the street, they now have the most amazing portraits! So my encouragement is to just trust us! You don't have to worry about a thing! Trust our locations, and I promise you, you'll LOVE the results!



THE CASE OF A RAINY WEDDING DAY

One of the most frequently asked questions that we receive during wedding season is “Soooo, what do you do if it RAINS?!”. I want to reassure you that even if it rains, you will still have beautiful portraits and BRIGHT colors in your images! Overcast skies mean vibrant colors! I know that rain isn’t ideal, and no bride would wish for rain on their big day, but if it happens, it happens..... and it’s going to be JUST fine!! Some of our best weddings have been on rainy wedding days! Here are a few things to remember:

1. All I need to create natural light portraits on a rainy wedding day is a porch! Just one porch!
2. Let us worry about the pictures. You have enough to think about. If there is a chance of rain, We’ll be sure to do some extra scouting to find a covered location or two, for us to use for you first look, romantic portraits and bridal party portraits. Let’s have a backup plan ahead of time so there is no last minute decisions needed to be made.
3. Take it one step at a time. Don’t think about your entire day and what will happen if it rains. That will only overwhelm you! Definitely have a rain plan for your venue, but then let your vendors do the work of handling the rest of the day if rain is in the forecast.



This was the last shot of the night and it so perfectly shows that the rain can't keep us from taking beautiful images! Don't let the fear of rain steal your joy. You can't control it, and we promise we will make the best of it!!!





your bridal party.

Lets chat about your bridal party! This is when the fun REALLY begins! I know from experience that all brides want their closest friends to have an AMAZING time during their big day, and I will make sure that happens! Bridal party portraits should be a ton of FUN! After you share your first look, depending on the locations and the timing of the day, your bridal party will join us for portraits! If all goes well, we will be able to accomplish ALL of your bridal party protraits BEFORE the ceremony. This means that your guys and gals will be free to mingle at cocktail hour if they wish! If there are flower girls and ring bearers involved, they can either join us for the pre-ceremony portraits or we can take one final group photo after the ceremony, before family formals. Be sure your groomsmen arrive with boutonnières on, and your bridesmaids arrive with bouquets!

RECEPTION DETAILS



The party is here!! Receptions can be a blast! However, it's important to make sure that you have your event well thought out. This is the job of your coordinator and your DJ/Band. Your caterer will also play a big role in the design and set up of your event. Every aspect of your reception affects the overall outline of the evening. For example, if you're not having a plated meal, your reception will need to be set up in a way that allows movement. Guests will need to be able to find the food stations easily, and there will be a mixture of dinner tables and hightop cocktail tables. This will encourage guests to mix and mingle. If you are having a plated dinner, you will more than likely need escort cards, full place settings and space for all of your guests to be seated comfortably. Whatever the style of your event, make sure that you plan out all of the aspects of the evening. Your coordinator and DJ can help you set up the evening so that guests won't leave early or experience long periods of waiting for the next thing to happen.



Much like the ceremony, you have the freedom to make your reception your own! It's your party, it should be exactly how you want it to be! Here is a list of some key events that happen often at receptions:

- *Bridal Party Introductions*
- *First Dance*
- *Daddy-Daughter Dance*
- *Mother-Son Dance*
- *Anniversary Dance*
- *Money Dance*
- *Traditional Religious Dances*
- *Welcome by Father of the Bride*
- *Blessing*
- *Cake Cutting*
- *Toasts*
- *Bouquet and Garter Toss*
- *Large group portraits with friends*
- *The exit of the Bride and Groom*



RECEPTION TIPS

The fun has begun! It's time to relax, dance and celebrate!! Your reception should be a BLAST! The last thing you need to be worrying about is your timeline. Your coordinator and DJ should take care of making sure that everything stays on schedule so that you can enjoy your night. Here are some helpful tips that will help your reception flow smoothly.

- **GUEST CONSIDERATION** : *Take your guests into consideration when planning your timeline. If you have a lot of elderly guests that will not be staying until the very end, make sure you schedule the cake cutting at a relatively early time so that they can be a part of it. Grandma's love seeing this sweet tradition!*

- **KEEP IT MOVING** : *Chat with your coordinator about how you can plan your reception in a way that will keep guests engaged and moving all night!*

- **MAKE IT YOUR OWN** : *If you want to have a special dance with your grandparents, do it! Make your reception a reflection of who you are and don't feel tied to traditions. Also, make sure you give your DJ or Band a "Do Not Play" list if there are some songs you really don't want to hear during your reception!*

- **DON'T GET CAUGHT UP** *in the formalities and the details. Sure, details are pretty and fun to photograph, but they can steal the joy of the day if you get too caught up in them. (Just speaking from experience here) Plan your centerpieces, welcome table, etc. well before the wedding date, and teach your coordinator or family friend how to set them up so that you aren't even thinking about those things the day of!*

- **RECEPTION COVERAGE** : *If you haven't purchased enough coverage time for your photography to last until the exit, that's ok! We have several options! (See next page!) I recommend planning your timeline so that you can have at least one hour of dancing photographed. The guests who dance during the first hour will still be dancing in the third hour! One hour of dancing will be enough time to really capture the joy of your reception!*





RECEPTION:

CONTROLLED *EXITS*

Exits! If your coverage ends before your exit, you have the option of planning a faux exit with your bridal party! This is more common than you may think. Instead of saving your exit until the very end, you can plan a faux exit with just the members of your bridal party and a few family members! This allows us to have more control over these shots and the party NEVER has to stop! In most cases, no one even notices that the bride and groom are missing for a few minutes! Also, it's almost impossible to tell that the whole wedding party isn't there waving sparklers and sending off the happy couple! I dare you to look at our blog and see if you can pick out which exits were fake and which were real! This idea allows our couples to save money and still have all of the shots that they dreamed of!



Handmade Signature Albums



Katie and I have always said that we would grab all of our kids, our Bibles and our wedding album if our house was on fire, and MAC! Could we always build another wedding album if something happened to this book? Yes. However, there is something special about creating your first heirloom. We got our wedding album right after we were married on 7.7.07 and we treasure it even if it doesn't look as neat as the ones we create for our clients! Having digital images is wonderful, but having a printed keepsake that tells a visual story of our wedding day is priceless! If you haven't already invested in a Album of your own, you can always come back to us at any time and order one. We aren't a photography business that pushes product sales at all. However, these albums are important not just for our couples to have... but for their grandchildren to enjoy as well.

SIZE OPTIONS:

10x10, 12x12

SAY THANK YOU WITH A PARENT ALBUM :

Our parents did so much to make our wedding a dream come true and so we wish we would have gifted our parents with an album after our big day! After the wedding chaos is over and life returns to normal, or if you want to surprise your parents with their very own albums from your wedding for Christmas, let us know before October 1st so we can get them designed with our online proofing system and ordered just in time for the Holidays!



PHOTOS



All images copyright © 2020 James Stokes Photography, LLC

📍 Medford, Wisconsin, 54451, United States 📞 715.570.5718
✉ info@jamesstokesphotography.com 🌐 www.james-stokes.com



🇬🇧 English

YOUR ONLINE GALLERY

Years ago you had to order prints of the images that you wanted to have forever. That isn't how we work around here! We want you to have ALL of your memories in your possession forever and ever! We also want you to share your images freely and without any hesitation. This is why we deliver your images via an online gallery! This means that you don't have to wait on a package in the mail, and you'll have access to them wherever you are! I've listed some important information that will help you understand your online gallery and all that it can do on the next page! Enjoy! :

DOWNLOADING PHOTOS:

You will be able to download your edited images directly from your online gallery, and they will be high resolution! This process is very simple! All you have to do is click the “downwards all images” and you will be prompted to hit the start button. You will be sent an email with download instructions. If you opt to download the entire gallery, you will be notified via email when your entire download is ready. It takes a few minutes to prepare for hundreds of images to be downloaded! You can also download individual images by clicking on the image and hitting the download button below each image. Guest will also be able to do this.

ACCESSING YOUR PHOTOS ON YOUR PHONE:

You should have no issues accessing your photos on your phone, however, some phones do not allow downloads. We recommend downloading your images to a harddrive and loading them to the cloud. We offer an APP that will allow for 50 of your photos to be stored on your phone. Just let us know if this is something that you would like!

ORDERING PRINTS:

You can actually order professional and affordable prints from within your online gallery and have them shipped directly to your house! Print sizes start at \$10 and are printed in a professional lab to ensure color and contrast accuracy! You are more than welcome to print images on your own. However, I would warn you to avoid Walmart, Target and Costco. I cannot promise that your colors will print true-to-life if you choose to print at those stores. If you don't print through your gallery, I recommend using Mpix.com! Also, don't forget to use your credit at checkout if your collecting included one.

GALLERY EXPIRATION:

I have great news! Your galleries will not expire for a whole year, however, we keep your images both in cloud and on our backup harddrives for years after your wedding. However, even though you will have access to your images for a long time, I would still recommend downloading them and saving them in multiple places for safe keeping! Lastly, we will send you a USB for safe storage. We encourage you to keep this in your firesafe just in case.

SHARING, WATERMARKING & EDITING:

You have the freedom to share your images in any way that you choose! These are your images, and we want you to love them so much that you can't help but share them! We don't believe that it is necessary to watermark our images. All we ask for is some type of credit whenever you use an image on social media! We only have ONE rule when it comes to what you can and cannot do with our work. We always encourage our clients not to re-edit their images. Let us do that hard work! However, if you have an image or two that you want to print at a very large size and you find an imperfection, we will gladly perfect it! * Watermarks may appear in your gallery, however, downloads will not have these on them.



THANK YOU!

Last, but certainly not least, THANK YOU for trusting us with your special day. Katie and I are so honored to be the ones capturing your memories, and we cannot WAIT to celebrate alongside of you! Enjoy this season of planning but also remember that your MARRIAGE is more important than the wedding. The wedding will come and go in a matter of hours, but your marriage needs to stand the test of time. Continue to make time for one another, even with all that needs to get done. As you continue to plan, please feel free to contact us with ANY questions you may have along the way! Depending on your date, our next step would be to finalize an engagement session! Also, about 90 days before the wedding, you'll receive an online questionnaire (questionnaire.james-stokes.com/) that will provide us with everything we need to know for your big day!! We hope this guide has been helpful as you continue to plan and prepare for your wedding day!

God Bless, - The Stokes