



Wedding Day Planning Guide

Congratulations on your decision to get married! As you probably are aware by now once the initial flush of excitement fades you are left with the most daunting and harrowing of tasks: Planning Your Wedding. The dread sets in... All of the options, possibilities, choices, expenses...

We have decided to create this guide to confront potentially THE most stressful aspect of wedding planning... and that is the scheduling of the actual wedding day as it pertains to photography. As wedding photographers we want to share our firsthand experience of how the entire wedding day flows from start to finish.

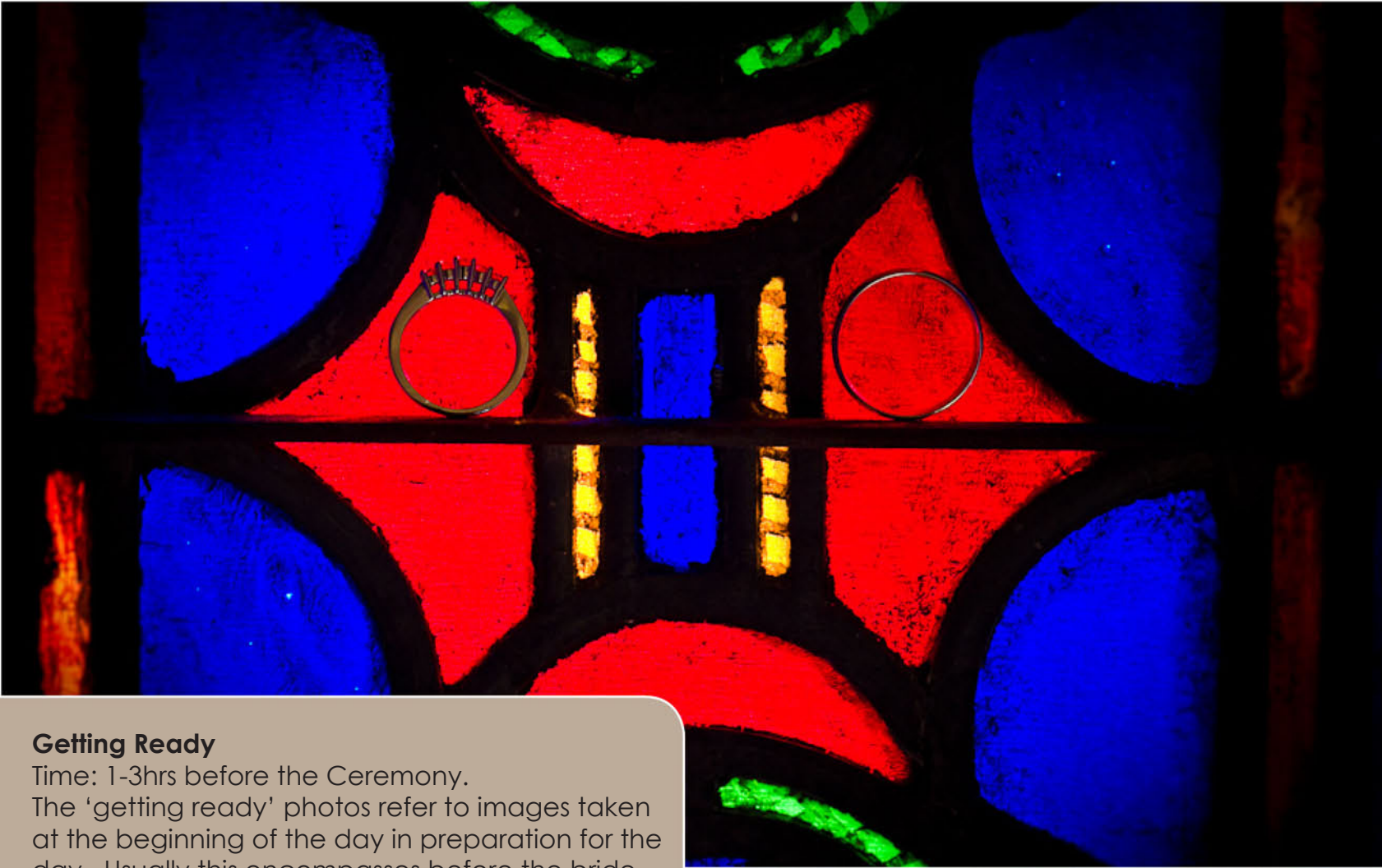
Often when we meet with potential clients they are interested in learning about how a wedding day typically unfolds. Let me give you a comprehensive break down of the most common elements in a wedding with our personal notes and observations. Once you understand the various elements that make up a wedding day we can then start to look at how to combine them in various ways (such as taking the wedding photos beforehand).

And finally after we have gone over a few of the common itineraries in theory we will share four different actual wedding day itineraries to show you how these elements translate into reality. Let's get started by talking about the basic elements that create your wedding day.

Wedding Day Elements:

1. Getting Ready Images
2. Ceremony
3. Family Portraits
4. Wedding Party - Bride/Groom Portraits
5. Reception





Getting Ready

Time: 1-3hrs before the Ceremony.
The 'getting ready' photos refer to images taken at the beginning of the day in preparation for the day. Usually this encompasses before the bride puts her dress on right up to the ceremony (although there are many variations). Sometimes we will show up and the bride will forgo some of the getting ready shots and already be dressed; so it's important for you to think about whether or not you want those images on your wedding day.

In our experience, if you are interested in 'getting ready' images it makes sense for you to give us ample time to photograph the dress, shoes, and details as well as putting the dress on and perhaps some portraits. We also love to have time (at least 15 minutes but we've had up to an hour on some weddings) to take portraits with the bride and her bridesmaids alone and the groom and his groomsmen alone. By doing this before we don't have to do it later during portraits and we can focus on other images or head to cocktail hour.

Normally we also take a few formal images such as the bride with her parents, the bride with each of her bridesmaids individually etc. If there isn't enough time dedicated to 'getting ready' images we often find that everyone feels rushed before we even get to the ceremony.





Ceremony

Time: Everything from 15 minutes to 1.5hrs. The ceremony is probably the easiest and most clear cut element of a wedding since the planning and actual events of the ceremony are prepared by someone else (church, or traditions). Typically as photographers we do not need much info about what will take place (Unless the ceremony is very non-traditional) so you won't need to provide much direction. It is helpful to let us know if there are any strict house rules such as places we cannot stand etc.

Receiving Lines

A large wedding with a receiving line can go on for an hour so please be aware of this fact and make sure that it does not detract from time you have allocated towards portraits. Another important note to keep in mind is that after you walk back down the aisle as a newlywed it is important to be removed to a separate location so that everyone can exit the church without seeing you. I like to call this the natural receiving line since your guests can't help but stop and congratulate you unintentionally consuming precious time in the process.

Here are a few tips for the ceremony: When you are walking up and down the aisle resist the urge to rush and walk slowly...take in the moment. Another good tip is to be sure to take a generous first kiss so that we have time to capture it.





Family Portraits

Time: 15mins to 45mins

This section of the day tends to be the least popular and the most hectic. Trying to photograph two families when everyone is excited about the upcoming party is no small feat.

Typically the family formals are restricted to immediate family such as parents, grandparents, and siblings. Make sure you take some time to think about who you want to be included in these images and make sure they know where/when they need to be for pictures. I always suggest creating a list (with names if possible) and giving it to a loud aunt who can wrangle everyone together (Remember that we will not know anyone's name but yours) Normally we try to allocate 15mins - 45mins for family pictures. (30 minutes is generally on the safe side)

Sometimes the couple will request a large group picture. Generally this is anything over 20 people or even the entire reception... Due to the difficulty in arranging and managing a very large group of people it is very helpful to make us aware of any large groups well beforehand.

We will want to find the best location and time (specifically if there is a location where we can photograph from above such as from a balcony) so that we do not take too long or miss anybody in the photograph. Sometimes it is best to do these images at the reception- where the dj can tell everyone when and where to go.

1. Bride+Groom+Grooms Parents
2. Bride+Groom+Grooms Parents+Grooms Siblings
3. Bride+Groom+Brides Parents
4. Bride+Groom+Grooms Parents+ Brides Parents
5. Bride+Groom+Grooms Parents+ Brides Parents + Siblings
6. Bride+Groom+Grandparents

(Aunts and Uncles are sometimes included but often we will get those images during the reception)





Portraits

Time: (Preferably) 1-2 hours

This part of the day is typically why people hire us to photograph their wedding so listen closely:

1) Give us enough time to work. Why do you want to rush on your wedding day? There is no need for us to feel rushed or pressured. It's simply a matter of realistically scheduling time and understanding what you are trying to get out of it. If you only want a few wedding images that's fine but don't expect us to have enough time to create some of the more elaborate images that you see in my wedding gallery.

I find that if we have 45 minutes to 1 hour at one general location we will have lots of time to creatively explore the area. This allows us to capture a wide variety of images from artistic to traditional. We are always able to provide beautiful images no matter how little time but it helps to have some time to play around right?



2) Wedding Party Captain

This is a tip that I have learned by analyzing the wedding portraits that have run the smoothest.

Working with a wedding party (especially a large party) is a lot like coaching a team. I am the coach and I call out plays (poses or ideas) and it helps if I have someone in the party that can help me communicate my ideas to the wedding party. If I were a dork I'd call it a wedding party captain. Keep in mind that we will not know everyone's name so having someone (occasionally the bride or groom but often the best man or maid of honor) that is able to assist with directing, and keeping your party focused will make your portraits fun and efficient.

In all of our best weddings everyone was attentive, respectful, and was willing to work with us and contribute ideas to make the pictures look unique and interesting. You have to be patient since it takes a lot more time and direction than you would think to make a group of people look natural.





3) Have the locations/addresses, wedding party, limo etc. all ready to go. You must be prepared for lots of dawdling from your wedding party so keep them motivated. That is the perfect job for the wedding party captain!

Also give yourselves plenty of time to travel from one location to another and consider the time of day and local traffic. If there is enough room on the limo/bus for us we will often ride along so that we don't have to worry about parking or getting split up while driving.



Cocktail Hour

Do you want to attend your cocktail hour or are we using that time to take wedding portraits? We can definitely do both however, with a limited amount of time the variety and quantity of images can be greatly reduced. If you want to enjoy your cocktail hour you might want to consider finishing your wedding party photos before the ceremony or at another time. (See Pg. 12 for more details)

Reception

The relevant details we need for your reception include when are the intros, dances, special events, the cake, garter and bouquet toss. It's important to make sure that the timing of these events will happen before we leave. This is one area that most couples tend to forget about since often the catering company/venue doesn't know when we're leaving. We love to stay until the end of the reception since this allows us to capture everything that is going on without worrying about leaving.

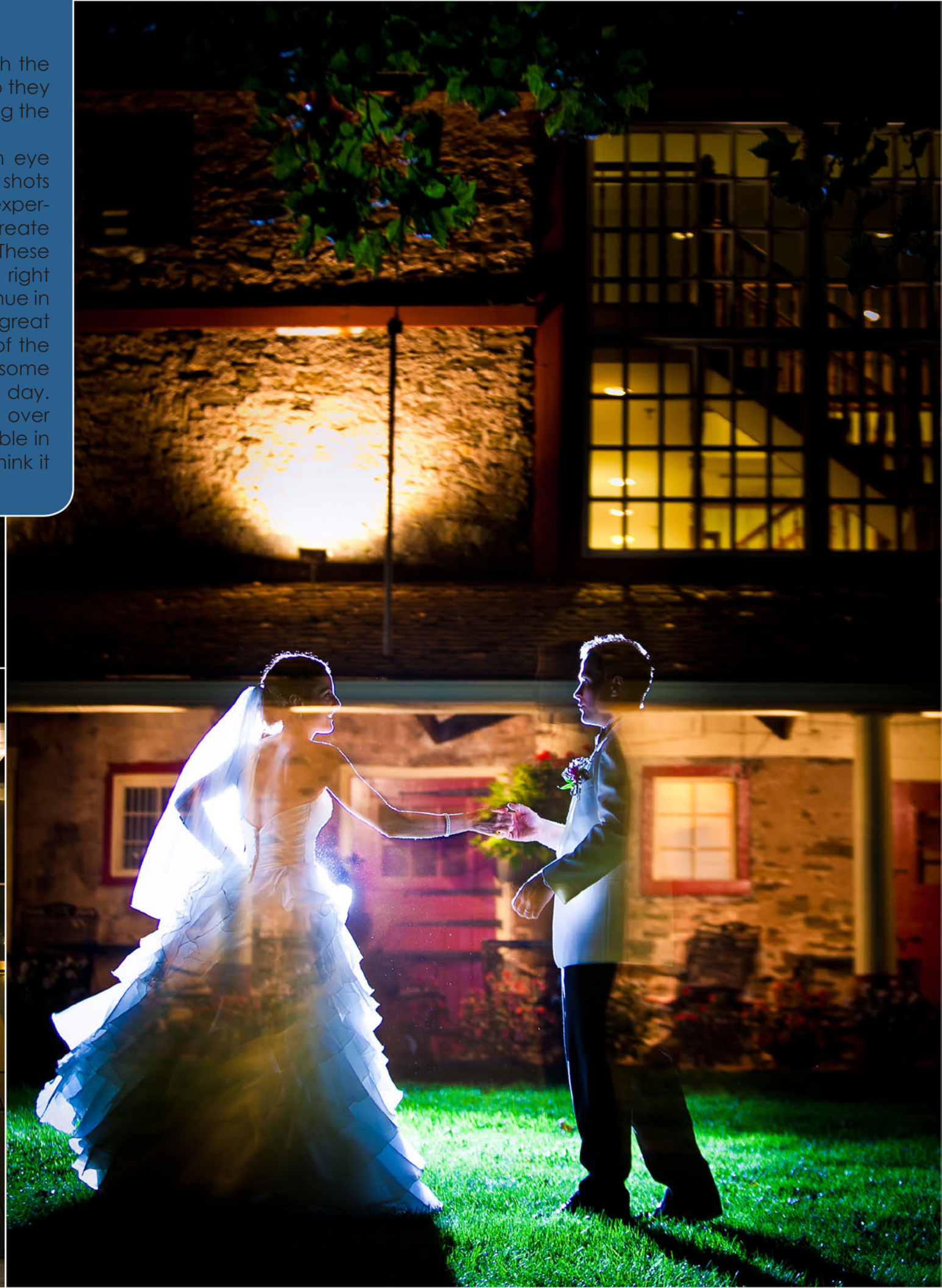




Photos In The Dark:

Do you notice a theme with the images on this spread? Yup they were all taken at night during the reception.

We always like to keep an eye out for great nighttime shots since we love to use our expertise in wireless lighting to create dramatic moody images. These images were all created right outside of the reception venue in only a few minutes. It's a great way to escape the chaos of the dance floor and capture some of the best images of the day. Since the hard part is well over you will feel more comfortable in front of the camera and I think it shows in these photos.



Wedding Day Structures

This section deals with how the previous wedding elements can be combined as well as their advantages and disadvantages.

Traditional

The traditional structure is tried and true. It is necessitated by the fact that the bride and groom will not see each other beforehand. Here it is:

Getting Ready Shots

Ceremony

Family Formals

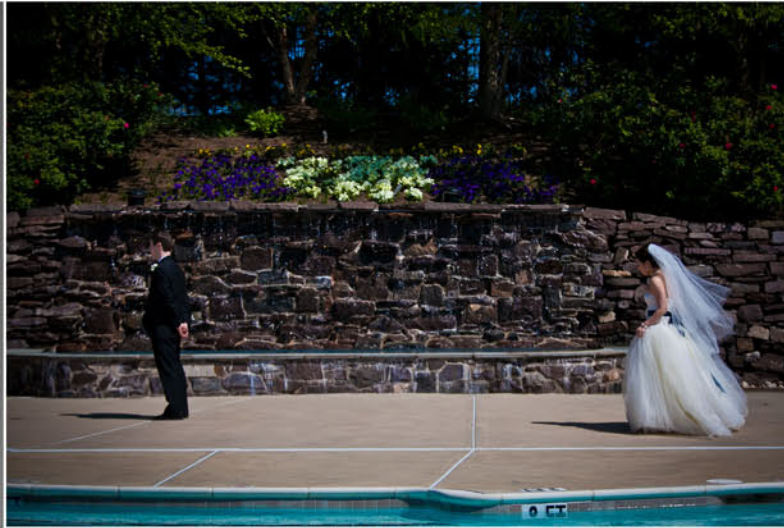
Portraits

Reception

This is a great structure and most of our weddings fall into this category. The important thing is to allow enough time for getting ready images as well as portraits. You also have to take into account how much time we will actually be allowed in the church if that is where we are taking the formal pictures. Often there is mass after the ceremony so we only have a limited amount of time in the church before the priest starts to get angry at us (I'm hoping by giving you this info we won't have to deal with any more angry priests;)

The other snag that can occur is when the couple wants to attend their cocktail hour leaving us very little time for portraits. If you don't want to miss cocktail hour yet you also want to photograph the family formals, photograph your wedding party portraits and still make your cocktail hour that doesn't leave much time at all. You will need to decide whether you want to attend cocktail hour at the expense of some quality portrait time.





Modern

I define the modern structure as when the bride and groom see each other before the ceremony to take most, if not all of their portraits. This works best when the ceremony is later and there will be limited sunlight or if the couple wants to attend their cocktail hour.

This approach normally features what is called a 'first look' which is simply when we arrange for the couple to see each other for the first time that day and photograph it under better conditions than what is possible in a church. In my opinion the modern approach does alleviate a lot of the stress that is often caused when a couple wants to enjoy their cocktail hour. Basically we can just do everything beforehand (maybe with the exception of the family formals which are typically more efficient to do after the ceremony since everyone is already there)

Here is the Modern structure:

Getting Ready Shots

First Look

Portraits

Ceremony

Family Formals

Reception

It can be argued that the anticipation of the groom seeing the bride as she walks down the aisle for the first time is worth the extra hassle of the traditional approach. However it may be worth parting from tradition since all of the images have been taken beforehand and you can just enjoy your wedding day from then on out.

Separate Day Portraits

While I am laying out different wedding day structures here is the most avant-garde and potentially least stressful way of scheduling wedding photography... Just do your portraits on a separate day! Here is how it looks:

Wedding Day:

Getting Ready

Ceremony

Family Formals

Brief Wedding party pic session

Reception

Separate day: portraits

This method allows for the most stress free and creative portrait session since you are basically dressing up and having fun with no thought of attending a ceremony or reception afterwards. The portrait session can be done either before the wedding date or after the wedding date. I think this approach delivers the most bang for your buck with your wedding dress since usually it is never used again. And instead of fitting in portraits of the couple and the wedding party we can just focus on images of the wedding party and get straight to cocktail hour!



A note on Travel Time and Multi Location Portraits

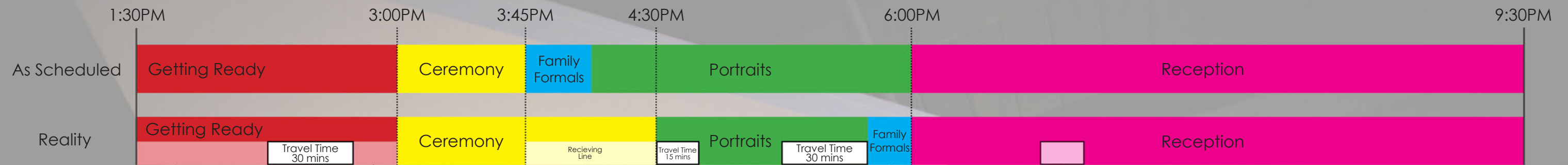
Of course it goes without saying that travel time must carefully be estimated and accounted for on your wedding day. It's better to overestimate and allow extra time since there's no need to stress yourself. Take a look at the locations that you want and get an idea where you want to stop for pictures. You should also keep in mind how you are going to transport your wedding party as well as us if convenient. This is where consulting with us is helpful since we can give you a pretty good idea of what to expect. If your wedding day is all taking place at the same venue and we're taking pictures on site it can give you more leeway if your schedule is running tight.

Daylight Savings, & Best Lighting

If you are planning a fall wedding you need to make sure that we will actually have sunlight to take your pictures or you will end up with a limited set of images taken in the dark. The best time to photograph is the hour before sunset. But really any time of the day will work because of the various lighting techniques that we employ.

What if it rains!

This is absolutely one of the areas where preparation and planning come into play. Since we specialize in lighting we can definitely capture some beautiful images inside. It's just a matter of thinking ahead about where we will be able to go inside. (The image on this page was taken in the rain)



At Bride's House for 45 mins.

Church for Groom Images 15 mins.

Unexpectedly long receiving line goes on for 45 mins. The family formals get pushed back until the reception.

We only had 30 mins to photograph a wedding party of 23 as well as the bride and groom portraits.

The family formals were rushed due to the reception about to begin and the difficulty rounding up everybody since they had already begun to party.

Stole bride and groom away for some sunset portraits

Getting Ready
Ceremony
Portraits
Family Formals
Reception
Travel Time

Actual Wedding Examples

These next pages are actual schedules from weddings that we have photographed. I have included a color coded timeline detailing all the events of the wedding day. On the top is the 'intended' schedule that the bride and groom had given to me and below is what actually happened on their wedding day. I have also included the schedule in list format with some of our notes. The list format is very similar to what I look at on the wedding day in case you are wondering how to make your own outline.

Wedding Day Couple #1: Traditional - 8 Hrs

This was a couple that we absolutely loved and wished we would have had more time with. Here was their wedding day:

1:30pm-2:15pm: Getting ready at brides house - Had plenty of time but makeup ran late and we left with just enough time to get to the church and set up.

2:15-2:30: Get to church and photograph groomsmen. - Since we ended up spending extra time with the bride we didn't get to take any groomsmen images.

3pm-3:45: Ceremony - We just arrived and had to get ready for the ceremony.

Receiving Line - And we come to the real hitch in the schedule of this wedding. This went on for 45 mins greatly reducing the time that we had for portraits. We decided to scrap the family formals at the church and do them at the reception.

4:15-6pm: Portraits - We drove to the portrait location but we had a large wedding party with very little time to work with them before we had to head to the reception.

6pm-9:30pm: Reception - Since we didn't have any time to do the family formals before we had a very difficult time gathering family members at the reception for formals. Were able to steal the couple away for some images but only had about 15 mins.

This example is probably the ideal schedule since the bride and groom allotted plenty of extra time just in case we ran late in one area. Their pictures turned out awesome and they had a great time on their wedding day.

Wedding Day Example 2: Traditional - 10 Hrs

12:00 - Groom Pics at grooms house - Plenty of time to get some nice images.

12:45 - Bride's House for pics - Since the bride was right down the street the travel time was minimal and we were able to get some shots with her family as well as with her bridesmaids.

1:30pm - Leave for church - There was enough time at the church for us to get setup and ready for the ceremony. We like to get some nice shots of the church or venue so this worked perfectly.

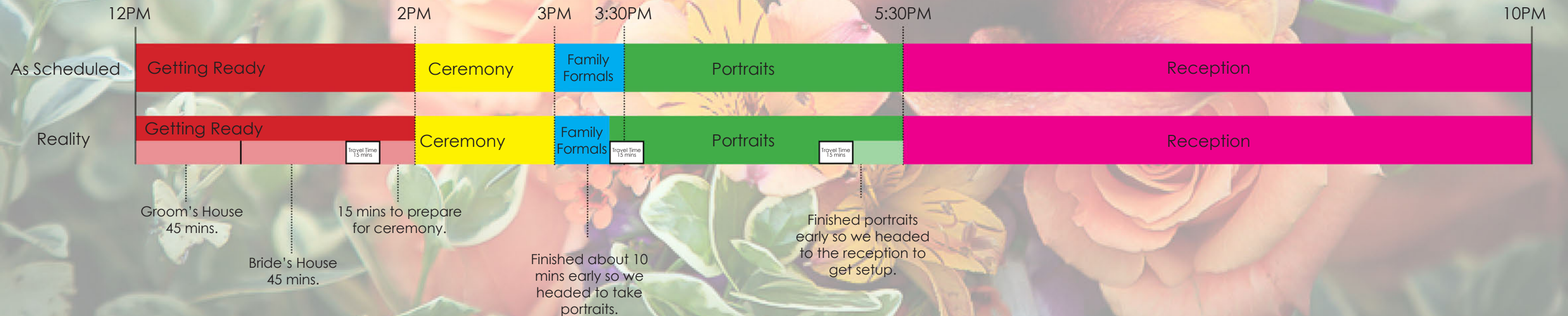
2pm - Ceremony Starts

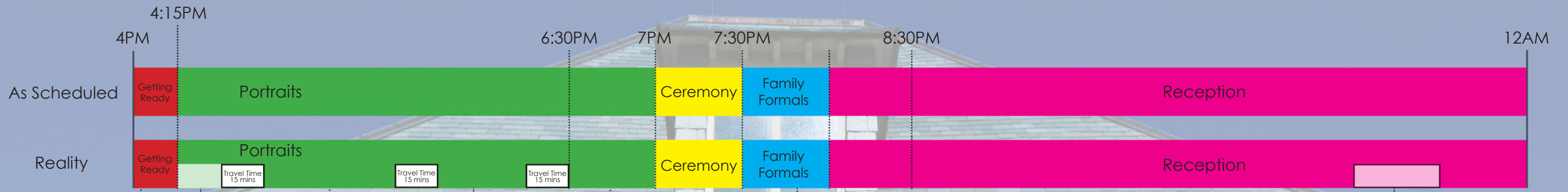
3pm - Family Images - Everyone was there and we finished 10 minutes early.

3:30pm - Portraits - Despite a very unfocused and reception ready wedding party we had allotted plenty of time so we were able to capture some great images.

5:30 - Reception starts - Since we actually finished the portraits early we had plenty of time to get to the reception, prepare and relax for a minute.

10:00 - photographers leave





Quick getting ready shots of groom

Portraits at Art Museum

Portraits at Race St. Pier

Time to prepare for ceremony since we had plenty of time for portraits.

The family formals were unorganized and we ended up photographing a 30 person group image.

Stole bride and groom away for photographs.

Bride and groom 'First Look'

Since we were driving around Philadelphia for portraits before the ceremony we scheduled about 2 hrs for portraits. That turned out to be the perfect amount of time. We were able to create some of our favorite images from this wedding because the couple and their wedding party were so cooperative and willing to share ideas. We even left the reception to take a few night shots with the couple.

Wedding Day Example 3: Modern - 8 Hrs

4pm - Guys Getting Ready - Since the couple didn't really want too many getting ready images we just shot a few and then arranged their first look.

4:15pm - First Look - The first look was arranged very efficiently so that the groom didn't have to wait too long and we could go around town and take portraits.

4:30 - Portraits - Since we were driving around town we had plenty of time and we also traveled in the limo bus with them which saves us having to find parking.

6:30 - Ceremony - We returned with plenty of time to setup for the indoor ceremony.

7pm - Ceremony

7:30pm - Family Pics - These could have been a little more organized as all of a sudden we were faced with a 30 person group picture to arrange.

8:30pm - Reception Starts - We had plenty of time to setup and we also built in some time at the end to get some night shots

12am - Photographers leave



The most prominent lessons to learn from this example are that the sun sets around 5PM in November. That combined with a lot of traveling left us in the dark (literally) for wedding party pictures.

Wedding Day Example 4: Traditional - 9 Hrs

1-2pm - Guys Getting Ready - We had plenty of time to do a few groomsmen images as well as some portraits of the groom.

2-3pm - Girls Getting Ready - We had plenty of time.

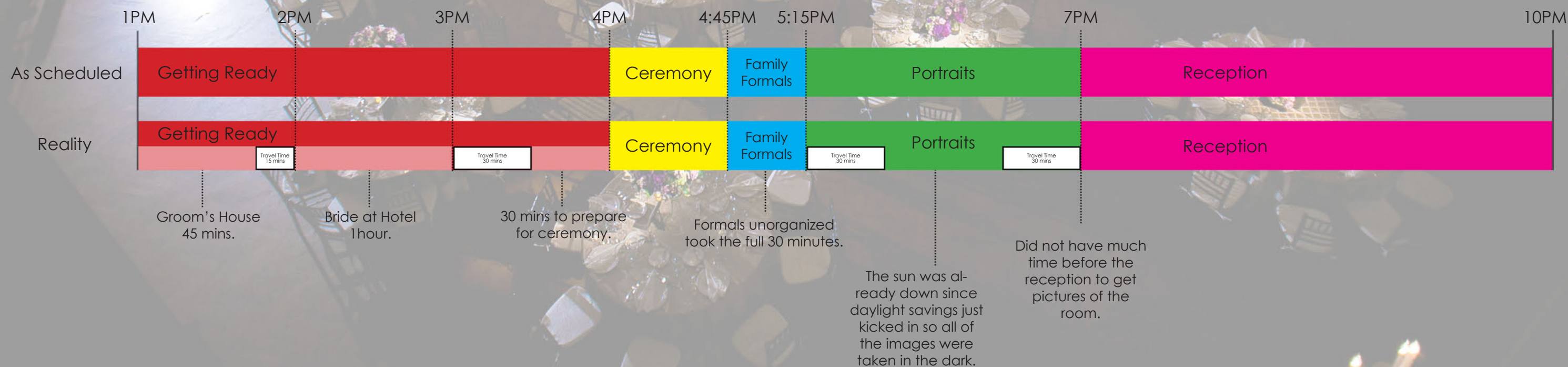
4pm - Ceremony - We had ample time to get setup for the ceremony.

4:45pm - Family Formals - Due to an unorganized and unfocused group it took awhile to finish the formals. We also got kicked out of church by the pastor who was very unhappy with the behaviour of the wedding party.

5:15 - Portraits - We had to take the portraits in the dark since they didn't account for daylight saving time. It is possible but difficult to take wedding party pictures once the sun has set.

7pm - Reception - Since we couldn't get all of the images outside due to low light we had to rush to get some images at the reception before they were introduced.

10pm - Photographers leave



Happy Bride



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Final thoughts
The main point that I want to convey in this guide is that there is **no reason** that you need to rush on your wedding day. It's **YOUR** wedding and I want you to enjoy it as well as enjoy your wedding photos.

It all comes down to doing a little planning ahead of time. And remember I am always here to help you through it.

