

# WED DOSSIER PHOTOS

BY LISA SHAMES



StudioThisIs brings some drama to a couple's big day.

## PICTURE PERFECT? *Traditional wedding pictures are a thing of the past. Make a memory worth a million words!*

Remember when wedding photography consisted mostly of stiffly posed portraits in pre-planned scenarios? We do too. But these days, contrived doesn't have to mean characterless. With the introduction of new technology coupled with brides and grooms' desire for a more personalized experience, a new breed of wedding photographers have broken free from the pack, creating photos that look like they could just as easily be found in the pages of a fashion magazine as in a wedding album.

The way Jeremy Bustos sees it, there really shouldn't be much of a difference between photographing a wedding and a commercial shoot. And he should know, having done plenty of both as founder and creative director at StudioThisIs, a nine-year-old company with studios in the Midwest and on the East Coast. With a formal background in illustration, art direction and photography, Bustos never intended to be a wedding photographer, but now it's his primary focus. "Wedding photography is like the red-headed stepchild of the industry, but it's one of the hardest types of photography to do," he says. "You're giving people their first family heirloom so the pressure is on."

With that thought in mind, Bustos, along with his two partners, approach each wedding with the same meticulous planning and creativity as they would any other stylized shoot, which includes scouting locations, consultations and plenty of post-production work. At each wedding StudioThisIs shoots, there are at least two photographers and two assistants present. And while he admits that in the beginning he had to "drag clients kicking and screaming" toward their style of photography—a combination

of the realism of photojournalism and the glamour of a fashion shoot—now it's a different story. "These days, many couples talk to me first about the photo schedule before they plan the rest of their wedding agenda."

At Chicago-based Elizabeth Fraiberg Photography, partners Elizabeth Fraiberg and Beth Hollander combine their backgrounds in painting, film and fashion photography to create wedding photos that are less scripted and more candid. "A wonderful wedding unfolds itself like a novella," says Hollander. "We articulate the chapters in the most artistic fashion we can." In addition to the photo-editorial shots that capture the decisive moments of the day—"the ones they planned and the ones they didn't," says Fraiberg—the duo also works with the couple prior to the wedding to determine important locations for personalized photos. "It's all about the couple's memories," says Fraiberg, who admits that sometimes they have to do some prompting to get the bride and the groom into character. "We're pretty animated people," she adds, "which is an added bonus when you're getting a couple to loosen up."

With 15 years experience, Jai Girard got her start photographing celebrities, but it was the occasional wedding she did on the side that truly inspired her. "I always found that when I came back from shooting a wedding, I was more emotionally charged because of all the love and energy," she says. "That makes for really good pictures." To produce her unique style of wedding photography, this Chicago paparazzo doesn't do any pre-scouting, preferring instead to create "on the fly" for

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...CONTINUED her *Vanity Fair*-meets-fashion-fantasy photos. That goes for the obligatory formal shots with the parents, too, where she eschews backdrop and big lights for a more natural environment.

When shooting a wedding, Girard brings along three cameras, in addition to a second or third photographer. But no matter how prepared she is, it's the unexpected shots that are often the best. "The secret to doing a great magic trick is to create a distraction," says Girard. "It's the same with photography. By talking and distracting my subjects, I'm able to get the shots in between because they don't know you're actually shooting them."

On the day of the wedding, Hollander and Fraiberg look at everything from bad weather to last-minute changes as opportunities for a great photo. And while they, too, always incorporate some classic-style photos—"Every bride has a mother who'll kill us if we don't get a traditional shot," says Hollander—they, and often a third photographer, spend most of their time roaming the event searching for those photo-worthy moments. "You don't have to look too hard," says Fraiberg. "It's all right there in front of you."

To make sure he and his clients are on the same page, Bustos cites meeting with the couple prior to the wedding as crucial to the outcome. "By the time their wedding rolls around, not only do I want to do a good job, but I've developed a relationship with them," he says, adding that on more than one occasion he's been asked back to photograph their first child.

But friendships aside, Bustos admits this type of wedding photography isn't for everyone. First off, there's the time commitment, including a



**THE NEW AVANT-GARDE** Clockwise from left: Photographer Jai Girard manipulates a continuous light source for a shot at the Hilton Chicago. An American Gothic-style shoot by StudioThisIs. Elizabeth Fraiberg captures a couple's joy with a series of pictures taken at Glencoe Beach.

minimum of two hours with the couple. (Bustos recommends shooting the day before the wedding so that the couple can best enjoy their big day. For those who have jitters about seeing each other before the ceremony, he says not to worry: "The emotion you get is from the magnitude of the moment, not whether or not you saw each other the night before or earlier in the day.")

Then there are the unusual locations couples might find themselves in with StudioThisIs, from the top of a building in the meatpacking district—"To get there the whole wedding party had to walk through a *Silence of the Lambs*-type setting," says

Bustos—and inside a historical schoolhouse museum (the bride for this one was a teacher) to a hilly mountainside for his own wedding. "We were practically rock climbing," recalls Bustos. But his clients—oftentimes designers, art directors and producers, including two from *The Oprah Winfrey Show*—always appreciate the outcome. "A couple that comes to us wants this type of photography," says Bustos. "It's not that we don't include everything else. It's just that we add a lot more." ■

*StudioThisIs*, 219.465.0189, [studiothisis.com](http://studiothisis.com); prices range from \$7,000-\$12,000. *ElizabethFraibergPhotography*, 312.909.6660, [photographye3.com](http://photographye3.com); prices range from \$5,000-\$12,000. *Jai Girard*, 773.342.1400, [jaigirard.com](http://jaigirard.com); prices range from \$5,250-\$9,000.