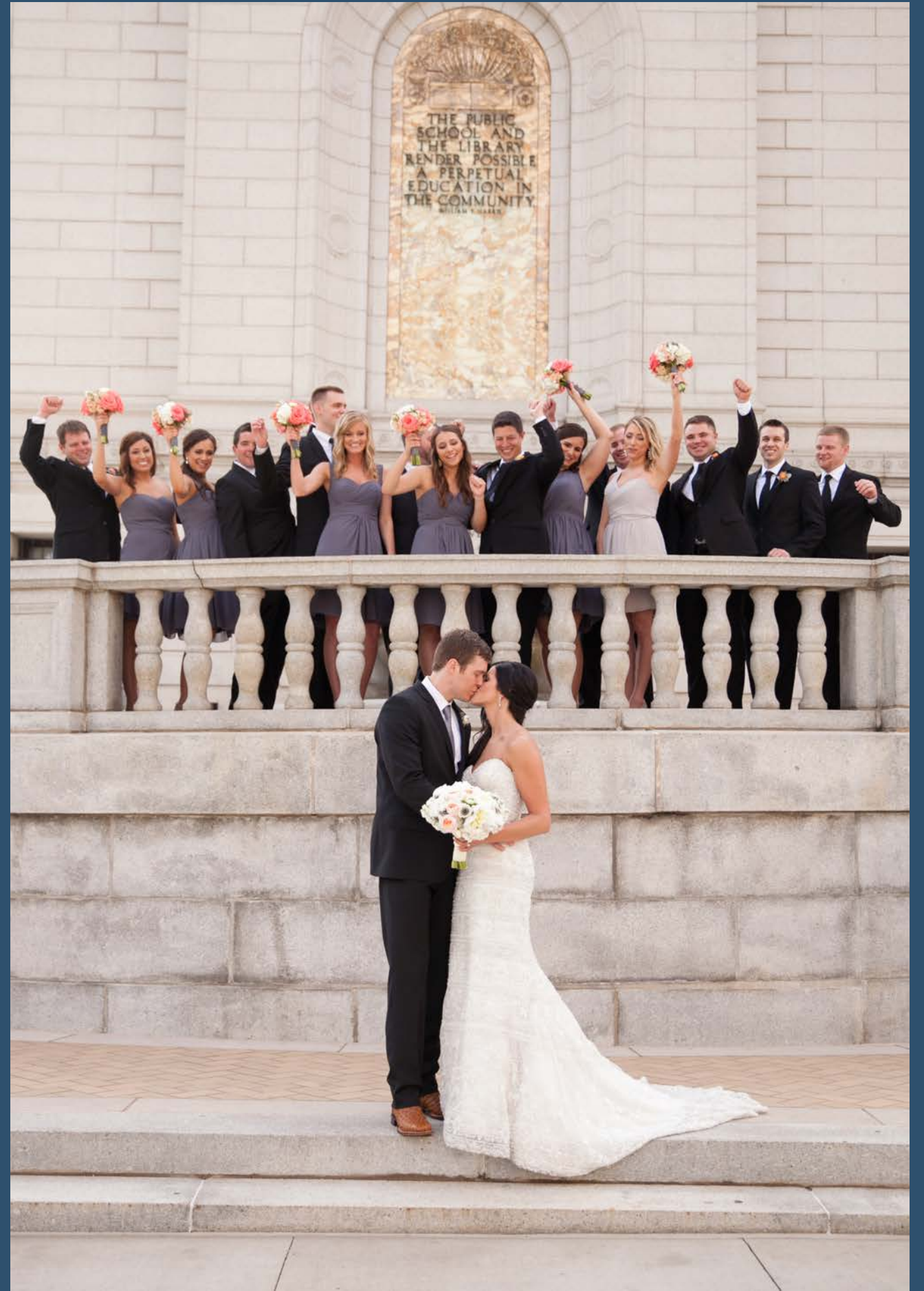
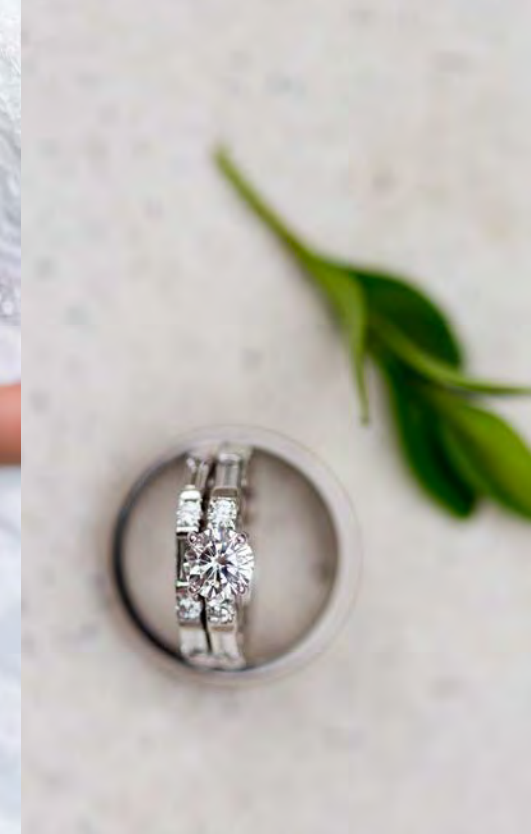




I am often asked, “How do I have the perfect wedding day? Not the wedding everyone wants me to have, but the wedding day I want.” After over ten years as a wedding photographer, I can earnestly tell you that every couple I work with has this very response sometime during the planning process. Weddings are a celebration of how amazing two people are together, but merging two lives, two families, and two groups of friends can invite quite a bit of advice. That information can be hard to sift through and apply, after all, you are getting married for the first time, it’s not like you have a masters degree in weddings. Since I get this question from almost every couple, I put together this list of fantastic tips to get the wedding YOU want.

These are my *10 Tips*





1. Determine What's MOST Important to YOU.

There are countless traditions and expectations. There is everything from not seeing one and other before the ceremony to garter and bouquet tosses. When you factor in wedding party selection, ceremony time, vows, cake cutting, first dances, party favors and sorority dances things get overwhelming fast. If you are honest, none of these things are the primary focus of your wedding day, they can certainly add an element of fun, but only if they mean something to you. To make the planning process more focused and meaningful, I tell my clients to select three to five things that are the most important to them on their wedding day and focus their budget and efforts around those things. Your five things may be the perfect venue, amazing photography, dream dress and tux, beautiful floral designs, and being surrounded by those who mean the most to you. Whatever is most important to you is where you should focus your budget and energy while planning! It's your wedding day, and you and your fiancé get to choose what is a priority. By being focused on the stuff, you're both excited about, the entire planning process will be more enjoyable and trust me - you want that!

2. Consider the First Look

What's a First Look? It's when the bride and groom see each other before the ceremony, have a few moments alone, and get portraits done beforehand. There are several ways to do this. My favorite way is to have my couples write a heartfelt letter to one another and read it before turning around and revealing their wedding day splendor to the other. Why do I recommend this? Time flies and wedding days go at warp speed. The first look allows the couple to slow down and be together alone. Many of my brides and grooms have less guarded reactions during the first look and can fully experience the beautiful emotion and sweetness of the one they love without having an audience. I've photographed couples as they pray together, share their vows, read letters, affirm each other, exchange gifts, or just embrace with intense joy - It's sincerely so wonderful! Doing a First Look creates a more relaxed timeline and allows you to enjoy those you love throughout the entire day. I completely understand and respect the tradition of waiting until the bride walks down the aisle, but if you're prone to stress or anxiety, the First Look can be a calming and tone-setting alternative.

3. Hire Vendors That You Love

Your wedding is a celebration of your lives together. It is the day you are starting your family. Your wedding day IS A BIG DEAL. Hire people who you connect with, passionate about what they do, and create a product you love. If you've ever been part of a bridal party, you have seen first hand that a bride and groom spend a majority of their wedding with their vendors, especially their photographer. Like choosing the friends you want to stand by you on your big day, you want to select talented vendors who you trust and will make your day better (STRESS-FREE) because they were there.

4. Get Personal

Weddings are the perfect time to show off your unique style as a couple. Consider what is meaningful to you and your fiancé as a couple and include that in your wedding. Do you have a special family heirloom, a family member you adore, a meal you both love to enjoy, or a dog or two that you love? Include them somehow!

5. Hire a Planner or Coordinator

Many venues come with on-site coordinators, but often time they are working for the venue, not the couple, so they don't always put the couple's interest first. In fact, more times than not, they are there to make sure the venue doesn't get damaged and that the events happen at the scheduled time. Make sure you know the role the onsite coordinator will play and what they are doing the day of your wedding. I highly recommend hiring an experienced wedding coordinator not only to take care of all the details the day of the wedding, but to help the entire planning process go smoothly. The last thing you or your family need to be doing on your wedding day is working or worrying.

THE *First Look* & WHY IT'S WORTH IT

You're investing in 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 investment and get the most for your money.

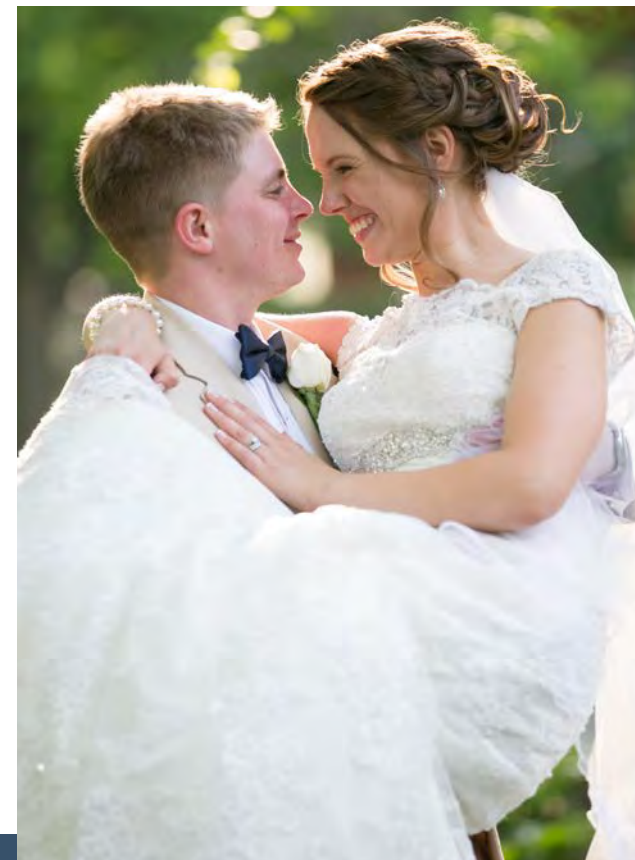
You actually get intimate time on your wedding day with your man. Most brides don't realize that when you come down the aisle and totally SHOCK him with your gorgeousness...he can't even tell you how amazing you look. He can't touch you, embrace you or even SPEAK to you. You have to wait until 40 minutes later when the ceremony is over for him to react and tell you how amazing you look. And after 40 minutes of the ceremony, the reaction isn't the same as the initial first glance.

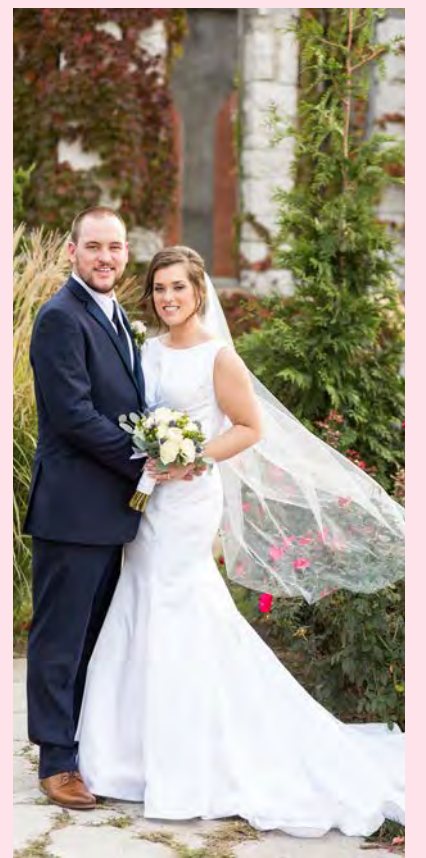
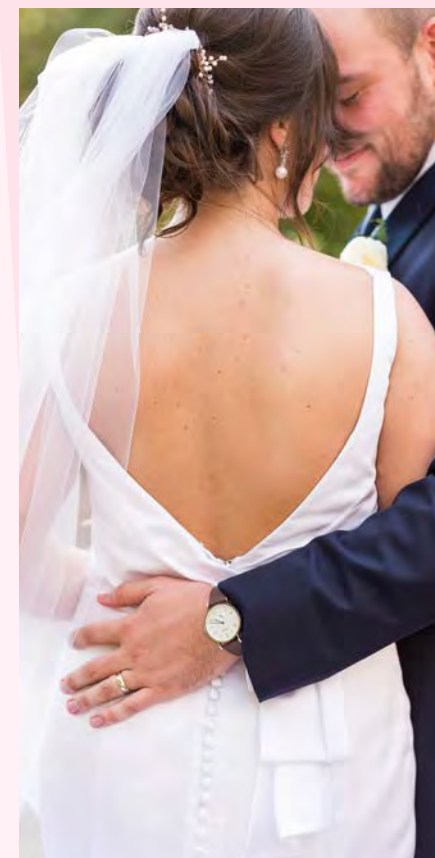
First Looks allow you to extend your wedding day. Normally the wedding day would start when you come down the aisle, then the ceremony would end, you would rush through portraits so that you're not late for the introductions, and then it's reception time. With a first look your wedding day is extended 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 my client's wedding albums are filled with just images from this time together before the ceremony.

First Looks allow you to be TOGETHER and alone on your wedding day. When Jeremy and I saw each other, not only was it intimate, it was our only time to be alone...the whole day! We cried and laughed and cried some more, that put us in the PERFECT mood for our romantic portraits. Normally portraits are a little rushed after the family formals and it can be hard to really get back into that "loveey 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!

You get rid of the nerves. I'd say, literally half of my couples who 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 that initially weren't a fan of the first look, but afterwards admitted to being SO much more relaxed and ready for the ceremony!

SIDE NOTE: 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 his 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. :)





6. Unplug

As a wedding photographer, one of the biggest obstacles that presents itself on a wedding day occurs while shooting the bride during her long-awaited walk down the aisle with her Dad. In the age of technology, I now have to compete with a dozen bright cell phone screens and an iPad (or two) dangling into the aisle to capture a personal photo for Instagram or Facebook. These screens are not only a garish distraction in the fringe of the photo, they will also make the image look completely dated in the coming years. Most importantly, the presence of technology takes away from the once in a lifetime moment of the bride walking towards her groom in excitement for their future. I encourage my couples to include a note in their invitation, post a cute sign, and have their greeters remind the guest of the unplugged ceremony.



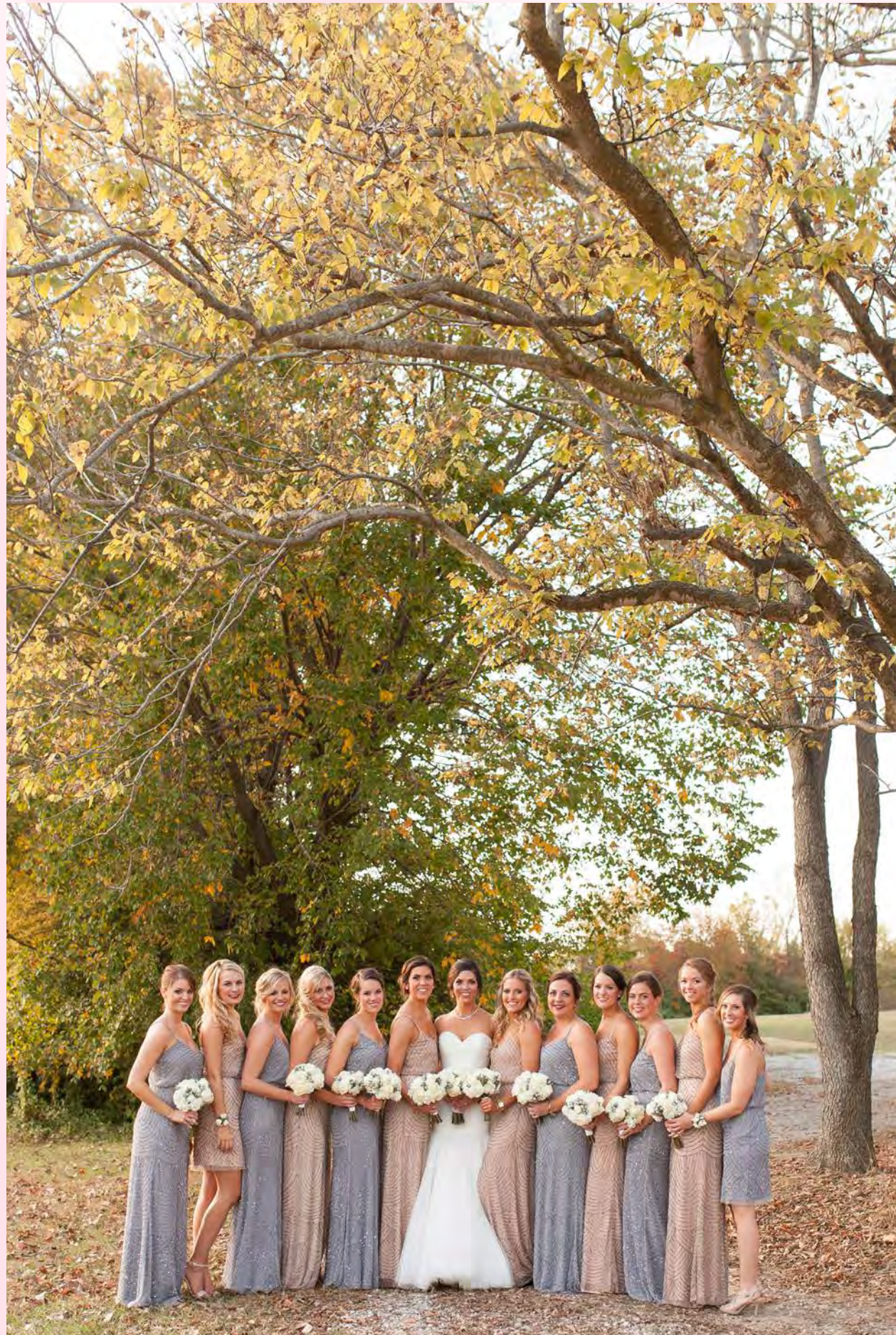
7. Delegate

There are lots of people who would jump at the chance to help you and your fiancé as you plan or help on the day of your wedding. Most of us have a hard time delegating tasks for any number of reasons. Two of the main reasons are we either have a very specific vision or idea, and we want it done just right, or we simply don't want to burden our friends and family with a task we think we can do on our own. I have news for you, planning a wedding is a BIG JOB, no one can do it alone. No one is good at everything, but everyone is good at something. Consider your own strengths and talents and the strengths and talents of your inner circle, and just ASK for help in the areas where you need it. I promise you have a lot of sweet people in your life who would be honored to help you. As an added bonus, allowing others to gift you with their talents will make the day that much more special.

8. Hair & Makeup Trial

Every bride wants to feel and look her best on her wedding day. Part of feeling confident and beautiful is feeling like the best version of yourself. A talented, professional hair stylist and makeup artist are key to perfecting the look of your dreams. Schedule a consultation with one of my preferred hair and makeup artists, or someone you already know and love before your wedding. Do a trial run so you can work out any issues you may have before the big day. Sometimes the look we love on Pinterest doesn't translate well to real life, a good styling team will be able to guide you to the perfect look and apply it, so it photographs perfectly.





9. Time Waits for No Bride

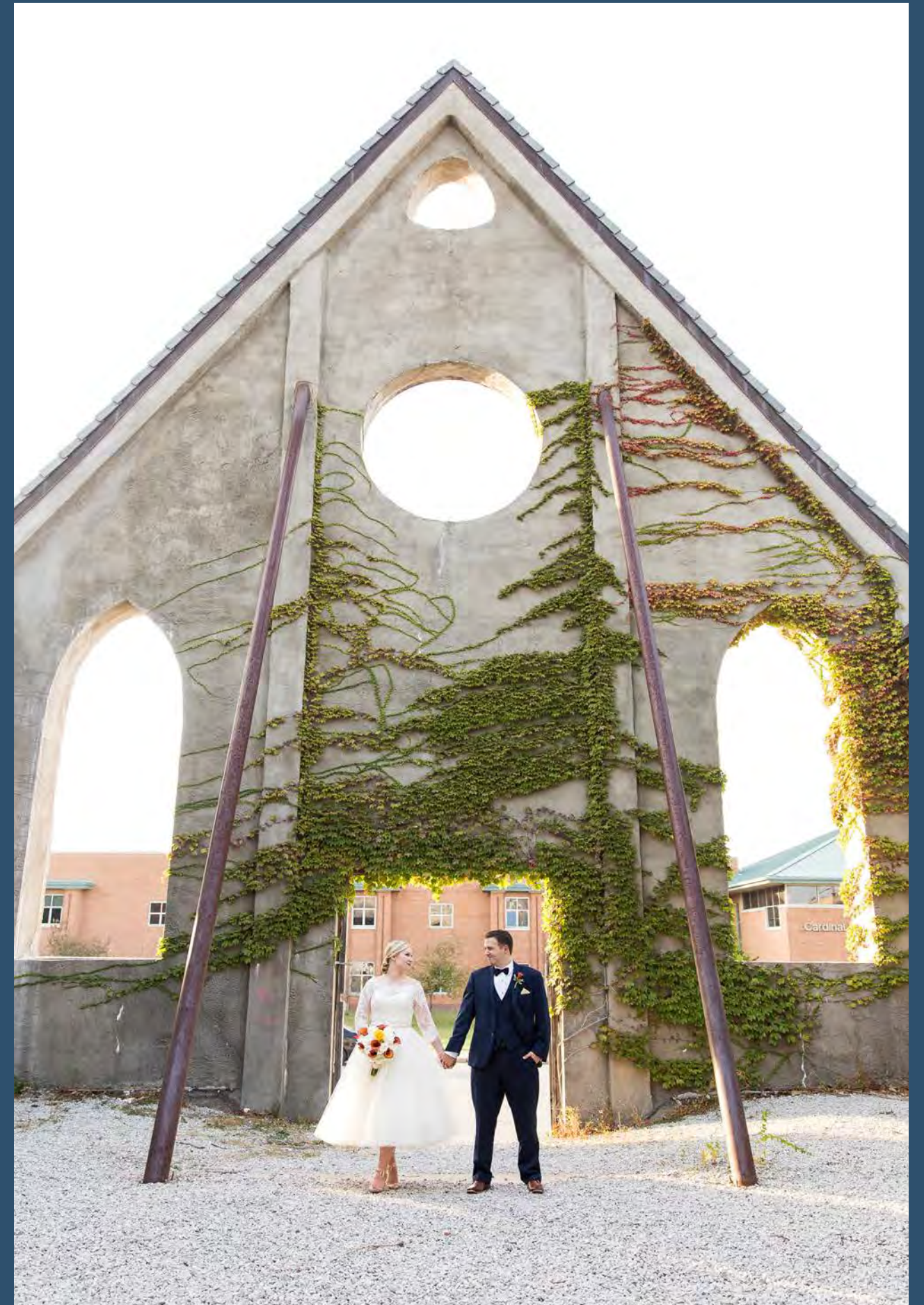


No one jumps into wedding planning with a desire for a day filled with stress, but a tight timeline can cause just that. Which is why I always suggest allowing for more time than you think you'll need. Wedding days can be unpredictable, and no bride wants to feel rushed or stressed. Creating a schedule that allows ample time for photographs you will treasure in your wedding album, as well as special time with your closest family and friends is necessary for the perfect day. It helps to talk to an expert, like your wedding photographer or wedding planner (or both!). They can give suggestions for your ceremony and reception times based on the wedding day you want to have.

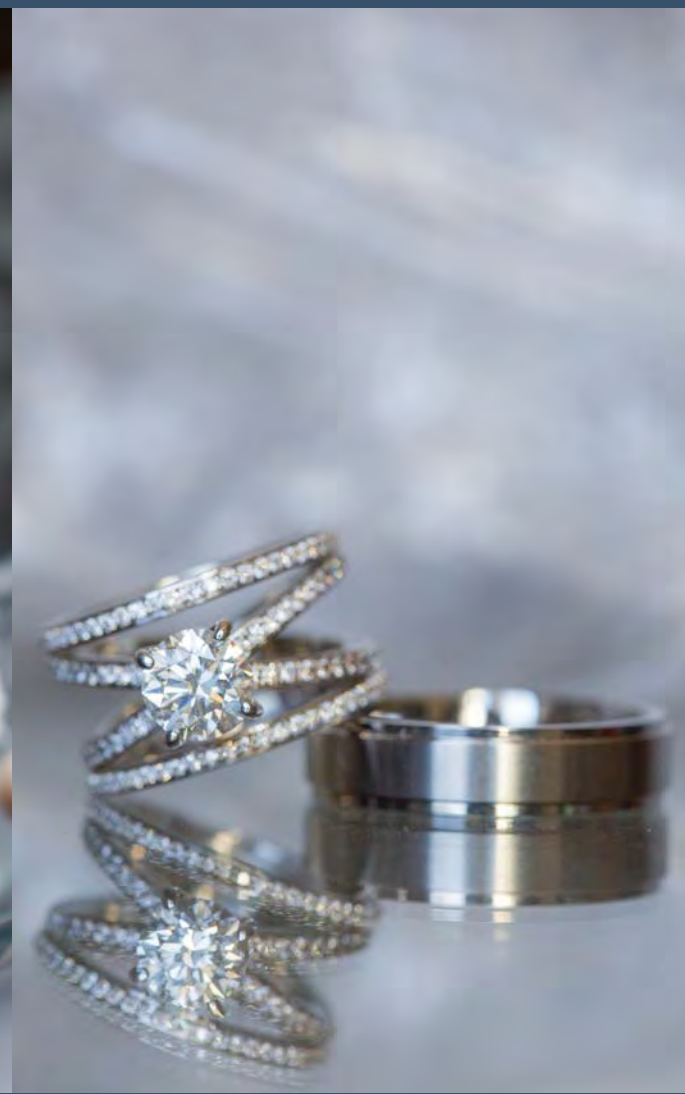
10. Don't Lose Your Focus



The couples I love working with know their wedding day is one of the most important days of their lives and they can't wait to start the next chapter with their new titles as "MR. & MRS." But they also know the most important part of their wedding is their marriage. It is incredibly easy to lose site of the blessing that marriage is (and will be) during the wedding planning process. Wedding planning isn't all rainbows and butterflies. Even if everything doesn't turn out as you planned at the end of the day, you are husband and wife, and that is the most important part-being "MR. & MRS" makes it the best day ever no matter what!



favorite vendors



Planners

Saving Grace Occasions
savinggraceoccasions.com

Mr. & Mrs. Wedding Events
mrandmrsweddingevents.com

Style Alter'd
stylealtard.com

Florist

Special Events Florist
thespecialeventflorist.com

Les Bouquets
lesbouquets.com

Belli Fiori
bellifioristl.com

Entertainment

Downtime Band
downtimeband.com

Rock Star DJs (Adam)
rockstardjs.com

Griffin and the Gargoyles
griffinandthegargoyles.com

Bakery

The Cakery
thecakerybakery.net

Wedding Wonderland
weddingwonderlandcakes.com

Sarah's Cake Shop
www.sarahscakeshopstl.com

Videographer

Sweet Tea Media
addsomesweet.com

Bird Eye Media
www.birdeyemedia.net

Beauty

Savanah Moore
labellemarieestl.com

Beauty By Whitney
beautybywhitney.com

Holly Hanak
hjymakeupartist.com



Last, but certainly not least, 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 me with ANY questions you may have along the way!

thank you!
do